

Q&A: Do you think that Christianity is set up in a way that favours people who can read?

Firstly, interesting thought that Christianity was “set up.” I’m not saying I disagree – I “set up” things with regard to organising church and administrating a (very) small section of the people of God all the time. And I trust I do it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But “set up” sort of sounds like Christianity is the outcome of a committee meeting or something – the reality is that it has grown organically and divinely chaotically over millenia.

I think Christianity as it currently is expressed does presuppose an ability to read – but mostly because (in the Western World at least) – the whole of society is “set up” that way. If the idea of Christianity is to communicate the truths of the good news of Jesus of Nazareth to our society then that is entirely appropriate – you use the medium of communication that best suits.

In times gone past the emphasis has been less so. For instance, the early church had a significant (and reliable) oral tradition (that informed much of the Scriptural canon). At other times the emphasis on iconography, stained glass windows and other imagery were intended as a means of communicating gospel truth. The Reformation (in England at least) emphasised the public reading of Scripture so that those who couldn’t read could hear. And much of the early educating system formed around monastic libraries and the teaching of people to read (and copy) them. The gospel has always been contextualised in its communication.

The emphasis on reading I think simply derives from the fact that until very recently the best way to communicate information persistently – by which I mean the best way to say something to somebody else in a way that will last after I am gone – was writing. And so the record of Christian truth has, necessarily, been writing – and perhaps that has shaped our society.

Of course we now live in an era when communication can persist through other media such as audio and video and perhaps we will see less reliance on “reading” in Christian expression. I know, for instance, that I make use of a NIV audio Bible to listen to in the car – and I have given something similar to someone who had failing eyesight and could no longer read. People download sermons and expositions of Scripture. It’s becoming less and less necessary to be able to read in order to not only hear the truths of Scripture but have a record of them.

But like all things historic in our world if you want to learn more about them then you need to “go to them” somewhat. And so teaching people to read so that they can delve into the authoritative truth of Scripture is useful – even necessary. And so is teaching people NT Greek and Hebrew so they can delve into the original documents. We teach people as much as we can to get as much as they can out of the written Word of God.

But the truth speaks to all and it is our job to make it accessible no matter where they are at.

So is that “favouring” people who read? I’d rather simply “favour” people and give everyone as much as I can give them to discover as much as they can.

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