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Commemoration / Remembrance / Reconciliation

1 Introduction

There are events in the lives of individuals, communities, and even entire nations, which have a serious impact. Tragic events. Some of these affect many people. Among these, for example, are military conflicts, terrorist incidents, natural disasters, mining accidents\(^1\), air disasters, ship and ferry wrecks and mass traffic accidents. Events originally experienced as individual losses make up another group, but families affected in this way, remember them together. Commemorative acts remembering traffic accidents or mountaineering victims\(^2\) are one such example. We must not overlook commemorations for loved ones who have died naturally and whose family members honour them in commemorative acts, often carried out in private in a pastoral context.

Political prisoners who died or were executed in prison during the rise of socialism in Czechoslovakia may be considered a special group; commemorations take place as part of memorial gatherings for political prisoners. Similar in character are commemorative acts in significant places of human suffering. As examples of such we can mention Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland; the execution room with a guillotine and equipment for execution by hanging in Prague Pankrác prison, where 1,075 people were executed under German occupation (referred to in the Czech Republic as sekýrárna (the axe-room) from the word sekera (axel)), or the Czech village Lidice, whose inhabitants were massacred after an assassination attempt on Heydrich during the Second World War and the village was razed to the ground. In such places, memorials take place on anniversaries even several decades later, and these are intended as a reminder and a show of respect for the memory of the victims. This article will explore such intentions, as well as the array of additional goals of commemoration, remembrance, and reconciliation.

\(^{1}\) For example, the mining disaster on 8\(^{th}\) August 1956 where 262 miners died in the Bois du Cazier mine in the Marcinelle parish, which is part of the town Charleroi in Belgium.

\(^{2}\) For example, a memorial service takes place annually at the Symbolic Cemetery near Popradské mountain-lake in the High Tatras (Slovakia).
2 Types of Commemorative Ceremonies

From research interviews with church leaders and military chaplains it appears that from the liturgical point of view, we can divide commemorative acts as follows:

a) Church commemorative ceremonies – in the shape of (1.) a church service (or mass) by one church, (2.) a church service (or mass) according to the liturgical rules of one church with room for an address and prayer of clergy by a different Christian church, or (3.) an ecumenical service with equal room for active participation of representatives from two or more churches. Besides this, there is also the possibility of commemorating the dead within the framework of church life (for example, commemorating the dead on All Souls’ Day, Sheppy 2005, 70–79), or individual commemorations on anniversaries of death, which the clergy can carry out in a narrower or wider family circle in homes, at the graveside or in church (Sheppy 2005, 80–83).

b) Secular commemorations with clergy participation in a variety of forms (1.) state memorials, within the framework of which clergy of the Christian church have one point in the programme; (2.) military memorials with active participation from the clergy; (3.) commemorations of professional bodies (for example, mining, firefighters, river transportation workers, etc.) in which we also come across active clergy participation.

3 Periodicity of Commemorations

Regarding commemorations, we come across various approaches to their periodic repetition. In some cases, they take place annually on a set day of the year. Others take place on the jubilee anniversary or without any noticeable regularity. In practice we also come across commemorations which remind us of tragic events from decades or centuries ago which, because of their local significance take place regardless of whether it is a “milestone” anniversary or not.

3.1 Annual Commemorations

Belonging in this group are commemorations on All Souls’ Day and important historical national events, connected with loss of life.

Commemoration on All Souls’ Day (November 2nd): Since human society is continually bidding farewell to its members, this commemoration also takes place annually with the aim of remembering those who have departed from us, not only in the particular year, but also in the past. This opportunity tends to be reflected in various forms: (a) in the liturgical forms of the church commemorating them; (b) with ecumenical worship; (c) with a secular commemoration (in rare cases also with room for active clergy participation).
Important historical national events, which are connected with a loss of life (for example, in the Dutch context a national day of mourning and remembrance on 4\textsuperscript{th} May, or in the Slovak context commemoration of the heavy fighting on Dukla during the Second World War, where thousands of Soviet and Czechoslovak soldiers died. Each year there are also services of remembrance for important tragic events of less significance for society as a whole. The Slovak Armed Forces stop organizing this type of commemorations after the 10\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the event.

