

Introduction

The title of the book you are about to study should make it clear enough what the book is about. We would like to think that **Part 1** of the book is motivational, while **Part 2** is inspirational.

In **Part 1**, we want to encourage you to take the Bible seriously in all your use of it. As Christians, whether students, pastors, lay leaders, or just 'ordinary' believers, we should take the Bible seriously for what it claims to be and what the Church has confessed it to be throughout the centuries, the word of God. We shall think of some of the dimensions and implications of that confession in Chapter 1.

But we must also take seriously the fact that the Bible comes to us as the words of human authors. That means taking full account of the contexts within which God spoke through human beings, in their own historical, cultural and social setting. And it means using simple and appropriate tools of exegesis in finding out what those human authors and editors meant to say when they produced the texts we now have collected in our Bible. This will be our focus in Chapter 2.

Third, we should take the Bible seriously as a whole. The Bible is not just a collection of miscellaneous teachings that we can mix and match at random. It comes to us with a clear overall structure and plot – a universal story with a beginning, middle and end. It comes as a 'canon' – that is as an authorized collection of literature that exercises guiding authority within the community of faith. It comes to us as what the Apostle Paul described as 'the whole counsel of God'. So we need to take it whole, so that it may govern the way we think about everything else in life. The Bible as a whole must shape our world-view. What this means is the subject of Chapter 3.

Having laid these foundations in **Part 1**, we move on in **Part 2** to give you some examples of how the Bible can be, and is being, creatively used in different parts of the world. The list of topics that you will find in the Table of Contents is of course not exhaustive. But we hope these chapters will not only give practical guidance in some key areas, but also inspire you to think of other ways in which you can use the Bible to good effect – fully respecting its 'given-ness' as the word of revelation entrusted to God's people, and yet also creatively experimenting with multiple ways of allowing its relevance and challenge to be felt and heard in our different cultures.

At this point it might be helpful to state this is not an Introduction to the Bible. We will not be thinking about the background to the Bible, its history, the dates and authorship of its various documents, or the different

forms of critical study that have been applied to it. Those things are covered in other International Study Guides and basic textbooks.

We will give attention to some important principles that we need to keep in mind when we read, study, preach or teach the Bible, but neither is this a book about **hermeneutics**. We will not be thinking about the many theories of how people find meaning in texts, and how such theorizing affects our reading and understanding of the Bible.

Also, this is not a book of practical **homiletics**. So we will not be thinking about the art and discipline of preaching specifically. The volume in this series by Roger Bowen, *A Guide to Preaching*, covers that well. Nevertheless, we will include some reflection on how we can build the bridge between studying the Bible and preaching it. We have all probably experienced preaching from the Bible that we thought was bad or inadequate, or even dangerously misleading. How can we do better?