**Ministerial Meandering**

For those of you who weren't brought up by Victorians, Mrs BDBAYD was one of the two sub-aqua spinsters who saw to it that the water-babies grew up into decent water-adults in Charles Kingsley's fairytale. Her colleague, Mrs Do-As-You-Would-Be-Done-By, was the cosy one, treating her charges as they wished to be treated: with unlimited love and sweets.

Mrs Be-Done-By-As-You-Did was a different kettle of fish. She was stern, bespectacled, unbending. She behaved toward the babies as they behaved towards others, making sure their actions came back to bite them, until they gradually learnt the golden rule of civilisation: if you don't like it yourself, then best not do it to someone else.

In The Water Babies Kingsley made the moral case for the new science of evolution, but people have been hammering home the same point for 4,000 years. There's an Egyptian fable which concludes: "That which you hate to be done to you, do not do to others." The ancient Greek Epictetus said: "What thou avoidest suffering thyself, seek not to impose on others." But it's Mrs Be-Done-By-As-You-Did we need now I think. A big 200ft version, stalking the streets like Godzilla, her glasses flashing as she pinches and prods us back on course.

As we know, Jesus told us in his Sermon on the Mount, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,’ (Matthew 7:12) so there is nothing particularly original about either Jesus’ words, nor Charles Kingsley’s. The place we might call the ‘moral high ground’ actually doesn’t exist. It is a chimera, an ephemeral self-delusion set in quicksand or on the top of a toppling rock.

The cynic would say that attempting to attain this moral high ground is pointless anyway, and we’d all be better off with the adage, ‘Do unto others before they do unto you.’

And there is some justification for such an attitude; think of most martial arts - or even boxing (the only ‘sport’ I am aware of that sets out to inflict permanent brain damage on the opponent) - we have heard that the best means of defence is attack, and that is certainly true in many self-defence situations. If you wait to be thumped or stabbed, you may have nothing left to defend yourself with, either physically or mentally.

A quick, pre-empted foot where it hurts, or a jab in the eye, may just dissuade your would-be attacker from following through, or at least suggest to them that you will not go down easily.

There is nothing particularly ‘holy’ about this meandering - and I make no apology for that - but I would urge us all to beware of behaving as if we had the moral high ground in situations where the ground is shifting all the time.

I raise this not because I think folks in our flock are behaving in such a way, but because as I look at the world stage and the obvious demonization of Putin (rightly so), I feel just a tad uncomfortable when I think to what lengths we will have to go to defeat him. It will also be dirty and ruthless, and I hope people will not say it was like a holy crusade; there was little that was holy about the crusades, and they were more savage than you can imagine.

Moral high ground does not exist for us human beings.

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