

The train timetable

I knew a man who knew the railway timetable by heart, because the only thing that gave him joy was the railways, and he spent all his time at the station, watching how the trains arrived and how they departed. He gazed in wonder at the carriages, the strength of the locomotives, the size of the wheels, he watched in amazement as the conductors jumped into the carriages, and the stationmaster.

He knew every train, he knew where it came from, where it was going, when it would arrive at a certain place and which trains departed from that place and when they would arrive.

He knew the train numbers, he knew what day they ran, whether they had a dining car, whether they waited for connections or not. He knew which trains have mail cars and how much a ticket costs to Frauenfeld, Olten, Niederbipp or somewhere else.

He didn't go to the bar, he didn't go to the cinema, he didn't go for a walk, he didn't have a bicycle, a radio or a television set, he didn't read newspapers or books, and if he got letters, he wouldn't read them either. He lacked the time to do these things because he spent his days at the station, and only when the railway timetable changed, in May and October, would he not be seen for a few weeks.

So he would sit at home at his table and learn everything by heart, read the new timetable from the first page to the last, pay attention to the changes and was happy when there were none. It also happened that someone asked him for the departure time of a train. Then his face shone and he wanted to know exactly what the destination of the journey was, and whoever had asked him for the information certainly missed their train because he would not let them go. He did not content himself with citing the time, he also cited the number of the train, the number of carriages, the possible connections, all the departure times; he explained that one could go to Paris on that train, where one had to get off and what time one would arrive, and he did not understand that

people were not interested in all that. However, if someone left him standing there and left before he had listed all his knowledge, he would get angry, insult them and shout at them: "You have no idea about railways!"

He personally never got on a train.

That would have made no sense, he said, because he already knew beforehand what time the train was arriving (Peter Bichsel).

Many people (distinguished scholars among them many) know everything about the Bible, even the exegesis of the smallest and most hidden verses, even the meaning of the most difficult words, and even what the sacred writer really meant, even if it seems otherwise.

But they do not turn anything written in the Bible into their personal lives.