

'THAT I MAY KNOW HIM' [David Marshall]



What would you say to someone who accused you of bibliolatry? The first thing you could say would be, 'What does that mean?'

At all events, that's what I did when it happened to me. When the reply came, 'excessive passion for the Bible', I could recall being accused of worse things!

In common with the late Rumpole of the Bailey I rarely, if ever, plead 'Guilty as charged'. But the evidence against me was considerable. I own most of the English versions of the Bible currently in print. One or other of these versions is invariably close to hand. I habitually walk around with a copy about my person. Nothing gives me greater, deep-down satisfaction these days than studying the Word. That satisfaction is never greater than when I discover some

new insight into a Bible biography, a parable of Jesus, a prophetic book, the gospel story or the letters of Paul.

That evidence would all seem to point to a Guilty verdict.

A final piece of evidence – the one that had prompted the charge in the first place – was that, with the help of a friend, I have recently completed the construction of a log cabin at the end of my garden. It is insulated, carpeted, heated (my wife calls it 'GCHQ') and exists so that, when I so choose, my studies can be uninterrupted!

Nevertheless, I enter a plea of Not Guilty to the bibliolatry charge! And not just because of my Rumpole of the Bailey instincts!

Bible study is a means to an end, insofar as I am concerned. The 'end' is not simply satisfaction at discovering some new take on the truth or grip on the Gospel. It is not just (to paraphrase A. T. Pierson) that 'The Bible is the study of the evidences of Christianity [of which] the Bible itself is the greatest evidence of all.' That is not to dismiss the extraordinary way in which the books of the two testaments validated themselves and came to be included in the 'canon'. Nor is it to detract from the astounding manuscripts and archaeological discoveries of the last two centuries which have proved the accuracy of the Bible.

The Bible is not just an accurate book: there are many. It is not just a powerful book: there are others. It is not just that it is an inspiring book: books about the Bible can also be inspiring.

The Bible is a book with a Voice: it speaks to me. Above all things the Bible is the supreme revelation of God. The central focus of the Bible is on a Person, and it is a Person whose 'voice' I hear. The perfect revelation of God in Scripture is in Jesus Christ. Jesus makes the unity between the two testaments. In the New Testament he fulfils hundreds of Old Testament prophecies. All sixty-six books enshrine him. The chief characters, institutions and histories prefigure him. The best 'windows' on Jesus are the four gospels. That is why any study of the Bible must begin there.

Christ is the central figure of Scripture and the Cross is its central symbol. The very shape of the cross suggests the length, breadth and height of the love of God. Men may reject an angry God, but how can they reject a God who, even at the point of their rejection, leans forward in entreaty?

Only one day in every 350 in the life of Jesus is referred to in the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But the record of the events of the last seven days takes up one third of the accounts.

Why? Because the Cross is the clearest depiction of the heart and the mind of the God I study the Bible to know and to hear.