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THE BIBLE STUDY METHOD OF SUZANNE DE DIETRICH

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
in  
The New York Theological Seminary

New York, New York

1966

26069

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Statement of the Subject

It will be the purpose of this research to examine the English publications on Bible study written by Suzanne de Dietrich in order to discover her method of Bible study. She is an outstanding lay theologian of Europe who has greatly influenced many people, particularly in her work as resident lecturer on Bible study at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland. It has been written of her:

No single person and no single book [Le Dessein de Dieu] in the European context has done more to re-introduce the lay people of the European churches to serious Bible study.<sup>1</sup>

This research will examine her books and articles in order to find what she has done to provoke such a reaction, to challenge people to read and study the Bible.

### The Significance of the Subject

In all the history of Christianity, there has rarely, or perhaps never, been a period of time when so many who call themselves Christians have known so little of their own sourcebook, the Bible, as today. Many men have tried in many ways to bring people back to a better grounding in their

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<sup>1</sup>Robert S. Paul, "Book Reviews", Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XVII (November, 1961), 97.

faith by exposing them to a study of the whole Bible. Suzanne de Dietrich has been a stimulus to many people, bringing them to a study of the Bible, expecting to find meaning for everyday life. She has written guides for study which have challenged lay people and helped them to discover the meaning of their faith in group Bible studies. The need continues, and lay people must continue to be challenged and encouraged to examine and study their faith today. This inquiry will examine her method of approach and her procedure in stimulating people to study the Bible. Because the needs of today are similar to the needs which she has met, it is hoped that this investigation will yield a method of study which may profitably be employed today by other teachers as well.

#### The Impact of Suzanne de Dietrich

Mlle. Suzanne de Dietrich was born on January 29, 1891, in Alsace, France. She received a diploma in electrical engineering from the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1913. She was associated with the French Student Christian Movement beginning in 1914, and became an officer in 1929. From 1935-46 she was secretary to the World Student Christian Movement, and was a frequent contributor to their magazine, The Student World. From 1936-38 she was also the world secretary to the Young Women's Christian Association. From 1936-54 she was the resident lecturer on Bible study at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches in Bossey, Switzerland. In 1950 she was awarded an honorary

degree of the Doctor of Theology by the University of Montpellier (France). She is a member of the Reformed Church of France, and she has worked hard to promote the ecumenical movement. Since her retirement in 1954, she has written, lectured, and travelled in several countries, including a year of teaching at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.

Mlle. de Dietrich has been particularly interested in liturgy and worship, in the Biblical foundations for church unity, and in Bible study, especially as related to evangelism. Her publications reflect these dominant interests, and show her concern to encourage lay people to read and study the Bible for themselves. In a foreword to her book, The Witnessing Community, Donald G. Miller writes:

It is difficult to combine serious study of the Bible, reflecting the results of specialized study, with a type of presentation that is at once understandable and challenging.

Here is a work that brings these into happy combination. Suzanne de Dietrich has been endowed, both by training and by experience, with the ability to speak to the lay mind. . . . For long years she has taught the Bible to student groups of many nations and to varied groups of professional laymen. . . . Considered by many to be the outstanding lay theologian of Europe, Suzanne de Dietrich has been honored by the great and loved by the humble.<sup>1</sup>

Her theology was developed during a period in which great emphasis was given to the historical background of the Old Testament, the sources of the Israelite religion, and form criticism. Yet her own thinking, while not

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<sup>1</sup>Suzanne de Dietrich (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), pp. 9-10.

disregarding this material, has laid stress on the encounter of God with men, and on the unity of the witness to God throughout the Bible. She does not hold to the verbal inspiration of the Scripture, but she does believe that the Bible is to be the Word of God to man, and that he must study it with an attitude of listening for this Word. The mainstream of theology today is close to her position, much closer than when she began her work, as seen above.<sup>1</sup> One would expect that her work would therefore be recognized by the theologians, and be quite relevant today. This is indeed the case, and her guides are widely used today, both in America and in Europe.

#### The Method of Procedure

This inquiry will attempt to educe a method of Bible study which will be helpful for those who might wish to teach others the same method. The first chapter will trace the pattern of study which Mlle. de Dietrich uses for herself, including her approach to the Bible and her use of outside sources, as far as it is discernible in her work. The second chapter will explore what she has written concerning teaching, and the procedures and techniques she employs in her guides. The third chapter will attempt to educe from her work a lucid method of study and teaching which might be of use to another teacher.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. H.H. Rowley, C.H. Dodd, John Bright, and others.

## The Sources of the Study

The sources of this research are the books and articles written by Suzanne de Dietrich which have been written in, or translated into, English. There are also several book reviews which in some measure evaluate her work and ideas.

Although she has also written some articles which have not been translated, the sources for this study adequately represent her work. Her most important book, Le Dessein de Dieu, was translated into English: God's Unfolding Purpose. Articles written over a period of years for The Student World were written in English, and several other books are now available in English also. The writer could find no books and a very few articles which are not now in English.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PATTERN OF BIBLE STUDY OF SUZANNE DE DIETRICH

#### Introduction

The pattern of study of Suzanne de Dietrich as it emerges in her writings will be explored in this chapter. First of all, her conception of the Bible will be considered: why she believes it is important to study, what she expects to gain from her study, and her view of the various difficulties of the initial study of the Bible. Inquiry into her use of supplementary materials as she attempts to gain the meaning of the words will follow. Finally, the study of the text and its interpretation will be examined.

#### Her View of the Bible

What the Bible is. Mlle. de Dietrich believes that the Bible is the Word of God to man. By this she means that it is the revelation of a hidden God, who has chosen to reveal Himself through His acts in history. However, it is not a clear and precise logical explanation of God; nor is it an easily comprehended document. Rather she writes:

The Bible is a very peculiar book: unique in its greatness but unique also in its complete scorn for all that our human wisdom would have tried to make of it in

writing it.<sup>1</sup>

All the complaints one can utter, both against God and His Word, and against His world, and the suffering and injustice which one constantly meets, are found in the Bible, already heard, already answered, in God's own peculiar way.

What the Bible contains. The Bible has a message for men today. It contains ideas which they need to hear now. She writes:

The Bible answers man's "why", but it answers it in God's way, not in man's way. For His reply is action and not explanation. The Bible is there to tell us that none other than God Himself can give peace to the soul in its final distress.<sup>2</sup>

It is a record of God's choosing the weak consistently in history; how He acted for salvation or redemption. The Bible is not a systematic presentation of abstract ideas or a philosophy; it is neither a set of general principles (although principles may be found to some extent) nor a rulebook for life. God has not so revealed Himself. A record of His revelation to man involves time and action, a word of promise or judgment followed by the fulfillment of the word in an act which interrupts man's life. The Bible is the record of His Word to a specific situation, of His action in that context of history, of what He did with a particular people at a

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<sup>1</sup>"The Lord's Swaddling Clothes," The Student World, XXXI, No. 3 (1938), 200.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

particular time. But in these actions and in this record, we find a timeless revelation of God: who He is, what He expects of man, how He deals with him. These acts are not only relevant to the past, they are also relevant to the present and the future, for they have shown what the nature of God is. The Bible is a living Word, revealing a hidden God.<sup>1</sup>

The place of criticism. Form criticism and literary criticism also have their place in this concept of the Word of God, for it is a book which has been transmitted orally, written down, edited, and re-edited by men over a period of perhaps a thousand years. Although Mlle. de Dietrich is aware of the possibility of the critics superimposing their prejudices upon their study of the Bible, still she enumerates the ways in which Christians have gained by being helped to understand the Bible from their work.<sup>2</sup> She cautions a reader to let the Bible witness to itself in questions of authenticity; a particular part must be seen as a part and in the framework of the whole.

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<sup>1</sup>G.E. Wright, in God Who Acts, speaks of the Bible as primarily "the record of the acts of God, together with the human response thereto"(p. 107). Because of this definition, he feels that men ought not to try to impose a strict unity upon the Bible or the theology one gains from a study of it. Mlle. de Dietrich would probably agree with this point, but she prefers to emphasize the unity in the midst of the diversity, as does H.H. Rowley in his book The Unity of the Scripture.

<sup>2</sup>Discovering the Bible (Coonoor, India: The Sunday School Union, 1952), p. 32.

