

6th November 2020

CONS

“All we need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure.”

Mark Twain, Letter to Mrs Foote, 1887

A “con”, in modern parlance, is a “confidence trick” played on an unsuspecting victim, usually to their detriment. Mark Twain may be right: when you have confidence in a plausible story, *and* you are ignorant of the possible consequences, then success is assured – usually for the confidence trickster and not for the victim. Beware of the “con” ...

Consider, for example, the recent report of a man who helped police return a pair of Humboldt penguins to a zoo when he learned they’d been stolen. He’d paid nearly £10,000 for the birds after seeing an advert on Facebook. Microchips in the birds showed they’d been taken from a Safari Zoo. A former zookeeper had been helping police with their enquiries. Now, excuse me for being sceptical, but if I saw *penguins* for sale on *Facebook*, I might be a tad suspicious. A con, perhaps?

TV programmes offer warnings of such cons, reminding people to beware of the tricksters – instancing folk conned out of money, conned into buying something that doesn’t exist or purchasing fake goods, conned into relationships for sexual gratification. “Beware of the con”, we’re advised, and rightly so, when we see the effects on innocent victims.

Trust is an important commodity. To damage it, as con-artists do, harms us all. Bad people play on our trust, and, as a result, we can be cautioned to “trust no one”, just as Shakespeare said in *Henry V*:

*Trust none; for oaths are straws,
men’s faiths are wafer-cakes ...*

How sad it is if that’s true for all of us, all of the time. Of course, confidence tricksters betray our trust, and, as a consequence, we may find trusting *anyone* really difficult. But don’t let the “cons” take us down that road. Let’s value trust where we find it. If we’re trusted by someone, make sure we don’t break that trust. And if you’re a victim of a con, remember there are *still* people who *can* be trusted, whose oaths are more than straws, and whose faiths are always stronger than a flimsy wafer-cake.

A prayer for today

Loving God, put your trust in me as I put my trust in you. Amen.

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