When the 'voice of God' was heard: My Word

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World War I, the "war to end all wars," ended when the armistice between the Allied Nations and Germany was signed on Nov. 11, 1918. On May 13, 1938, the U.S. Congress made Nov. 11 a legal holiday: "a day to be dedicated to the cause of world peace and to be thereafter celebrated and known as 'Armistice Day.'"

However, on June 1, 1954, Congress changed the name Armistice Day to Veterans Day, as new U.S. military interventions began to increase around the world.

American novelist and World War II veteran Kurt Vonnegut wrote about his war experiences and his time as an American prisoner of war surviving the horrific fire-bombing of the German city of Dresden in his famous novel "Slaughterhouse-Five." Years later, Vonnegut reflected on the U.S. government's changing the official recognition of Nov. 11th from Armistice Day to Veterans Day in the following way:

"When I was a boy, all the people of all the nations which had fought in the First World War were silent during the eleventh minute of the eleventh hour of Armistice Day, which was the eleventh day of the eleventh month. It was during that minute in nineteen hundred and eighteen, that millions upon millions of human beings stopped butchering one another.

"I have talked to old men who were on battlefields during that minute. They have told me in one way or another that the sudden silence was the Voice of God. So we still have among us some men who can remember when God spoke clearly to mankind. Armistice Day has become Veterans' Day. Armistice Day was sacred. Veterans' Day is not. So I will throw Veterans' Day over my shoulder. Armistice Day I will keep. I don't want to throw away any sacred things."

This substitution politicized the day by changing the focus from peace to war in its celebrating and honoring military veterans and the wars they served in. Sadly, it's too often political rhetoric and patriotic symbols being used to thank our veterans rather than genuine compensation and care for their sacrifices and service.

Let us reconsider the original intent of the Nov. 11 remembrance, where a solemn silence and ringing of church bells in nations around the world recognized the pledge for peace agreed to on that morning in November 1918, when the "voice of God" was heard.

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