

3rd November 2021

Accuracy

“The power of accurate observation is commonly called cynicism.”

George Bernard Shaw, The World

An important balance to university life was “the summer job”. In the 1960s and 70s, there were plenty temporary jobs in the Fort William area. One of mine was as a “lab assistant” in the Pulp and Paper Mill at Corpach. I was studying physics at university, so “lab assistant” seemed a good fit. Physics? Chemistry? No one in HR seemed to know the difference.

Lab work consisted of taking daily samples of pulp at various stages of production, running tests and submitting the results to “the office” for analysis. Accuracy was crucial. A mis-read result or a fumbled addition would cause problems. I discovered that the guy who’d had my job previously had been sacked for a series of inaccuracies. I made sure I didn’t suffer the same fate. “The power of accurate observation” may be deemed cynical by some, according to George Bernard Shaw. But for me, the power of accurate observation was crucial to my summer employment.

What about us? Are humans made to be accurate? I don’t mean in the recording of test-results, but in behaviour, righteousness, morals?

In the “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is recorded (accurately, I hope) as saying: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Perfect? We can *strive* for accuracy, but is perfection really possible? John Ruskin wrote this in *The Stones of Venice* in 1853:

You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cogwheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanise them.

It is “unhuman” to believe we can be accurate *all* the time. We are not machines. We are not made for absolute precision. But I’d rather be human and make mistakes than be a mere set of tools or cogwheels and be perfect. Am I wrong? I’m sure you’ll tell me if I am. After all, I can’t be expected to be accurate *all* of the time, now can I?

A prayer for today

Perfection, Lord? Well, I can try. And, honestly, I do

But would I be accurate in my belief that you’ll understand if I fail? Amen