The Bible was written down by men in a particular time in history, and their beliefs about the world and ways to convey truth are reflected in their writings. Yet it does not become only a cultural or cultic book because of these things. It is a record of man's dealings with God, recorded in a meaningful way not only to remind ~~men~~, but to teach and convert others. Particularly in the Old Testament does one find it difficult to accept many of the beliefs expressed. Yet without a grasp of the Old Testament, much of the significance of the New Testament is lost. An understanding of the Old Testament prepares one to understand the imagery, the concepts, and the language used throughout the New Testament, and ~~also~~ the fulfillment of the Messianic hope which began with the curse of God in the Garden of Eden, and the recognition there expressed of the need for redemption.

The unity of the Bible. The Bible is a whole, and presents one God. Yet there are difficult problems, which Mlle. de Dietrich is quite willing to admit and squarely face. In a chapter in Discovering the Bible, she writes of the desire of some Christians to drop consideration of the Old Testament because it is Jewish, nationalistic, merely a prelude to a universal religion in Christ, and because of the difficulty of reconciling the 'bloodthirsty' characteristic of some of the books, and the desire for vengeance and the self-righteousness of the Psalms with the love, compassion, and mercy of Jesus as seen in the New Testament. In answer to such

questions, she reminds the reader of Luther's use of the image of the baby in swaddling clothes, and asks him to search enough to find the baby and not be content with seeing only the clothes.<sup>1</sup> She chooses the book of Judges to illustrate the understanding to be gained from the Old Testament, and reminds one of how faithful God is, even to His stiff-necked people who desert to paganism over and over again. She writes that the Old Testament can bring an enriched knowledge of Christ, and sums up the chapter by setting forth these two principles:

The two principles which should guide us in our study of the Old Testament: (1) to replace each passage in its historical context, taking into account the spirit of the times in which the event took place and the purpose of those who recorded it; (2) to interpret its significance in the light of God's total revelation as fulfilled in Christ in order to discard what is time-bound and to retain the permanent lesson contained in it. For 'these things are warnings for you.'<sup>2</sup>

The relevance for today. Throughout each discussion of Biblical passages, and issues of the day such as ecumenism, the law, and war, Mlle. de Dietrich assumes that the understanding one gains from the Bible is to be applied to today's

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<sup>1</sup>Discovering the Bible. Note p. 30ff for this whole discussion.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 32. Compare this view with Norman H. Snaithe's book, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament. He writes that the New Testament cannot be properly understood without a thorough grounding in the basic ideas and meaning of those ideas found in the Old Testament. H.H. Rowley agrees in saying that neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament can be properly interpreted without reference to the other, in The Unity of the Bible.

life. The lessons came in time and history, but they taught men of the nature of God and their relationship to Him, and these revelations are equally true today. The Bible is the record of God speaking to man, preparing him for the coming Christ, and teaching him how to worship and obey. The book, God's Unfolding Purpose, demonstrates Mlle. de Dietrich's belief that God has one purpose, that of salvation, and He pursues it throughout history. The purpose is fulfilled in Christ, yet men must still be persuaded and shown of His purpose and His love, as well as His commandments and expectations. Men today must study His Word if they wish to learn how to obey and to worship God and Christ, or how to live among men as He desires. One's study of the Bible should have far-reaching consequences; it should be shaping and molding the one who reads and takes seriously these words as the Word of God today. This study must be careful and searching; one needs the help of the Holy Spirit if one is truly to understand. The proper spirit of study is therefore a spirit of prayer and meditation, of expectation that God will give understanding as one continues to study. Bible study is not to be taken lightly; it is a serious matter, and of great necessity for a Christian.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this concern, Mlle. de Dietrich stands with perhaps every Christian scholar, from as widely varying theological stands as that of Bultmann to that of Rowley, although there may be differences as to how or why such study is important.

## Her Use of Supplementary Materials

Theological works. Mlle. de Dietrich frequently refers to extra-Biblical sources for particular information. She will quote a statement from a commentary to illustrate an idea of her own, or comment upon why she disagrees at particular points with an author.<sup>1</sup> Most commonly, her use of scholarly materials does not appear in the text. However, sketches of the background of a book or passage reveal that she has diligently studied to find the probable date, author, and other materials which will enlighten the student of the Bible. In This We Know she includes a bibliography of six commentaries and two wordbooks, and in the text she shows her knowledge of Greek as well.<sup>2</sup> In God's Unfolding Purpose, she does not refer to any particular sources, but gives the date and a verbal picture of the conditions under which the various books were written, as well as the reactions of the people to the works.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes, this can be gained from careful Biblical study, but at other times, one must use other sources in order to give a complete study. Mlle. de Dietrich uses commentaries and dictionaries and theological wordbooks in her studies, but she rarely will refer directly to them. She prefers to paraphrase and to use simple

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<sup>1</sup>See This We Know, pp. 18, 19, 36, 37.

<sup>2</sup>For examples, see This We Know, pp. 15, 22, 26.

<sup>3</sup>God's Unfolding Purpose. Note particularly pp. 49-50, 67, 105-107, 127-128. She also refers the reader to a bibliography for further study on pps. 271-272.

untheological language where possible.

Non-theological works. Mlle. de Dietrich refers to modern authors or events at times in her books in order to make particular Biblical ideas clear in the context of today's philosophical (in the broadest sense) thought, or to show the need for careful Biblical study in order to find the meaning of life.<sup>1</sup> She often contrasts the popular ideas with Biblical ideas.<sup>2</sup> She occasionally discusses the insights of a secular work in comparison with the insights of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> She is apparently widely read in a variety of fields besides theology, and she uses her knowledge as she studies the Bible.

#### Her Textual Study

Context. In each study Mlle. de Dietrich is careful to establish the context before she considers the text. The place within the total framework of the Scripture is located, as well as the chronological and cultural context, when it is necessary for a fuller understanding of the text. In her study of Jeremiah, for example, she writes first of the place

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<sup>1</sup>As in Free Men, she quotes from Camus (p. 15) and relates an incident from World War II (p. 37).

<sup>2</sup>See Free Men, pp. 69, 75, 102, 110. The Word with Power (p. 15) contains illustrations.

<sup>3</sup>As in The Witnessing Community, pp. 13-14, she discusses The Lonely Crowd by David Riesman in the introduction to the book.

of a prophet and his word in Jeremiah's time.<sup>1</sup> Then she moves to the history, for she says:

To grasp the meaning of Jeremiah's message we have to retrace briefly the historical background of his ministry. As we said before, a prophet always speaks "to a situation" and can only be fully understood in the light of that situation.<sup>2</sup>

She establishes the dates of important events which occurred during his lifetime, relating him to these dates and the kings to whom he prophesied. Only then does she begin to examine what his message was, after the situation into which his message came was clearly presented.

The book of Jeremiah is not isolated, but a part of the revelation of God, of a panorama of events and people, and it must be understood in its place in this greater whole. The God who spoke to Jeremiah also delivered the people from Egypt and made a nation of them. He established a covenant with them, and because of His love even now is trying to bring back the people to obedience within the covenant. He is a God of redemption, of salvation, and the judgment which they suffer is a result of disobedience to their own God, whom they know from experience can deliver them. His Word to Jeremiah is an attempt on His part to bring them into salvation, to deliver them from the punishment which shall surely come if they do not heed Jeremiah.

Mlle. de Dietrich then points out that the place of the

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<sup>1</sup>"Three Studies in the Book of Jeremiah," The Student World, XXXII, No. 4 (1939).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

Israelite nation in the Old Testament is paralleled by the Church in the New Testament. The place of privilege and knowledge of God which was Israel's place is taken now by Christians; the responsibility to obey is just as crucial for the Church today as it was for the Israelites in Jeremiah's day. The book of Jeremiah must be approached as a message in the context of the history of his time, and of the Biblical history of events and of the future work of God. It must be taken as a Word to His Church today as much as to His people then.

In her study of Jeremiah, the context is seen to be of great importance. Not alone in this study, but throughout each publication there is a careful regard for the historical setting of the particular text and the context of the passage in the whole view of the Scriptures. In Discovering the Bible, she writes:

An important rule of Biblical studies is that the Bible is its own interpreter. Every part should be seen in the light of the whole. In reading a given book we should ask ourselves what specific truth about God, man or the history of the people of God, this book is meant to convey. It often happens that the writer himself does not know the full meaning of his testimony and that later writers will have to interpret what he has said in the light of the revelation bestowed upon them.<sup>1</sup>

Mlle. de Dietrich seems to be convinced that one must have some knowledge of the place of the particular passage under study in the light of the whole movement of the Bible.