### 3.2 Commemorations on Jubilee Anniversaries

Belonging to this category are reminders of events that have significance for the history of humanity in general, for a nation or some national or religious group and which were connected with loss of life. As an example of these events, we can mention the memorial ceremonies and commemorations on the 600\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of John Hus being burnt at the stake or, from the point of view of the so-called radical reformation, the 480\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, commemorated with international participation, of the arrival in Slovakia of Anabaptist preacher Andreas Fischer, who was later executed by being thrown from the walls of Krásna Hôrka castle (in what is now Slovakia). These anniversaries are not remembered with commemorative ceremonies every year. When there are significant jubilees, it is appropriate to give them both commemorative and media attention.

### 4 Specific Examples of Commemorations

As examples of commemoration we mention: (1.) Commemoration of Second World War victims; (2.) Commemoration of air disaster victims, Hejce, Hungary; (3.) Commemoration of traffic accident victims, Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovakia; (4.) Commemoration of mining disaster victims, Kremnica, Slovakia.

#### 4.1 Commemoration of Second World War Victims

In this group of commemorations, we mention (1.) the commemoration of the massacre of the inhabitants of Lidice village (CR) and (2.) the state commemoration of Second World War victims in Amsterdam, Holland.
4.1.1 Commemoration of the Victims of the Massacred Village – Lidice, Czech Republic

The commemoration is carried out to honour the victims.

After the assassination attempt in Prague on the acting Reich protector Reinhard Heydrich during the Second World War, Adolf Hitler decided to make an example out of the punishment of this act. The Czech village Lidice was selected for this purpose and on 10.6.1942 German soldiers gathered the men over 15 years of age and shot them in this place. The women were transported to Ravensbrück concentration camp, and 82 children were slaughtered in a gas van in Chelm extermination camp. The village was burned and razed to the ground.

Following the commemoration on the 76th anniversary of this event, we can begin the creation of a theory of commemorations:

The commemoration began with mass on the foundations of the ruined church, and then continued with laying wreaths at a mass grave. We highlight a few emphases in the content of the addresses which were spoken there:

In his address, Andrej Babiš, the Czech Prime Minister, offered a point of view on the slaughter of hundreds of people from a political perspective. He observed the appalling dimension of the historical event. He used expressions like “victims of the Nazi self-will”, “the appalling nature of the German occupiers’ action”, “They wanted to demonstrate that they could with impunity determine the fate of completely innocent people [...]. They wanted to demonstrate in their own awful and malicious way that no power could restrain them in their senseless cruelty and give the citizens of the protectorate a warning.” (Babiš, 2018)

Immediately after this address, military chaplain, Lt-Col Kloubek, was called upon to pray. He saw his role in our moving on in our view of this tragedy – to a humane way of life in forgiveness, respect, and cooperation. In his prayer, after introductory words of thanks to God, he expressed his requests:

And I pray that this place would be a place symbolizing unification, connection, cooperation, and mutual understanding. I pray that we may be able to forgive one another and that we not renew hostility again and again. I pray that our path to Lidice means a new path in our lives, that it might be a path towards one another, that it be a path of love, encouragement, understanding and friendship [...]. I pray that every reminder of evil things would ignite in us a new longing for approaching one another amicably, for mutual tolerance and love of one another. May our Heavenly Father in the Lord Jesus Christ help us to do so. Amen. (Kloubek, 2018)

Although the prayer by itself apparently offers only limited possibilities for communication with those present, practical observation shows that the opposite is true. In our study of this commemoration, we arrive at the observation that individual parts of the programme also affect those present in their mutual synergy. What the chairman of the government expressed was necessary, that what happened in Lidice was appalling and evil. But what the chaplain expressed in the prayer was also necessary, that consciousness of evil should lead people in the present day to pursue positive
approaches to living together in a community of nations. It is precisely in an expression of the need for forgiveness and in the pursuit of peaceful co-existence that we can see the clergyman’s role.

**4.1.2 Commemoration of Second World War Victims – Amsterdam / Soesterberg, Holland**

Dutch protestant chaplain, Lieutenant Colonel Jan Tom Schneider, serving at Airforce (Dutch military) describes this memorial ceremony and the role of the military chaplain in it as follows:

The fourth of May is a national day of mourning and remembrance. In the evening the King is present at the national monument in Amsterdam, remembering all victims of the Second World War (a chief of the military chaplaincy prays or speaks a few reflective words there). On the morning of that day the Airforce has its own intimate gathering at the Airforce monument in Soesterberg. Retired military, delegates from all over the country and the Airforce orchestra all surround the monument. The General usually highlights one or two service members for acts of bravery against the Germans in the first days of the war in May 1940. After music, the national anthem, and two minutes of silence, the chaplain has a seven-minute contribution. This can be anything; a general theme around the struggle for freedom, followed by a short prayer. And then four F16 fighter planes fly over in ‘missing man’ formation. Very moving. (Schneider 2019)

