

Why It Is Much Easier to Condemn Past Generations Than to Judge Our Own

It is very easy for us to condemn the moral actions (or inactions) of past generations. "If only we had been there," we say to ourselves, "we would never have done what they did." But are we sure? Will our actions (or inactions) be judged harshly by future generations?

It is far easier to judge others than to judge ourselves. As Paul wrote, "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things" (Rom. 2:1, NIV).

If we had been born and raised as white Christians in the early 1800s in Alabama, are we sure that we would have recognized the evils of slavery?

If we had been Christians living in Europe during the Holocaust, are we sure that we would not have looked the other way rather than risked our lives to save our Jewish neighbors?

And isn't it ironic that some of the most vocal social justice warriors today are among the most militant proponents of abortion, one of the greatest moral abominations on the planet?

Commenting on this mindset, Jesus said to the hypocritical religious leaders, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants

of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!" (Matt. 23:29-32, NIV).

Not long after Jesus spoke these words of rebuke, some of these very leaders were complicit in His death.

Thinking back to the Holocaust, a September 2013 article in the strongly left-leaning *The Nation* begins with these words: "In early 1943, at the height of the Holocaust, a prominent journalist denounced President Franklin Roosevelt's response to the Nazi genocide in harsh terms: 'You and I and the President and the Congress and the State Department are accessories to the crime and share Hitler's guilt,' she wrote. 'If we had behaved like humane and generous people instead of complacent, cowardly ones, the two million Jews lying today in the earth of Poland and Hitler's other crowded graveyards would be alive and safe. ... We had it in our power to rescue this doomed people and we did not lift a hand to do it – or perhaps it would be fairer to say that we lifted just one cautious hand, encased in a tight-fitting glove of quotas and visas and affidavits, and a thick layer of prejudice.'"

And who was it that penned this biting denunciation? It was "none other than Freda Kirchwey, staunch New Dealer, Roosevelt supporter and editor in chief of *The Nation*."

The article continues, "*The Nation* spoke out early and vociferously for US action to rescue Europe's Jews. After the 1938 *Kristallnacht* pogrom, it called for admission to the United States of at least 15,000 German Jewish refugee children. (The administration declined to endorse the proposal.) The Roosevelt administration's refugee policy 'is one which must sicken any person of ordinarily humane instinct,' Kirchwey wrote in 1940. 'It is as if we were to examine laboriously the curriculum vitae of flood victims clinging to a piece of floating wreckage and finally to decide that no matter what their virtues, all but a few had better be allowed to drown.'"

Could many lives have been saved, both Jewish and Gentile, had America taken action earlier?

Coming under special fire in this just-quoted article was Prof. Laurence Zuckerman, who had defended FDR's World War II actions. In response, he wrote (remember, this was in 2013), "At a time when our country's leaders and many of its citizens are agonizing over how to respond to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, we might all agree that figuring out the best way to stop mass murder overseas has never been an easy task."

And so it is that today, we find ourselves in a similar situation. Right in front of our own eyes, on our TV screens and smartphones and tablets, we see the terrible carnage in Ukraine, often in real time. Our government even accuses the Russians of "war crimes" and "genocide."

Yet we have our reasons, we say, not to engage more fully. "Should we use our planes or send our soldiers, it will result in a much greater, potentially world-impacting bloodbath. At times like this, we need to act strategically and pragmatically."

And every day, the body count grows, including thousands upon thousands of Ukrainian citizens (with countless babies and children and women and elderly among them), as other nations take similar, cautious stands.

Are we doing the right thing? Will history look back at us favorably?

And what of our participation in the Beijing Winter Olympics after accusing China of committing "egregious human rights abuses and atrocities"? Was a diplomatic boycott really the best we could do?

As to our policy with Ukraine, I do not claim to know with certainty what course of action is right, very much wanting to

help the Ukrainians end the war quickly but being unsure of the long-term consequences.

But that's the point I'm making. We all have our excuses. We all have our reasons. We all have our justifications.

And yet, just as we look back with horror at Christian participation in the slave trade, future generations will look back in horror at some of the choices we have made today. Are we sure we are on the side of that which is right and just and true?

May God help us to humble ourselves in His sight, to be ruthlessly honest, to be willing to receive truthful criticism and to want our blind spots exposed. To quote Paul again (in a very different context), "But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31, ESV). {eo}

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