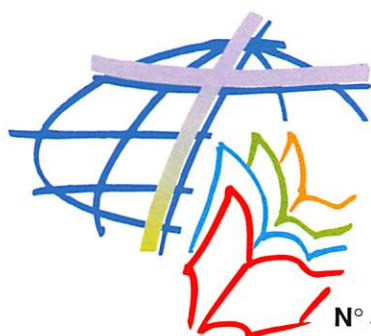


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## **Bible in Art**



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**English Edition**



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## EDITORIAL

### Dear Readers,

Bible in art - this topic is ambiguous and multi-layered. The Bible itself is often lauded as a picture-book, a book that provokes the imaginative powers of reader and hearer with its verbal images, a book that loves to formulate its message in picture language. When we say that something was meant figuratively, we are engaged in translation, interpretation. The translation of the biblical message into pictures for purposes of preaching is a device that reaches far back into Christian history; the *Biblia Pauperum*, as a Picture-Bible for the illiterate, is only one example of this picture ministry.

This double issue is devoted to the use of pictures in Bible ministry and limits itself, in the selected examples, to painted pictures and drawings. The various dimensions of the topic are of course always involved.

The preaching of the Christian faith through the use of images was not something that was considered natural from the beginning. The Old Testament, after all, contains a strong prohibition against images. The article of Günter Lange reflects on the opportunities and the limits of biblical picture language. The biblical message expressed in picture language implies a translation into a specific context; the picture serves here as a medium of interpretation and inculturation. The examples from pastoral praxis presented in this issue attest to this fact. The pictures of the Massai Bible, with their language of color and motif, translate the Christian message into the life-world of the shepherd peoples in the steppe of East Africa. The catchy and often humorous paintings that Fr. Wolfram Dressler uses in his work of biblical pastoral ministry in Latin America communicate the biblical message in such a way as to reach also the young people whose customary reading comes out of comic books and colorfully illustrated magazines. The 'method of biblical pictures' based on the seven-step-method in South Africa supports and strengthens personal access to the Bible through the use of pictures. Finally, icons that play a central role in the liturgy and spirituality of the Orthodox Churches, are not only pictorial

representation, but sacrament: through the icon encounter takes place; it makes possible a 'simple' access to the Christian faith-mystery. If it is true that faith comes through hearing - what then can be the function of pictures? This is the question addressed by the article of Herbert Fendrich. He shows that pictures based on the Bible can not merely be used as a substitute Bible for the illiterate, in the sense of the *Biblia Pauperum* (Gregory the Great); rather, the multi-layered character of pictures and even the proper quality of the picture-genre itself can offer a potential added value to the text and serve as a kind of magnifying glass to aspects of its message.

The present issue, under the heading 'From the Federation', once again contains extensive notes from the lives of our members in many parts of the world. And a short notice on home affairs: a slight change in the imprint betrays an important change in the General Secretariat of the Catholic Biblical Federation. In July, 2000, Mrs. Clara María Díaz relieved her predecessor Fr. Ludger Feldkämper in the office of General Secretary and with her new assignment has also taken over the responsibility of coediting the Bulletin. The next issue of the BDV will report on this change in administration.

Pictures in the service of biblical pastoral ministry translate the Word of God into the life-word, into the context of the observer. They address individual experience, fantasy and feeling and they summon to a response. Pictures illustrate the Christian message; they supply a kind of snapshot for deeper inspection and enable a multidimensional communication between image and observer. They make possible a silent encounter with the Word of God. Pictures in the service of biblical pastoral ministry facilitate access to the Word of God: and this is precisely the core task of the CBF. Let us use the power of pictures where the word does not suffice. In the figurative sense as well!

*Alexander M. Schweitzer*



## Bible and Images

### Opportunities and Limitations of Biblical Picture-Language

GÜNTER LANGE

*The Bible thinks and speaks in images; it employs verbal pictures and evokes images in the minds of the reader and the hearer. The author of this article offers some reflections on the possibilities and the difficulties of biblical picture-language and draws methodological and didactic conclusions. Dr. Günter Lange is emeritus Professor of religious education and catechetics at Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany.*

*The article is taken, with minor alterations, from: Wolfgang Langer (ed.): Handbuch der Bibelarbeit, Kösel Verlag.*

## Historical Presuppositions

In their final form, the ten commandments of the Old Testament contain a strict general prohibition against images. The basic idea is conveyed in the statement: "You shall not make yourself a graven image" (Ex 20:4; Deut 5:8). This injunction forbids the production, the erection and the worship of any image of Yahweh – a fortiori, images of other divinities are also excluded. An image of God would be from the start a "foreign" image. The prohibition against images respects the identity of Yahweh as an incomparable, living God, not subject to manipulation.

It is of course true that in the piety of Israel and of Judaism this prohibition of images has not always been adhered to with equal strictness; but at the time of the New Testament it was strictly observed. In the early Church, even after its separation from the Synagogue, the prohibition continued to be taken for granted as a confessional mark that distinguished believers from "Pagans". The earliest material Christian as well as Jewish examples of biblical images are dated today to before the middle of the 3rd century A.D. (the Roman catacombs; the Synagogue and house-church of Dura-Europos). Since the theologians were still signaling an official ban on images in the 4th century, their appearance must at first have been a matter of private usage, in the realm of popular piety: sketches of predominantly Old-Testament salvation paradigms (Jonah, Noah, etc.), visualized images of heavenly bliss, very much in the artistic style of late antiquity.

In the fourth and fifth centuries the image program expanded, gained entry into the official life of the Church and forced the Church to reflect on the question of the spiritual, pastoral and theological legiti-





macy of this new medium. After a stormy period of conflicts and crises over images in 8th century, the image question finally received a positive resolution with the 7th ecumenical council of 787 (Nicea II); images attest to the fact that in the incarnation God became visible, accessible. Our image of God is the human image of Jesus Christ. This means also: non-symbolic images of the Trinity or of God the Father remain subject to the prohibition against images for some time to come, indeed, into the 12th century.

### Image and Word

In the theological struggle over images the ancient maxim "a picture is a silent word" played a large role. In the West, a related idea took hold in the form of the statement:

**When in modern Bibles "old-fashioned" pictures predominate, this is a sign of poverty in terms of the relationship of religion and art in our era or of a lack of courage in communicating the faith in a way that corresponds to the signs of the time**

pictures are a substitute Bible for the illiterate (Pope Gregory the Great, † 604). Both statements were supposed to legitimate images on the grounds that they were extremely close to the biblical word; thus, picture and word were explained as interchangeable for purposes of preaching.

The early history of Bible images shows that pictures evidently belong to the post-apostolic ecclesiastical tradition. They document

how the Word of God has been received, internally worked out and visually translated in every age. The history of Bible images shows which biblical themes were preferred in different eras. The pictures offer the Bible's effective history (Wirkungsgeschichte), and indeed especially at the grass-roots level. For this reason, in order to interpret them we need to have at hand not only the biblical text to which the image immediately refers, but also liturgical texts, non-liturgical edifying narrative literature (the Apocrypha), homilies, songs, mystery plays, etc. Thus, though pictures can be seen as a form of book-reading it is really more accurate to view them as a form of preaching or catechizing.

In saying this, we are in no way denying the fact that biblical pictures have never constituted an "autonomous" art. They have always been in the service of the Word (cf. Acts 6:4); their intimate connection to this word is evident. But it belongs to the specific characteristic of the medium "artistic portrait" that it speaks its own language in color and form. The artistic accomplishment in the portrait gives the message an independent form that must be respected

from a didactic-methodological point of view – a form that can have a fruitfulness of its own at the catechetical and spiritual levels. It interprets the text in its own way and must be decoded as an independent interpretation.

### Limitations of Painting

Pictures often have a greater suggestive power than words. The relatively restrained descriptive character of many biblical scenes is some-

times interpreted through a vivid and realistic portraiture (example: the smoke rising from the offering of Abel, Gen 4:3-5). This reflects back onto the Bible reading: we read the text with the eyes of the painter. But it is especially where the tradition of the word has left a void, has refrained for a good reason from direct clarity and allowed the background character of the event to be guessed at that an objectified portrait becomes a danger: cf. in the OT, the theophanies, but also, for example, Gen 3 (Paradise) or Gen 22 (Abraham and Isaac); cf. in the NT: Lk 1-2 (Jesus' origin in God), the transfiguration, the appearances of the Risen Lord.

However legitimate it is to bring out the aesthetic independence of the picture medium, theology cannot refrain from subjecting images to the measure of biblical faith-experience and faith-language. The danger that theologically dense texts would be misunderstood through an objective-realistic representation rich in detail, as though the texts were historical narrative (best example: Nativity paintings) is certainly minimal in the forms of expression of twentieth century art. However, the pressure of visual habits is so great that even forms containing a symbolic content (e.g., medieval manuscript paintings) can often be read realistically and misunderstood.

