BOOKS I HAVE READ: SEVEN THINGS ABOUT THE BIBLE

Posted on September 20, 2021 by Eddie

The purpose of Scripture is not to help people get a passing grade in Religion 101. Rather, the purpose of Scripture is to bring people to believe in Jesus, to draw close to Jesus, to grasp hold of Jesus, to rest in the one whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light
Category: Observations

Michael Bird's book Seven Things I wish Christians Knew About The Bible, is the best overview of the nature and purpose of Scripture that I have read in a long, long time - perhaps ever.

The paperback is 224 pages long, with a fair number of footnotes and an extensive Scripture index. Bird is a fascinating communicator; he is a distinguished academic, who is able to convey complex concepts with a mixture of clarity and good humour which makes them much more accessible than they might be otherwise. There is no reason why the average reader would not enjoy this book.

The seven things that Bird wishes we knew about the Bible are:

1. how the Bible was put together;
2. what "inspiration" means;
3. how the Bible is true;
4. why the Bible needs to be rooted in history;
5. why literal interpretation is not always the best interpretation;
6. how the Bible gives us knowledge, faith, love, and hope; and
7. how Jesus Christ is the center of the Bible.

If you want to know more about the book, then probably the best thing to do is to watch Bird reading from the introduction himself.

https://youtu.be/0vBDyasY9QQ

Given that the introduction to the book is available on video, I'm not going to say a great deal about it myself; I'll allow a few quotes to give you a further idea of the contents.

> *If biblical scholarship is a bit like a foreign land, then I want to be your tour guide and interpreter. I want to show you how the insights of biblical scholarship can answer some of your questions about the Bible, enhance your experience of the Bible, and sharpen your understanding of the Bible.*

> *In other words, you canâ€™t explain inerrancy or infallibility using terse descriptions, like answers to a multiple-choice test. Instead, you need an essay on God as a revealing God, the*

meaning of inspiration, and more in order to properly explain what is and is not being claimed. Some might complain that this means that inerrancy or infallibility dies the death of a thousand qualifications. Well, perhaps, but trust me, any complex term, whether it is â€œdemocracyâ€ or â€œincarnation,â€ is going to need layers of explanation if the concept is to be properly understood and not knocked down as a flimsy straw-man argument. Some ideas in theology and religion are irreducibly complex. Anything related to truth claims and the Bible is bound to be so.

The dividing line between traditional, historical, and orthodox Christianity and liberal, progressive Christianity is not about being pro- or anti-inerrancy. The real issue is whether the Bible is in any sense prescriptive for Christian faith. For many liberal Christians and progressive churches, the Bible is not normative in any way; rather, it is negotiable in every place.

I mean, just how much of the Bible can you translate into a culture, and how much do you have to leave untranslated? When Bible translators first came to Papua New Guinea, they had a problem. How do you say that Jesus is the â€œLamb of God who takes away the sins of the worldâ€ to people who have never seen a lamb and who have no idea what a lamb looks like or how lambs were used for sacrifices and meat in the Middle East? Now, in Papua New Guinea they do have pigs, which were symbols of prosperity and wealth, and pigs were used in indigenous religious practices. So could you say that â€œJesus is the Pig of God who takes away the sins of the worldâ€ ? Perhaps, but probably not a good idea given Old Testament prohibitions on consuming pork, which would create confusion. So probably best to leave it as â€œLamb,â€ and then when someone asks, â€œWhat is a lamb?â€ go ahead and explain it to them. But I hope you get the point. Some things need to be left untranslated, kept different, and made foreign in order to properly understand them.

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I am personally allergic to trying to reduce Christianity to some kind of touchy-feely lovefest,

> *where we all hold hands, share our feelings, and talk about hugging rainbows. But biblical interpretation is useless, futile, and even offensive to God when it is divorced from the virtue of love.*

> *Ironically enough, despite the popularity of Psalm 23 in personal piety, Psalm 23 is never once quoted in the New Testament.*