

The Scriptures and the Church

SUMMARY

The Scriptures have always been central to the faith and life of the people of God. The Kerygma Program, through its publication of resources for the study of the Bible, program design, educational principles and training events, seeks to encourage and support congregations in a responsible study of the Scriptures in the church. The process begins with recognition of the need for adult Bible study.

THE SCRIPTURES AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

In Psalm 78 the writer reflects on “wise sayings” and “mysteries from the past, things we have heard and known, things that our fathers told us ...about the Lord’s power and his great deeds and the wonderful things he has done.” (TEV)

To the Psalmist it is the responsibility of each generation to share with the next the stories, the wisdom, and the laws of God so that “they also will put their trust in God and not forget what he has done, but always obey his commandments.” (TEV)

Evidence of the value and impact of reflecting on “things we have heard and known, things our fathers told us” appears throughout the Scriptures. Two notable events in the New Testament are recorded in the stories of the Emmaus Road (Luke 24) and Philip and the Ethiopian official (Acts 8). The dialogue of the Emmaus Road incident culminates in Luke’s report that “beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures” (NRSV). The disciples later reflect, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us? (NRSV) The Ethiopian official hears the good news of Jesus as a result of reading Isaiah. Luke reports that “Philip began to speak, and starting with this Scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus” (NRSV). In response the official seeks baptism and “goes on his way rejoicing.”

Throughout the Bible, Old Testament and New, and throughout history, it is the Scriptures heard, read, studied and proclaimed that have shaped and informed, judged and inspired, motivated and energized the people of God.

THE BIBLE AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Contrasted with the major role of Scriptures throughout history is the strange phenomenon of the contemporary church in western civilization.

Today, while the Bible is widely revered, it is seldom regularly read or seriously studied by adults who identify themselves as Christians. The result is an acknowledged adult biblical illiteracy that pervades the church. This situation, the subject of comment by theologians, clergy and educators, is properly an issue of deep concern.

One of the clearest and strongest statements on the problem of biblical illiteracy comes from Dr. James Smart in his preface to *The Strange Silence of The Bible in the Church*:

“My finding is that the Bible is in a very bad way in the church. In a century in which biblical scholarship has made tremendous advances...(there is)...a steady decline in the educational use of the Bible in the church and a mounting ignorance of the contents of the Bible among members of the church. It is a puzzling phenomenon. I am convinced that it constitutes the crisis beneath all other crises that endanger the church’s future. The church that no longer hears the essential message of the Scriptures soon ceases to understand what it is for and is open to be captured by the dominant religious philosophy of the moment, which is usually some blend of cultural nationalism with Christianity. All distinctions become blurred when the voices of the original prophets and apostles are stilled.”¹

Currently theologians and educators are increasingly identifying adult Bible study as one of the church’s most urgent tasks. In an age of pluralism, few responsibilities are more important than helping adults explore the biblical story that shapes and informs the Christian life.

Without such study the church, as Dr. Smart contends, simply begins to reflect popular culture, values and attitudes.

While the challenge of serious Bible study for adults is clear, it is not easily met. All too often the best efforts by pastors and educators to promote and encourage Bible study meet with discouraging results.

It is in response to these challenges and problems that The Kerygma Program has been developed. The results are impressive. In thousands of congregations large numbers of adults are discovering the study of the Bible to be an exciting adventure of learning and growth and are responding to study opportunities with enthusiasm.

¹ *The Strange Silence of The Bible in the Church: A Study in Hermeneutics* by James D. Smart. copyright MCMLXX, The Westminster Press. Used by permission.

THE KERYGMA PROGRAM: BASIC CONVICTIONS

Contributing to the success of The Kerygma Program are several basic convictions concerning adults and the study of the Bible. Among these are:

- Adults are genuinely interested in a serious study of the Bible.
- Adults will make substantial commitments to legitimate study opportunities.
- Given adequate information and a definitive schedule, adults will register for courses of study scheduled from a few weeks to a year or more.
- Given quality study resources, adults will complete “homework” assignments and actively participate in a learning group.
- The majority of adults who register for courses will complete their studies.

These convictions are not theories based on speculation, but realities based in fact. In congregations large and small, urban, suburban and rural, “typical” congregations where “everybody is too busy” and lethargic congregations where “no one is interested,” the overwhelming evidence is that Bible study can be transformed and transforming.

The scriptures have been central to the life of the people of God in every age. They can and should continue to play their central role of shaping, informing, judging, inspiring, motivating and energizing faith and life.

The purpose of The Kerygma Program is to help make that happen, to help congregations create and sustain an engaging program for the study of the Bible to which adults will enthusiastically respond.