Structure. In the longer studies which are complete book

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<sup>1</sup>p. 24.

studies, Mlle. de Dietrich has carefully examined the contents for the structure of the book. She looks for a framework or an outline by which the contents of the book may be divided into sections which may be studied separately and in relation to each other. To find such an outline, she notices the repetition of ideas or words or notes the similarity or differences between the parts as she studies, tracing ideas and thoughts through the whole. In her commentary on Matthew and in her study of the letters of John, she discusses the structure of the books along with matters of introduction; the date, authorship, background, and significance.<sup>1</sup> Then she proceeds to make an outline of the whole of the book, and study it section by section, according to the outline, seeing how each part relates to the other parts of the whole book. In her book, God's Unfolding Purpose, the use of structure is again clearly demonstrated, this time in the whole of the Bible. She sees the purpose of God as the organizing factor for the Bible, and shows in her table of contents as well as the exposition of the whole book how the various parts and books illustrate God's purpose of redemption.

In her shorter studies, the framework outlined in detail in each book is used as a means of placing a particular passage in its context in the whole Bible. But each part has its own structure as well, and this is examined and expressed within its own framework as well as in relation to

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew, Richmond, Va: The John Knox Press, 1961, pp. 10-12. This We Know, pp. 12-13.

the whole. The structure is found first, before proceeding with further study, for it is only as the passage is seen in the light of the whole that it can be rightfully interpreted and applied.<sup>1</sup> To find the structure is to begin the study. The structure will show the theme and its development through the passage, and will enable the student to correctly interpret the text in the light of the whole book and the whole Bible. It is a necessary step. Although it is not spelled out as a study of structure in her work, except in the book studies of Matthew and Letters of John, it underlies all her work and supports her emphasis on the study of passages in context.

Word studies. Having determined the context and the structure, there are still a variety of ways to proceed with the study. One way is through the study of important words in a passage or section. Mlle. de Dietrich seems to be sensitive in her use of words. If there is a word which is particularly important, she will explain at length the meaning of the word according to Biblical usage. In Free Men, she explores the meaning of the word liberty, as it is used in the Bible, by examining the nature of the liberty which was initially lost through sin, but regained through Christ. In a shorter study she writes:

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<sup>1</sup>In Our Unity in Christ, in each chapter, she introduces the important points made already, or the development of the book as a whole before she begins the actual study of the passage. See also pp. 10, 14, 20. Note also her discussion in Discovering the Bible, pp. 37-38.

We must pay close attention to the terms employed. The same term is sometimes used with different meanings in the Bible itself; more than that, it is almost always burdened with a theological or ethical meaning, which it does not possess in secular terminology. The first problem, therefore, will be in the sphere of etymology; it will be an attempt to define briefly the meaning of certain essential terms, and their evolution in the course of the centuries.<sup>1</sup>

She goes on to define fully law and righteousness as the basis for a discussion of the view of law in the Christian's mind, as seen in the teaching of the Bible. Her word studies are more often a basis for understanding the main thrust of a passage than an end in themselves; the definitions are given in order to interpret properly the meaning of the passage. If a word is seen to be important, it will also help to focus on the proper meaning of the text.<sup>2</sup>

Themes. Besides the word study, another technique Mlle. de Dietrich often employs is the use of a theme. The passage under scrutiny is entitled with a phrase which embodies the main thrust of the material. The study then proceeds as an exploration of the various facets of this theme in the material. Or, if she wishes to consider a particular doctrine or question of any sort, she will discover several passages concerning that theme, and contrast and compare them in order to discover the Biblical teaching on that subject. She will often give a lengthy introduction to a thematic study,

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<sup>1</sup>"The Biblical Basis of Law," The Student World, XXXVI, No. 4 (1937), p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. with Snaith, Dodd, Bright, Rowley and Vincent Taylor on the importance of word studies as a basis for proper interpretation.

expressing her convictions concerning the theme, with specific Biblical references, before setting forth the way in which she arrived at these convictions.<sup>1</sup> The practice of naming a theme seems to be the result of her study and thought about the passage, and a teaching device, rather than a method for use in initial study.

The text. Mlle. de Dietrich applies herself to a passage for study by reading it in order to discover its meaning within its own expression of ideas. That is, she reads it to find out what it says and what it may mean. She paraphrases the sentences. She considers the use of imagery to explore the possible meaning for that image in the particular place. She follows the implications of each idea for the situation, bringing in her own knowledge of the setting and background for that passage. She makes herself thoroughly familiar with the ideas and the relationships between the several ideas of one passage. Only when she has studied the passage does she turn to other passages to broaden the thought or ideas gained in one place.

Correlation with other texts. When she has studied a passage she will compare it to other passages with related ideas or similar images. She will show what relation this passage has to the whole of God's purpose. She will compare a point

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<sup>1</sup>Note two thematic studies for examples: The Word with Power and Our Unity in Christ.

of decision to other points of decision, in which there were different choices made, and different results seen. The process of correlation is a means of testing the truth of one's discoveries. She writes, "An important rule of Biblical studies is that the Bible is its own interpreter. Every part should be seen in the light of the whole."<sup>1</sup> At the same time she writes of the slow and long process of understanding the whole:

The believer who meditates on the revelation of the Bible grasps little by little the deep and hidden unity of it; and this unity has a name: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end".<sup>2</sup>

Correlation is a necessary part of the Bible study, but it is a part which is never quite finished, and only gradually grasped.

#### Her Interpretation of The Bible

Although much of the foregoing material deals with the matters of interpretation, this section will directly explore the bases of interpretation which Mlle. de Dietrich consistently uses. In the many centuries since Christ came, and the canon was formed, there have been only a few major types of exegesis of the Bible. Allegorical and typological interpretations were the usual methods until the Reformation. After that, the Bible was believed authoritative over the

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<sup>1</sup>Discovering the Bible, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>"The Lord's Swaddling Clothes", The Student World, XXXI, No. 3 (1938), p. 205.

traditions of the Church in Protestantism, and the Word of God was thought to come directly through the Bible rather than through the intermediary of the Church. In the modern period, critical study of the Bible as a literary and historical work has gained importance. Of these various methods, Mlle. de Dietrich is a true reflection of the modern thought; critical study is necessary for comprehension of the true meaning of the Scriptures. Yet the Word of God is given to men through the Bible, and they must study it reverently as well as critically, with prayers for understanding.<sup>1</sup>

Typology and allegory. Her use of typology is limited to a few references, most of which appear in the New Testament. She does not allegorize the meaning either, for she looks for the meaning of the passage in its most obvious interpretation. She prefers to interpret the literal sense, and to understand how that meaning fits into a progression of knowledge or an unfolding of God's purpose (to use her own words), rather than to find a foreshadowing of the Christ in each event or to see each object symbolically representing some phase of the Incarnation. The Old Testament has its own legitimate meaning. The student must search for this meaning in the light of the whole. She writes:

The student of the Bible is faced with two opposite dangers: one to see only the facts themselves and to take them in isolation, so that their deep meaning remains hidden. The other is to neglect the historical realism which is so typical of Biblical story-telling

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<sup>1</sup>Discovering the Bible, p. 13.

and to interpret facts only as signs, or symbols, meant to convey some spiritual truth.<sup>1</sup>

Historical approach. The stories told in the Bible are historical; that is, they record events and reveal a meaning behind those events, the meaning that God is active in His world, and that all history is meaningful.<sup>2</sup> It is not cyclical, but God acts and speaks in time. God's will is being worked out in history, which is progressing to an end point, a goal. She writes:

These two visions in Genesis and Revelation are the two beacons that cast light upon the whole sweep of human history that lies between them. Now history has meaning and direction, for its final word is God's decisive victory, which is accomplished by the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

History can be interpreted in relation to Genesis, Christ, and Revelation, and the events recorded in the Bible must be seen in this way. Yet the study of history is important for another reason also; to establish the context in order to correctly interpret its meaning and its relation to the whole of history. As she writes:

God speaks in history. For this reason, historical criticism, which puts each text in its proper historical context, has a legitimate place in all serious Bible study.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 18. For an excellent discussion of the history of allegory and typology in interpretation, see James D. Smart, The Interpretation of the Scriptures, ch. 4.

