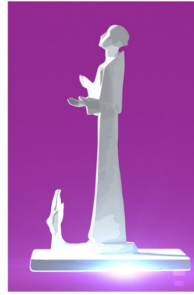


EXPLORING THE BIBLE

a St Francis College short course



Theme 1: A place to start

Question 1b. What is the Bible, anyway?

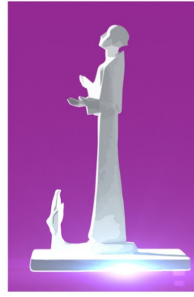
1. Identify the different formats of Bible that you are familiar with, book, app, online text. Do you have a preferred format? Is there a Bible in your past for which you have a particularly strong attachment? If so, what does/did it look like, where did you get it from? What made it special to you?
2. Greg Jenks suggests that the Bible is 'this amazing gift to us from our spiritual ancestors'. How does it add to your experience of reading the Bible, to think of it as a gift to you from your ancestors?
3. There is a suggestion that some parts of the Bible are more useful than others, as in life, deep spiritual learning often comes wrapped up in ordinariness. How do you respond to that suggestion?

Greg Jenks

What is the Bible? Well, it's a book, well it used to be a book actually, and before it was a book it was a pile of scrolls and for many, many people the Bible is no longer a book, it's an app. So what do you mean by asking me what is the Bible anyway? It's a textual artefact which exists in different modes now, historically, and for Jewish people still, it's proper mode is a scroll and for proper religious use these words have to be in a scroll. For many Christians it's still imagined as a leather bound book with gold trim and really, really fine paper that you have got to be really careful turning the pages. But for

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many of us (and certainly for many younger people) and certainly in my own regular practice of using scripture it's increasingly an app. Whether it's a section within Epray or a part of my Bible software, as I'm doing some work on a text, I'll tend to engage with the text that way and flick between languages and flick between different translations. So part of the answer: the bible is a shifting target. It's no longer what it was.

It's a collection of spiritual bits and bobs from the Jewish community and the early Christian community which other people in the past have valued and so it has become canonised and it has a 'these texts and not those texts' kind of quality about it.

It didn't drop out of heaven. It was created by people who didn't know they were contributing to a thing called the Bible; there was no editorial committee, no overall editorial line in the Bible because it was something created retrospectively.

But it's this amazing gift to us from our spiritual ancestors. This is the stuff they found really important and we accept that as a gift, we engage with it. Some of it we go 'yecch', like Psalm 45: 'It's ok sweetie, the King thinks you're a good looker, just shut up and go into the harem!' ... um really?

But other stuff just strikes you as immediately relevant. Two days ago, the psalm that we used included the line, 'I wept for you as if for my own mother'. Now one of the people doing morning prayer with me, her mother is seriously ill and in hospital right at this moment, so that verse kind of struck everybody as 'wow'.

So that's what the Bible is. It's a collection of amazing spiritual wisdom with a whole lot of stuff that we've got to separate from. We don't just throw out the dross and keep the good stuff because, like life, the Bible, the good stuff comes wrapped up in all the other stuff and that's how it is.