



In George Orwell's novel *1984*—in that dark world, that dystopia—there is something called the “Two Minutes Hate.” A daily ritual in which all were obliged to participate, all members of the Party, it was a strange event, something like a religious service.

Busy at work, everyone would stop what they were doing to sit together in chairs, each person facing a giant screen. As the Two Minutes Hate began, upon the screen would flash various images, various objects of hatred—enemies, traitors, and so on. And it would provoke in everyone an orgiastic response: mass convulsive hatred, screaming, chanting, bellowing, hellish noises; Orwell described it as a sort of electric current, a “hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness” flowing through the crowd. It was a hatred controlled perfectly by the screen, by the rhythms of sight and sound; one couldn't help getting swept up in the “general delirium” of it, even if at first you wanted secretly to resist it. The mass orgy of hatred eventually invaded the brain; images of the worst sort of crimes and cruelty would dance across every mind. It was, of course, how the Party controlled its members, by manipulating and ritualizing hate. Hatred—hating what and whom one was told to hate—became the mark of Party loyalty; it's what made you a good member. Even if you didn't have any convictions about anything yourself, that didn't matter. Hating was how one belonged, how one survived. As the character, Julia, put it, “Always yell with the crowd, that's what I say. It's the only way to be safe.”¹

Now, of course, *1984* is fiction, just a novel. Its characters, its crimes, its emotions are exaggerated. Yet, having recently read this and other works of Orwell, it is eerily descriptive of what society has become and what we have become. An overly screened world of hatred, our better angels shouted down, even within ourselves; hatred or even silence born of fear for what others might think of us: ours isn't the dramatized world of Orwell's novel; there is no Big Brother; rather, we've become Big Brother ourselves. Our world isn't that of Orwell's novel, but it is too much like it. Because we've been tricked into hatred, too many of us, each of us. Our own Two Minutes Hate: you're carrying it around in your pocket; you might even be holding it—as it holds you.

It's a world which shouldn't surprise us. The dark catalogue of history, the depravity of the human heart, evil rampant, seemingly triumphant: it shouldn't surprise us. The God of the Hebrews, Jesus Christ, the lights and saints of the faith: none of them were ignorant of the reality of evil and hatred, none of them blind to it. Rather, what they show is what we ought to do in the face of evil and hatred, how we ought to handle it, fight it, and conquer it. Which is the lesson we seemingly always forget, the bravery we always forsake for cowardice. “Always yell with the crowd, that's what I say. It's the only way to be safe.” That's the fact of Orwell's fiction, and it's the Christian lesson we need to learn again.

“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”² The way Dr. King put it was to say, “Somewhere somebody must have a little sense...the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil...Somebody must have religion enough and morality enough to cut it off.”³ But that's what's missing: people strong enough to be different, to love when everyone else hates. Because it means giving up the last word, giving up

¹ George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet Classics, 1977), 14-17, 122

² John 13:34

³ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Knock at Midnight*, 60

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John 13:31-35

winning, at least the way we think we should win. It means seeing that what Jesus did, we're meant to do too. And that's to find our cross, find ourselves on it, and still talk about love and forgiveness even though we're nailed down and even though no one understands.

St. Ephraim the Syrian was a deacon and a poet. He was beautiful, and so were his words. There is a legend that as a child he had dream in which a vine sprouted and grew up out of his mouth. The vine grew and spread and "filled all the space under heaven, and it was very fruitful," the legend says. "All the birds of the air" came to eat of the fruit of the vine, but the fruit never ceased to grow.⁴ The legend of a dream of a Christian, a deacon, a poet—a beautiful man with a beautiful vine of words. It's what he gave the world, beauty like the love Jesus commanded. It's how God, through him, made all things new.⁵ It's what he gave, this beauty which still shines today.

But what do you give? And what can I give? *Amen.*

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⁴ *Give Me a Word: The Alphabetical Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 98

⁵ Revelation 21:5