<sup>2</sup>God's Unfolding Purpose, pp. 18-20.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

History itself is not the end, however, but the means. Through a more accurate historical knowledge, one can see God's purpose in the history. She writes that the Bible "does not speak to us of God, but in the name of God,"<sup>1</sup> for God speaks to men through the acts there recorded.<sup>2</sup>

Biblical theology. Mlle. de Dietrich studies the Bible from a position of belief that the whole Bible has a message of redemption for men, as valid today as when it was written. Each part fits into a whole, and the whole is a drama of salvation. Each act can be understood, but to know the purpose of the whole is to ~~understand better~~ understand each part. Her theology is developed from the acts of God recorded in the Bible, and the reactions of men to Him, from the God whom these acts reveal. Her many years of Bible study have given her a theology which is first of all based on the insights of the Bible, and secondly on the historical and source criticism.<sup>3</sup>

Application. The Bible is the Word of God, speaking to men of what God expects from them. It is a book which teaches men how to act in a way pleasing to God, although it is not a

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>On her stand on the importance of history, she is in agreement with a majority of scholars today. Cf. John Bright, C.H. Dodd, H.H. Rowley, Norman Snaith, and G. Ernest Wright.

<sup>3</sup>Her position is in contrast to Bultmann in emphasis, but note similarities in considering criticism of secondary importance to theology, to positions of other scholars, such as Dodd, B.F. Westcott, Rowley, and others.

rulebook. From it one can formulate principles for action. Application from the Bible must not be based on a single text, but on the whole import of the Biblical teaching. Yet the teaching must be specifically applied, and it is here that proper interpretation is crucially important. In each study, Mlle. de Dietrich moves steadily towards the place of application; the meaning in the passage is important, but it is absolutely necessary to apply this meaning to life today in terms of decisions and actions for today. It is not antique; it is relevant and essential if a man wishes to understand the meaning of his life. Bible study can give a man insight into the purpose of his life, and of the events which occur to him. It is to the Bible that one must turn in questions of war and peace, of freedom and unity, and all the great issues of today's world, to search out the mind of God. Having seen God's purpose in the study, one must then act in accord with His will. The Biblical teaching must be used in the churches, the individual's life, but also in the community and state affairs; it must affect every part of life, and Mlle. de Dietrich is consistent in applying it to each sphere.

### Summary

The Bible in Mlle. de Dietrich's view is a book which contains the Word of God for man. Although it is not verbally inspired, the meaning of the book is more than a history

of events; it shows the significance of all history, and the place of man in that framework. It is necessary to study and understand it in order to know the meaning and purpose of one's life. Study of the Bible entails study of the findings of history and literary criticism as well, for those results bring fresh insight into the Scripture. The Bible is a whole and the New Testament is the continuation and fulfillment of the Old Testament.

The background and setting of a book can be found in theological books; commentaries, wordbooks, dictionaries, all have their legitimate place in Bible study. Yet one must thoroughly steep himself in the Bible if he is to understand its deepest meanings. This, for Mlle. de Dietrich, means first of all to determine the structure, then to pick out and define crucial words or ideas. The passage must be examined and its meaning ferreted out, but it must be seen in the light of the whole of the Bible, and in the context which it occupies in that whole.

The interpretation is the result of thorough study of the possible meanings, possible both in this particular context, and in the wider context of the Bible. There is little use of allegory or typology; the historical approach is favored. The purpose of the study is to learn how to please God today, so application is of great importance, and is considered in each study. The pattern of study which has emerged in this research is as follows: (1) study of commentaries to determine the setting, (2) find the structure of the passage,

(3) determine the crucial words or ideas and define and discuss them at some length, (4) correlate the results with other passages in which there are similar or related ideas or teaching, (5) discover the meaning of the passage as it stands and in the light of the other passages, then apply this meaning to today's world and to the individual's life.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TECHNIQUES OF TEACHING

#### Introduction

Suzanne de Dietrich is a well-known Bible teacher in Europe, and is beginning to be known and recognized in America, too.<sup>1</sup> She impresses people with her warmth and understanding, and with genuine concern for others, as evidenced by repeated comments from a variety of people who have participated in studies she has led. However, this element in good teaching cannot be measured, only noted. Although some of her effectiveness has been due to her own personality, yet her method is also a part of her teaching, and it is this element to which the inquiry addresses itself. This chapter will examine her publications intended to be used as guides for Bible study, and her book, Discovering the Bible, in order to find her techniques of teaching. It will consider the group relationships, the choice of material for study, and the group procedure in the study.

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<sup>1</sup>Supra. p. 1. That she has become increasingly popular in America is evidenced by the translation of Free Men into English in 1961, and the publication of two further study guides in 1965: The Word with Power, and Our Unity in Christ, as well as the appearance of two short biographies in two periodicals: Concern, 1964, and World Call, 1965.

### Functions within the Group

Mlle. de Dietrich realizes the value of both individual study and group participation. In her guides she writes questions for study which are designed to be answered by the group. She gives assignments to the group, and in other ways encourages members to come prepared to share their own discoveries. She expects them to participate actively, not to hear a lecture. She insists that group study can, and must, be exciting if people are truly to understand the nature of their relationship to God.

The leader. But group participation can only be properly used if the leader has some understanding of how to lead the group through the study. The first requirement is that the leader properly understand the passage himself, and Mlle. de Dietrich gives several suggestions for the leader's study of the passage. They are as follows:

- (a) Look for the relation of the passage to its context.
- (b) Look for its meaning in its historical and general setting.
- (c) Translate it into terms of ordinary speech and find its central point.
- (d) Place it in the context of the Christian message as a whole. What specific message is it meant to convey?
- (e) Look for important and difficult words . . . What is their contemporary meaning? What do they mean here?
- (f) Note the relevance of the passage for us personally and as a Church. How does it affect what we believe and what we do?<sup>1</sup>

These questions are to be used by the whole group, not only

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<sup>1</sup>Discovering the Bible, p. 55.

the leader, but Mlle. de Dietrich recognizes that few groups will consistently prepare well because of a lack of time. She recommends that the leader suggest that the group meditate daily on the passage, perhaps using a textbook to guide their meditation and rotating the book among the members.<sup>1</sup>

Even if the leader has truly seen the significance of the passage, his preparation is only the beginning of a profitable group meeting. She stresses the need to let the group members discover the answers themselves, to share their own ideas, yet to guide the discussion at the same time. The leader must help each to participate and quiet those who speak too much. He must have the sensitivity to ask a question which will stimulate the group at the right time. The leader is responsible to summarize and to clarify the teaching at the close of the discussion. He must be concerned for the members of his group, praying consistently for them.

Mlle. de Dietrich suggests that eight to ten members is a good size for a group, although many groups are larger or smaller than this. Weekly meetings are preferable, and they should last no longer than an hour and a half. Whatever the length agreed upon, the meeting should convene promptly and end on schedule. This is primarily the leader's responsibility, but the group members have to arrive on time.

The Group. The group members have their own responsibilities also. They must be conscientious about doing that which is

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

necessary for preparation, both in praying and in studying the passage. They must come to the group ready to learn and to share what they have already learned. They must come expecting to find meaning for their lives in the passage. They may take turns preparing an introduction to the study which will present some clear questions for the group to study together. They are to work at finding the meaning together, however the leader chooses to lead. "A Bible study group is a place where we try to listen together to what God has to say to us through a given book or passage. When God's word becomes clear and living, its bearing on our lives becomes clear, too."<sup>1</sup>

People who attend may come for a variety of reasons, from curiosity to a desire to understand and use the Bible in daily life. Those who come out of curiosity will sense the purpose and commitment of the group, and will either join in the purpose or stop coming to the group.<sup>2</sup> Those who are committed to its purpose should be supporting the group with prayer.<sup>3</sup>

Both leader and group members are joined in a single purpose, that of understanding the meaning of the Bible in order to serve God as He demands. Consistent study and prayer must be a part of the group life and it ought to stimulate individuals to study and to grow in self-understanding, as well as the understanding of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

## Choice of a Passage for Study

Old Testament Passage. Mlle. de Dietrich offers suggestions for choosing a passage for study, and she offers a wide variety of ways the various passages can be used in her book, Discovering the Bible. She speaks of the Old Testament as able to teach central truths about God, which ought not to be neglected. She cautions groups not to get caught up with source criticism and miss the central truths of the passage. In Genesis, for example, one can become involved in the sources of the documents and other technical problems, and miss both the historical and the divine reality portrayed there. She writes, "Our main concern is to know what this book intends to tell us about the reality of God and the destiny of man."<sup>1</sup>

She writes of the prophets, mentioning specifically Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah, and giving suggestions for study. She sketches each book and offers situations in which the prophet might be relevant. For youth groups, for example, she suggests using the book of Amos, to raise questions about personal religion, politics, social life, the approaching judgment of God, His holiness, and the need for repentance in order to be saved from destruction.<sup>2</sup> She wrote a series of studies on Jeremiah just before World War II (1939) in which she showed how Jeremiah's concerns were the same concerns of the world at that time, with the possibility of imminent war and a powerful

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

enemy.<sup>1</sup> She writes of Daniel, Job, and the Psalms in the way each deals with important themes, as a rich source for group study.

