

Centering On Ministry

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We Center on Ministry

By Barry L. Callen

The intent of this new publication is to provide a vehicle by which the Center for Pastoral Studies of the Church of God can assist Church leaders to communicate helpfully with all those engaged in Christian ministry. Each issue will deal with a topic of current interest and relevance. The writing will be done by the faculty of Anderson School of Theology, members of the Departments of Religion of the several Church of God colleges and others in leadership roles who are thoughtful in their concern for a growing and effective ministry. Continuing-Education Students of the Center for Pastoral Studies participating

in Colleague Groups may find *Centering On Ministry* of service in stimulating meaningful discussion. Suggested bibliographies and guidance for leading a group study of the topic at hand will be available upon request.

This first issue of *Centering on Ministry* and the one to follow are being provided without charge to all ministers registered in the 1976 Yearbook of the Church of God. Future issues (Fall, Winter and Spring of each year) will be provided as a service of the Center for Pastoral Studies to its own Continuing-Education Students and to the alumni of Anderson School of Theology. It will be available to others on a subscription basis.

This initial issue looks at the "Centrality of Scripture." It is ironic that the Church of God centers its life and thought around the teachings of the Bible and is at the same time almost paralyzed with the disease of Biblical illiteracy. I know of no greater priority in the Church today than that of coming to grips again with God's Word and its teaching for our day. The brief articles which follow attempt to explore some of the meanings of Biblical authority.

We will be very interested in receiving your reactions to this proposed plan of publication and to this initial issue of *Centering On Ministry*. If you have suggestions for the themes of future issues, please send them to us at once. We are eager to make the Center for Pastoral Studies and this new publication fruitful in their service to all who are engaged in Christian ministry.

The Bible in Worship and Preaching

By James Earl Massey

Pushed to the pulpit by the text, experience, and purpose, we preachers are expected to honor God and help men through our sermons. We should be prepared to offer the sermon as an act of worship. As a clear declaration of the Word of God to men, our sermons are directly prepared to bless men; but only that which first blesses God can ever help men. The more fully a sermon is understood as part of the preacher's worship the more it will be influenced both by the preacher's life and the purpose of worship itself.

George A. Buttrick has commented that "A sermon is an 'I-thou' transaction: the congregation 'makes' the sermon almost as much as the preacher makes it," adding that "a sermon is part of worship, is itself worship—the ascribing of worth to God, the celebration of all worthy life before the Unseen Eyes. Remove the prayer-worship, the brooding of the Spirit on the worshiping congregation, and how much of the sermon is left? A sermon is an 'offering' on an altar."¹ Buttrick is right: a sermon is best understood in connection with the worship setting of which it was a part, and it is a decisive act of worship. As such, our sermons should confess faith, inspire faith,

and sustain faith. This keeps our preaching confessional, Christian, and centered.

Since our preaching is done, more often than not, during a service of worship we need to remember and regard how such a setting influences our pulpit work. As one of a pastor's major responsibilities during the worship service, the sermon is his formal contribution in speech within a pattern of action whose range of dynamics can be most determinative in shaping views, values, and behavior. We are accustomed to discussions about the content and thrust of sermons as delivered, but we should not overlook the "ritual setting" for that delivery. As communication, the sermon is affected by the setting within which it is preached, by its placement within the sequence of worship actions, by the relationship between its own theme design and the theme and order of service. As communication, the sermon is also affected by its correspondence as speech-product with the religious speech-culture of the worshiping group.

Given our tradition as organized churches, and given the place of the sermon in group worship, we must not overlook the bearing this ritual setting makes upon the occasion of hearing. Fixed rites and forms influence perception, expectation, and degrees of involvement. The whole pattern of the usual worship service involves a traditional time for gathering, a special place (church sanctuary) with special materials as aids to worship (bulletin, Bible, hymnal), authorized persons to guide the experience (ministers, choir), special forms of language in connection with certain actions (prayers: pastoral, offertory, dedication, benediction), and an understood purpose that presides over the entire time together—the celebration of God. If the setting is adequately organized and controlled, so that cultural factors are not a limiting secularism, even the ritual can be revelational and a means of touching the soul. Where ritual might sometimes fail to effect this, however, the sermon is still expected to succeed.

