

## LIES, DAMNED LIES, AND ?

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One of the striking features of the recent American election was the aggressive fibbing by both sides regarding the platforms and qualities of the other. The Bush administration was spectacularly successful in this arena, persuading a significant number of the American people that there were Weapons of Mass Destruction, that there was a link between al Quida and the Hussein regime, and that the purpose of the Iraq effort is to establish a liberal democracy in Iraq. None of these claims stands up to serious inspection, and yet tens of millions of Americans, some quite intelligent and well educated, believed them. Why?

The obvious explanation is that Bush succeeded in mobilizing a propaganda machine in support of his lies which must have made Herr Goebbels to roll over in his grave green with envy. But, would this propaganda blitz would have succeeded if there were not a block of American voters conditioned to accept, even welcome, being lied to? Who were they? Beyond those with vested interests in the Bush Doctrine, the military-industrial complex types and the Big Oil crowd, the obvious candidates were the adherents to the evangelical sects who were widely seen as core Bush supporters. The evangelicals are people who believe firmly that the Bible is The Word of God in spite of the obvious contradictions, difficulties in translation, and impossible demands emanating from rigorous reading of scripture. People who believe that the Bible is every word the Word of God are clearly candidates for fibbing successes by persons in authority be they clerics or presidents, and probably the advertising moguls.

However, before taking a holier-than-thou attitude toward the evangelicals we would be wise to ask - Do we have a like weakness, all be it on a less extreme level ? I think we do, and one obvious candidate is our claim to be a "non-creedal church". The Gage Canadian Dictionary (2002) defines creed as, 1. a formal statement of the essential points of religious belief; 2. any set of basic guiding principles; 3. In Christianity, the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. Note the order of priority. Thus the Purposes and Principles are a creed, like it or not. Further, we treat them as such. So why the denial of this reality? My correspondence with one of our clergy suggests that, indefensible as it is, our "non-creedal" claim can become a pillar of an individuals religious convictions and thus very hard to drop in spite of its lack of credibility.

Even more challenging is facing the truth about ourselves, our relations, and our country. On November 21s last Dr. Neil Nelson gave us a very moving account of the harm done in the native schools during the years when public policy was to attempt to suppress native culture, and turn First Nations Canadians into sort of dark skinned white men and women. This cruel policy was accomplished by forcibly taking children from their parents at an early age, providing them with sub standard accommodations and food, and frequently making them victims of sexual abuse. Many children grew up without having had the experience of a loving and dependable relationship with even one adult. Thus lacking the experience and skill to be a good parent they imposed their patterns of alcoholism and abuse on their children. Neglect and abuse continues among native Canadians reflected in high suicide rates and the continuation of alcoholism and violence . All to many Canadians and their governments are unsympathetic to the conditions of these native citizens reflected in unwillingness of governments to back measures needed to break the cycle of native violence and self-destruction.

Parallel situations are outlined by Erna Paris in her prize winning "Long Shadows, Truth, Lies and History". (Vintage Canada 2001) People and their governments, she says, both have great difficulty coming to terms with the legacies of past events such as the Holocaust in Germany and France, apartheid in South Africa, and slavery in the United States. Many decent people just want the past swept under the rug. The trouble is that the past won't stay under the rug. It keeps popping up in unexpected and embarrassing ways and places. Urging that the past be honesty faced and dealt with is not a entry to democratic popularity. One illustration. In the first decade of the 20th Century Germany took over South West Africa (now Namibia) Their occupation resulted in the deaths over a quarter of the population. The German Social Democratic Party exposed and criticized this piece of genocide. What was its reward? It was soundly defeated in the subsequent general election. The German citizenry resented the name of the fatherland being blackened in this way. It appears that exposing the lies we tell ourselves, and dealing with the lies we previously accepted about our gang and our country, is one of the most difficult and painful process people have to deal with. Courage is what is needed, and I will deal again with this question again in the Chronicle Journal's "Spiritual Gatherings" due out on December 9.