

Masters of Biblical Studies
The Past Is a Foreign Country
Wendy A. Williams

Dr. Louis A. De Caro Jr.
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Mr. Carl R. Trueman's "Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History (Wheaton Press, Crossway 2010) elucidates, while studying history, how not to make the same mistakes of the past by imposing one's ideas, one's values and one's function of today into an unrelated past. This article describes the many problems which can arise, when one neglects to adhere to the rules and principles of study. We must remember the importance of context in analysis by establishing verifiable and plausible evidence. One should always be heedful and careful of the terms, the language, the culture and conventions that are completely contrasting from today's society. The way to make the study of history germane and true is by providing supportive data that gives evidence that maybe limited and provisional, but none the less still true.

Mr. Trueman states it best, "History is not just the past but a representation by someone in the present". Historians should be cognizant of the temptation that anachronism poses and make every effort to understand that the past is a foreign country (pg. 139). Understanding the forms of anachronism and what they mean are essential. Anachronism is defined as a thing that belongs to a period other than that in which it exists: that is outdated, out of place or ancient. Let us first be mindful that words offer different meanings for different times. The second "not seeing past agendas as modern developments" that is not to equate one's values that held highly by trying to legitimize it to an unrelated past (pg. 140). The third form is called "categorical anachronism" which misuses insertions of race and nationalism terms inappropriate for the period of history prior to the 19th century and the misuse of moral, ethical or intellectual standards that do not apply during the time studied (pg.141, 142). We must understand and follow Mr.

Trueman's that states, "I cannot write and think as a sixteenth-century man because I am not one, and the world in which I live is not the sixteenth century world" (pg. 144). He has done a fine job describing and contrasting the many forms of anachronism that historians fail to address. In hindsight, "History is written with some degree of anachronism, but we must know the contrasting limits while retelling history" (pg. 144).

Acknowledging comprehension, allows for one to become a true historians, who will provide correct interpretation and awareness to and of the past. Mr. Trueman addresses the author's motivation and intent when writing history. Intent is purpose and motivation come from the author choice to reveal. "The original intention is an important part of understanding the significance of any action: but we should avoid reducing the historical significance of any action to original intention" (pg. 152). Books and ideas are historical actions performed by historical agents of the past, so how do we go about obtaining the truth. To obtain the truth, we must first understand how the language at the time was established and developed to get the full disclosure of the context (pg. 156). Mr. Trueman states, "We are not claiming that all historical interpretations are equally valid; we are simply stating that no historical interpretation can claim to give exhaustive accounts of any single action. To help one in the search of correct interpretation, we must explore the historical, physical, cultural and structural components of literary context (pg. 156). The example provided by Calvin and Turretin's are exemplary that de first indicate that the works are over a century apart, the literary forms have changed (pg. 158). Turretin's work, when compared to Calvin, operates very clearly within a form of discourse, both in terms of overall structure and much of its technical vocabulary, which dates back to the

twelfth century; but his theology is distinctively Reformed, not medieval. We see clearly that they both have different theologies (pg. 164).

It was a pleasure reading this article because it is reflective upon my current studies in the History of Christianity. To comprehend anachronism is to understand how not to approach the study of history. Mr. Tueman states “Historians have a hard task in front of them” and they must look at the relevant conventions that shaped the human behavior of the time during which the specific historical act to be studied occurred (pg. 164). Historians must provide the truth in the retelling of the narrative by letting history tell her story. History is not to be misunderstood as something that is non-existing, but to be understood with context being crucial to meaning (pg.179).

I’ve thoroughly enjoyed the article because it has provided me with specific clarity on how to understand the past when studying history. I am now better equipped to ensure the proper study of history utilizing the tools that will give an accurate and correct meaning to its context.