The expectations of church members



The Centrality Of Bible Study

By George Kufeldt

The study of Scripture is basic to the total seminary curriculum, because it is basic to the total life and work of the minister. What is implied by and included in the study of the Bible which makes it so central to both curriculum and life? How does one approach the study and teaching of the Bible if he sees the Bible as being of such basic importance?

It is easy to say that the study of the Bible must begin with the learning of the languages in which the Bible was first written, Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. This would make possible a minute analysis of the text which, hopefully, would enable the student to better understand what the Bible said and still says. A related requirement would be an intensive study of the historical, social and religious setting within which the people of both the Old Testament and New Testament live. After all, one must know a people in its environment in order to understand what they said and heard.

How does such a study of the Bible differ in kind and quality from the study of the writings of the German Goethe or the Greek



Homer? Is there something else which must be included and involved in the study of the Bible if it truly is of central importance and meaning?

This approach to the Bible is likely to be an arm's length kind of study, one in which the Bible is to be the object of study and thus subject to our control. This cannot be study which allows the Bible to be a dynamic force and resource in our daily lives. Indeed, such an approach easily fails to understand that

regarding our preaching should be considered as a plus-element to the worship service, and as a basic vote of confidence in our purpose as spokesmen for God. Although many attendant expectations are quite arbitrary and culturally-conditioned, there are still dynamics at work in them which keep the members present, alert, and open on some level. All of this provides the preacher with the opportunity to share his word on a still deeper level of need. When we have been attentive to pray about our members and to trace out the implications of the Word for their lives; when we have been pushed to our pulpits by desire and commitment to share with them our God-given message and our anointed

personhood; and when we have prepared ourselves to communicate effectively—in the spirit of true worship, then the hungry sheep will look up and be fed, and the ailing soul will find healing and strength. Godly expectations are not left unmet when we preach in the spirit of worship. Human needs are not left untouched when our sermons are personal in thrust to meet identifiable needs and concerns. And God is not left displeased when our sermons, rooted in the insights of the Word of God, are delivered with a strong sense within us of being partners of God.²

¹George A. Buttrick, *Sermons Preached in a University Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1959), p. 9.

²On this, see my book *The Responsible Pulpit* (Anderson: Warner Press, 1974), esp. pp. 78-89.

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the Bible not only is great literature, but it is a special kind of writing. It is far more than paper and ink. It is none other than the Word of God. To paraphrase Abraham Heschel's word about the prophets: "Through the Bible the invisible God becomes audible."

This means that in order to make and keep the Bible central to all study and living we must ever keep before us Alan Richardson's true declaration that "the subject of the whole Bible is the living God." Thus, we must guard against making either God or the Bible an object of uninvolved academic study in which new information about God merely becomes material for the giving of a lecture or the writing of a term paper rather than a guide for living. The clue here is the fact that God of the Bible is the living God, our eternal contemporary who not only has spoken through men of old, but who is still speaking to those who will listen and obey. The living God cannot be separated from his Word. So, the true student of the Word of God is one who knows the Author through daily prayer, worship and obedience. Luther stated it this way: "He who studies the commands of God will not be moved; but he who hears God commanding—how can he fail to be terrified?"

It is important, indeed, and necessary to study and know the Bible from the perspective of knowledge of the original languages in which it was written, and of every other facet of learning which enables us to understand the life and times of the people of the whole Bible. But, we do not truly know until we ourselves come to know experientially the God who speaks through this revealed Word. It is then that grammar, Biblical themes and history have life-changing meaning for us and through us. What we have been trying to say was well summarized for us in 1734 by J. A. Bengel in the preface to his famous Greek New Testament "Apply your whole self to the text: apply the whole matter to yourself." Whenever this is done, we begin to understand how the Bible is different from the writings of a Goethe, a Homer, or any other literary giant. The Bible is the Word of the living, eternal God, and we can know the Author Himself!



Scripture and Tradition

By John W. V. Smith

The centuries old debate between Protestants and Roman Catholics as to whether Tradition or Scripture is the primary basis of authority in the Christian church is winding down.