She deems the Old Testament books those of preparation and explanation, witnessing to the Christ who was to come, yet teaching of God's reality and man's destiny. In God's Unfolding Purpose, she refers frequently to Old Testament books as they point to Christ. The books are important because they reveal the Christ, and they are not considered in their own historical setting. On the other hand, in The Witnessing Community, she conceives of the whole of history as a kind of drama. In this drama God reaches out repeatedly to man; man breaks the relationship; God tries to heal it through a covenant which man also breaks, until Christ breaks the cycle and brings final healing. Here she values the chosen people as a witness to God in themselves, recognizing their imperfections and failures, and sees them as revelation also, not merely as a preparation for Christ. In her individual studies of books or passages, she investigates each carefully as a unit in itself, although she always tries to see the book in the larger context of the Bible. The Old Testament has meaning both in itself as it points to God and man, and as a witness to the coming Christ, and has many passages rich in value for a group study.

New Testament passage. She suggests that the best place for an inquirer to begin is in the Gospels, for these teach of the

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<sup>1</sup>The Student World, XXXII, No. 4.

person of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Several frameworks for study are offered, one following the order of Mark, another comparing the Synoptic Gospels at particular points to note the differences and the similarities. She speaks particularly of John because it is so rarely studied in groups and so often read by individuals. She suggests that one approach to the book might be through studying the conversations Jesus had with various people. Another approach is to study the discourses. She affirms that this Gospel has light for a dark world and is a profitable source of study.<sup>2</sup> She suggests that Acts is a rewarding book study, but due to its length it might be helpful to study it by themes, covering part of the material in class and privately studying the remainder to supplement the group work. She writes also of the Epistles as sources for study about Paul, the early church, or the actual subject of the letters, whether ethics or doctrine. She discourages study of the book of Revelation because "it seems to be too difficult a book to make it advisable for group study."<sup>3</sup>

In her larger studies, she interprets the New Testament in different ways; once as a series of studies on the witnessing community, tracing its growth and development,<sup>4</sup> and another time as the further unfolding of God's ultimate purpose of

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<sup>1</sup>Discovering the Bible, p. 60ff.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>4</sup>The Witnessing Community.

redemption.<sup>1</sup> Her works also include the books of Matthew and the Johannine Epistles. From her various studies, it appears that the choice of a passage from the New Testament would be particularly appropriate for a young Christian group, except for the book of Revelation.

Topical study. At times, one wishes to study according to a particular theme or topic, in order to answer some questions or to better understand a Biblical principle or subject, such as unity or the Holy Spirit, or prayer. Mlle. de Dietrich distinctly distinguishes between this study of a theme and a problem-centered approach. In the latter one may apply a particular Biblical answer as a general panacea, or as the answer to a particular problem of today. Mlle. de Dietrich insists that thorough study of a Biblical situation and its message must precede the application of the message to present life.

Biographies are a type of topical study. The danger is that one may consider a person as a human hero rather than as a prophet of God or a witness to His power. One must learn to see men as instruments of the Great Actor, God, throughout the history of man. And one must see them in their own setting, rather than the student's, before the message of the Gospel can be applied. She suggests study of various men of the Old Testament, patriarchs, judges, prophets and kings; and of Peter and Paul in the New Testament.

Particular important words or images are another approach

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<sup>1</sup>God's Unfolding Purpose.

in topical study. Words such as justice, peace, and freedom have deep meaning in the Bible. Concepts rooted in the Old Testament are carried into the New Testament and made more meaningful in Jesus Christ. A study of the various passages where these occur may lead to a more profound understanding of such concepts. Living water is an example of an image found throughout the Bible. Another is the shepherd. A study of the passages where these images occur will lead to greater depth or understanding of the nature of God and Christ. One of her studies along this line is "The Biblical Basis of Law" in which she explores the concepts of law, covenant, and righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

Her writings reveal more studies using a topical approach than a book study approach. She explores the theme of unity of Christians in Christ in a series of New Testament passages.<sup>2</sup> In The Word with Power she deals with a Christian's sense of and call to mission by studying passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament, relating each to other passages and concepts of the Bible. In Free Men she takes the concept of freedom and shows by a series of biographical sketches how various men played a part in the whole of the development of man's idea of freedom until in Jesus true freedom was seen. His disciples were also freed in a radical way, as they followed Him. In it she combines two methods: the concept of freedom

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<sup>1</sup>The Student World, XXXVI, No. 4 (1943).

<sup>2</sup>Our Unity in Christ. The passages are I Corinthians 12:4-13, Ephesians 4:1-16, and John 17:20-26.

studied in a series of biographical sketches.

In writing for The Student World, she uses several approaches. Once she takes a text and makes a study of it, as in the study of the Sermon on the Mount, "The Righteousness of Men and the Righteousness of God."<sup>1</sup> Another time she apparently is given a theme, "War Rather than Injustice?" and selects two verses (Ecclesiastes 8:11, Jeremiah 6:14) to use in studying this issue.<sup>2</sup> And at other times, the theme deals with several passages of Scripture, and each is considered in turn. One example is the article, "Thoughts on the Silence of Jesus,"<sup>3</sup> and another is "Spes Unica," a series of seven studies, each using several verses as the basis for questions.<sup>4</sup>

In a choice of study material, Mlle. de Dietrich occasionally uses book studies, but she seems to prefer exploring a particular theme or idea and choosing relevant passages for that theme. She has a wide variety of material covered in her studies and articles in this way, both from the Old Testament and the New Testament.

#### Procedure for Study

Preparation before the meeting. As discussed earlier in the passage, both leader and members are to prepare before the

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<sup>1</sup>The Student World, XXX, No. 3 (1937).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., XXXII, No. 1 (1939).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., XXXIV, No. 2 (1941).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., XXXIX, No. 3 (1946).

meeting.<sup>1</sup> The group is expected to be a discussion group with no one or two members dominating but with each member working towards understanding the passage fully. There is generally an assignment given, whether it involves research and background or supplementary reading or whether it is a study of the text with some questions in mind. The leader is expected to be thoroughly prepared at each meeting, but must allow the group members to discover the meaning and implications of the passage for themselves. He must act as a resource person at times, and must be prepared to see all sides of an issue as well as the historical setting and background for the passage. He must have studied until he is able to make the application and grasp the significance of the passage for the church as well as the individual today, if such an application can be made. The leader's preparation is therefore intensive, while the group member studies a particular aspect or related area. The findings are related to the group either by way of introduction or in reports during the discussion.

Procedure at the meeting. For this section of the research the four works Mlle. de Dietrich has written with questions for group use will be the basis of study. These include two articles published in The Student World, "Spes Unica"<sup>2</sup> and "Three Studies in the Book of Jeremiah" followed by "A

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<sup>1</sup>Supra., p. 27-30.

<sup>2</sup>The Student World, XXXIX, No. 3 (1946).

Selection of Ten Readings from the Book of Jeremiah, with Questions."<sup>1</sup> This We Know, studies in the Johannine Epistles, and Our Unity in Christ are the remaining two sources. The other published works do not contain questions for group use.

The leader usually begins the study with a short introduction to the unit, which will bring up the main issues or questions to be discussed at the meeting. This may be done by any group member, however; it is not limited to the leader. It may be the assignment for a member, and this may rotate among the group. Whoever introduces the passage must summarize and bring sharply into focus for the group the main issues for their discussion. Mlle. de Dietrich does not give suggestions for the introduction, but by her questions and her helps to study, the main issues become apparent (also by the student's preparation).