In relation to the religious element in a secular ceremony’s framework, chaplain Schneider observes that the secular context in his country “is different from that of the UK or the US, where the church’s contribution, prayer and the pastor are still very evident in daily life. In the Netherlands this is no longer the case”. In the Dutch context, therefore, “prayer for the troops has become a rarity. Now and again a script for a ceremony might still reserve room for it.” In view of the secularized context, he considers it important that the minister prepares his audience before actually delivering the prayer and explains what he is going to do asking “for a listening ear from those who are not used to praying in their daily lives.” At the same time, he recommends the use of simple expressions.

**4.2 Commemoration of Air Disaster Victims – Hejce, Hungary**

On 19.1.2006 soldiers of the Slovak Armed Forces were returning by air from a mission in Kosovo. Approximately 20 km from their planned landing in Slovakia, they crashed near the Hungarian village Hejce. 42 of 43 people died on board the plane. Every year the most senior representatives of the SR army, and also relatives and loved ones of the victims, along with Catholic and Evangelical military chaplains visit the site of the tragedy.
In 2019 there was a commemoration on the 13th anniversary of this tragic event. It began with Catholic mass. During it there was also opportunity for an address and a prayer by an Evangelical minister. After mass the participants moved to the tragedy’s memorial site, where the Slovak and Hungarian Ministers for Defence gave speeches. This was followed by the laying of wreaths. Within the framework of the programme at the memorial site, where speeches are delivered, there is only scope for prayer from the military chaplains. In some cases, only one slot is possible for all churches, and sometimes it is possible to provide space for ministers from two churches. But such a degree of church involvement is not the general experience in the framework of international studies.

Regarding commemorations related to air disasters, as time goes by, we can observe the beginnings of a narrative of increasing distrust and doubt of official investigation results and the propagation of conspiracy theories. Not only in the case of this disaster, but also after the fall of a Polish aeroplane with a government delegation on its flight to Smolensk on 10.4.2010, a similar trend can be observed. Therefore, the theme of loss is still current among most of the bereaved and complicates their coming to terms with it. The minister needs to find his bearings in his tasks. His task is to bring a spiritual dimension to the commemoration and not to stand in for investigators of the tragedy. If he wants to contribute to solving controversial questions, he must remember that a commemoration is not the appropriate place for this.

4.3 Commemoration for Traffic Accident Victims – Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovakia

On the basis of a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly from 26th October 2005, the third Sunday in November is World Day of Remembrance for Traffic Victims. On this day police chaplains organize commemorations together with the clergy of the firefighters’ corps in the Slovak Republic. Catholic clergy usually perform them in the east of the country, and protestant usually in central Slovakia, in the town of Liptovský Mikuláš. This division does not arise from the commemoration itself but rather from the fact that these two pastoral ministries of the Slovak Armed Forces are organized independently. This type of commemoration has several goals:
- to express an awareness of the fragility of human life;
- to honour all victims of traffic accidents;
- to express sympathy to the bereaved for their pain and loss;
- to express gratitude to the rescue services, who are always prepared and intervene when accidents occur;
- a preventative function: to warn of danger and encourage responsible traffic behaviour based on a respect for life;
- to offer an opportunity for medical and fire rescue workers, and police staff to be able to come humbly before God at commemorations with a religious character.
to come to terms, spiritually, with the stress that they experience when encountering accident victims.

After an address and prayers, and the reading out of traffic accident statistics (victims’ names also at regional commemorations), candles are lit for each traffic accident victim as a reminder of the light of the world – Jesus Christ.

As far as prayer is concerned, Catholic clergy pray primarily for the dead. Protestant clergy do not pray for the dead. In both streams of Christianity, we find the following thoughts in their prayers:
- the consciousness that our time is in God’s hands;
- people do not know when and how they will die;
- the request that Christ be with us in our hour of death;
- a request for comfort for the bereaved;
- an eschatological perspective: faith in the resurrection and eternal life;
- an expression of thanks to God for rescue service workers (medical rescue workers, fire fighters, police workers), who are active at accident scenes and have saved many lives. (A commemoration as a whole does not only express thanks on their behalf but also to them.)

