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Laurence White: Today, pray for Omagh

Friday, 15 August 2008

Today the town of Omagh will remember its darkest hour, August 15, 1998, when a republican car bomb exploded in the town killing 29 people. The local council will open its Garden of Light memorial to the victims of that atrocity.

It should be an event which everyone who is opposed to violence and violent men could attend.

It should be an event to which the relatives of all the victims, and the survivors of the atrocity, could come.

It should be an event to which everyone in Northern Ireland could subscribe because we are all sickened by terrorism and its continuing blight on our society.

Sadly, it is an event which is subject to controversy. At least 10 of the families bereaved by the bombing will boycott the event.

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They, along with other relatives, will attend their own ceremony on Sunday.

Some relatives don't want to attend the official ceremony because of the attendance of politicians. They feel let down by the Irish and British governments who pledged to bring the bombers to justice but haven't. Even the clergy of the four main denominations turned their backs on the relatives' Sunday ceremony until they saw sense this week.

Some don't want to share space with Sinn Fein councillors. The dissident bombers of Omagh were once mainstream republicans.

Some don't want their tragedy turned into a public spectacle, even 10 years later, and who can blame them?

Today, the best thing we can do for the people of Omagh, especially the bereaved and surviving injured, is to say a little prayer. Thank our gods that it was not us that suffered and remember that the bombing was just the start of the injustice they have suffered for a decade.

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