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Editorial

This spring has acquired a special importance in the minds of most Europeans, because it represents the completion of a whole generation since the end of the last war in Europe. Forty years of peace is an achievement in itself, though it is likely that the celebrations this year will have more to do with the fact that the young men who lived through the stirring events of 1939–45 are now fading from the scene, and the survivors sense that their exploits will no longer command the same attention in a few years time. It is a last fling of the old glory, a final reminder of a vanished era in which the European powers warred with each other on a global scale.

Christians have cause for thanksgiving too, as we remember 1945, but we also have a responsibility to be in the forefront of those who bear witness to the fact that the freedoms for which men fought and died then have been only partly realised. The nations for whom we went to war have groaned under the peace that has made us rich, and the prospects for Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the other states of Eastern Europe look as gloomy now as they ever did. The Soviet Union too, is a prisonhouse of peoples, not least of courageous believers, who sacrifice their careers and even their lives in defence of their freedom to profess the name of Christ. We cannot change the political system which 1945 has bequeathed to us, but no believer and no church should let this anniversary pass without a silent commemoration, and an open reminder, that our brethren in Eastern Europe still yearn for the life which we in the West take for granted.

1985 is also the fortieth anniversary, as it happens, of the great victory of Labour in the June elections. With hindsight we can see that that event consecrated and probably hastened Britain's retreat, not only from Empire, but from the world stage in general. It was a triumph for the Little Englanders, those who believed that Britain could go it alone in the world, and who were little disposed to take such things as foreigners into account. The nation has paid dearly for this attitude, which remains deeply embedded in the popular consciousness. How is it still possible, after a generation of continuing decline, with the pound now worth scarcely more than the dollar, for the mass of the population to continue to believe that British is best, and that the rest of the world can be ignored?

Christians, alas, share this attitude, and Anglicans not least of all. How many of us are aware, for instance, that the Anglican Communion is wider—and increasingly more prosperous and influential—than the Church of England? How many of us realize that in many ways the Church of England is becoming an anachronism, out of step even with the churches which share its wider

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fellowship? The position of the 39 Articles, the ordination of women, church-state relations—all these are discussed in this country in sublime and supreme indifference to what is going on elsewhere. Eventually this attitude will catch up with us; sooner or later we shall have to pay the price for our disdain of “abroad”. A nation which withdraws into itself dies, or is overwhelmed, and the end may well be far worse than anything we now imagine.

Perhaps the best way to remember 1985 is to look back to another anniversary, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which led to the influx of large numbers of Huguenots into this country. What turned out in the long term to be a disaster for France, has been an enormous blessing for England, where Huguenots and their descendants have made a notable and lasting contribution to our national life. In 1685 we were an open nation, ready to receive the persecuted, concerned with what was happening in Europe, and conscious of our solidarity with fellow-believers, even if they spoke a different language and worshipped in a different way. Can we recover this spirit in 1985? Can Evangelical Christians, in particular, put away narrow nationalism, and recover the broadness of outlook in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, Englishman nor foreigner, and thus lead the way to a new and more fruitful era in our history than the generation since 1945?

GERALD BRAY