4.4 Commemoration for Victims of an Ancient Mining Accident – Kremnica, Slovakia

In some localities we also come across commemorations for mass tragic events which happened centuries ago. An example of this practice is the Slovak town of Kremnica, where, for several years, commemorations took place on the anniversary of the mining disaster of the year 1443 (for example the 572nd anniversary in 2015). Šturec hill, under which were the richest gold-bearing veins, collapsed during an earthquake. The ceilings in the mine collapsed and sources conclude that more than 500 miners died in the tragedy.

5 Identifying the Goals of a Commemoration

The goals fulfilled by a minister in his service at commemorations emanate (1.) from the forms of participation and time allocation, (2.) from the time that has elapsed from the event, of which the commemoration is a reminder.

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3 For more on themes that dominate this kind of commemoration see section 5.2.3 Commemorations for tragedies in the distant past.
5.1 Types of Participation and Allocation of Time

The minister takes part in the commemoration in a variety of ways.

*Ecclesiastical forms of commemoration.* Sometimes it is an entire church service (according to the liturgical precepts of one church or ecumenical) with its customary length. The minister sometimes has an opportunity to deliver an address in a limited timeslot within the framework of a different Christian church’s liturgy. When the framework is a church service, the entire commemoration has an ecclesiastical character and on occasions with national significance, this is sometimes part of a more extensive commemorative programme.

*Secular forms with clergy participation.* Ministers have an opportunity to participate in secular commemorations. This possibility is shared by ministers from parishes as well as military chaplains. Concerning commemorations organized by the Slovak Ministry of Defence, according to its Communication Department, they are given the opportunity, for example, to participate by way of prayer and this in an approximately four-minute timeslot. Some ministers introduce prayer with three to five sentences. With some, it is more. Clergy, inexperienced in this area need to be reminded that time allotted at state-organized commemorations must be handled carefully, especially if a military aircraft flyover is also to be part of the ceremony. Authorized individuals behind the scenes of the ceremony communicate with pilots and guides who are waiting for the signal to fly military aircraft over the location of the commemoration at a specific time. Due to this synchronization, everyone, including clergy, is expected not to exceed the time allotted him.

5.2 The Influence of the Time-Lapse from the Event on Determining Goals

The less time that elapses between the event and the commemoration, the more similar the emerging goals will be to a funeral ceremony’s pastoral goals. As more time elapses, individual grief decreases. But studies show that clergy must not assume that the notion of the loss and grief will fade after ten years. It is more appropriate to determine whether any of the bereaved who had had to deal with the loss of the particular accident’s victims will be present or not.

5.2.1 Commemorations during the Grieving (or Painful Period) of the Bereaved

If the commemoration takes place at such a period that the bereaved of the victims are also participating in it, the structure of goals must naturally consider dealing with loss and mourning and must express sympathy for their pain and point to the comfort of faith.
Conversations with bereaved individuals who have participated in commemorations reveal that, even after ten or more years, some of them (above all the victims’ parents) state that their loss is still painful. A father who lost his son, said 13 years after the event: “Even after so many years it is impossible to forget. I think about my son even several times a day.” (Bodolló 2019) Wherever there is a clearly guilty party in the tragedy, anger, or helplessness, as the case may be, may also persist.

Therefore, regarding commemorations it seems that it is more appropriate to distinguish between periods where bereaved parties, who are still processing their grief in some way, are present, and commemorations which occur after such an interval of time that direct relatives of the victims are no longer present.

Besides this, where serious losses are concerned, some bereaved individuals are confronted with secondary losses connected to the event. For example, the mother of a female soldier who died in the aeroplane crash, lost her husband, who did not live to see the first anniversary of the tragedy (Bodolló 2019).

Studies show that, with the increase of time from the event, what occurs is not necessarily a lessening in the difficulty of the grief but that in fact the opposite trend can be observed. While the tragic event itself might represent a primary source of pain and grief for the bereaved, other events, connected to the tragedy, often become a secondary source of traumatizing grief. Therefore, their situation might actually deteriorate. Here we can have in mind the following:

(a) Coming to terms with the results of an official investigation into events and a distrust of the results. This distrust can be if after the investigation, the results are deemed secret (for example, the investigation into the Hejce air disaster, Hungary in 2006). This encourages the rise of a variety of questions and even several conspiracy theories.

