

Views from the Pews: The Bible as a Key

One of my reasons for participating in this project was to acknowledge the loss of Archdeacon Reg Nicholson, whose articles in the weekly pewsheet were eagerly read by all - even during that Sunday's Sermon if the acoustics weren't that great!

Reg combined two gifts – priesthood and journalism- which enabled him to apply Christian principles of good communication. Thus it was that we remember his phrase - 'The Bible is a Library'. We might add that it was a library assembled many centuries ago, by a committee. A committee of men. A committee assembled to deal with the theological issues of the day. So it was (and remains at least on one level) a human-made object. As such, it is open to mis-use and even abuse. President Trump once brandished it in public in a way that made it look like a weapon. A joke did the rounds after that – that he held it so very tightly to ensure it didn't fall open at 1 Corinthians 13.

Like all libraries, the Bible is also a gift, one which we need to use thankfully, wisely, and prayerfully. The Old Testament is the foundation for the New. We cannot read the Old in isolation, nor must we pick and choose the bits that suit the agenda of the day. Join a study group (Jesus was always running them) and debate scriptural meaning. Everything in it has contemporary application in one way or another. The Bible was not intended as a handbrake. That's an accusation many like to make of the Koran, but there was a 19th and early 20th century Enlightenment in Islam, which we need to read up on before passing judgement.

Context is everything – if a word or phrase looks uncomfortable or awkward, dig down, ask around. Look at different translations. And we should not be shy about older scriptures; what was the theological, social and political context for some Old Testament phrasing? After all, Jesus was always in trouble with the Jewish establishment because He challenged orthodox and restrictive interpretations.

Maybe we can adopt a phrase like this;

"The Bible is a Key; it can only be used to open doors and let people in. It should never be used to lock doors and keep people out".

Richard Swarbrick