

## EDITORIAL

Ndiyanibulisa egameni likaYesu Kristu, umSindisi wethu. As I anticipated in my last Editorial, I am now writing from my office in Dumisani Theological Institute, King William's Town in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The isiXhosa greeting with which I began (which means 'I-greet-you in-the-name of-Jesus-Christ Saviour of-us') opens each worship service and church meeting of the isiXhosa-speaking Free Church in Southern Africa. It has become a helpful reminder to me (as I have come to recognise what is being said!) that although I have come to a country far from my homeland and very different (not least in terms of the climate!), and to people whose history and culture are not my history and culture, yet every Christian I meet here has, like me, found salvation *only* in the person who bears the hellenised name (easily recognisable in either isiXhosa or English), Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Regardless of our ethnic origin or our present place of domicile or our language, if his grace has transformed us then we have been made part of a single redeemed family which allows us truly to describe Jesus as 'umSindisi wethu': *our* Saviour.

Now that we are here in South Africa, my main responsibility will be to teach the Bible in a way that is appropriate for an African context. What exactly that means in practice is, I think, beyond my ability to say at present. I have lived in Scotland all my life and have learned to study and to teach the Bible in that context. This is not a fault – everybody has to come from somewhere – but it does mean that I cannot assume that what was appropriate in Scotland is necessarily appropriate in South Africa and now I must take the role of learner before I can be an effective teacher.

While the process of learning to teach the Bible in Africa will no doubt require a lifetime, I have been employed to teach *now* and so I cannot put the task off indefinitely. Thus, I have tried to locate some resources which might help me to teach with some sensitivity to my new context. I have decided to share some of the results of my search here, not primarily because I expect that many readers living outside Africa will themselves have to teach the Bible in Africa (although some of you might – do not discount the possibility), but because it may be useful for readers in other contexts to be aware of the serious reflection which is being carried out, in Africa and elsewhere, on how the Bible is being and should be read in

Africa. One significant resource which I have discovered is a large volume edited by Professors Gerald West and Musa Dube, entitled *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*.<sup>1</sup> This collection of some thirty-nine articles reflects something of the variety of approaches to reading the Bible. Many of these articles are by no means evangelical in perspective (although there are some evangelical contributors) but there is no other book which provides such a wide-ranging introduction to the use of the Bible in Africa. Some features are particularly notable: a sense of the diversity of Africa – the experience of certain Christians in Malawi is different from that of another group in Nigeria and different again from the experience of various South African Christian communities – and a strong emphasis on the need for biblical interpretation which speaks to the (often harsh) realities of life. Of quite a different character is the work of Professor Bennie van der Walt, recently retired from the Institute for Contemporary Christianity in Africa at the Potchefstroom campus of North West University (formerly Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education). In his book, *The Liberating Message*,<sup>2</sup> Professor van der Walt argues that it is necessary to develop a holistic, biblical worldview in order to address the situation in Africa. This book, and his more recent volume, *Understanding and Rebuilding Africa*,<sup>3</sup> are important contributions to a sensitive Christian understanding of the situation in Africa. These books have been helpful to me in my attempt to be sensitive to my new African context and I hope that others may find that they provide a window into the needs and challenges facing the churches in Africa.

How then should I teach the Bible in Africa? To some extent, it is necessary to teach skills and methods which apply everywhere: use of original languages (whenever possible); careful attention to context; interpretation appropriate to literary genre, etc. But perhaps there are some issues which demand particular emphasis. Tentatively, I have concluded that I must teach the Bible in (South) Africa emphasising at least three such principles: Firstly, I must emphasise that the Bible is God's own account of how he has acted in history. There is no benefit to Africa in transplanting the events recorded in the gospels into African soil and constructing an 'African Jesus'. The 'scandal of particularity' is that an African's hope – and the hope of every other person – lies in Jesus, a Jewish man, who was God incarnate and who died on a cross in Israel in the first century AD. Secondly, I must emphasise the relevance of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Leiden: Brill, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Potchefstroom: ICCA, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Potchefstroom: ICCA, 2003.

biblical text. This is not, however, to manipulate the text; it is simply to recognise and to make clear that the Bible has its own relevance to issues of politics, economics, education, etc., as well as to one's spiritual life. There is, of course, a danger that in attempting to use the Bible to address various social and political issues, one might neglect the crucial matters of how human beings are to relate to the Creator whom they have offended and yet who has provided a redeemer. Yet there is no reason why there should be any dualism which faces us with an either/or choice. For example, one can scarcely read Ephesians 2 without appreciating *both* its profound presentation of God's gracious salvation *and* its implications for human relationships. Thirdly, I must provide ways in which my African students can offer their own readings of the text, rather than simply accept mine, while challenging them to reflect critically on their readings in conversation with the readings of others.

As time goes on, I hope that I will develop these principles and others as I engage in conversation with colleagues and students here in South Africa. As the process continues, I would like to ask *SBET* readers in Africa and elsewhere to take an interest in and to pray for the teaching of the Bible in Africa.

### *In this number*

The first two papers in the present *Bulletin* were originally presented at the excellent meeting of the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society, held in April 2005 at the Faith Mission College, Edinburgh. The theme for the conference was 'Being Disciples/Making Disciples' and those of us who attended were privileged to hear two gifted speakers lead us into further reflection on this important topic.

The lead article is by Professor John Webster of the University of Aberdeen. Although Professor Webster delivered the Finlayson Memorial Lecture at the conference, that lecture was delivered as the second part of a two-part presentation and so we have decided to hold the publication of the Finlayson Memorial Lecture back to the next number of *SBET* in order to preserve the integrity of Professor Webster's work. The first part of the presentation, which is published here, is a refreshingly biblical-theological treatment of the call to discipleship. The original oral delivery in a conference setting is reflected in the published version of the address. Readers of *SBET* have already benefited from Professor Webster's writing and I am delighted that we can enjoy a double measure of his helpful reflections in this *Bulletin* and the next.

The second article is by the other conference speaker, Dr David Smith, of International Christian College, Glasgow. Dr Smith is well known as a

sensitive interpreter of contemporary culture as well as of Scripture, and as an able academic with a missionary's heart; these qualities are evident in his helpful discussion of the challenges to discipleship in (post?)modern, Western society, drawing on the writings of D. Bonhoeffer and Z. Bauman, among others.

As our third article, we are glad to welcome an exegetical-theological contribution from Dr James Hamilton, Assistant Professor of the Houston campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr Hamilton examines the evidence relating to how God was present with his people according to the OT documents from Joshua to Malachi, having already examined the relevant material in the Pentateuch in a previous article published elsewhere.

Finally, Dr Tim Trumper concludes his two-part study of the implications of renewed attention to the Pauline doctrine of adoption with particular consideration of the potential impact on the theology, soteriology and doxology of Westminster Calvinism.

I offer my grateful thanks to each of these authors for making their work available in the *Bulletin* and I am delighted to be able to present these papers to you, the reader. I trust that you will find these papers stimulating and helpful – perhaps even provocative – and that you will use them to develop your own Christian thinking and ministry. We also, of course, have a healthy selection of book reviews to help you read wisely and effectively, and I wish to express my grateful thanks to my colleague, Dr Iain D. Campbell, for his diligent work as Review Editor, as well as to all our reviewers for their contributions.

*Alistair I. Wilson*