(b) Coming to terms with public opinion, shaped by the media and speculation about blame for the tragic event, e.g., the widow of the pilot from the tragic event, suffers the loss of her husband, but also suffers from information passed on to her that the tragedy was caused by her deceased husband, although, according to some, it may well have simply been a technical failure;

(c) Coming to terms with the way the victims’ bodily remains were handled (one victim’s mother complained that her son’s body was incomplete in the coffin; according to her, DNA identification was not provided for torn off sections of the bodies, but only for the biggest parts);

(d) The bereaved of victims of a bus and train collision (Polomka, Slovakia, 21.2. 2009) stated ten years later that this event had changed their lives, bringing them a great deal of pain, with which they must live somehow. They complain that the guilty party has neither contacted them nor apologized to them. They consider it an injustice that his prison term was shortened and that he is living his life freely while the victims of the tragedy do not have this possibility.

The minister who makes an address on the site of a tragedy or who is performing an ecumenical church service must have realistic expectations about the possibilities of his address. He must use to good theological purpose the few moments he has
available for the address as a gospel support for the bereaved and to help them become reconciled to their loss. At the same time, he must count on facing a secularized audience. A segment of them may possess a critical attitude toward the church.⁴

Although funeral sermon theory envisages comforting the bereaved, responders to empirical research in Slovakia did not confirm that this goal is actually achieved (Masarik 2015, 143–156; 2018, 504–512). We can assume the same thing with commemorations. Therefore, effective approaches must be sought both from the perspective of the address or prayer as well as from the perspective of the programme structure (in secular forms) and the liturgical structure (in ecclesiastical forms). Effective communication of comfort can be observed where the minister has personally come to terms with difficult problems and has learnt to find comfort in faith in God. This experience behind the scenes of his ministry can work to enhance what he offers in addresses or prayers.

In relation to individual types of events the following goals are included:
- With mining disasters: respect for the victims, realization of one’s own mortality and an increased sensitivity to technological and natural factors that might lead to tragic events in the future, leading to improved work safety.
- With traffic accidents in various transport modes: respect for the victims and realization of one’s own mortality. Motivation to drive responsibly and show consideration in traffic.
- With victims of military conflicts and political persecution: the need for a constant reminder that a negative turn in political developments may take on even monstrous proportions, which horrify us as we remember the commemorated events. Therefore, it is necessary to seek peaceful solutions as a starting point.

With all these types of commemorative events, religious goals also take shape; the consciousness that human life is fragile, whether due to natural phenomena (avalanches, earthquakes, tsunami), or technological tragedies (shipwrecks, air disasters, bridge collapses etc.) Therefore, in our religious contribution to these commemorative events we remember our own ephemerality and ask for God’s protection. A part of this is also a motivation towards an ethical lifestyle because the event we are commemorating reveals the fragility of human life and we do not know when and how our days will come to an end.

In conversations before and after commemorative events, where the bereaved have shown interest in a pastoral conversation, the minister has ample opportunities to offer them this help. This is the practice of the military chaplains in the Slovak context, and they meet with interest among the bereaved. The head of the Ecumenical Pastoral Service of the Slovak armed forces, Colonel Bodolló noted: “Bereaved families are thankful for the involvement of the clergy in their grief; repeatedly, there-

⁴ “The church ‘stinks’, a chaplain wants to conquer you with his faith […] This is what I sense with a lot of people. And it makes us careful and sometimes too modest.” (Schneider 2019)
fore, they want to meet with the clergy at other opportunities also. We ask ourselves what next, how to stand by them in their grief and also how to help them practically.” (Bodolló 2019)

### 5.2.2 Commemorations after a Greater Lapse of Time

When much time has elapsed since the event, when widowed individuals form relationships with new partners, or later when only some of the bereaved are still living, motives like coming to terms with pain and comfort of the bereaved disappear from among the commemorative ceremony’s objectives. The particular tragic event’s message takes on greater prominence. For example:

- When commemorating distant accidents, like the disaster in the Bois du Cazier mine, in Belgium, 1956 (TASR 2016) – the fragility of human life may be reflected upon;
- On the anniversaries of military events; the need for peaceful solutions to conflicts and reconciliation between opposing nations, motivation to prevent similar tragedies (here military chaplains also see the necessity of working with youth and young teens in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts). The more time that elapses, the more open the minister can be and the more easily the need for reconciliation can be pointed out than would be possible immediately after the conflict in question (although it is precisely then that it tends to be very important). Historical records from post-war years in communist Czechoslovakia show that hinting at friendly attitudes towards people from “Western” (that is capitalist countries), led to political reprisals and long-term imprisonment. Therefore, it was necessary to wisely seek out forms of influence that would attain goals and minimize victims.
- At commemorations where professional bodies remember the loss of their colleagues, to pay their respects, to exalt their honesty, diligence, sacrifice, solidarity, and professionalism.
- At commemorations for victims of political persecution – the need to transfer this experience across the generations to grandchildren and great-grandchildren so that knowledge about the abuse of power (e.g., about communist oppression) is conveyed to the next generation. In this context, the minister points to the need to seek life attitudes which correspond to faith in God, whether someone is on the side of those in power, or of those who may be endangered by this power.