### Didactic consequences

From what has been said thus far: All pictures can be located stylistically and historically. A glance at the biblical text depicted by the painting and a careful comparison of the picture with it must then cause us to ask questions such as the following: What struck the painter as most important in the text? How did he make it speak to current concerns? How did he or she embellish it anecdotally? Is the



challenge of the text somehow neutralized, or is it sharpened in the artistic representation?

If every era and every culture construct their own image, it follows, for the choice of images used in the biblical ministry, that those are to be preferred that best express the artistic language and vision of our own time and culture. For example, when in modern Bibles or catechisms used in the schools "old-fashioned" pictures predominate, this is a sign of poverty in terms of the relationship of religion and art in our era or of a lack of courage in communicating the faith in a way that corresponds to the signs of the

**The following description should serve as a rule of thumb for the quality of a picture: the more many-layered, the more multidimensional, the more powerfully evocative a picture is the better**

time. The following description should serve as a rule of thumb for the quality of a picture: the more many-layered, the more multidimensional, the more powerfully evocative a picture is the better.

Since the human eye is a living organ inhabited by spirit, it is always the whole man who sees, including his individual history and his cultural specificity. This is why there can be variously accentuated interpretations in many-layered pictures. So too, in discussions centered on pictures, personal sensitivities and experiences more often come into play than in mere discussions

about a text – a welcome effect for the "believing-learning-together" experience. Multidimensionality, however, has its limits in that every interpretation must relate to the visible Bible stock, just as the picture itself does to the Bible text. Otherwise the picture functions merely as a "psycho-technical catalyst for a sharing of feelings and whims" (A. Stock). The interpreting word must open eyes, serve as an aid to vision.

### **Individual questions of method**

In view of the Bible's preeminence one might be tempted to assume that the only correct methodological sequence is to go from an interpretation of the text to an encounter with a picture. But this would be one-sided. There is a danger in this case that the picture would be seen from the start as nothing more than an illustration of the text. However, after a lengthy engagement with the text a visual impulse can be just what one needs. The picture as "silent word" can often help one to advance from the endless discussion a text can generate to an experience in

which the biblical message is allowed to have an integrating, meditative effect.

On the other hand it can happen that Bible texts offer no new insights to a given audience (which would first need to be won over to more intense work with the text in order to counter a certain weariness and annoyance with the Bible) or that access to the written text is lacking for other reasons (illiteracy, the lack of a Bible translation, etc.). In such cases going from a picture to the text could be indicated as a helpful order of procedure. The distancing that lies already in another

medium, especially when the latter has its own, unfamiliar and eye-opening form, can often break through dominant expectations and supply motivation for an unbiased look at the text. Justice is done to the picture: it is allowed to express itself fully before being subordinated to a text. And this can lead to a new encounter with the text. This is especially the case when the selected painting is in no way bound to the biblical text but rather, for example, poses the human "question", expresses the peculiar experience that is dealt with by the text itself.

This sequence from picture to text could be disadvantageous in that the text could appear faded by comparison to the suggestiveness of color and form, or one could fail to see the picture's perspective on the text from the point of view of contents.

One way or another the picture, as opposed to the text, gives freer rein to intuition and fantasy, allows the soul's image-level more uninhibited motion, offers models of existing appropriation and interpretation of texts and lures us to abandon ourselves not only intellectually, but also meditatively to the contents of the biblical message creatively portrayed in image.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)





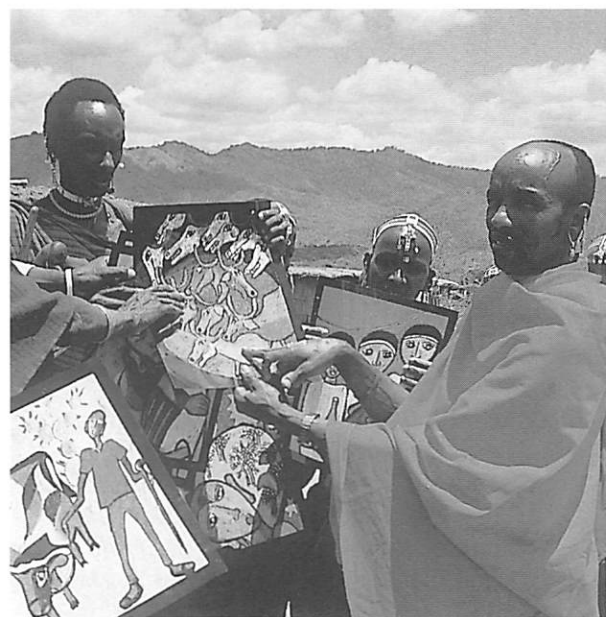
## The Massai Bible

### A Picture-Bible from Africa



**T**he Massai are a shepherd people who live in the prairies in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. The long-time director of the Mission Station Handeni (Tanzania), Fr. Odilo Hüppi OSB, who has since passed away, called the Massai nomads the "Israelites of Africa". He writes: "The Massai worship one only God, Engai, the one, almighty creator of the world. He is the guardian of all; he is loving, incomprehensible, one only. He is kindly and often forgives his children. But he punishes them as well in order to make them better. Engai gave everything to the Massai; they are his chosen people. The Massai trace their land

of origin in the North. According to their own tradition they were the shepherds of the Pharaohs. For centuries they wandered through Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia, finally reaching Kenya and Tanzania, ever in search of the great grass prairies for their herds of livestock. In the faith traditions of the Massai one finds noteworthy echoes of biblical themes. They believe they were cut off from God because in ancient times a great chief committed an offense against God. In spite of a strict command not to kill a mother cow, he slaughtered it in a time of famine so that he could survive with his children. As a result, the umbilical chord was broken. This Massai tradition finds a response in the message of Jesus. Jesus, the Son of God, by the power of his resurrection reattaches the umbilical cord, the chord of life: this is the new covenant."



For over 20 years Sister Karin Kraus, a German nun, has been living with the Massai in the steppes of Tanzania. It was in her capacity as a veterinarian that she first gained access to this shepherd people whose well-being and survival depend on the condition of the herds. She encountered the Massai in the world of Abraham; she took

(To be continued page 12)



## Recognizing God in a Guest

Abraham and the Visiting Angels

<sup>1</sup> Yahweh appeared to him at the Oak of Mamre while he was sitting by the entrance of the tent during the hottest part of the day.

<sup>2</sup> He looked up, and there he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them, and bowed to the ground.

<sup>3</sup> "My lord", he said, "if I find favour with you, please do not pass your servant by."

<sup>4</sup> Let me have a little water brought and you can wash your feet and have a rest under the tree.

<sup>5</sup> Let me fetch a little bread and you can refresh yourselves before going further, now that you have come in your servant's direction." They replied, "Do as you say."

<sup>6</sup> Abraham hurried to the tent and said to Sarah, "Quick, knead three measures of best flour, and make loaves."

*Gn 18,1-6*



**B** Gn 18,1-6: If I find favour with you, do not pass your servant by.

**C** The passage on the appearance of the mysterious three men – messengers of God – angels, who are Abraham's guests, offers an occasion to lecture on angels (good and bad) and on guardian angels. (Cf. Matt 26:53; Matt 18:10).

Key:

**B** = Bible

**C** = Catechism





## Rejoicing after a long separation

Jacob and all his sons



<sup>5</sup> So Jacob left Beersheba. Israel's sons conveyed their father Jacob, their little children and their wives in the waggons that Pharaoh had sent to fetch him.

<sup>6</sup> Taking their livestock and all that they had acquired in Canaan, they arrived in Egypt – Jacob and all his offspring.

<sup>7</sup> With him to Egypt, he brought his sons and grandsons, his daughters and granddaughters – all his offspring.

<sup>28</sup> Israel sent Judah ahead to Joseph, so that Judah might present himself to Joseph in Goshen,

<sup>29</sup> Joseph had his chariot made ready and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as he appeared he threw his arms round his neck and for a long time wept on his shoulder.

Gn 46,5-7; 28-29

**B** Gn 46,5-7; 28-29: Joseph through his arms around his father's neck ... and Jacob blessed all his sons.

**C** The "family portrait" is an occasion to reflect on the fact that we "are saved not only as individuals, but in community, with Jesus Christ as leader and brother in service of our loving Father." (Cf. Rom 8:29).





