

Don't Mention the War

She was a beautiful German girl. She came as a guest to my parents house in the early 1960s. It was a very significant event for our family, because my father had bitter memories of the Second World War and wasn't much open to the idea that the Germans were even human beings. But I took her out for a meal, was terribly international and friendly, and I carefully avoided mentioning 'The War'. I thought the meal was a great success, but I found out later that she thought that I was just a scruffy student.

Looking back, I think that this experience had a wider continuing lesson for me. It is that we can behave so complicatedly in avoiding a stereotype (i.e. a fixed mental impression); that we don't see something that should be more obvious. As that German girl might have said: 'Never mind the War, I just wish that you were better washed and dressed'.

Satan is very clever. He knows that we are easily distracted from the important things by something that we judge to be more important because it's familiar. Given his love of ruling over the sources of power, he is most obviously found where power lies; and today, power comes from the information that we may unthinkingly absorb from TV, radio, Twitter, or the gossip on Facebook. What all these have in common, is that they can pressure us into believing that what everybody else thinks is important, should be important for us.

But let's be careful. Just because we might have 'a fixed mental impression', or believe what 'everybody says'; that doesn't mean that TV, radio, Twitter, or Facebook; are automatically agents of Satan. The real key is not the medium; but the message. We need to look behind the labels and test the contents.

On the 18th of May, the Orthodox Church celebrates a saint called (depending on your language): Photini, Svetlana or Clare. She is the Samaritan woman of St John's Gospel (Chapter 4, verses 5-32). The Samaritans, for the Jews, sound a bit like what the Germans were for my dad. But Jesus saw through the labels: to love, enlighten and inspire a real human being. Read the story.

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