

A Faith That Equips Us for All of Life – And That To Come

A Faith For Life – And Eternity

I've just returned from a rather intense 3-day tour of the Somme battlefields and cemeteries, based in Arras, a centre of much fighting and destruction. One aim – fulfilled, thankfully – was to find the commemoration of my grandfather John Vincent Thomas, who perished, seemingly from shell-fire, in the very last months of the war, and who has no known grave; (I've earlier recorded my view as to how the sacrifices of those many men have now been betrayed by our leaders), and I was caused to reflect on the ultimate fate of this cursed generation, how so many died – rows upon rows of graves; I think our coach must have passed at least 30 cemeteries, many possessing over 1,000 interments – and yet a far greater proportion returned than was, apparently, anticipated in the closing stages of the war; but all died, in the end, as all must.

All causes and hopes perish in the end, and nations and civilisations also rise and fall, our own currently doing the latter. The end of *this* life is ... ending. But also I learned very much, on this trip, about the strength of the human spirit – and not just from the miseries of the combatants. I am used to being the oldest person in any group – ie. at work, surrounded as I am by, to me, very young colleagues – but here I was the youngest, and had the amazing experience of meeting an old lady who had been to my school (a boarding school for children whose fathers had died young, a place largely kept going by two world wars): arriving there in 1943, she had left in 1951 – *the year I was born* – yet she still went on trips like this (not unwearying for those much younger), and was still, obviously, very active, despite obvious infirmities.

I didn't discover if the elderly lady was a Christian, but I suspect she was, as, for one thing, that was among the gifts that the school gave to many of us, and certainly me (in early teen years). For many (who are 'cradle-Christians', rather than experiencing conversion later in life) such faith guides them, consoles them, and strengthens them through the long years, but above all, causes them to reflect on eternity (there is the story of the young African Christian who came to an English church, recently, and found it full of old people – Was it not depressing?, he was asked; Not at all, he answered, for there he had experienced how the Christian faith had been a power in peoples' lives for a very long time, and was their hope for that to come).

Eternity comes to us all, or rather, it *is*, 'has been', and 'will be', including those who perished in the war, and those who returned home, and we who only stand and wait as the things of this world, around us, tarnish and perish, are overrun, cast down.

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