

Telegraph Prize Crossword 27,905: “Performer of church ritual, mostly bombastic in inclination (9)” was a clue which, ironically, took me longer than most that day. The answer: liturgist (most of turgid [bombastic], set inside list [inclination]). I eventually got it because intersecting letters and the cryptic bit meant it had to be that. However, a liturgist is usually thought of as someone who puts together our church services, not a performer of church ritual - most off-putting! Nonetheless, I could see how the setter might have used the word wider than its exact meaning (the etymology goes back to public/people and work/service). Words can be fun but often, related to the age in which they were used, the context can change their sense significantly. What an undertaking, then, it has been to translate the Holy Bible from its various sacred texts and languages recorded, literally, over thousands of years. The translators over the centuries have often gone back to the original texts, many of the words of which have had to have the same sort of struggle in arriving at their meaning as I had in my crossword - and often with far more depth of cross-referencing.

The number of books the Bible contains varies (from 24 in the Hebrew Bible to the Ethiopian Orthodox 81), as do its translations. (Who knows the number of books commenting on the lessons to be learnt therein?) Each translation has been written with the hope of transferring the record of our relationship with God and for inspiration to bring about a people that truly reflects the image of God. Often translations target a specific group with that in mind. By that bench mark, though, it would appear we still have have more versions to go...

If all that seems too enormous to take in, perhaps that is why we Christians understand the Word of God to be Jesus, which is in fact one of his titles. Here we have everything needed to know God’s will translated into the one version. Jesus answers our question, “What would God be like if He was one of us?” As it says in John 14.7, “Jesus [said], ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.’” At last a clue, although sounding a bit cryptic, which actually is not.

The last Sunday of this month will be Bible Sunday; time to reflect on the amazing compendium of sacred writings that has so influenced the lives of people, for the worst when misunderstood, but mostly for the good. Time to reflect on the most thought-on study ever undertaken by mankind: God and us - and the care we should take in pondering it.

For now, a clue of my own: “After heading east, thus, a mixed instant led to understanding by a select few. (8)” Entirely not what the Bible translators wanted!