The issue of authority was among the most substantive differences which the sixteenth century Reformation produced. In Martin Luther's revolt he insisted on the "sufficiency" of scripture as the sole foundation of spiritual truth. He thereby rejected the authority of that vast accumulation of other documents produced during hundreds of years by councils, scholars, and popes which the Catholic church revered and regarded as sacred Tradition. Moreover, Luther and the other reformers disavowed the authoritative role of the titular head of the Roman church who claimed to be the apostolic successor of St. Peter and the "Vicar of Christ" on the earth. In taking this "sola scriptura" position they were accused of erecting a "paper pope," and destroying the aggregate of divine revelation which the centuries had brought together. So the debate began, and so it has continued until our own time.

The Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s brought the first softening of the lines

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of difference on this and many other issues. In particular, the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*, while not disclaiming the authority of later Tradition, placed the Biblical record in a preeminent position as the primary basis of the Church's teaching. Catholics, including the laity, for the first time in Christian history were urged to read and study the Scriptures for themselves. The result is the development of what has been called the Catholic Biblical Movement. Catholic scholars have experienced a remarkable resurgence of activity in textual and archeological studies. Sacred Scripture has been declared the center and source for new forms of the liturgy. Bible study is now an integral part of Catholic education.

The most dramatic development, perhaps, is that Scripture has become the "occasion" for the great amount of dialogue and cooperation between Protestants and Catholics. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible, produced by Protestant scholars, has been issued in a Catholic edition and is officially recommended for reading. Protestant and Catholic scholars work side by side in archeological and linguistic research. The monumental Anchor Bible is the product of this joint scholarship. So also are some of the translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls. One Catholic scholar has gone so far as to say, "It is no exaggeration to say that there remain no major differences among recognized Protestant and Catholic Scripture scholars concerning the literal meaning of the sacred text. What differences do remain are in the realm of dogmatic interpretation."¹

There are some Catholic leaders who feel that this new enthusiasm for Biblical scholarship and Bible reading may have gone too far. William Baum, Archbishop of

Washington, stated in a 1973 address to the graduating class of Georgetown University:

There is today within the Catholic community an unhappy tendency to adopt a new kind of *sola scriptura* approach. There is a laudable attention to the text of Holy Scripture but an inclination to skip over 2,000 years of development in drawing conclusions and applying the Holy Scriptures to our present needs. It is imperative that we return over and over again to the Bible, but it is equally important that we hear the voices of the Fathers and Doctors who have commented on the Scriptures through the centuries.²

Among Protestants there is, on the other hand, a very evident resurgence of interest in studies relating to the developing tradition of the Church. In Protestant seminaries and among serious-minded laymen there is a rediscovery of such fields of study as patristics and conciliarism. Protestant publishers are issuing new editions of the writings of Augustine, Thomas à Kempis, and Aquinas. Theological discussion lifts up ancient creedal formulations and liturgies. Many Protestants incorporate the Nicene and other statements of faith in their own forms of worship. There is no small amount of excitement in the discovery that all Tradition is not "dead." Some Protestants also tend to get carried away by their new insights and forget the primary role of the Scriptures themselves.

The lesson is obvious. For our day the issue is not Scripture or Tradition, but rather finding a way to deal meaningful with Scripture and Tradition in the developing and living of our own faith.

¹Ronald E. Modras, *Paths to Unity* (Sheed & Ward, 1968), p. 291.

²As quoted in *Ecumenical Trends*, II (July, 1973), p. 9.

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The Centrality of Scripture in Christian Education

By Jerry C. Grubbs



The centrality of Scripture in the Christian Education ministries of the church can be understood in light of the overall objective of the church's educational task. This objective is often stated in the following way:

The objective of the church's educational ministry is that all persons be aware of God through all the ways he makes himself known, especially through his redeeming love as revealed in Christ Jesus, and that they respond in faith and love—to the end that as new persons in Christ they may know who they are and what their human situation means, grow as sons of God rooted in the Christian community, yield themselves to the Holy Spirit, live in obedience to the will of God in every relationship, fulfill their common discipleship and mission in the world, and abide in the Christian hope.

Growing out of this objective are three characteristics of the Christian Education task. Christian Education which achieves

this stated objective must be intellectual, emotional, and activistic.

