

Life amounts to becoming a Celtic manuscript, illuminated and illuminating.

I once (no, maybe on four visits) had the joy of viewing the frescos in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Spello, Italy. It presented within the walls of a side chapel three separate scenes from the Gospel narratives of the Annunciation to Mary, the Birth of Jesus and the episode at the Temple in Jerusalem of the twelve-year old Jesus instructing the Temple scholars. It dates from the year 1500 and is the work of Benetto di Biagio, otherwise known as Pinturicchio. Indeed, the chapel is usually kept dark – only illuminated for a few minutes at a time lest the light damage the artwork

It was the third fresco, depicting the boy Jesus instructing the Temple scholars, that quickly caught my attention. The boy Jesus stands alone in a tiled open space before the Temple. Scholars, old and young and in highly ornate costumes, flank him to the right and left, obviously impressed by what Jesus – a child – is saying. Then what especially caught my eye were books, scattered, one half-open, on the floor in front of Jesus.

In reading up on the painting I learned that, of course, with the arrival of Jesus in our world, books became “obsolete” because Jesus was now the Word of God in our midst, a *living* source of all the wisdom we need. But I was also amused by the suggestion that, given the invention of movable print (and the printing press) only forty five years earlier, books had become the novelty of the times – a reading public had begun, resulting – one could say – in Amazon today. One might conclude that Pinturicchio himself, by showing the books, may have been advertising them for a commission from the Amazon of his day!

Also the technology of efficient publication generated the arrival of modern science, which in some ways put the Bible out of business as the only Book worth reading. And with the arrival of science the world latched on to “facts” like Sergeant Friday, to a literal, factual reading of nature and even of the Bible (as do modern fundamentalists) - no more myths.

But by our time things seem to have come full circle. Many a modern scholar of literature and Scripture convincingly show that there is more to reality than “facts”. There are deeper dimensions which people of earlier times [like the times of the Bible] reached by way of their imaginations - possibly more meaningful than even the writer of a modern book may have in mind. Psychology has probed into this since the 20th century. Fritz Perls said (I think) that one way to interpret one’s dreams is to identify with all the things in the dream – so that if I dream I am carrying a suitcase full of dirty linen – maybe I myself am a suitcase full of dirty linen and need to clean up my act!!

I found that helpful after I had a dream long ago in which I am saying Mass in a dark cathedral and about to recite the opening page of the central part of the Mass, just before the consecration of the bread and wine, when all the printed Latin letters, black upon white, changed into blossoms of the loveliest flowers – like a garden patch, small flowers like violets and morning glories, row upon row. Which, if I read the text as did our ancient ancestors, could say that *I* am a page of dead letters the could very well be transformed into the page of an old Celtic manuscript, color everywhere and letters written in such intricate designs as to amaze me. Which dream could apply to you, too.

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