

Toxic Truth Deficiency

Have you ever wanted to throw a brick through your television? I have in mind the peddling of retail products which make such outrageous and sensational claims that they can only be regarded as outright lies and shameless deceit. I have written on the topic before, and I do so again because it is so deeply concerning to me.

I have in mind quasi medical products which “guarantee” to grow back lost hair or restore virility or improve brain function. It is obvious to any reasonable person that if it were as easy as popping a pill, our medical doctors ---scientists in their own right--- would be prescribing these things and making our woes go away. These are lies generated by professional liars!

They are also an easy target for me to write more broadly on the “structuralizing” of deceit and lying in our world today. The world of advertising and marketing is rife with this sort of thing. But most of it is manifest in subtle ways which grate on me, (and, perhaps on you too.).

When I go to the bank and stand in line waiting for the next available teller, I scan the environment with my eyes and what do I see? I see random posters of people conducting themselves in some idyllic version of life: They are always stock photos of models, male and female, with perfect teeth, flying kites or sailing boats or grilling in the back yard in perfect, serene, prosperity. I suppose I am to infer that this is the life that the bank will provide for me as long as I maintain my minimum balance. Ugh! Give me another brick.

A decade ago some news pundit coined the term “spin doctor.” It was a moniker designating some political operative who created a cleverly crafted narrative to suit his or her own agenda and then proceeded to plant it in the news stream. The new term, championed by the current President, is “fake news,” (though I would want to apply it much more broadly than he does.) It’s not just misinformation or alternative-truth we are talking about here; it is lies and the active corruption of society through the normalization of lying. Give me a truckload of bricks!

I am in danger of becoming an old curmudgeon if I don’t temper this reflection with faith and hope.

But, I do see the normalization of lying as extremely toxic.



WYSIWYG

What you see is what you get. The acronym formed from the first letters of that phrase was adopted in the early days of personal computing to describe something we take for granted today; that what you saw on the screen of the computer is what would actually print out on the piece of paper.

I strive to be a WYSIWYG person in my every day living. I don’t want to live a lie or put forth misleading information about myself. Within the limits of prudence, I want to be transparent to others so that they need not worry about agendas or ulterior motives and such. This means an active check on my ego, (my false self or, as one spiritual writer puts it, “my pride form.”).

I love the Gospel passage wherein Jesus encounters Nathaniel under a tree and declares, “**Ah! Here is a true Israelite. In him there is no guile!**” (John 1:45, In some translations it reads “**In him there is no duplicity!**”) Even though this is a relatively minor scene within the whole of the Gospel, Jesus exclamation is striking: He seems refreshed or soothed by the character of Nathaniel. He is WYSIWYG in the best possible sense: He is not crafty or devious or cunning or wily. He will not stab you in the back or use you. Wouldn’t you want the Lord to say that about you?

Obviously, WYSIWYG can be a bad thing and refer to a genuinely evil person who does not bother to hide or cloak his evil. I am assuming goodness and a dedication to rigorous honesty as I adopt that awkward acronym. Throwing bricks is, clearly, not the solution to the toxic obfuscation and denial of truth which permeates our world today. But, I want to believe that our rigorous dedication to truth in our personal and communal lives can make a difference. It requires critical thinking, prayer and reflection to hack through the jungle of lies and deceit. But, recall the Lord who says “**Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no.’ Anything else is from the evil one.**”