

Is there one truth you can find – or are you travelling hopelessly?

Travelling Hopelessly

Recently, I've been preparing some lectures (to be given in June) on the art of painter John S. Sargent (1856-1925). In his last decades, Sargent produced a series of large murals for American public buildings, and those at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts depict Classical subjects, myths and stories. One lunette shows the Danaides, young women who were fated eternally to fill up a large urn with water, from heavy ewers, only to see the water perpetually run out at the bottom of the urn.

I was reminded of this picture last night, when, in a television documentary concerned with a famous novelist, a senior Anglican was shown expressing the view that the most untrustworthy thing one can experience is the thought that *I* have the truth, and others are wrong. It seemed to me that beneath this liberal-sounding remark was actually an attack, not on those who might believe that they alone possessed the truth (and perhaps had the right to impose it on others), but a rejection of the idea that there might be a (one) truth that people were capable of finding, compared with which they would know untruth.

The attack upon objective truth and reality is, of course, a prominent feature of the present “Postmodernist” age, and, sadly, it is found in the Church also. And if there is not one truth – and your truth really is not as “relevant” and valid as mine - then we are all of us mired in a fruitless perpetual quest for meaning and purpose, and, also, an endless search for how and why things came to be, our essential nature, and our ultimate destiny; and certainly, the first victims in this war are ideas of right and wrong, ethics and morals. The militant atheists, by contrast, have no problem whatever in telling you that they know the ultimate objective truth – the evolutionism, on which their materialism rests, and in which it had its origins, is not something proclaimed, and taught, as optional, or subject to possible questioning; but the Church can never manage this degree of certainty, sometimes, indeed, not any at all.

Those who reject ultimate truth – they call it *absolutism* - like to quote the saying (which I'm sure I've railed against before, on this site) that it is ‘always better to travel hopefully than to arrive’. No, such a journey is in truth that of some endless treadmill of delusion, and such a fate (will they not realise?) is utterly and completely hopeless. The very illusions, with which this actual hopelessness blinds, them makes them prey to a hundred tyrannies; and, indeed, the Tyranny of Relativism*, as Pope Benedict called it, is the source of this despotism.

It seems to me that the mask-like, rigid faces, of Sargent's maidens, endlessly trudging up stairs with their heavy burdens, fully portray the soul-destroying, wearying, hopelessness that today's “liberal” clergy might bring us to.

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* “Tyranny of Despotism” is also found; this may be something to do with translation from German.