

Can we trust this Christmas when trust is the basis of ...

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It's Christmas. If Christmas Eve does not, in many ways, embody the spirit of Christmas then nothing does. But my wife is at work, my sons are still in bed, and the Christmas shopping and present wrapping that are my job for the day can wait for an hour or so and I can muse for a moment on what, if anything, this means.

I'm a Quaker, and therefore see every day as sacramental.

I'm a Christian who knows full well there's a one in 365.25 chance Jesus was born on 25 December.

I admit that the nativity story has no bearing at all on my faith, much as the resurrection narrative has little either. Maybe that's why I am a Quaker. I'm sure the those stories are told in good faith: their literal truth is something about which each must decide.

And that's relevant to what I feel today. We view the world through narratives. They're not all, by any means, of our making; indeed, most are not. They're also, very rarely, exclusive. Our lives are full of competing narratives. We continually make and remake the narrative of our own lives, and so do those all around and beyond us. Others have to decide if they believe our narrative or not (and daily I am reminded right here that some do not believe mine). We have to decide if we believe theirs.

At the core of those narratives are not facts. Indeed, facts are rarely more than narratives in themselves, as Andrew Mitchell is discovering. At the core of everything is belief, on which is built trust. We simply can't know most things embracing any complexity, or human action with any certainty. In that case objectivity is for all practical purposes so near enough impossible we might as well ignore it as a quality for guiding behaviour. We therefore have to rely on something much more intangible, and so much more important, which is that someone means what they say.

Just about everything we do is built on trust. I'm trusting my sons will get up so that when we need to go out soon they will be ready. That may be a little naive of me;

experience tells me that at least one of them will push his time in bed to the limit. I am absolutely confident my wife is at work. Not because I'll be checking; it's just the basis on which we run our relationship. We tell each other what we're doing. After a long time knowing each other I've never had reason to doubt.

And what we learned this year is that we do have reason to doubt so much of the economic narrative of this country.

The crash of 2008 was not because of light touch regulation. It happened because bankers were trusted and resoundingly abused that trust; indeed criminally abused that trust. We now know that. A narrative has to be rebuilt as a result. Banking should never be the same again as a consequence.

We now know George Osborne's promise that if only he promised to cut government spending and taxes then business would expand, invest and people would spend more was a myth. None of those things would happen. The assumptions on which he built that narrative were wrong. His refusal to change his mind in the face of that failed narrative means people no longer trust him: his judgement was not just flawed for believing the wrong narrative in the first place, because we've all done that. It's been proven flawed for not being able to change in the face of the evidence that the belief was wrong. People have lost faith as a consequence

We know that large companies have acted immorally on tax. We know that they have made a choice to tax avoid when there's a shortage of tax revenue, knowing that their choice will mean that either others have to pay the tax they seek not to pay or that other people, real people, even their customers, will lose vital services they need as a result. Once, when tax revenues were plentiful pre-2008 we did not see the reality of that choice. In 2012 we did. And we didn't like what we saw of the choices that these companies made, or what it told us about their narratives. We lost trust in them.

2012 has been a year when narratives have been shattered and have been shown to be myths; myths on which society has been built for sometime. The myth that those who handle money can be trusted. The myth that the economics of the market works. The myth that corporations, even the ones whose products we make a key part of our lives, can be trusted to do right by us. All those narratives are now in need of replacement.

2013 presents us with the challenge of building new narratives to replace those that are broken.

What's that got to do with Christmas, or even the narrative of the winter solstice if Christmas really does mean nothing to you? Simply that both are the tale of new life and new hope coming out of the darkness. That's what the festival at this time of the year is really about; it's why, no doubt, Christians appended the Christmas story to the winter solstice celebration.

This Christmas I wish you a new narrative: a sustainable narrative; a narrative of hope that endures in 2013 because it is a narrative based on trust, on human concern one for the other, and of respect based on the belief that each of us have a right to be here and a right to enjoy our time here in peace, with sufficient to keep us, and in the company of those who care about us.

My musing is done: sometimes a blog post gets a life of its own. This one did.

And what's more, both boys are up now, despite my lack of faith!

Happy Christmas.