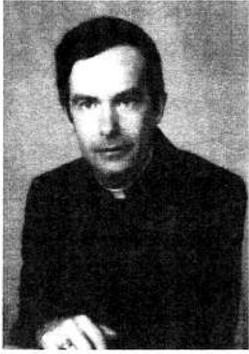


Chaplain's Corner, Hughes Camp Chaplain Richard W Rudd



Thucydides, the 5th century BC Greek author of *The Peloponnesian War*, is the reputed father of recorded history as we know it. History is one of those subjects one either loves or hates. When most of us are young, we are engrossed in the present and aiming toward the future with little regard for the past.

We are preoccupied with cares related to education, career, marriage, family, finances, social status, exploring the world around us, and all the other cornucopia of options attracting our attention and decisions demanding to be made. Some do not develop an appreciation of the value of history until late in life, usually beginning with genealogical research. Trying to understand life without knowledge of history is like being blindfolded and transported to an unfamiliar location. You would not know how you got there, where you were, or in what direction to go. History gives us the perspective needed to navigate through the sequence of past, present, and future of life.

Based on a record of reliable evidence, history is past events that shape our contemporary world and form the foundation upon which the future is built. It is so much more than a rigid skeletal framework of dates, names, and pivotal events. History should not just be memorized; it should be understood. All events are as unique as the people who generate them. A better understanding of the past enables us to understand ourselves better. We all play a role in the formation of history. To a lesser or greater degree, all of us influence others, events, and our surroundings. The world would not be the same if we had not passed through it. Even if our contributions are not formally recorded, nevertheless the effect is there. We all make history. It is normal for man to want his accomplishments recognized and the fact that he lived noted; man wants to be remembered. That is one reason why parents have children and those children carve their initials in trees; it is why books are written and monuments are erected.

If history is fictionalized, it can be dangerous. . . It can offer a beguiling and seductive allure for those seeking a simplistic and romantic, wistful, and

sentimental refuge from the problems of the present and the uncertainties of the future. Glorified and idealized, it becomes a mythical state of mind. Reflections on the antebellum old South, the roaring 1920's, or the rock and role era of the 1950's are examples. Memory can be intentionally and unintentionally unreliable. Facing the hardships of life in the wilderness during the Exodus, the Israelites forgot the harshness of slavery in Egypt, but chose only to remember that they "...ate bread to the full..." (Ex. 16:3) Fear and discontent can magnify out of proportion the good in the past and what we vilify in the present. Thus, we might use a selective knowledge of the past to indict the present for its perceived faults. However, a comprehensive knowledge of history will reveal there are no idyllic good old days. The angels sent to warn Lot and his family told them, "Flee for your life; do not look back..." (Gen. 19:17) "But Lot's wife behind him looked back and she became a pillar of salt." (Gen. 19:26) Instead of focusing her hope on the prospects in the future, her heart remained in the past. Even historians can be guilty of unrealistically and neatly categorizing and simplifying the past, making it seem that events have sudden beginnings and instant endings. Life is a struggle for survival and improvement. Events are numerous, complex, diverse, and overlapping. Real life is messy, lacking academic neatness and order. There are people who have had visions of the future; nobody has ever travelled back to the past. We are travelers jetting through the present, a momentary tick of the second hand and beat of the heart, speeding toward the future that waits on the horizon and leaving the past behind as a vanishing vapor. Each new day with its own promises and challenges is never exactly like the one before and every day in the past is unique and gone forever.

A second danger of fictionalized history is looking back to the past with an ulterior motive. Some seek to revise and rewrite history to support their present agenda and blueprint for the future as they envision it. They are the ones who want to rewrite the history books. Others seek to edit out the history they find offensive to their peculiar sensibilities. They are the ones who want to remove monuments, flags, and even desecrate graves. The remedy for this is a thorough knowledge of history based on

sound documentation from multiple sources, asking questions, and thinking for yourself. In spite of our best efforts to study history, to learn the who, what, where, when, how, and why, we must not be disillusioned when, as in the present and future, we encounter questions we can only ask and never answer, things we only imagine and never actually see. We must resist the temptation to attempt to fill in those gaps in time with speculation using our creative imagination.

We live in a fleeting interval of perpetual transition between a time that has been and a time yet to be. As darkness becomes daylight before our eyes, the past is followed by the present. The two are woven together and interconnected. We are not conscious of the transformation until we experience one of those moments of epiphany. Christ warned us against inordinately dwelling on or seeking solace in the past, saying, "Nobody who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Lk. 9:62)

But He also advised us to be aware of history when He said, "Remember Lot's wife." (Lk. 17:32) We cannot live without hope. Hope sustains us in the present and guides us toward the future, not the past. That is why St. Paul said that "...forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, (we) press on toward the goal..." (Phil, 3:13)

Father Richard Rudd Hughes Camp Chaplain