

Class: TH605 History of Christianity

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Subject: The Past is a Foreign Country

In writing the research paper on "The past is a foreign country," the author Carl R. Trueman, made a few critical observations. One of the greatest temptations for historians is to impose on the past categories or values that were simply nonexistent (p.109). Here in our world today, we must understand they did things differently. Sometimes we wish things could be like what we knew back then. Even the Old Testament text suggested to the Children of Israel to go back to the old Path and walk in it when they find it. Maybe this was a reference to the covenant.

The author made mention of the problem of anachronism in writing about the past. That is trying to make something belong to a period for which it is impossible. Some actual examples were shared, like the word Liberty. In presenting the meaning of that word today, the historian may have a whole new or different purpose than the founding fathers because of how things are viewed in this generation. Maybe The United States of America is the only country in the world that claims its constitution is a living document, perhaps meaning it can adopt or accept whatever new doctrine, virtue, or human new belief comes it is the way. Its founding statements can be obsolete. For historians, there is a challenge in writing about the past to make it relevant for today. "Our contemporary culture is that all truth is relative. This is my truth. Now tell me yours. This relativism has manifested itself within the historical profession (p.25)." One of the great tragedies of history is denial, especially about the Holocaust.

Numerous politicians deny it ever took place. Also, articles were written to explain it never happened, even by politicians in the halls of the United States Congress. One of the reasons this is so appalling is because it is a recent event.

Great Strengths of History

The author indicated that writing history involves a synthesis of data, with the benefit of chronological hindsight, that allows the historian to offer not simply robotic chronologies of who did what and where but why they acted the way they do (p.113). It is believed that all historians have their own biases in what they say in their writings. We see that today not about the past but the present with our media. Some news is called spin, and the information is reported based on the respective journalist's political viewpoint. For those of us who depend on Historical documents to ascertain the doctrines we believe in and to understand their foundational point from history, we rely on the honesty of our writers. Some of us are amazed by the evidence we are studying now, and reading the same information from history from two to three different writers is well corroborated.

History of ideas

The author expressed his concern about this subject. He believed that anachronism had done much harm on this topic (p.115). The belief is that some represent ideological expressions of class interest, or they have another agenda for writing history. It is like detailing an event's account to make someone, a group, or an association look good. Or to refute an opponent. These are the events that cause harm to the reputation of history. Another danger in writing history is the comparisons or contrasting scholars from different periods of history. The author

made an essential illustration between Augustine and Calvin, he showed how they were both brilliant men, but they lived a few hundred years apart. Even though they were writing on the same subject, their respective audiences were very different, with differing interests, in different situations at their respective times.

The Mind of True Historian

John Lukacs defines history as "The remembered past" and is inevitably shaped by those who do the remembering (p.26). The claim to neutrality in history is merely a specious means of privileging my point of view disguised as simple truth. As the author noted, the heart of the true historian's task is the matter of verifiability and accountability by public criteria. Maybe most readers want to be in the situation to know what they are reading is reliable. In understanding the Hebrew scripture, we learn that most of the tradition was handed down orally, which creates some amazement to see today's people standing before a judge and is not accurate as to what they witnessed about eight months ago after they testified about a matter and are cross-examination by defense council, one wonders if they were an eyewitness at all. In analyzing the past, we encounter words like Intentionalism, meaning the belief or assumption that the meaning of a text is determined mainly by the stated or implied intentions of the author. And functionalist, that which makes something a thought, desire, or pain depends not on its internal constitution but solely on its function or the role it plays in the cognitive system of which it is a part. In the past, we are looking for actual historians in a foreign country as they research with an internationalist perspective. Trying to understand where the event is coming from, what was happening at the time, what caused the event, and who the recipient will give understanding for the application. Or lessons to learn from.

The examination of the Historical past leaves us with a lot of questions, such as why Martin Luther wrote favorably about the Jews then later changed his mind and wrote the intense antisemitic things he wrote, was it because of the situation of the political climate at that time, was it some heinous action of the Jewish People, was he a victim of something that happened, these are some of the issues historians apply it is looking glass into. Was he affected by the anti-Jewish writings of his day? What might be different if he was in our world today? As the author stated on p.140, "In approaching historical actions, then, historians have a hard task. They need to do more than look at the war, book, or speech that interests them in particular."