

*The Endless Battle: The Fall of Hong Kong and Canadian POWs in Imperial Japan* is an absorbing book. It has everything I could want in non-fiction: drama, suspense, a fabulous protagonist, authentic details, a simple but illuminating prose style, and at page 135 the beginning of a denouement that left me weeping. I believed in every word. Andrew “Ando” Flanagan was a hero in the way a hero should be—smart, wily, brave, high-spirited, with rock solid values. His son, Andy Flanagan, has done him proud in this re-creation of his life. The son has used the father’s diaries, oral accounts, and historical documents to give a vibrant picture of those years. He resisted the temptation to speculate, to make up details, to fictionalize. The book is an unadorned, true portrait of a hero who at one point weighed 68 pounds, and yet lived to be 79, siring eight children. The book made me proud to be a New Brunswicker and grateful that it has been published.

Andrew was smart: he traded food for a Japanese-English dictionary, eventually becoming fluent in Japanese, good not only for him but for his compatriots. “Working and studying with Dr. Smith had taught Andrew the importance of communication.” The son has managed to demonstrate in only a few words the remarkable relationship of scholar Dr. Stephen Percy Smith and his employee Flanagan who had a tenth grade education.

Andrew was wily too and had the high spirits a hero needs, participating in rowdy antics when they presented themselves. He would not give in, taking every opportunity to sabotage the enemy, never surrendering his own inner dignity. He was brave. His friend Fidele Legacy was in quarantine with diphtheria, dying. Andrew was about to be moved to another POW camp. He took a long staff and pole-vaulted over the fence knowing that if he were caught he would be shot. “To cheer him up Andrew talked about some of their antics...” He gave Fidele a few things he could trade for food. The scene is an unpretentious portrayal of “Love thy neighbour as thyself.”

I want to quote whole passages—the revelation he had while observing a sunset, the distinction he made between the evil Japanese guards and the ordinary Japanese people, the way he used Dr. Smith’s advice, and how the good doctor kept the faith. But you will have to read them for yourself.

It’s a Christmas story strangely enough, the opening action being the fall of Hong Kong on Christmas day, 1941 when their commander ordered the Canadian Royal Rifles to surrender, the beginning of their ordeal. Every Christmas Andrew told his family the sad story of that day, not holding back on the particulars.

On another note, in a television interview Pope Francis speculated on one phrase in the Lord’s Prayer, “Lead us not into temptation.” The Pope feels that Our Father would not lead his children into temptation. Assuming there was a man named Jesus, and assuming this man did create this prayer, it was heard by someone who, as it was being said in Aramaic, memorized it, passed it on, and fifty years later it was translated into Greek and written down. Later it was translated into the Latin Vulgate and much later it was translated into English.

Translation is a notoriously difficult art. An English translator in 2017 trying to figure out a good word for a fellow New Brunswicker’s complex French word faces a challenge. I’ve heard Jo-Anne Elder discuss how she came up with a translation for such a word. Memorizing, repeating, translating by fallible human beings—it’s no wonder that some words and grammatical constructions in the bible are suspect. Looking in my Greek/English interlinear New Testament, I can’t make head nor tail of the phrase in question, but it does seem that Pope Francis has a good point. “Lead” isn’t a good translation—it’s literal meaning is “carry us not”. “Do not let us fall into temptation” would be better, the Pope suggests. And “temptation”

doesn't seem to be a good translation either. "Trial" is maybe better. It's strange to think that such a central tenet of western civilization is so iffy.

A similar problem is presented with an even more central tenet: the word for love. The King James gang came up with "charity", but it soon became corrupted. The word love is so broadly used—"I just love apple pie"—that its meaning is diluted—not corrupted, just diluted. The only way we can figure out the meaning is in repeated anecdotes, parables, literature. The parables of the Good Samaritan and Prodigal son, and Ando Flanagan risking his life to cheer up a dying Fidele Legacy.

Pope Francis suggests it's Satan that leads us into temptation. But I for one have no concept of Satan at all.

It's the season of the year when such problems come to mind.

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