

the writers: "Where are they coming from?" The worthwhileness of history is not just in the objective realities but also in the ideals of the persons who speak of them.

(2) The Understanding of Concepts

As is true in history, we meet scenes in the Bible where the understanding of party A explains the interactions or response to party B. The simple facts pinpoint both A and B in a sphere of time and a reportable event occurs predicated on how A understood B. The actual understanding is somewhat conjectural and so is a matter of subjective assessment.⁷ The essential facts are plain and easily agreed upon but the understanding of the parties involved requires some fine "reading between the lines."

This understanding is not only a factor in the position of the writer but also in the thinking of the parties involved. To see Luther's concept of the Eucharist is to understand his disillusionment at Marburg; to fail to understand his dilemma is to make him appear to be something of a recalcitrant demagogue. Gaining this information taxes the mind and research capacity of the student but it is eminently valuable for we are learning to see ourselves better through understanding the concepts, decision and actions of others. In this regard history becomes a vast mirror. Viewing oneself in history requires care because it is a subjective affair. Yet to fail to do it at all is to lose much of the practical meaning of history.

Beyond these immediate ends, conceptual understanding allows one to see why people will die for a cause, why individuals will cooperate or not cooperate over a whim of little real consequence. Gaining this information we are better able to set a proper course to either avoid tragedy or cultivate success or maybe do both at the same time!

(3) Reconstruction

A reconstruction consists of a fresh study of known facts, the supplying of suggestive data to explain further the meaning of the known facts, and the analysis of motivation and behavior as both observed and assumed. The end result of the reconstruction is, hopefully, a better appreciation of both the incidents involved and the processes that produced them. Dangers abound in this field but so long as the reconstruction is plainly labeled and not confused with reality, it is a worthy ploy. By design it allows for a rearranging of data and this at times will allow a better vision of the total picture. It is regrettable that no matter how attractive the supposed reconstruction may be, its hypothetical timbers can never be accepted as established fact. But the potential insights it brings make the reconstruction an exciting procedure.

Reconstructions are particularly interesting when literary accounts are evaluated for their place in history as well as when unlikely (and unwitnessed) accounts are reported in otherwise reliable literature. The Paul and Thecla narrative offers a good example.⁸ Reading the account (it is