After the issues have been presented to the group, there is a discussion of the issues through questioning and challenging of statements made. The questions generally seem to deal with an issue and its relevance to the church and the individual today. It is assumed that the passage has been thoroughly studied so that the context, the historical setting and the message at that time is fairly clear. The task for the group is to discover the meaning of the passage for today, and in what areas one needs to change one's former understanding. For example, in the group study section of I John 1:1-4, the four questions deal with "the authority of apostolic witness",

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., XXXII, No. 4 (1939).

"our witness", "life eternal", and "fellowship".<sup>1</sup> Discussion following the first question, "What conveys unique authority to this witness?" would revolve around verses 1 and 3, but would probably include a consideration of the disciples' life with Jesus and their authoritative role in establishing the church. The second question moves at once to the authority behind "our witness": "On what authority does it rest? The Scriptures? The testimony of the Holy Spirit? The tradition of our church? Our personal experience?" With the variety of questions the group is able to discuss all kinds of authority and the comparative strength of each type. The use of these two questions could therefore bring the group to a complete discussion of the question of authority relevant to today's conflicts and tensions based on the study of these few verses. Such a discussion assumes the seriousness of purpose of the members and their maturity in the group. No one member is to run the discussion his way, nor should anyone be silent week after week. Each must be working, contributing and allowing others to contribute as well.

The first section of I John is relatively short, but it contains some very important questions. Mlle. de Dietrich breaks up the study into material for two group sessions, and writes,

The content of these sixteen verses is so full of meaning that if they are to be studied in one session, the group will have to make a choice rather than attempt

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<sup>1</sup>This We Know, p. 20. All subsequent quotations in this paragraph are also from this page.

to cover all the issues.<sup>1</sup>

She covers the passage in her questions and expects the leader to choose which are the most important for his group at that time. She suggests word studies on truth and sin as part of the assignment, but it is clearly at the leader's discretion to assign them or not.

For group questions in I John, she consistently follows the same pattern: first, a full discussion of the passage, followed by a series of questions which explore the main issues discussed in the passage. She tends to leave the whole of the direction of the discussion up to the leader. To give great freedom within a framework of main topics, she writes only the initial questions or areas for discussion. By this means the guide will suit various ages and interests. She appears to expect the group to apply the passage specifically to their time, but does not force this in her questions.

In another section she strongly suggests assignment by teams, with each team concentrating on a verse, a theme, or a word study, guided by questions to help their preparation.<sup>2</sup> In each assignment, she suggests texts from other Scripture to help discover the meanings more accurately. She gives no procedure for sharing the material found; the leader is free to follow any procedure he feels will lend itself to discussion of these ideas. In the second part of the same section, she selects the comparison with Cain as a chance to reread the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-40, studying I John 2:29 - 4:6.

story in Genesis and to discuss whether, how, and when righteousness provokes hatred. She adds, "Where there is no opposition, might this mean that the message and life of the Christian community has become so innocuous that nobody minds?"<sup>1</sup> Although this is a yes or no question, it is likely to promote a discussion along the lines of the passage. She uses yes or no questions at other times, but more often asks for reasons or meanings or applications of teachings to today's world.

In the final section of study (I John 5:13-21, II and III John), she writes a series of summary questions on the basic issues of these letters. With each of the questions except the last, she writes guidelines for the discussion to take. The four questions are simple and general: "1. How do we know God? 2. What is truth? 3. What is true fellowship? 4. What remains for you, personally, the main message of these Letters?"<sup>2</sup> These are three areas of major learning from the Letters, and the group is asked to be quite specific in listing what they have learned. It is also suggested that they may wish to discuss again the words which they have studied, to share the deeper meanings they have seen as a result of their study. Consistently there is an assignment, expected preparation, and shared findings in the group meeting. The issues are usually discussed first in the context of the passage, then specifically in the context of the world of today. The final session is used for summary of learning from

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 59-60.

the previous sessions.

In a second study of a particular book, Jeremiah, she follows the same general pattern: The discussion of the passages in the first article, then a series of questions.<sup>1</sup> The questions inquire about the basic issue in its own historical setting then about the same issue today. For example, the first week's questions, on Jeremiah 1, ask:

1. Define the Biblical conception of a prophet as shown by the story of Jeremiah's vocation.

2. The Bible speaks of the word of God as an active power which performs what it commands. How did this word come to the prophet of old and how did he know it was God's word? How does it come to us today?<sup>2</sup>

In this study there seems to be a stronger emphasis on the historical setting, both in the first and second articles. Perhaps this is due to its foreignness to the contemporary way of life. There is, therefore, greater need to explain and clarify the historical meaning here than in I John, which is written in prose, and deals with questions of sin, love, righteousness, and truth in terms similar to contemporary thought forms. At each lesson, she gives one or more related references in other parts of Scripture, suggesting that they will help to answer the question partially. She selects a theme which runs through Jeremiah, and finds passages where the theme is particularly clear and writes a few questions to consider in the study of that theme. For example, in the theme, "God, Lord of History," she selects Jeremiah 18:1-10; 25; and 46-51.

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<sup>1</sup>The Student World, XXXII, No. 4 (1939).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 330.

as the passages and asks a few questions after summarizing briefly the prophetic view of history.<sup>1</sup> The questions are those issues raised by such a view, i.e., what of the nations' responsibility if God is sovereign; war considered as a judgment and punishment; and finally, "What bearing has this prophetic conception of world history on our own situation today?"<sup>2</sup> Thus she asks only three questions, but each will lead to a discussion of issues in the contemporary world as well as in Jeremiah's time, and the final question asks the group to relate the two and make the discussion helpful to today's life.

The other two studies deal with a theme rather than a book and use passages from a variety of places. In studying the unity of the Church in Christ, Mlle. de Dietrich points out in an introduction that the topic of unity has become important to the church because of the growing awareness of the sin of division and the attempts in the ecumenical movement to close these divisions. She writes what unity is not and what it ought to be in Christ, and cautions the reader not to forget "that the ultimate unity will be achieved only in the Kingdom of God and by an act of God."<sup>3</sup> The same pattern as emerged before is seen in this series as well. First she discusses the passages chosen, then writes questions for group study. Again she refers to related passages, although in this book there are only a few references. She concentrates the force of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>3</sup>Our Unity in Christ, p. 9.

questions on the local church and its need for growth in understanding the concept of unity. She asks very specific questions about the concern for the other churches in the same city or area, and each one's ability to work together with the others in love and in truth. There is a strong emphasis in the questions upon the application, and almost no emphasis on the historical meaning and background.

In the final study to be considered, Spes Unica, there are a series of eight themes, based on many verses.<sup>1</sup> There are references all through the series to related passages. There is very little discussion of the chosen passage in this work, but she makes a few comments before asking the questions. She begins with the despair of Ecclesiastes, then looks at the hope of the forefathers, the prophets, the Psalmists, Ezekiel, the Apostles, Revelation, and the "messengers of hope"<sup>2</sup> which Christians are commanded to be. In studying the hope of Israel throughout Scripture, she concentrates in the Old Testament on understanding the feelings and thoughts expressed. In the New Testament and in Ezekiel 37 ("a Dead Nation Called Back to Life")<sup>3</sup> she applies the hope to the hope of Christians today. In the final study "(a study in the apostolic sending)"<sup>4</sup>, the application is the main concern, although it is based on the Biblical understanding as it has been studied.

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<sup>1</sup>The Student World, XXXIX, No. 3 (1946).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

The pattern has emerged in the guides of discussion of a passage, then questions for the group. The questions seem to be of two types primarily: either concentration on the historical background and understanding of the passage, or emphasis upon the application of such a message to the world today. The former type almost always precedes the latter type and is the necessary foundation for a true understanding of the faith.

### Summary

In this chapter the techniques Mlle. de Dietrich uses in teaching the Bible have been investigated. The group is expected to prepare the passage and to come to the meeting able to share and discuss the results of their study. The leader is responsible for the details of the meeting and for guiding the discussion along lines which are fruitful for the group members. Both leader and members must support the group in prayer and in faith.

The choice of a passage depends partly upon the group needs. An Old Testament passage might be chosen to show the nature of God, or sin, or the need to repent. It might be chosen because of a similar situation in the present day. Or it might be chosen to fill a gap in the knowledge of the particular passage. A New Testament passage might be chosen for a group of young Christians because of their need to know the Gospel in greater detail. One would study Acts or the Epistles for the early history of the church and for studies in doctrine.

