

Scientists & historians



*“For this light momentary affliction...”
2 Cor 4:17*

A sense of perspective...

Back in my school days, I was really fortunate to have good science teachers. As a result, I became very interested in the sciences and caught a vision for their potential to benefit and improve our world.

By comparison, my history teacher completely failed to excite me. Somehow, we got bogged down in the French Revolution and I just didn't get it. Unsurprisingly when I moved into the world of higher education, I chose a science course. It took many years before I developed a taste for history.

At this time, when we are still waging war with Covid-19, our government has been very clear that their policy is guided by the best scientific evidence and advice. Thankfully progress is being made, although there is still, of course, a long way to go. So, as well as being hugely grateful to our NHS frontline workers who put themselves in a position of risk to help us it is, I think, appropriate

to draw attention to the contribution of our scientists. Be they statisticians who work with data and computers, immunologists who work with pipettes and centrifuges to develop effective tests and vaccines or engineers who work with mechanical and electrical components to design equipment, we salute them all. Whether they are based in universities or industrial and commercial settings, their collaborative and collective efforts are making an essential contribution to bringing this pandemic to an end.

But what about historians? Has history anything to contribute at this time? I think it has. Historians help us to see the present in the light of the bigger picture – the sweep of time. We do need the big picture because without it we'll see things from a very narrow and limited point of view.

History provides us with a sense of proportion. Historians tell us that at the time of the Black Death in the 14th century between 75 and 200 million people died. They tell us that in the 17th century Great Plague 15% of the population of London perished during just one summer. They tell us that at the end of World War One, more recently, some 20 million people died of influenza worldwide. Now every death is a tragic loss for the families concerned but what we are experiencing now as a society is, comparatively speaking, *“a momentary light affliction”*, to borrow some words from the apostle Paul.

Such a perspective can help us if the return to normality is slower than we would wish. It can help us to remain positively focussed and restrained. It can help us not to give-in to complaining and criticising those who are working so hard on our behalf.

Perhaps the greatest danger we are facing at this time, is not so much the Covid-19 virus itself but the temptation to be impatient and throw away the gains which have been made by the remarkable and heroic efforts of so many people.

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