

14th September 2020

Seeing

“Not only is there but one way of doing things rightly, but there is only one way of seeing them, and that is, seeing the whole of them.”

John Ruskin, The Two Paths

A *Peanuts* cartoon has Linus wearing glasses. Lucy wants to know “why?”, so she asks, “Are you wearing glasses because you have myopia or hypermetropia?” Quick as a flash Linus responds, “Neither! I’m wearing glasses so I can see better.” Before the days of varifocal and bifocal lenses, my Granny had two pairs of glasses: “Reading glasses and seeing glasses,” she called them. She went to the movies once with only her reading glasses with her. She could read the wording on the side of a popcorn tub, but she couldn’t see a thing on the screen without her “seeing glasses”.

What does seeing mean? I don’t mean *physically* seeing, or what glasses my Granny should wear, or what causes Linus’s sight problems. But, how do we *discern* things, interpret issues, react to what’s around us? Often, we see what we want to see, what pleases us or chimes with our thinking, and sometimes only a part of an issue. The best of us, in the best of times, follows Ruskin’s mantra and tries to see the whole thing.

Arthur Conan Doyle has Sherlock Holmes say in *Scandal in Bohemia*, “You see, but you do not observe”. I would suggest that often “We see, but only what we *want* to observe.” And, even worse, having observed a little, we decide that we’ve seen enough.

Brian Keenan, a Belfast-born writer, was kidnapped by Islamic Jihad in 1986 and spent four years as a hostage in Beirut. His book, *An Evil Cradling*, published in 1991, recounts the ordeal of that experience. Among the many powerful insights Keenan offers us, there is this one:

*Politics is only a small part of what we are.
It’s a way of seeing, it’s not all-seeing of itself.*

Perhaps if we recognised that *any* way of seeing is “not all-seeing of itself” when we don’t or won’t see the whole thing, then we might see and try to understand the world’s issues in a more holistic way.

A prayer for today

All-knowing God, see me as I am, and help me see the world with your eyes. Amen

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