Revelation is a difficult book and it would probably be best not to use it in groups. One might choose a topic to study rather than a book; this could take the form of a word or an image followed through the Bible, or a biographical study, or an idea that recurs in the Old and the New Testament.

Whatever the choice of passage, the group is usually given an assignment, and is expected to come to the meeting ready to share the knowledge and discuss the passage. The leader is prepared to act as a resource person. At the meeting he will give a short introduction to the passage which will summarize and clarify the points for discussion. He then asks a few key questions which will lead to a discussion of the material. The questions first concentrate upon the context and the historical setting, then move to the application of the passage in its own context and in the contemporary life. There is a strong emphasis throughout her work upon the need to understand the Bible in its own setting, and to apply its message to the existential situation.

## CHAPTER III

### DOMINANT FEATURES OF THE BIBLE STUDY METHOD OF SUZANNE DE DIETRICH

#### Introduction

Chapter three of this research will attempt to select the salient points of the method of study of Mlle. de Dietrich and discuss each in some detail, in order to discover some understanding of her effectiveness in this method. The outstanding features, as they have appeared in Chapters I and II, include the emphasis on the unity of the Scriptures, and the need for correlation of the texts in study. A second noticeable feature is the predominance of the historical approach; all materials ought to be understood in their own setting; then a message of contemporary value may be considered. This view permeates and colors both her interpretation of passages and her teaching guides. Another keynote is the thorough preparation with the use of commentaries and other such texts to supplement the student's knowledge of the Bible. The concern for the proper and specific application of the Word to the world of today is the last of the cardinal points as seen in the preceding part of this inquiry.

## The Unity of the Scripture

Mlle. de Dietrich's grasp of the Scripture as one basic message of redemption and reconciliation affects all her work. In the midst of the unity she sees the diversity, also, and simultaneously accepts it. The unity emerges from a tracing of the great themes of the Bible, such as the witness of the community to God, the repeated sin of man and his need for reconciliation, and the redemptive purpose of God. Yet from the same themes, the differences also emerge. Variety is natural, because of the great number of men God chose through the ages to be His instruments, and the length of time spanned in the Bible. The diversity among the men and the divergent types of their experiences may account for much of the diversity in the books where diversity exists. In spite of this, and through all the differences, a basic unity does exist, and Mlle. de Dietrich's conviction of this unity is seen in two books particularly, God's Unfolding Purpose and The Witnessing Community. In these she traces each theme through the whole of the Bible, finding a way to see the unity in the midst of the diversity.

Another characteristic trait in all Mlle. de Dietrich's work is the frequent references to related texts. Because of her comprehension of the unity of all the books in their witness to God, she often refers the reader to several other books on both Old and New Testaments. With such correlation of texts, the student also is enabled to see the underlying unity of all Scripture. The particular book or passage being studied is seen in the light of the whole message of Scripture, thus

helping to guard against misunderstandings of individual parts.

### The Historical Approach

Some knowledge of the historical background and significance of a particular part of the Bible is nearly indispensable to proper interpretation of that part. When a book is cut off from its roots, it may be interpreted in an entirely different way from the way in which it was originally meant. When the historical approach is neglected, other approaches take its place. An allegory may be seen in the most straightforward narrative at such times. Typology may be used to endow otherwise insignificant objects with the weighty responsibility of a witness to Christ, and a foreshadowing of his ministry. The meaning may be distorted beyond recognition, in this manner, and become far from what was probably the original meaning. If the student takes into consideration what is known of the historical background and what probably happened in forming and transmitting the documents which now make up the Bible, he is more apt to interpret the passage in accordance with its original intent.

In James D. Smart's book, The Interpretation of the Scripture, he discusses the way in which historical knowledge has influenced the interpretation of Scripture. During the Medieval period, there was little access to knowledge of the Biblical life. The usual interpretive method was of allegory, with frequent use of typology. Later, as scholars learned more and more of the actual practices of the Biblical times, the Bible could be translated with a better approximation of

its meaning. The Bible again could become a two-edged sword, not allowing the student to be satisfied with his society and tradition but cutting across all the boundaries known to him.

It is this freshness which is needed in the world today. Mlle. de Dietrich attempts to free the Bible to speak as the Word of God. She believes that if one understands the Biblical situation aright and its meaning is clear, that the meaning for today will also be clear.<sup>1</sup> In order to uncover the true meaning, it is necessary to learn of the customs of the times. The way words were used and the importance of speech must be appreciated, especially in studying the prophets. If the Bible is studied in its historical setting, a more accurate interpretation is possible. It is with this background that the contemporary meaning can most easily be seen, and the Bible becomes the word of God to man. One must take into account the possible errors and accept them as the result of God's using man to accomplish His purposes. One must not look for infallibility, for man is incapable of perfection in this life, and he was responsible for transmitting the stories and messages in which he saw and knew his God at work. Mlle. de Dietrich's writings reflect her respect for the historical approach. She establishes the context of the situation before writing her thoughts about it.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes she has a long section of historical background and at other times a few sentences suffice

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<sup>1</sup>Discovering the Bible, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>"Thoughts on the Silence of Jesus", The Student World, XXXIV, No. 2 (1941) is a particularly good example of this tendency which is found in all her writings.

to orient the reader to the setting of the passage. Whether long or short, she consistently does take the historical approach in her study of the Bible.

### The Use of Commentaries

Because of the myriad customs and historical knowledge essential to a proper interpretation of Scripture, the use of commentaries and other such aids becomes invaluable. Such works are available with some cost or effort to nearly everyone who wishes to use them. At times a knowledge of geography is useful; this can be found in a Bible atlas. Wordbooks and dictionaries can help to discover the intended meanings for words which have become too familiar and are no longer understood. They also are a valuable tool to trace the development of an idea through the Bible. Commentaries assemble much that is known from extra-Biblical sources which has a bearing upon the passage, and make it easily available. Mlle. de Dietrich rarely refers to the books directly, but she is careful to establish the history and culture surrounding a book of which she is writing before beginning to interpret its meaning. Only once does she give a bibliography, and this includes two wordbooks and several commentaries.<sup>1</sup> She does not appear to rely upon her own knowledge and what she can learn from the study of the text alone. Instead she depends upon what scholars have learned from extra-Biblical and Biblical sources both,

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<sup>1</sup>This We Know, facing p. 60.

and builds upon this information. Yet what is in the Bible will also test the theories of the scholars, and at times she is free to disagree with the ideas expressed in commentaries.<sup>1</sup> So although the extra-Biblical sources are frequently used, they can be wrong or misleading, in her opinion, and should be used as helps to study, not answers which preclude the need of study.

### The Application of the Word

"All our Bible study is of no avail if it does not lead us at some stage to this personal encounter with Jesus Christ Himself."<sup>2</sup> Over and over again the need to understand the Bible as a message for the student today appears in Mlle. de Dietrich's work. This quotation expresses her conviction explicitly, but in all her writing the same conviction is implicit. Whether it is a guide for study groups or not, there is a strong concern that the message be properly understood and then taken personally. In the guides the questions demonstrate her attention to application by repeatedly directing the group to consider their life, their church, and their community, in the light of their study. In the other articles and books, she writes of her own ideas on the application<sup>3</sup> which Christians must make if they are to serve God today.

Perhaps a large part of the effectiveness of Mlle. de

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<sup>1</sup>The Student World, XXXII, No. 4 (1939), pp. 306, 313, 319.

<sup>2</sup>Discovering the Bible, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>The Word with Power, pp. 31, 37, and The Witnessing Community, p. 35, are lucid examples of a recurring trait.

Dietrich's work is her ability to apply the text so that it clearly and inescapably speaks to men. Although most Bible teachers agree that application is the apex of the study process, it is difficult to discover how to apply it so that the majority of the students not only understand but also are motivated to change their lives accordingly. One of the factors which influences Mlle. de Dietrich's work is her insistence upon the need to understand a passage in its own setting first. Only after this is clear is any attempt made at finding the relevance for a contemporary student. Also, her language is not theological or difficult to follow. She writes in a lucid style, assuming the intelligence of her reader but not a theological training. Therefore, the student can grasp the meaning and follow her reasoning. Yet this is not enough; even Eve knew that she was not to eat the apple, but she ate it anyway. Knowledge alone is not the answer.