## Compassion

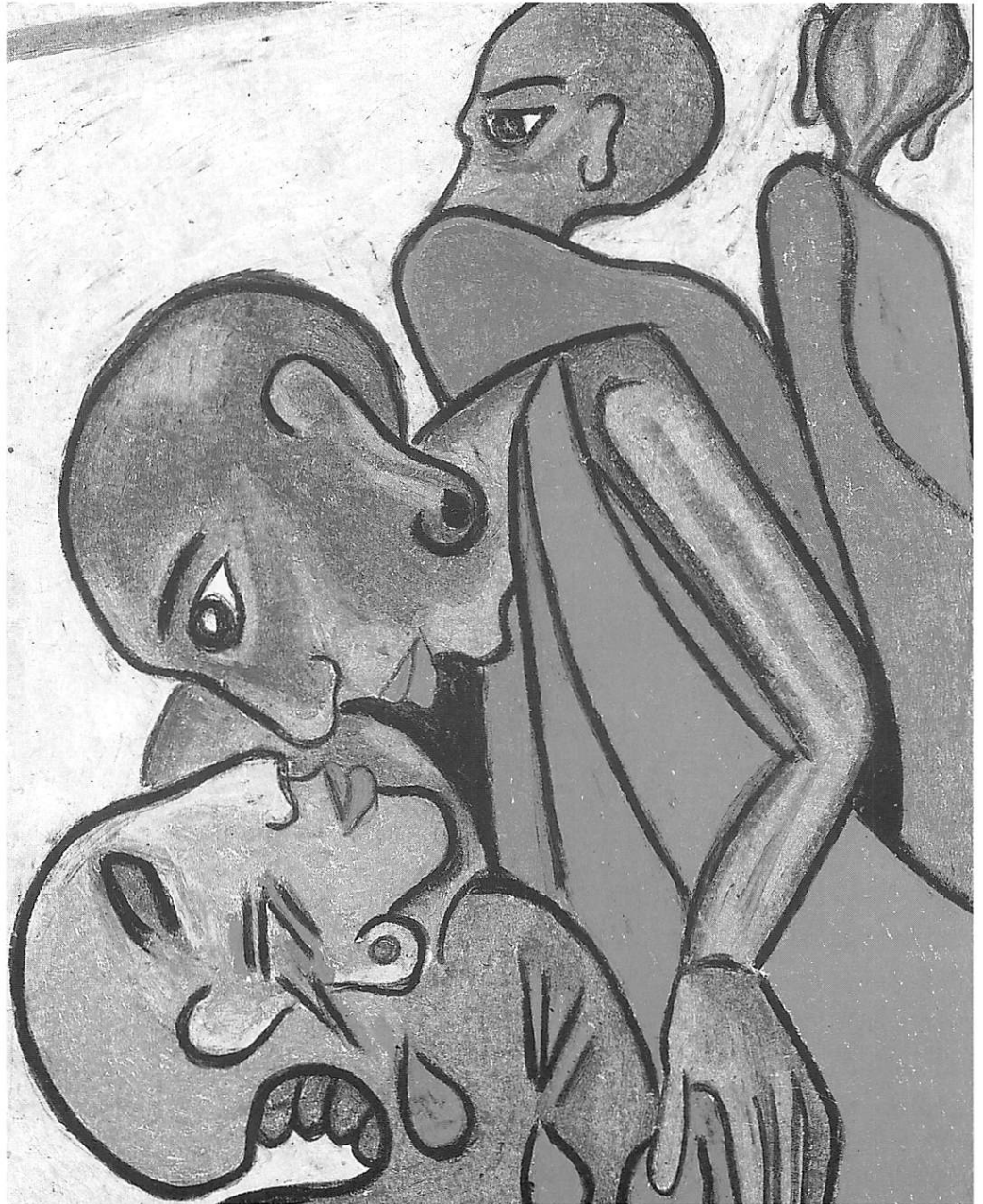
### The Good Samaritan

<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan traveller who came on him was moved with compassion when he saw him.

<sup>34</sup> He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him.

<sup>35</sup> Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I will make good any extra expenses you have."

*Lk 10,33-35*



**B** Lk 10,33: But a Samaritan came on him ... and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

The Massai-Missionaries also encounter the ancestor question which the message of Jesus did not address. Here, the pericope of the Samaritan (who in the eyes of the Jews was a

heretic) can be of help. The heretic becomes a model through the way he lives.

**C** Anyone who "follows the law that is written in the heart of every human being, teaching him to distinguish between good and evil", can "be saved"



## Letting oneself be found by Him

The good shepherd



<sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

<sup>12</sup> The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and runs away, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep;

<sup>13</sup> he runs away because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me,

*Jn 10,11-14*

**B** Jn 10,11: I am the good shepherd

**C** The Catechism speaks of Jesus' true humanity; he is a man, who "lives and dies a life like ours. The difference between him and us is that he did not sin. The Bible tells us that he takes pity on us in our hardships by taking them upon himself." (Lk 24:38).



out her Bible and told them the stories of the great tribal father Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob and of Joseph. What she read in these Bible stories, she met again almost literally in the tradition and in the daily lives of the nomads. When, for example, at the time of the giving over of the bride the father gives his daughter the advice:

"Go forth with your husband and look forward. If you look back, you will turn into salt" – who is not reminded of the story of Lot's wife (Gen 19:26)?

If Sr. Karin could no longer find the words she needed in Kimaa, the language of the Massai, she would draw pictures in the sand. Gradually she learned to recognize the symbolic meaning of colors as well; they are not merely a feast for the eyes, a kind of decorative medium, but they also say something about the status of the one who wears them. Colors are an expression of life and of the moods of the heart. Black is the holy color, blue the color of women, the color of loyalty. The freshness of youth is symbolized by the color red which evokes life, love, enthusiasm, manliness. The older generation has its own color: violet. White is not only the color of purity, but also of repentance and abstinence. Sr. Karin began to paint pictures that told the story of Abraham and his descendants and at the same time evoked the history and the life experiences of the Massai themselves.

What she sometimes succeeded in doing only with great effort and with the help of a good translator was accomplished by a picture with its colors and all of their symbolic power so familiar to the Massai. With the help of these pictures, the way of Abraham, the shepherd called out by God from his ancient homeland,

now became vibrantly alive for the Massai in their own symbolic world. Through pictures, Sr. Karin observed, the Massai are very approachable even though they never make pictorial representations themselves. It is above all the colors that are important for them. The pictures that originally came to be in this way now find a use in the Bible apostolate of the Massai. On the backside of each picture – there are 70 of them in all – is printed the corresponding biblical text to which the painting refers, together with questions out of the Swahili Catechism. The pictures have also been put into a smaller format; the Baptistal candidates take these home with them and show them to others, thus becoming messengers of the Gospel in the prairie land.

Today these pictures are employed beyond the borders of Massai territory in 17 nomadic tribes of East Africa. With the publication of the Massai Bible in 1985 (Die Massai Bibel. Bilder zum Alten und Neuen Testament. Stuttgart, Zürich: Belser 1985) the pictures painted by Sr. Karin Kraus for catechesis among the Massai became known to a wide public, far beyond the borders of East Africa.

However much these powerfully expressive and brilliantly colorful pictures can speak even to the outside viewer, they are nonetheless deeply rooted in the Massai people's culture, in their distinctive world of experience and perception. They communicate the biblical message in a more direct manner than speech; they translate it into the context of the Massai, into the world of their daily lives; they reach the heart of the viewer. This makes these paintings an outstanding way of communicating the Bible message.

(The above items of information are taken, among other things, from the introduction to the Massai-Bibel of Gabriele Miller and from the private notes of Fr. Odilo Hüppi.)

AMS

(Transl.: L. Maluf)





## Bible and Icons

### Silent Catechesis for Evangelizing our Imagination

PIERRE HUMBLLOT

The author of this article, Pierre Humblot, is a priest of the Chaldean Church and is active in Iran.

After years of hesitation, the Western Churches, with their concern for liturgical renewal in the domain of sacred art, and hence of liturgical music, hymnography and iconography, now often look to the Oriental Churches, – and above all to the Byzantine Church, the most Oriental of them all – to recover a more Christian, that is to say, a more biblical artistic expression. Thus, with regard to icons, it has become very common in our churches to see photographic reproductions of the works of the great Russian or Greek iconographers, often with a perpetually lit vigil-light or candle in front of them. What explains the popularity of such art? How can we properly evaluate it and make use of its positive aspects for a biblical catechesis? These are the questions we will take up here, more on the basis of a catechetical experience with adults in the East than on the basis of theoretical insights on iconography which have, by the way, been very well expounded in learned essays written by theologians of the Oriental Churches.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For example: Paul Endokimov: "L'art de l'icône, théologie de la beauté" DDB. 1970. L. Oupensky and V. Lossky, "The Meaning of Icons", or L. Oupensky: *Essai sur la théologie de l'icône dans l'Église orthodoxe*, 1960, Ed. Exarcate of the Russian Patriarch in Eastern Europe ...

