

5th May 2022

Mint

“It has ever been, and ever will be, permitted to issue words stamped with the mint-mark of the day.”

Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace), *Ars Poetica*

I'm involved with a second-hand book sale for *Christian Aid*. A city-centre church is given over to two weeks of book-sorting and a week of selling. All the donated books are sorted into categories, and the section I'm involved with is, not surprisingly, "Religious Books". Within that, the books are subdivided – prayer, New and Old Testaments, theology, Church history, sermons, and the like – including a place for Bibles.

On "sorting duty", I came across two Bibles, both "The Authorised Version" and in presentation-boxes: one with a Boys' Brigade logo, presented to a BB officer; the other, a wedding bible, with a plate saying to whom it had been gifted, when and by whom. This Bible had a rubber band around it with a slip of paper underneath, which read: "Please note, this Bible is in mint condition." The BB Bible could have had a similar note attached, for, quite clearly, neither bible had ever been read, as pristine as they day they'd been presented, "stamped with the mint-mark of the day."

Being an avid watcher of *Flog It*, *Antiques Roadshow* and other auction and antique programmes, I know the value of an artefact in its original box, untouched, never used, accruing value because it remains unspoiled. But a Bible? Pristine, mint, unopened, never touched? *Was it* given so that, in time, it could become a valuable antique? I think not!

I don't mind how people interact with Scripture. And, in this context, I wouldn't have minded if the Bibles had appeared battered and torn, dog-eared and written on, with a red pen through sections, big question-marks against others, or even with offending pages torn out! But I want people to *interact* with what's given, to make use of The Word, to engage with it – and *not* keep it as an antique and be proud that it's "in mint condition".

I hope the people who donated these Bibles are reading this and will believe me when I say, I trust they've given good service to the BBs or had a happy marriage. But I also hope they'll believe me when I say how disappointed I am that they've not made use of the gift they were given – a fine Bible in a box, and a Word from God contained within it.

A prayer for today

Your Word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path, to be used and to be useful. Amen

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