

WHAT'S THE USE? –THE BIBLE IN PASTORAL PRACTICE

BY IAN DICKSON

“What’s the use?” This pragmatic question lies at the heart of a new empirical field investigation now beginning into how the Bible is actually being used in current pastoral practice.

The project forms part of wider collaboration between Bible Society and Cardiff University, begun in 1998, exploring the uses of the Bible in historical and contemporary Christian ministry. Following a successful consultation with forty scholars and practitioners from Europe and the USA in 2000, a project team is now working on three related aspects, to be published together: a reader, a critical textbook and a workbook.

In preparation for the workbook, the question of actual use is being addressed. How does the Bible inform creative practice? Is the Bible today more of a problem than a resource or reference point, and, therefore, unused? While questions of this nature may form a broad framework for thought, this project is essentially exploratory – we want to find out what is happening on the ground, to discover people’s stories. It is also governed by the important demands of utility – we want it to be useful in promoting good practice among this and the next generation of Bible practitioners. In this sense, the project has the potential to inform and transform practice, to re-invigorate critical Bible use.

Phase one is to gather brief and focused information from as many sources as possible regarding actual use. Phase two is to select and develop a series of case studies. The project team are inviting readers of TransMission to send them a short account of how they actually use the Bible in pastoral practice (or teach its use), a summary of any strong views held (positive or negative), and profiles of what they would regard as bad and good practice. Suggestions for contact with other practitioners who might have an interesting contribution to make in this context would also be welcomed.

These brief accounts can be sent directly to Dr Ian Dickson, either by e-mailing dicksoni@cf.ac.uk or by posting them to the Department of Religious and Theological Studies, Cardiff University, Humanities Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff CF10 3EU, telephone 029 2087 4240 ext. 5479.

This project creates an important and unique opportunity for a working partnership with those whose concerns lie in the greater effectiveness of Christian practice. The findings are awaited with great interest.

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