

St Luke's in the City
10th Sunday after Pentecost
5 August 2007
Celebrating at the Crossroads

Dear Friends,

The Primates of the Anglican Communion have encouraged all Anglicans to take seriously Biblical hermeneutics. Our Province is holding a 'hermeneutics hui' this month. Our Bishop has invited us to a pre-Synod conference on hermeneutics in September. From the Greek verb ἐρμηνεύω hērmēneuō, meaning 'to interpret', hermeneutics is what all of us do the moment we pick up our Bibles. It is impossible to read Scripture (or anything else!) other than as an exercise in interpretation. Hermeneutics is as natural as breathing and eating. The Bible does not fall out of the sky with a single and unambiguous meaning. The Bible is not a 'book' in the conventional sense, but a diverse collection of writings composed and collected over more than a millennium. Interpretation is inescapable. The Bible is presently (and has probably always been) at risk from two deadly extremes – literalism which erroneously claims a 'plain meaning' of Scripture; on the other hand a rationalist reduction of Scripture to an inoffensive collection of improving stories and moral lessons. Literalism is driven by anxiety and fear, that any questions of the Biblical text will inevitably lead to a collapse of the deck of cards of faith. Anxiety is the true source of frothy-mouthed and legalistic statements about 'inerrancy' and 'authority'. The reductive mindset, on the other hand, is driven by a fear of religious fanatics waving floppy Bibles with aggressive fists, hell-bent on rules and regulations. The paradox is that both the literalist mind and the reductive mind are equally terrified of the mystery of soul (ψυχή psyche), which functions according to a language and grammar that challenges and threatens both legalism and rationalism. The tragedy of so much that passes for 'mission' and 'evangelism' is that, ultimately, it is repellent to most sensible people because its legalistic mindset is the enemy of true freedom. Equally tragic is that what passes for 'liberalism', evacuated of soul, is ultimately no different from polite and decent moral humanism.

Christian faith is grounded in and guided by the witness of Sacred Scripture. However for Christians, unlike our Jewish and Moslem sisters and brothers, the Word is not a collection of writings. Scripture has authority, but its authority is not a collection of words between two floppy covers. The Word is actually a Living Word, Jesus Christ crucified and risen. Authority is not a static source of information, a rule book, a set of orders by which the religious mind can free itself from all anxiety and doubt. The Windsor Report states: "The purpose of Scripture is not simply to supply true information, nor just to prescribe in matters of belief and conduct, nor merely to act as a court of appeal, but to be part of the dynamic life of the Spirit through which God the Father is making the victory which was won by Jesus' death and resurrection operative within the world and in and through human beings." (para 55 http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/section_b/p4.cfm) The life of faith, and the life of the church, depend on the authority of the Living Word, exercised through Sacred Scripture.

With my love,
David