#### But first, what is an icon?

To express in a nutshell the profundity and the catechetical importance of icons, I prefer the following definition: "The Bible of the Poor". The fact is that in an era when very few people knew how to read, the Church employed this universal language represented by art and its symbolism to express and transmit its contemplative awareness of the mystery. This explains the numerous miniatures found on biblical manuscripts opposite the inspired texts, images that attempt to express the inner meaning of these texts, their vital sap, in another register than the intellectual and bookish level of expression. Moreover, this suggestive art was reinforced and deepened through the hymns that employed the same symbols drawn from the Bible; hymns, amounting to a poetry and a music which, like the icon, would feed imagination and awareness in the same richly pregnant and thoroughly human way. This "Bible of the Poor" in no way represents a cheap-rate Gospel as do some "explained" and watered-down versions of the sacred text! On the other hand, iconographers, like hymnographers, are by no means left to their more or less unbridled imagination: they must consciously allow the fruit of the Spirit to flower in their hearts through an expression that is subject to rigorous rules inspired by the Bible as received and heard in Church.

It is usually the work of monks who, before beginning to express the fruits of their contemplation, request the prayer of the community as well as the imposition of hands by the Bishop, followed by a long fast so that their art might become an expression of the authentic mystery, actualized by the Spirit within the Church. The following is the prayer recited by the iconographer before he goes to work:

"Divine Master of all that exists, enlighten and direct the soul, the heart and the mind of your servant, guide his hands that he may be able worthily and perfectly to depict your image, that of your holy Mother and that of all the Saints, for the glory,





the joy and the embellishment of your holy Church."

When the work is completed, it will next be received and acknowledged by the Church, then blessed and consecrated with holy oil by the Bishop before taking part in the liturgical expression of a Church in prayer. This explains the attitude of loving respect on the part of believers with regard to the icon as well as their reverential gestures: the icon has become a medium through which believers are placed in the presence of the mystery. A friend of mine, who is an orthodox bishop in Lebanon, once remarked in my presence, with a smile: "You Westerners have the Blessed Sacrament; you don't need icons!" A statement that is not merely tinged with humor. Indeed, my friend's comment could be interpreted as a questioning of a style of worship that perhaps localizes in too materialistic and unilateral a way the Lord's presence in the midst of his people, which is in fact realized in a variety of ways – and this, without a marked link with a community. This is comparable to certain statues of Mary where she is represented alone, in isolation from her Son and from the Church, in a way that conflicts, it seems to me, with what is learned from the iconographic tradition as well as from the Bible...

On the other hand, more perhaps than in past generations, we need the icon, this quasi sacramental presence, to heal our eyes and our hearts from the often cruel and dehumanizing images that television puts before us. To evangelize our sensitivity by allowing us to contemplate an icon, to purify and adorn our imaginations rather than vainly attempting to bridle them so as to avoid distractions, to soothe our ears by a sacred music, to open up our being by a therapeutic dance like that of David, to exorcise our hearts through an integral and liturgical harmony that employs all the artistic potentialities of man – is this not to prepare ourselves for contemplation and for Life in God?

The icon, "the Bible of the Poor", and therefore of children who will once again learn to insert their entire being into the

mystical dance of the Risen One, our dance leader! This is what I have just begun to learn through my contact with the liturgies of the Oriental Churches. And I can attest how important it is for me to allow myself to be evangelized by this light that invades a somewhat rigid world, a world that almost resembles Islam where the dance of the dervishes is condemned and where all representation remains forbidden, as it was at the time of Moses, before the incarnation of the Word, which is what inspires in us the iconographic urge! Listen to the prayer of the Byzantine Church in response to those who reject the painting of icons:

"The indescribable Word of the Father made himself describable by taking on flesh from you, Mother of God; and having repaired the soiled image to its ancient dignity, he has united it to the divine beauty. And as we sing the praises of this salvation, we express it through action and through word"<sup>2</sup>

### **The language of silence: the icon, catechesis beyond words**

The mystery is entirely too ineffable to be transmitted by intellectual expression alone: as a work of silent contemplation, more suggestion than definition, the icon summons to an appropriate profitable silence of the mind, which extends into a uniquely articulated catechesis as well as to a less cerebral and warmer contemplative gaze.

In a sense, the icon approaches a form of expression dear to Eastern people, an expression rich with multivalent echoes and resonances; I refer to mystical poetry in song. Moreover, in an Oriental Church that has lost every written expression of its faith in virtue of a profound human uprooting which caused the forgetting of its traditional written language, the language of the icon makes it possible to transmit something of the Oriental traditions to Christians of this country without any book at all.

Moreover, the Bible does not define God, but rather evokes his presence through the creation and the reflected experience

<sup>2</sup> Kontakion of the triumph of Orthodoxy, written by St. Theophanes who died about 847, cited in Oupensky, in the above-cited work, p. 179. Cf. also St. John Damascene, PG 94, col. 1239: " 'You saw no image of him' (Deut 4:15): Oh! what wisdom in the lawgiver! How can one make an image of the invisible? How can one represent the features of that which has no equal? How can one represent that which has neither quantity, nor dimensions, nor limits? What form can be assigned to that which is without form? And what would one be doing to the mystery, were such an effort to be made? If you have understood that the Incorporeal has become man for you, then, obviously, you can reproduce his human image. Because the Invisible has become visible by taking on flesh, you can now produce an image of the one who has been seen. Because he who has neither body, nor form, nor quantity, nor quality, he who surpasses every grandeur by the excellence of his nature, he who, though divine in nature, has taken on the condition of the slave has reduced himself to quantity and quality and has taken on human features; so go to it and carve that form into wood and offer for contemplation the one who has desired to become visible."





of a people. Hence the importance of symbolism within the Bible, that mode of expression of which all sacred art seeks to restore an intuition. This explains how suited the icon appears to be to express the richness of the biblical message. As an example we could take that apocalyptic language which the Bible often employs to introduce us into the mystery, and which sometimes leaves us reeling in astonishment. So, for example, with the cosmic aspect of the paschal mystery.

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour... And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many... Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, ... there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow..." (cf. Matt 27:45, 51-53; 28:1-3).

An imposing spectacle, expressing the cosmic mystery of our salvation, which Saint Peter renders in his own way, when he evokes at once the prison of the dead and their evangelization by the Risen One, the death-dealing waters of the deluge and of Baptism, the Ascension and the submission of the heavenly powers ... (cf. 1 Pet 3:18-22; 4:6). The notes of our Bibles refer us to a whole panoply of symbols that express the Day of Yahweh and they affirm that certain of these expressions were so important and so well known that they formed part of ancient professions of faith. So it is, for example, with our "he descended into hell", a formula that some would propose eliminating today, on the grounds that it is incomprehensible! On the contrary, this event and its symbolic expressions hold

a central place in the iconography and hymnography of the Oriental Churches, and hence in their liturgical catechesis.



For of course the liturgy remains the privileged place for a biblical catechesis. And indeed, the icon renders accessible this language that is somewhat abstruse to our Western capacities of perception...

As we stand before this poor reproduction of a Syriac icon of Mardin dating back to the 13th century, let us recall the various Oriental traditions. Let us evoke the magnificent icon and its incredibly expressive colors which we know better.

### What do we see? <sup>3</sup>

In the background, the dark abyss of the lower regions, the prison of death far removed from any glimmer of hope and expressive of extreme human alienation; in the center stands Christ, victorious, luminous, brandishing his glorious Cross, the tree of Life and standard of victory. A cosmic event, and one that condenses all of time and runs through the whole of space which it takes hold of, in accord-

<sup>3</sup> A question always to be asked in catechesis, before beginning to read the icon from the top down.<sup>4</sup> Cited by Jean Corbon, *Prière Orientale des Églises*, vol. 2, p. 9.



ance with the scheme on the opposite page that shows how the universe was perceived by the ancients: the New Adam descends from the highest regions of the heavens, finally torn open, to live as the son of man, of Nazareth in Galilee, and then to continue this descent to the farthest reaches of our nothingness so as to allow this new people, now become his brothers and sisters, to sit with him as Son of Man in the highest regions of heaven. Thus, the Christ stretches forth his powerful hand to Adam and Eve, to every human being who exits from his prison at his call.

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Jean Corbon, *Prière Orientale des Églises*, vol. 2, p. 9.