### 5.2.3 Commemorations of Tragedies from the Distant Past

When it is a question of a long historical interval, at least several centuries from the tragedy (as in the case of the commemoration of the Kremnica mine tragedy of 1443)
themes that dominate the commemorative services are the fragility of human life, fatal work accidents and development of professional solidarity, when those belonging to a certain profession remember together with the public their deceased colleagues from the (long-distant) past. In a religious sense, it is an awareness of the fragility of human life and the need to remember that people will stand before God responsible for themselves in the end that stands out as important. Ján Ondrejčín, an evangelical pastor, who was one of the organizers of the commemorative ceremony for the Kremnica tragedy for several years, said in a research interview: “Usually I used as my source materials from the week of prayer for Christian unity. The goals emanated from the recommended texts. One year we preached and the next the Catholic priest. Because the miners worked hard, he used to preach about work [...] I was a question of drawing some spiritual goal from the memorial, which we placed before the nation.” (Ondrejčín 2019)

5.3 General Remarks

Regardless of its form and how much time has elapsed since the commemorated event, the minister brings Christian spiritual elements into the commemorative act. At the same time, he must also remember that they stand before a secularized society. His task is not to indoctrinate those present, but to enrich the particular commemoration with a spiritual dimension in such a way that it will be comprehensible and culturally acceptable. Therefore, he must be sensitive not to overdo the religious content. In the case of ecumenical commemorations, it is necessary to pay attention to an ecumenically conciliatory approach and to anticipate that participants from other Christian traditions will critically evaluate the presence or absence of some elements (e.g., orthodox participants asked the evangelical chaplain in Slovakia why he did not pray for the dead). The ministers should formulate their speech so that its departure points and content suggest Christian values and that they are not only present in the use of religious terminology.

The minister must also pay attention to not overloading their speech with superfluous details. According to Schneider, “many technical details, many explanations about the military mission or propaganda about the great effort made by the troops”, are not the chaplain's task. They can “leave all technical details to the military speaker [...] (and) concentrate on their task: expressing the words that fail us all when a young person has just died and focus on the relatives, their feelings, insecurity etc.” (Schneider 2019)

In an attempt to connect with the surroundings’ typical elements, a minister sometimes connects with impulses that he later uses metaphorically in the religious address. For example, one military unit’s emblem was a horse. The minister wanted to connect with this at the commemoration and said that the dead soldier left his unit to go to heaven on a white horse. Clergy attending from his church considered this inappropriate. The preacher should consider his line of content in his speech ac-
curately and not succumb to making an aesthetic statement to the detriment of its theological and pastoral suitability.

Regardless of the scope of their involvement (whether it is service or just a prayer), they must remember that their actions are part of a particular commemoration, therefore they must anticipate their actions being evaluated from the point of view of the event being remembered. The impulses which I have observed in my preparation in the Slovak context show that the minister needs wisdom to know which themes he can touch and which he should not introduce in his address.

6 Controversial Questions and Risky Impulses

6.1 Unethical Acts and Crimes on the Victors’ Part

Ladislav Lanštiak, who worked as a clergyman during the Second World War, wrote in 1948: “The post-war person has much to repair and reform in his character. This is also true of the soldier in full measure.” (Lanštiak 1948, 58) My German teacher reminisced about an experience from the end of the Second World War when a woman walking in a German town was shouting that she had been raped by a group of Russian soldiers. But at the commemorative ceremony at the end of the Second World War soldiers like these were also standing among the victors and were listening to expressions of thanks. A clergyman aware of this tension would look for effective opportunities and ways of solving it. A commemorative event is not one of them. Regarding his participation in it he must consider how he should approach the theme in order to honour the event and the people who suffered and lost their lives for the good of future generations – and meanwhile stay truthful to Christianity.

6.2 The Impact of the Political Context on an Evaluation of Historical Phenomena

Soviet soldiers were long considered the liberators of central Europe, which was much emphasized in the former socialist states. The historical fact that thousands of them died during the Second World War at Dukla (the border region between Poland and Slovakia) is still true. But the change in the political climate and Russia’s status in international relations, leads to a more reserved view of their country. This is also reflected in a perplexed attitude towards their victims.
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