ON READING THE BIBLE

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Category: Observations

Oliver O'Donovan has published a superb lecture on reading the Bible. My colleagues who are involved in literacy and Scripture Engagement should all read this without fail. Everyone else, should also read it!

> *The â€œJerusalem Declarationâ€ issued last June by the GAFCON conference included the following brief clause: We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God written and to contain all things necessary for salvation. The Bible is to be translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the churchâ€™s historic and consensual reading.I have not seen any public remark on these words; yet I should have thought they merited serious interest...*
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> *...without a proper value assigned to the corporate exercise of public reading of Scripture, private reading must look like an eccentric hobby. No collective spiritual exercise, no sacrament, no act of praise or prayer is so primary to the catholic identity of the church gathered as the reading and recitation of Scripture. It is the nuclear core. When Paul instructed his letters to be passed from church to church and read, it was the badge of the local churchâ€™s catholic identity. This is not to devalue preaching, praise, prayer, let alone sacramental act; these all find their authorisation in reading. As we know from St Thomas Aquinas, the act of breaking bread and sharing wine is not a eucharist unless the narrative of the institution at the Last Supper is read...*
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> *There is another requisite for the public reading of Scripture beside the lectionary, seemingly even less attended to, and that is a public reader. A task once confined to the clergy has now largely been made over to lay members of the congregation, but far from dignifying lay ministry, this has, on the whole, merely marginalised a task on which a great deal in the act of worship depends. I confess that I know of no church that trains its readers; its reading readers, that is, for when we call people â€œreadersâ€ and say we train them, we have something different in mind, which is itself eloquent! When I hear a lesson read with careful thought, with pace, articulation, pause and pitch all placed at the service of the sense of the passage, I make a point of thanking the reader, since the effort made will not have been asked for and probably not appreciated.* ***Yet many a church may stay alive by the ministry of its readers which would otherwise die by the ministry of its preachers*** *(emphasis mine).*
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> *We should not overlook in passing the concern of the Jerusalem Statement for translation, presupposed already in any act of public reading among those who do not speak Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic. No doubt the draftersâ€™ concern was primarily with first-time translation into minority languages, a cause now less daunting, though not less urgent, as a result of the admirable labours of the Wycliffe Bible Translators.*

Good stuff. You can read the whole essay (make yourself a coffee first) here.

HT Ben.