So it is with the hymns for the Feast of all Feasts which recapture all these symbolic dimensions in poetry, the magnificent

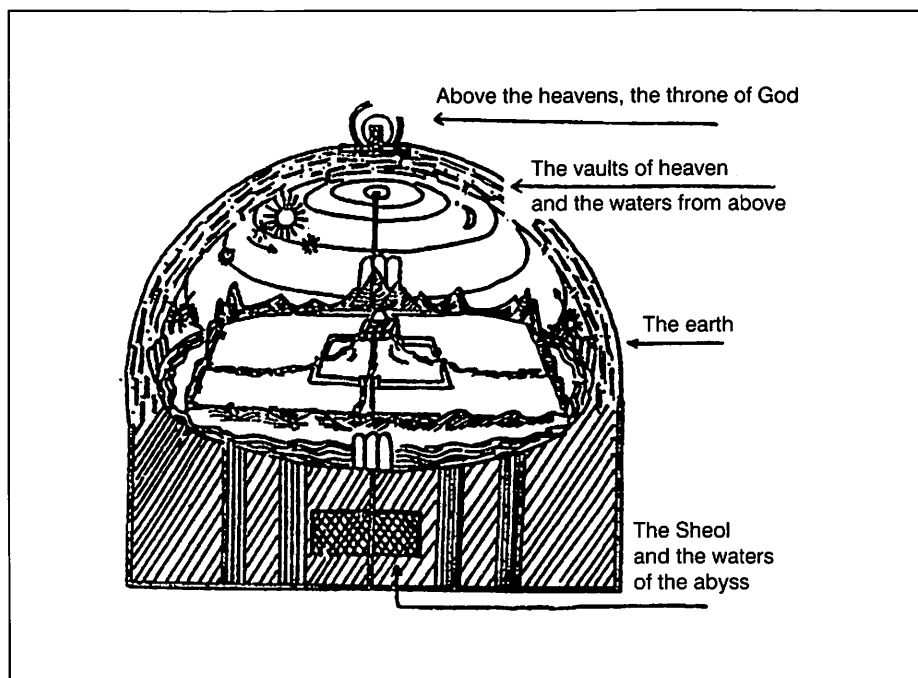
place. He has come to visit those who sleep and has stretched himself out beside them. His perfume has spread among the dead: They come to life again and sing words of praise to him.

Exult and rejoice, holy Church, sing glory and thanksgiving to the Spouse who saved you by his cross. Through his Resurrection the empire of death has been destroyed, Adam and his children inherit a new Kingdom.

Your Church praises you, o Christ our God, You who, through your death, have taken her for your Bride. Through the blood you shed you wrote her dowry and your love extends to the ages of ages. <sup>4</sup>

Having allowed these symbols to echo and resound, let us now apply all of this to the current situation here in Iran, for it is only when it comes into contact with our lives that, through the Spirit, the letter becomes Word of God. According to certain statistical analyses that have of course remained secret but whose results have been conveyed to me by a doctor friend, Iran has the highest number of youth suicides of any country in the world. This dark black hole hypnotizes us. In the iconographic tradition, it marked already the descent of the Word of God among us, and the descent from the Cross into the "place of the skull", according to the letter to the Philippians. These dark infernos, at the far end of the hole of our despair and our depres-

sions become our baptistery, the place of encounter and the virginal womb of the Church, the place of the transmission of Life through the power of the Spirit. For Jesus has gone down to where we above all do not wish to go and to where we are nevertheless inexorably headed. And it is only there that he awaits us and extends to us his open hand in the hopes that we will finally come to recognize that this is where our sin shuts us in. The stone has been taken away, the stone that separated the world of the dead from the



"Exultet", e.g., or this hymn of the Syriac Church which reads as follows:

You who raise the children of Adam, you have tasted death. Through your death, you give life to the dead and you have put sin to death. You who have destroyed hell and raised up Adam, make us worthy, at your coming, to enjoy you in your Kingdom.

In this night, the Son of our King has put death to death in its dwelling



world of the living, the stone that has weighed upon us, the other poor, like Lazarus, in tombs that strangely resemble that of Christ. "Where are you, Adam?" God had come down in the cool of the evening to seek his friend, Adam, hidden and covered with shame in the garden. He finally has found him and the garden is open to us, because the sword that was barring its entrance has been broken in the pierced side of Jesus.. The wall of hatred has crumbled and the curtain of the temple has been torn in two: access to the living God has again been opened for us. In him who took upon himself our tattered nature and our despairs we find healing, fellowship, fertility and communion in Hope. The man of sorrows becomes the New Adam, leader and choreographer who, being the first to enter leads the dance of all the maimed who are healed, according to the icon that we have been applying somewhat to our own situation... And why not?

Jesus since her childhood and often used to dream of meeting with him. She doesn't know how to read or write, but her tapestry is the outlet by which she expresses all her love. Her dreams have been realized and I ask myself whether, now that she is progressing in the knowledge of Jesus, this way of meeting, very biblical when all is said and done, quite surprising to hear of today but frequent in this country, might not simply be in process of being purified thanks to this regard directed to the icon.. As for me, when I hear one or another of the catechumens telling me about the dreams that have left their mark on their lives, I do not attempt to interpret and still less to authenticate, but rather to relate this perception in dreams with the biblical symbolism – a way, perhaps, of evangelizing the depths of the subconscious thanks to these dreams that often have a profoundly iconic character!

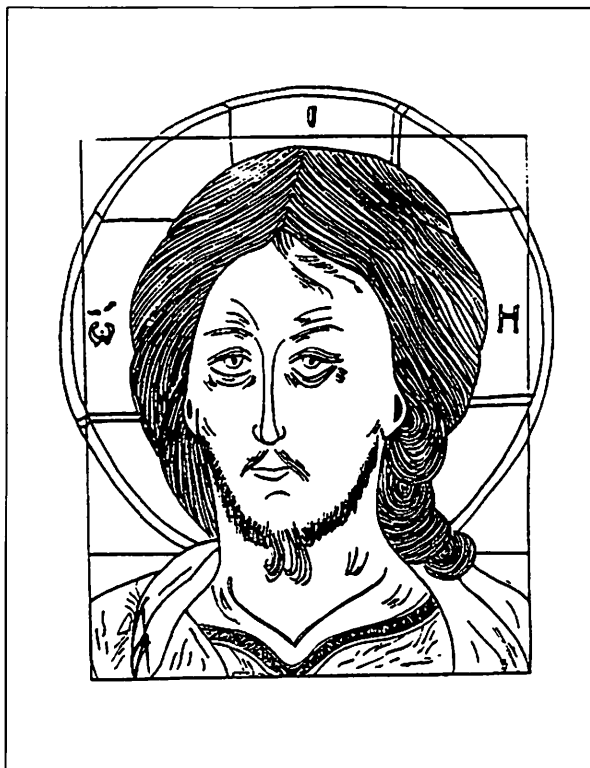
(Transl.: L. Maluf)



### **Icon: the presentiment, the dream, the hope of an encounter...**

In my apartment, the icon I like the best is not very beautiful, to my taste at least: in an Iranian-style weave, it seeks to reproduce that icon not painted by human hands according to the tradition, the face of Christ looking straight at us, summoning us.

The icon was not produced by a monk iconographer because unfortunately there is not a single monastery in our country; rather it was fashioned by an Iranian woman who came from great poverty – a woman whom I have been accompanying toward Baptism for about a year now, together with her large family of which she is the mother and grandmother. Sickly, but with a countenance that is radiant with serenity and joy, she had been looking for





