

Avoiding Missing Out

As a young man at university, I was a confused mix of absolute certainty and insecure doubt. Having taught hundreds of young men, I now recognise that my condition was a common one.

My mixed up condition meant that I used very loud opinions to act as a defence when I was confronted with alarming new situations. So when someone asked me whether I wanted to be a member of the university 'Socratic Society'; I refused. I had already decided that I didn't like posh Greek names.

I also had opinions about which parts of my university city were worth a visit. So there were places I went, and places I never went.

Some of my friends were less prejudiced. One of them did join the Socratic Society, and met CS Lewis; the Christian writer and author of the Narnia books. Another friend ventured beyond the usual places that we frequented, and took his copy of the Lord of the Rings to the house of its author; JRR Tolkien. Tolkien signed my friend's copy of the book in Elvish. (I wonder what that's worth these days!)

But sometimes my opinions worked to my advantage. I was against experimenting with drugs like one of my trendy contemporaries. My opinion was right: he died young. I was prejudiced against following a career with a certain company that was recommended to me. I have no regrets: the company went bust two years later.

Yet all these successes and failures are things are from the past. They remind me of the advice of an Orthodox Christian monk. It is that Satan likes to worry us with the two things we cannot control; the past and the future. Meanwhile, we are distracted from the present choices which we can control, and it is these that will eventually determine what we will regret, and what we will give thanks for.

Instead of worrying or voicing defensive opinions, there is a way that does give us promise for the future: 'whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things'. (Philippians 4:8)

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