

St George is a problematic saint for us on several counts, partly because of the lack of historical detail as to the original St George, and partly because of the legends which have since become attached, not least that of the slaying of the dragon. The value of martyrdom is not the issue here, though it can be misunderstood and misapplied, but other less acceptable issues today with regard to the nature of chivalry for example, knights rescuing maidens etc, and the attraction of the legend for those with nationalist and even racist sentiments. The presenter of today's *Thought for the Day* on Radio 4 was a Muslim who began well by wishing us all a happy St George's Day but ended less well by wishing us (or so I heard) a great St Joseph's Day. - an understandable Freudian slip, perhaps, given the uncomfortable association of the flag of St George with the far right. It's also interesting that the passage from St John which we've just heard, carefully avoids any mention of the dragon which is otherwise the prevailing motif in these verses from the Book of Revelation. Perhaps Muslims are not the only ones to be confused about quite how to place St George. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* is more sanguine about the whole business.

The legend of St George and the dragon is simply an allegorical expression of the triumph of the Christian hero over evil, which St. John the Evangelist envisioned through the image of a dragon.

This still leaves us with the problem of the macho and nationalistic aspects of the imagery with its encouragement to rely on personal valour alone and national might. Memories here of initial responses by several world leaders, recently, towards the Coronavirus danger, hoping to brazen it out by bluff and blame, the connection being that in Caxton's *Golden Legend*

The dragon, (was) a local pest which terrorised the whole country, (and) poisoned with its breath, all who approached it.
(*Oxford Dictionary of Saints*)

We certainly need a St George at the moment, but cast not in the image of a military hero so much as in the image of a Christ who, not only bears our cross with us, but also, through his death, brings us resurrection – a Christ-like figure, dare one say, represented to us by so many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic members of the NHS, not least the Muslims among them, who have given their lives in their care for the victims of the coronavirus pandemic.

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