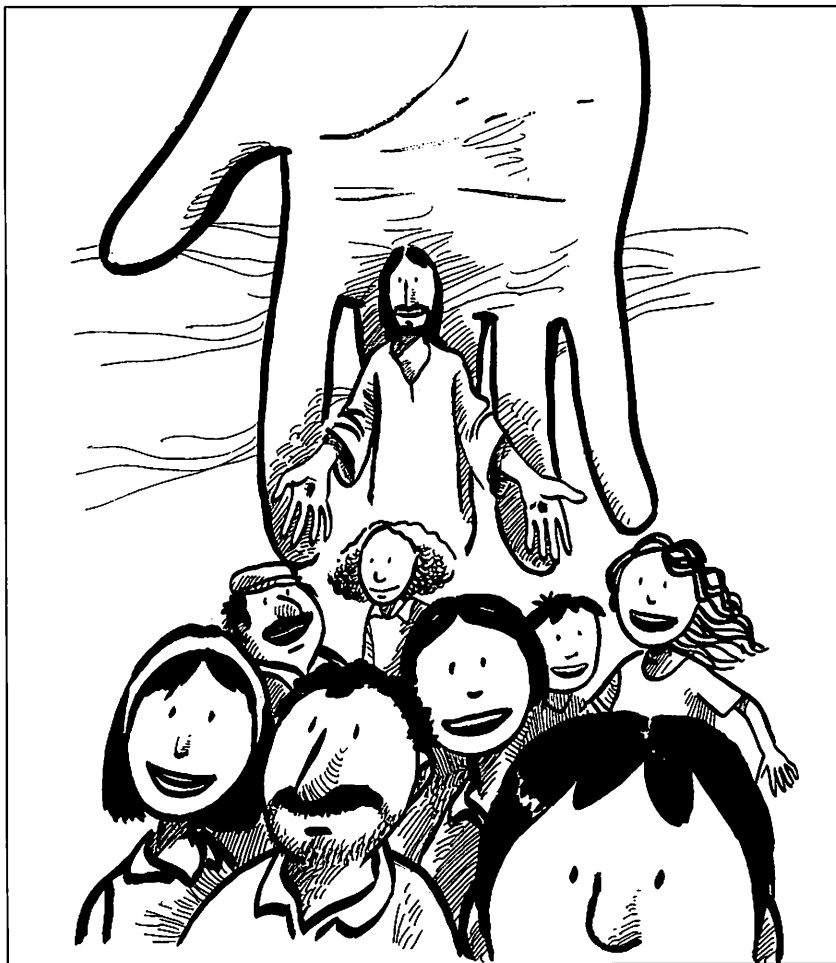
# Images born of necessity

## A Latin American Pastoral Adventure

WOLFRAM DRESSLER

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*Wolfram Dressler has worked for years as a missionary with the Divine Word Missionaries in Latin America and is the director of the Bible Center "Centro Bíblico Dabar" in Argentina. This article reflects the experiences of his work in the basic communities.*



"As the Father has sent me, even so I send you"

(Jn 20:21)

### Something had to be done!

"Necessity is the mother of invention", as the old saying goes. I wouldn't doubt it for a minute because I've experienced it in different places and situations I've been to as a Divine Word missionary. From 1984-94, I was working in 2 parishes in the Neuquen Province in the Argentine Patagonia. Parish means a zone encompassing 100 km. wide by 300 km. north and south between the Colorado and Limay rivers. In the Rincón de los Sauces community, located on an oil drilling zone, Sunday mass attendance was close to none, while at Cutral-Co, a city of 50,000, men stood out for their absence. I thought of the multiplication of the loaves, where there were "5,000 men not counting women and children". In the case of Neuquen you'd have to subtract three zeros from the equation. So that's how you'd end up: 5 men plus women and children. Well, maybe 5 is an overly optimistic figure. "Start with the children", an older priest advised, "the adults are already a lost cause."

So I did. I handed them a questionnaire with the following items:



- What do you think about catechism?
- Why do you (not) go to mass on Sunday?
- What do you think about the songs and the homily?

The answers were anonymous and - maybe for that reason - sincere and disheartening.

Catechism: a requirement for receiving first communion. After that, never again.

Mass is boring. The songs are outdated and without instrumental accompaniment.

The homily is unintelligible because its focus are the "old folks".

So I went to a mass as a regular parishoner to see for myself. I came to this conclusion: I'd even go with the Evangelicals because they encourage active participation in their worship. Something had to be done before opting to "change religion" as they say around here. Many people have done it here, this is apparent by the abundant Evangelical churches in the area.

After a Sunday mass some young people waited outside the church and asked the parishioners if they remembered what the three readings were about. Not even the lady who read could say. I highly encourage you to do this in your own parish - you'd be surprised by the results. I was shocked and I thought about Christ experiencing the same thing when He said: "They have ears and they don't hear", believe me, this provided no consolation.

Something had to be done!

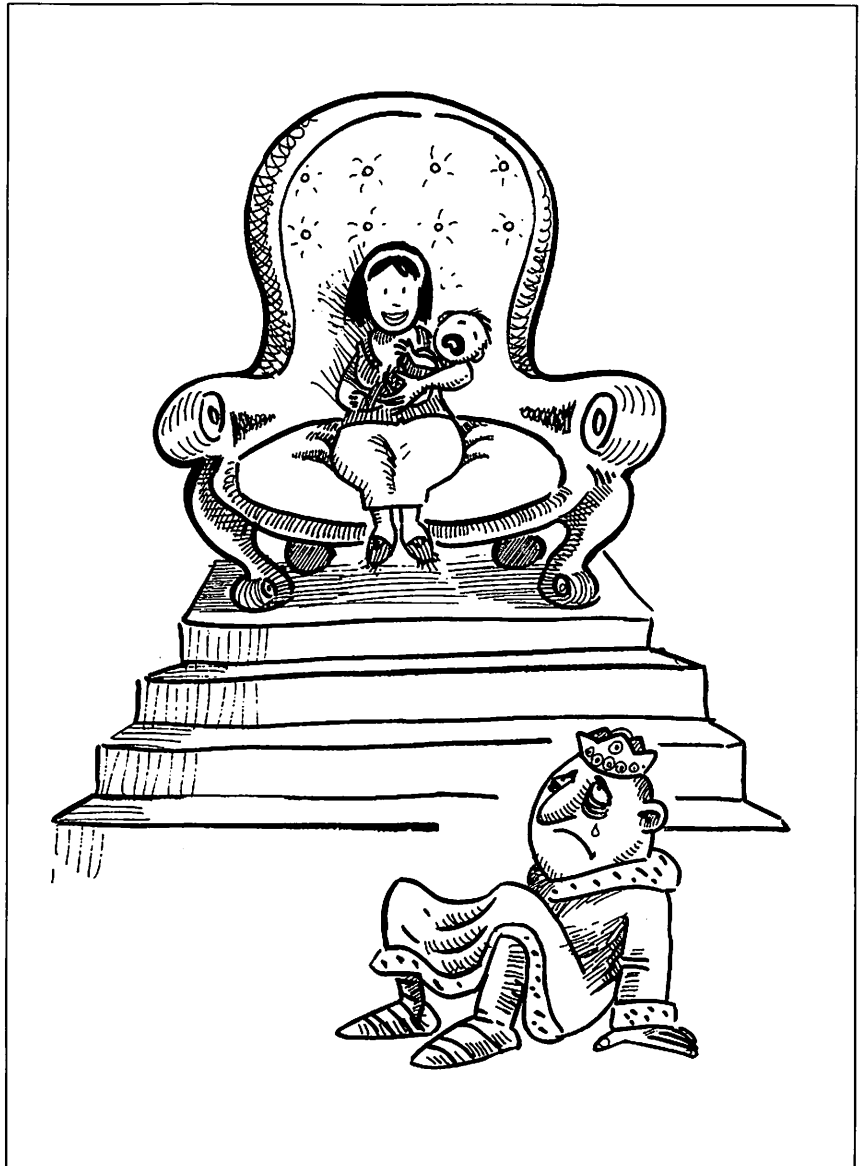
**"The Word of God" is born - cycles A, B, C.**

Over the next couple of weeks, I gathered people who shared my concern. We complain there's no light, yet no one's lighting even a candle, I told them. What's wrong? Are there no candles? No matches?

Or are we just a bunch of fools who don't know how to turn on the light? "Well, Father, we may be fools, but not a bunch of good-for-nothings!" said Ricardo, the more lively member of the group. "If they're not listening, why have so many readings?"

We then set out to choose the reading that most echoed the gospel or exemplified problems the community faced.

We also sought a phrase that would be the week's watchword. Would this phrase help in living the message into the following Sunday? The following



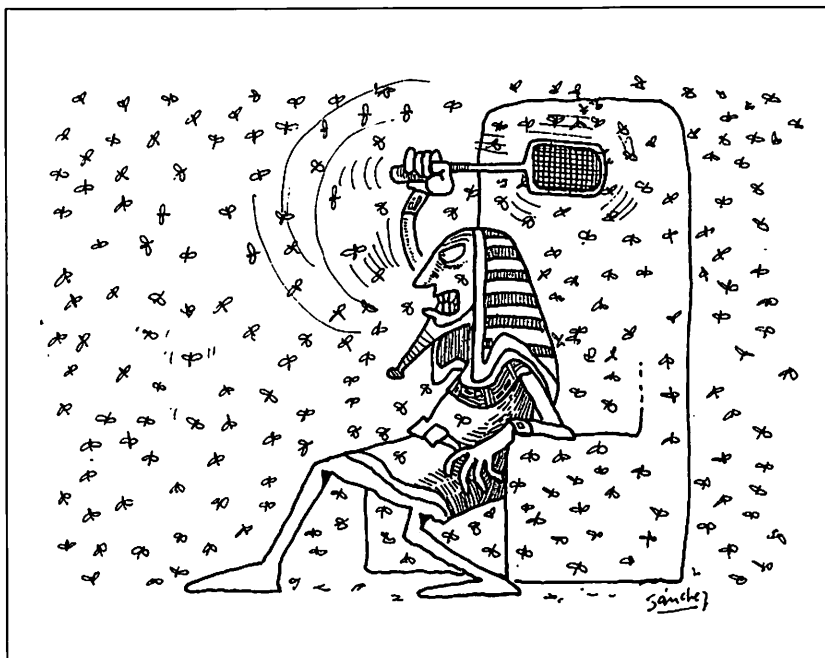
**"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"**  
(Lk 14:11; cf. 18:14 and Matt 23:12)





week's Sunday mass we included a message on pardon asking ourselves whether it was possible to live

trances. In others they weren't only enlarged but also colored. Some catechists even copy them and have their students color them. Once a lady asked me if I would edit the cycles in a smaller format.



