

Dear Friends,

## Remembering

Although Jesus encouraged his hearers to be forward-looking, to 'set their hand to the plough' and to stay focused on what they were aiming for (Lk.9:62), he also encouraged them to look back and to remember. At the Last Supper, for example, when he shared the bread and wine, he told his friends, 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Lk.22:19). As a Jew he was used to observing festivals such as the Passover and Feast of Tabernacles and recalling key events in his people's history. Memories are important. Whether personal to ourselves or corporately shared, they give shape to our lives, act as a source of knowledge and experience, and provide encouragement and inspiration for the future.

We should cherish them, but treat them also with a degree of caution. Where for example there is bias in the media, inaccuracy in reporting, or a deliberate failure to report what is clearly important, manipulated, memories can be distorted and prejudice and misunderstanding fuelled. It is quite possible, for example, for ruthless governments to tamper with the past. I am reminded of George Orwell's dystopian novel '1984', in which the central character, Winston Smith, works at the Ministry of Truth rewriting newspaper articles so that they conform to the party line.

Sometimes the past is altered almost accidentally without our realising it. During the recent referendum debate on the European Union, I (and doubtless many others) assumed that when we joined the Common Market in 1972, that it was for purely economic reasons and there was no suggestion whatsoever of it being the first step towards a closer political union. But just recently my wife gave me a leaflet which she had found at her mother's house. It told a rather different story. Published by the Daily Telegraph (and sold for a shilling!) it purported to provide the 'facts' surrounding the debate about joining the Common Market. A 1946 speech by Sir Winston Churchill was quoted approvingly on the first page:

"The sovereign remedy [for the hurts and divisions caused by the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War ... is] ... to recreate the European family, or as much of it as we can, and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom. *We must build a kind of United States of Europe.*"

This vision was developed throughout the booklet and clearly reiterated in the concluding paragraphs. It was not brushed under the carpet but proclaimed from the rooftops! Leaving aside the diverse views we may hold on Brexit, it struck me as being an interesting example of how memory can deceive us and history be rewritten.

Christianity is an historical religion. We believe in a God who has acted in history and should therefore be amongst the first to recognise its importance: how vital is the honesty and integrity of historians and members of the media, and how careful we need to be over what our children are taught (or not taught) in their history lessons. If we worship the God of Truth and seek to be led by his Spirit of Truth, we must uphold the truth however difficult that may sometimes be.

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