The questions of application are pointed and specific. For example, in a study of I Corinthians 12:4-13 - 13:13, she asks:

How far would Paul's description of the Body be a fair description of my own congregation? How far is there a real sharing of our earthly as well as our spiritual goods? Of our certainties and our doubts, our joys and our sorrows? Do we know what it means to trust and support each other in faith and love, or do we sit in judgment on one another? Where lies my own responsibility in all this? How do I stand the test of I Corinthians 13?<sup>1</sup>

She queries the student on his personal response, not as a stern and righteous taskmaster, but as one needing the same

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<sup>1</sup>Our Unity in Christ, p. 13.

lessons herself, as a humble sister, not a scholarly teacher. She recognizes the imperfections, yet always asks for a more perfect response from herself and from the reader. Her own involvement in the lesson, particularly in the application spurs the student on to a personal application also. Her identification with her reader allows him to be frank with himself. The questions direct the reader to spell out in detail the meaning this passage ought to have in his own life, and there can be no misunderstanding here. Yet she seems to expect the reader to act in accord with his knowledge, and assumes that it is always possible and desirable in his own eyes to improve. Perhaps these are some of the qualities which bring her readers to a personal encounter with Jesus.

#### Summary

The dominant features of Mlle. de Dietrich's work have been examined in an attempt to understand its effectiveness. Her concept of the unity of the Scripture, while accepting the diversity, has led her to correlate the learning of one part with other related parts in order to see the whole message more clearly, and not to misunderstand the teachings of the Bible. She has consistently emphasized the historical approach. In each of her works she places the book or passage in its Biblical context and writes of the historical setting. She explains the common usage of a word; she enumerates customs and practices which shed light on the meaning of the passage. This procedure is most helpful in making the meaning of the Bible clear. In order to give this information, she relies

heavily upon theological texts, such as commentaries, atlases, wordbooks, and dictionaries. She urges the student to use such books as well, to supplement the knowledge gained from individual or group study. To have seen the meaning is of no avail if it does not become a part of one's personal experience. To ensure this, Mlle. de Dietrich asks specific questions in a cogent style. She asks as one who also must answer, putting herself on the same level as her readers. She recognizes that men fail to meet God's standards, yet she knows that He loves and forgives men when they repent of their misdeeds. Christians are called to serve Him, and they learn how to do this in their study. She conceives of this calling as a privilege. Her readers see some of the privilege and are encouraged to new efforts to serve God acceptably.

## SUMMARY

The purpose of this research was to examine the written works of Suzanne de Dietrich in order to determine of what her method of study and her teaching procedures consist. This purpose was undertaken because it was felt that her work as a Bible study teacher was both distinctive and effective, and because the impact of her work is increasingly being felt in Europe and America. It was felt that the analysis of her method of study and of her techniques of teaching might yield a method which could be used by other Bible teachers.

In chapter one the method of study was examined. Mlle. de Dietrich, it was found, believes that the Bible is the word of God to man, as necessary today as it always has been. She does not hold to the doctrine of verbal inspiration nor to the inerrancy of the texts. The Bible records God's consistent purpose of the redemption of mankind, and His effort to redeem him, culminating in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. From study one will learn of his own responsibility, and will begin to understand the sovereignty of God. Form and literary criticism are helpful in establishing the meaning of the text, and the results of such studies are used in her work. The Bible is a unified whole, made up of diverse parts. The Old Testament and the New Testament are each incomplete without the other, and many of the concepts of the New Testament are rooted

in the Old Testament. The New Testament fulfills and completes the drama of salvation begun in the Old Testament. For these reasons it is necessary to study each part in conjunction with the other or misunderstandings are likely to occur.

The purpose of Bible study is to learn of God's message to mankind today, and more specifically, to the nation, the community, the church, and the person. Supplementary materials are frequently used, both theological, such as commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and wordbooks, and non-theological works, for comparison and clarity.

She approaches the Scripture with an awareness of the context of the particular book or passage, and fits each part into its place in the whole drama of salvation. The specific book is examined for its structure. The structural study reveals the relationships of the units in the passage, and allows the theme to emerge. Once the structure is seen, Mlle. de Dietrich may do one of several things. A study of an important word or a word which bespeaks a concept found in both Old and New Testaments may yield a profound meaning for a seemingly obvious term. A theme which seems to incorporate the thrust of the passage may be explored. She may follow the theme through several passages or she may refer the reader to texts with related and peripheral themes. The imagery is scrutinized to shed its light upon the passage. When she has followed the passage to the end and comprehends its context, she looks at it from a fresh point of view to find its meaning.

The interpretation of the Scripture is undertaken almost entirely from a historical view. Little use of allegory or

typology is found in her work. The Bible must be studied in its historical setting and its own understanding of history and event. All of history is under the control of a sovereign God. It is given meaning by His acts in it; by His interrelating to man. It is progressing to an end point, when time will no longer exist, and history will have ceased. The Bible relates many of God's acts which have been accomplished, and the accounts also interpret the meaning of the acts. A proper grasp of this view of history in relation to the Bible is a prerequisite for interpretation. Once interpreted, the meaning must be applied to the student.

Her method which emerged from this research was as follows: a study of commentaries and the passage to determine the setting, followed by an analysis of the structure of the passage. The crucial words, images, and themes are selected for particular study, and the results are correlated with other passages in Scripture. From this process the meaning of the passage emerges, and it is applied to the world of today and the individual's life.

In chapter two the techniques of teaching were studied, in order to evolve a procedure for groups to follow. It was seen that both the leader and the group member have their own responsibilities. The leader must thoroughly prepare the material, and the group members are given assignments which they are expected to prepare. The members must join with the leader in prayer for the group and its results. They must have a seriousness of purpose and be willing to work together to learn from the Bible.

The passage chosen will depend upon the needs of the group. An Old Testament passage may be selected to learn of the nature of God, or of His faithfulness towards man in spite of his many failings. Or the prophets may be studied, especially if the situation they experienced is similar to the contemporary one. Or it may be a series of passages chosen to follow a theme through the Old Testament in relation to the New Testament. A New Testament passage may be chosen if the group is young, or needs to learn more of Christ and the implications of their faith. A topical study is another possibility, following a theme, a word, or an image through several passages. A biography may also be studied, involving a variety of texts. Her own preference seems to be for a topical approach, but she also chooses books from both Old and New Testaments as subjects for her work.

Having chosen a passage, both group and leader are to prepare the material. They must come ready to discuss and to share their findings. At the meeting usually the leader delivers a short introduction, summarizing the main issues and presenting the points for discussion. The leader then asks a series of questions to stimulate the group's comments. These questions were examined in each of the four studies which she prepared as guides. From the analysis a pattern of questions emerged. The first questions concern the basic issues in the passage in its historical setting. Then the issue is explored in its relevance to the contemporary world. This pattern is invariable, although the emphasis may be on either type of question, depending upon the passage. When the passage is

unfamiliar material, the emphasis is on the former, but if the text is familiar, and the setting is generally known, the bulk of the questions deal with the application of the meaning to present-day church and experience.

Chapter three contained a description of the distinctive features of Mlle. de Dietrich's method, in an attempt to find why she has been effective in her work. The view of the Scripture as a unity in its entirety was first considered. She accepts the diversity which she believes is natural because of the length of time and number of people represented in the Bible. Yet she sees the unity behind the diversity, the unity of the redemptive purpose of God towards man, as it is expressed in many ways by many persons and events. From her grasp of the whole Bible, she is able to refer the reader to other passages in Scripture which are concerned with the same or related themes. In this way she guards against assuming a view which goes contrary to the major teaching of the Bible.

Her view of history is another of the cardinal points of her method. She feels it is necessary to understand the background and setting of a passage before one can expect to interpret accurately. When it is so understood, the message of the Bible becomes freshly and directly the Word of God to man. It cuts across all the limitations which men impose upon themselves, keeping them from Him. In order to learn of this background, Mlle. de Dietrich advocates use of theological textbooks to orient the student to the history and tradition surrounding the Scripture. These are not to be expected to answer all the problems, but they may clear up certain points. They

may at times be misleading, and their information must always be checked against what can be found in the text.

Mlle. de Dietrich considers the application of the text the reason for study, and a most important feature of the process. Her application is effected through specific and direct questions concerning the way in which the passage should affect the student's life. She asks the questions as one of the students herself. She is not testing the readers, but seems to be asking questions which she also must answer. She identifies with her readers and she accepts their imperfections, assuming they are willing to try harder to serve God. These features are an important part of her method, and may help to explain her effectiveness as a Bible teacher.

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