#### Pharaoh and the Plagues of Egypt

the Word of God. At first, it was an uphill struggle. Almost nobody remembered the phrase of the week. I encouraged the catechism children to come up with the winning poster of the week's watchword or do a live presentation during Sunday mass. Some young people even went as far as sketching these scenes representing the motives of the feast day celebrations.

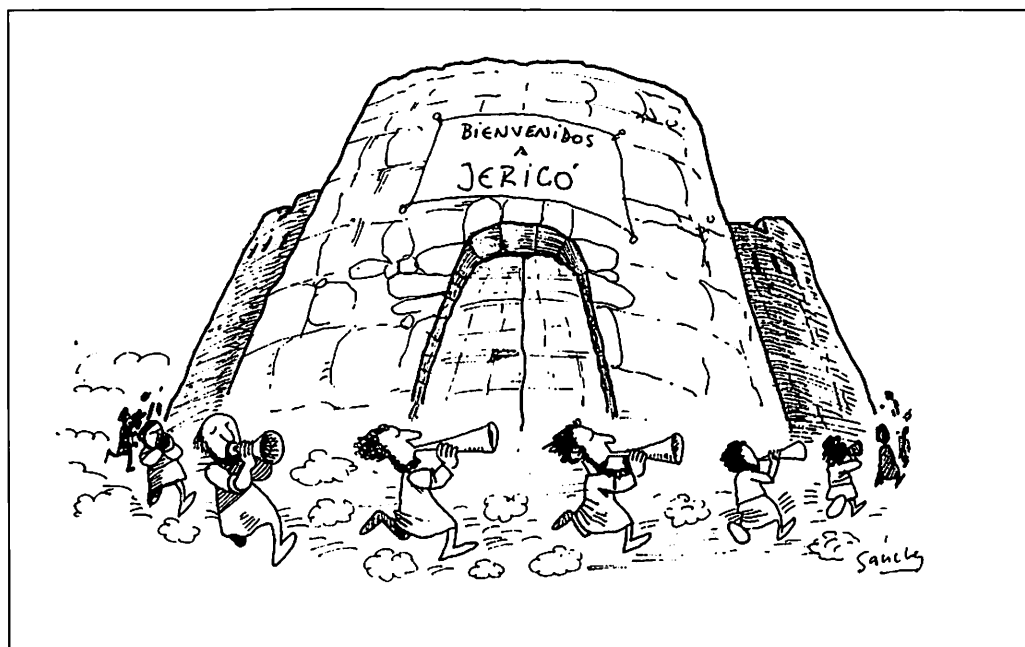
Later on, during a Bible course, I met Fr. Juan Carlos Sanchez who has a gift for artistic drawing. This is how we came, with his collaboration, to design the cycles A, B, C on A3 (29,7 cm x 42 cm). The reception of this was far better than we had expected. In some parishes the sheets were posted on the lecturns or en-

"Why not make a calendar out of them?" my companion Raul added. And so the A 4 (21 cm x 29,7 cm) format biblical calendar was born with the drawings and texts for each Sunday of the year. This was a way of getting a foothold in every household with our material.

A vendor who is not practicing, bought a large quantity to give to his clients. To my curious inquiry, he told me: "Every time I flip through it, on every page, I get a prickling sensation (a motive to examine myself) and that's what I want to share with my clients. Now even some evangelical pastors are interested in the material.

#### The Bible in a humoristic light

The booklets on a humorist reading of the Bible were born in a different way. I taught the Old Testament in the Letters and History Faculty of the Divine Word just outside of Buenos Aires. It had been difficult for me to awaken an interest for this subject matter in my students because they "had to take it" despite that it had nothing to do with their future careers. Thinking



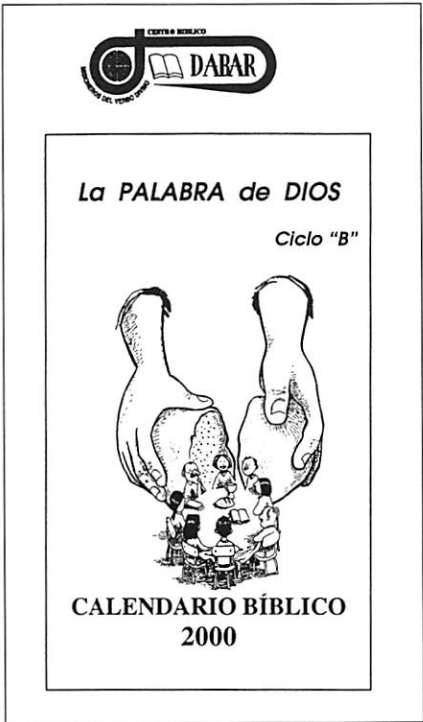
Welcome to Jericho



and meditating on the texts, I tried to present them in a different way. That is how the booklets on Genesis and Judges – *"My God, what have I done?"* - and *"Hurry, we're going to be saved!"* - came into existence. A student and the late Fr. J.C. Sanchez illustrated the text with funny cartoon characters. Especially the young people became interested in the Bible and came to better grip the more obscure parts therein. A lady told me that these booklets fell into the hands of three friends of her daughter, a student in Mar del Plata, and they began to read the Bible. Today they help her daughter in the catechism program.

However, editing humorous booklets isn't the only thing I do. I also write things that are of a little more serious bent. With this in mind, *"2000 Years and You Still Haven't Learned?"* was born – it's an up-to-date reading of the letter of James with photos and intertwining reflections. And the last to appear is *"Jonas, an Astute Prophet?"* a work that is in part exegetical and meditative with drawings that accompany the reflections.

(Transl.: J. Paulin)





# Biblical Education by means of Pictures and Images used in the LUMKO Method

**Trainers of the Diocese of Umtata, S. Africa**

OSWALD HIRMER

*The author of this article, Oswald Hirmer, is Bishop of the Diocese of Umtata in South Africa and looks back as longtime collaborator of LUMKO-Institutes on rich experience in practical work with the Bible. The method of biblical instruction by the use of pictures introduced in this article was worked out by the education team of the diocese on the basis of the seven-step-method of LUMKO.*

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In our diocese of Umtata we had to find means and ways to help our "sowers" (parent -catechists) who share their faith with the children of the small Christian communities. These "sowers" have very little formal education but are full of Christian wisdom and zeal. As we have a good number of different biblical pictures lying around in parishes and the diocese we had to find an easy method for the "sowers" to use these pictures. We tried different ways. At long last, after some years, we arrived at our "Sowers' Picture Method" which can be used for any biblical picture. With a minimum of training, our "sowers" are able to use it.

There is, however, one important condition. The "sowers" must be acquainted with gospel sharing (seven-step method) in which they learn how to share their faith with others, talk about how "a word of scripture has touched me." In our "Sowers' Picture Method" we include the step: "Now I share with you how this message has touched my own heart". Whenever I attended a session which was conducted by a sower, the children

became dead-silent when the "sower" shared something personally with the children. I feel that in this step the "real thing" can happen: a spark of faith can enkindle in the children the light of faith in which they can experience the closeness of God and Christ.

I was very happy to experience how the children answered to the questions in step 4 and 5. It did not take them long to respond to them well.

## **Sowers' Picture Method**

1. We invite and welcome the Lord in our midst.
2. Look at the picture - while we read the text from the Bible (twice)
3. Look at the picture and tell us what you remember of the Bible story!
  - What is happening in the picture?
  - (If there are people depicted:)



Who are these people?

What are they doing or saying?

4. Where do we see God's love for people in this picture?

5. "Now I share with you how this message has touched my own heart!"

6. God has shown us to today his love for us. How can we show this love to others?

7. We thank God spontaneously.

- We make a role play on today's story.
- We make our own hymn relevant to the story.
- We draw the story of today's lesson.
- We practice how we can tell our parents what we have learnt today.



Luke 10,38-42: Mary sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. The first steps of the seven-step-method are elucidated by this biblical image: The Lord is welcomed into the house. We listen to his words (whilst regarding the pictures) in silence and grant them entrance to our hearts.