The Bible is a unique source to which the church can turn in its attempts to determine the intellectual content of the curriculum. In answer to the question, "What do you expect your children to get from Sunday School?", many parents would reply, "We want our children to know the Bible." Christian Educators may not understand their answer, but there is no mistaking their intent. The Bible is a virtual library of written accounts of God's revelation of himself and man's responses in historical context. It is to the scriptures that the church must turn for the basic content of the Christ Event—the birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ. The Bible is not the only source to which the Christian Educator goes for an understanding of the nature and activity of God. However, it is both a primary and foundational source. Teaching which in any way minimizes biblical content soon becomes shallow.

Knowledge "about" the Bible is not sufficient for the Christian Educator. The church, in its educational ministry, attempts to help persons realize that "God's word to man" can become "God's word to me." The church's teaching ministry must be more than an interesting intellectual search. It must become a journey in which persons interiorize those things which make a fundamental difference in their life-style. Education that is "Christian" is education which enables the student to encounter a Person. The primary content of Christian education is not the Bible but rather the message of the Bible, and that message is the Person of Jesus Christ. Bible study creates the context for encounter with Christ.

For the Christian Educator, the Bible is the record of the God-Man relationship in suffering, struggle, and transformation. The Bible describes an active discipleship. Such activism is not the result of faith but rather

The Centrality of Scripture in Pastoral Care

By John M. Vayhinger

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me, . . . I was in prison and you came to me, I was sick and you visited me."

—Matthew 25:35, 36

From the earliest times in Judaism there were three distinct types of religious leaders: (1) The Priests, connected with public worship and ceremonies; (2) the Prophets, who spoke in the Name of the Lord on Moral and Personal Issues, sometimes rebuking kings in Israel; and (3) the Wise Men (Hakhamim) who acted as counselors with all levels of Hebrews, using principles of the good life and dealing with attitudes and the feelings of personal behavior. It would seem that Ezekiel and Amos sometimes functioned as members of the Hakhamim. Jeremiah describes the three functionaries in 18:18, "the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet."

Pastoral care and counseling puts together the "wise men's" functions with knowledge and skills from the sciences of psychology and psychiatry. Since all true knowledge comes ultimately from God (i.e. thinking God's thoughts after Him), then when we apply those "scientific" skills and facts to the service of mankind, we are carrying out God's will for the service (servant motif) of persons.

is a part of the educational process into faith. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament assert the political and social meaning of faith. The Bible gives both content and context to the Christian's active discipleship in the world.

Christian Education attempts to deal with the whole person. Thoughts, feelings, and actions are all important to an understanding of the whole person. The Bible is a crucial resource for setting both content and context for intellectual, emotional, and activistic concerns of Christian disciples.



There may be tension between the scientist and the religious person—for both speak from a partial comprehension of the whole truth—but there should be no conflict—for both should be used—in Christ's Name—to alleviate suffering and increase wholeness and holiness and effective functioning in relationships with persons.

Jesus' ministry was deeply involved with suffering persons. The gospels are filled with the miracles of healing—where His sensitive understanding and healing skill touched a paralytic boy, a manic psychotic, a blind beggar—and all were healed.

Jesus' ministry was equally deeply involved with sinners (John 3:3)—whose fears, compulsions and neurotic needs (like the woman by the well) made their lives complicated (living with six men!), collected taxes for the Romans, or sneaked in to have a talk with Jesus after dark.

His miracles are still beyond our skills—but with a combination of call, dedication and training, we can come closer to following in the example of our Lord.

His truth was not exclusively involved with sick and hurting persons and sometimes with hungry or sinful individuals. He was also deeply involved with healthy persons seeking fulfillment and

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self-actualization and wholeness. To improve loving groups and congregational harmony, to create efficient administration and church loyalty were also His goals.

In the study of Psychology and Pastoral Care we take these marvelous teachings of Jesus (from the Scriptures), apply them to living people who hurt (in prison, medical and psychiatric hospitals, Health Care Centers, family counseling centers, etc.) and send pastors out to preach the Word in serving those persons for whom Christ died.

It is anticipated that each of the future issues of Centering on Ministry will focus on a particular theme or issue of general interest to those in Ministry. Some Continuing Education students will use Centering on Ministry as a point of reference in discussion and dialogue in Colleague Groups. They may have a discussion guide and bibliography by asking for it. It would help us if you would send topics you would like discussed in future issues of this paper.

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