

Thought for the Day 1st May - John Reed

Read Revelation 20:11-15

“History is written by the victors.” Thus, according to many, spoke Winston Churchill.

Unfortunately, like many oft-attributed quotes, apparently he never said that at all. He did say, in a speech in the House of Commons in 1948: *“For my part, I consider that it will be found much better by all parties to leave the past to history, especially as I propose to write that history myself.”* Which is close enough.

But, even if Churchill didn’t express it in exactly those words, surely he can lay claim to the *idea* that history is written by the victors?

No, not even that. The idea was around a long time before him.

For example, Researcher Ken Hirsch (on the mailing list of the American Dialect Society) has pointed to instances in French from 1842 [*“[L]’histoire est juste peut-être, mais qu’on ne l’oublie pas, elle a été écrite par les vainqueurs”*], Italian from 1852 [*“La storia di questi avvenimenti fu scritta dai vincitori”*], and English from 1844 [*“Vanquished—his history written by the victors—Robespierre has left a memory accursed.”*]. Over time, it seems to have become a recognised maxim, being used for example by an 1889 historian’s account of the 1746 Battle of Culloden: *“it is the victor who writes the history and counts the dead.”*

Anyway, although it seems Churchill didn’t write it, it is a maxim worth remembering.

Last week, for instance, Malcolm Turnbull released his autobiography, *A Bigger Picture*. Included in it, of course, is a reflection on his time in politics, his Prime Ministership, and how he lost it. The problem for him is, as subsequent discussion in the media has shown, there is always more than one side to any story, and ... wait for it ... *history is written by the victors*. So Malcolm is fighting an uphill battle to convince his readers that everything that went wrong was all the fault of others, when those others have turned out to do quite well, winning elections and running a good and stable government in this time of crisis without him.

One must be very careful about trying to write history from the losing side.

Which means that we must be careful in our dealings with God. Because, for all our noise and bluster, one day he will open his books and hand down his judgment - on history, and on us. No amount of autobiographies trying to sell our side of things, trying to cast ourselves in a better light, will change anything. It is his book, and his alone, that will carry the day. So the thing to do is get in his right books now, and make sure that our names are written in his book of life!