### Table of seven-steps-method:

1. We welcome the Lord
2. We read the text
3. We choose a few meaningful words and contemplate them in silence
4. We ask God to speak to us through them
5. We share with others what we experienced in our hearts
6. We decide on a joint project in our group
7. We pray



# What are pictures good for?

## Reflections on the value of pictures

HERBERT FENDRICH

*Are pictures merely an aid for an easy access to Holy Scripture for those who cannot read? Or do pictures possess a value of their own, can they truly complement the written and the spoken word? The author of this article is a theologian and director of discernment in the office of pastoral ministry of the Diocese of Essen in Germany and he has done intensive work on the question of the role and use of images in Bible ministry.*

Pictures for biblical themes and narratives are hardly a matter of course. The early Church adhered strictly to the Old Testament prohibition of images (Exod 20:4). Later in the course of the Church's history there were ongoing disputes about whether pictures were to be allowed or not. In the Western Church the decisive argument was: We need to have pictures, since many Christians would otherwise have no access to Holy Scripture, because they are unable to read. In other words: Since the

Bible is a book for all, ways must be found for all to encounter the Word of God, even for those for whom the way of reading remains closed.

Today the majority of people are able to read; the Bible can be a book for all. Does this mean that pictures and works of art on biblical themes are now an unnecessary extra? The following reflections would extend an invitation to consider the ancillary use of pictures and works of art in our vital dealings with the Bible. Encounter with

the word and encounter with the image – this could perhaps become a fruitful interaction.

### Pictures are totally different

Precisely because most people today can read and because the liturgical lectionary also continuously confronts us with the texts of the Bible in the vernacular, whole series of biblical narratives – indeed precisely the most important ones – have become all too familiar to us. We no longer really listen to the texts; we know them already. There is nothing new! This is where pictures can really make a contribution. In the picture, the word appears in another, sometimes obstinate, sometimes foreign way. This is often all the more the case the more modern the pictures are. This alone intensifies the encounter with the text. We can make new discoveries; we can ask: What is different here in the picture? Why might this be so? What bothers me, what annoys me in the picture? And perhaps too: What appeals to me, gives me hope? Often these observations and reflections on the tensions between text and image cause us to see, read and understand an all-too-familiar text with totally different eyes.

### Pictures are multidimensional

This is true also of the text, of God's Word in general. But the many layers and the legitimate multivalence of the word often fall short when we merely talk about a text, because it is often too narrowly the one, exclusively "correct" meaning that is pursued in verbal discussions. With pictures there can be a great variety of interpretations, all of which are "right" if they focus on what one really sees. Pictures are thus also more friendly to the unique point of view of the individual that cannot easily be introduced in common discussion. In the picture there is room for fantasy and feeling.





## Pictures are magnifying-glasses

Initially the picture is at a disadvantage compared to the word: It can never portray more than an excerpt, a moment extracted from a larger narrative whole. But this enables the picture to highlight this moment all the more powerfully so that it touches and moves us. We can ask: Why is it that the painter has chosen to show precisely this moment? What moment would have been the most important, the most

moving for us? The magnified picture intensifies the experience, brings emotions into play.

## A picture is a silent word

This sentence was formulated already more than 2500 years ago in Greek antiquity and it reminds us of something very important: In the picture an encounter with the Word is possible also in silence. The picture responds to our yearning for a wholesome, beneficial silence, which is often far more fruitful in terms of ex-

perience and insight than is endless chatter and discussion. I am thinking of the many Christians in groups and communities that are not verbally gifted, but which have other "antennae", perhaps for the "silent word".

In the sense of these reflections numerous possibilities exist to bring pictures into play when it comes to Bible work – even in those parts of the world where most people are literate.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)





## In memoriam Cardinal Zoungrana

**Cardinal Paul Zoungrana**

\* 03.09.1917

† 04.06.2000

**President of the CBF from  
1978 – 1984**

Cardinal Paul Zoungrana, M. Afr., Archbishop emeritus of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, who died on Sunday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000 at the age of 82, had been the second President of the Catholic Biblical Federation (during his time called "World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate").

Both the election of an African Cardinal as President and Malta as the venue of the Federation's Second Plenary Assembly during which he took office, made visible the world-wide character of the CBF.

Cardinal Zoungrana sketched the identity and the purpose of the Federation at the Malta Plenary Assembly in the following words and the title "Sign of the Spirit":

"We have come to the end of the Plenary Assembly. A great effort has been made and much has been accomplished. We can leave with a good conscience. Permit me to thank you again for the confidence you have expressed in me, a son of Africa, by asking me to become President of the Federation. In that capacity I now address these words to you.

What is the objective of our work? To advance from the apostolate of the Bible to the Biblical Apostolate!

May each one of you live the Bible before you exercise that apostolate, the apostolate namely of diffusing the Word of God, of encouraging others to read it, to meditate it and to live its message as far as possible. And this applies to the whole People

of God not only to an elite- it has reference to the "little ones", the common everyday people, those to whom Christ addressed himself.

The Biblical Apostolate must permeate catechieses and all other forms of pastoral work, including those which utilize the mass media. The achievement of this presupposes that the Word of God is translated into a language which is understood by all the people. Our various communities are all at different stages of development, but the Word of God calls us to cooperate in a single concerted action. This is the sense in which the Federation is called to be an instrument for conscientizing the People of God, so that they may rediscover their scriptural roots in continuity with the communities we encounter in the Bible, which in their time also gave witness to the Word of God.

In this way the efforts of the Federation are a sign of the activity of the Spirit opening the eyes of the world to the manifestation of the Word Incarnate of which the Holy Scripture is a witness.

To make known and to distribute the Bible is to make known and loved the Person of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, who is the center of salvation history. From this point of view the light and the life of the Bible are not yet sufficiently known in the world.

Look at the spiritual hunger around you. This is why God asks us to sac-



rifice – each Church giving the financial support which is within its means. This is the highest form of charity – love.

The international character of the Federation is certainly a symbol of the universality of the Church. (...)

I support the recommendations and the proposed line of action of this Assembly, with its expressed hope that the Biblical Apostolate will become well established in each country, within each region and on every continent.

Each of us is now going to return to his own country, strengthened by the Word of God in order to become its effective servant. As Paul said to Timothy, the Federation now says to us:

"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus . . . I solemnly urge you to preach the message, to insist upon proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not), to convince, reproach and encourage, as you teach with all patience" (2 Tim. 4:1f)."

This address was published in the bulletin "The Biblical Apostolate" issue no. VIII/4/1978, Generalsecretariat of the Catholic Biblical Federation, Plenary Assembly II/ Malta 1978

## Africa

### Ethiopia

The pastoral department of Addis Ababa archdiocese has organized a 2-year course of biblical and theological studies for persons selected from eight parishes which commenced in October 1999. They also conduct a continuous course of sacred scripture by correspondence with 320 participants. Daniel Assefa of the Capuchin Franciscan Institute of Phi-

losophy and Theology begins with a brief commentary on a biblical text and a meditation taking people's daily life into account, and finishes up with a few questions stimulating readers to study the text and discuss it among themselves. In this way Bible study groups have been created in various parishes.

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Fax: +251-(0)1-55 31 13

### Cameroon

Bishop Esua (member of CBF Executive Committee) has informed us of the great success of the National Biblical Congress in Garoua with five delegates from each diocese and all the bishops (except those sick) as well as almost 200 other participants. More than 5000 people joined in the Bible Procession through the city of Kumbo. Each of the dioceses will be organizing similar congresses

during the Jubilee Year, concluding with a Closing Celebration from January 4-7, 2001.

On the level of Kumbo diocese, the Bible ended its 3-year pilgrimage through the whole diocese in the Kumbo Cathedral with the diocesan inauguration of the Jubilee Year. Thousands of people participated in the celebrations.

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Kumbo  
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### Ghana

Charles D.B. Mensah, one of the leaders of the biblical pastoral ministry in the dio-

cese of Kumasi, was invited to address a gathering of biblical exegetes of Ghana



**Catholic Diocese of Kumasi**  
**Biblical Apostolate-Diocesan**  
**Pastoral Centre**  
**P.O. Box 5624**  
**Kumasi**  
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in order to tell the meeting what the faithful need from Bible scholars. Some of his recommendations were: to form seminarians who will celebrate the Word of God with the people; to organize Bible seminars, workshops and retreats for various categories of lay people such as catechists, women, youth etc; to work with other specialists to make the Bible

accessible to all, especially illiterates, through the use of posters, drama, music and dance; translating the Bible, or parts of it, into local language and providing commentaries and footnotes to help the faithful understand what they read, and writing correspondence courses for children, youth and adults.

**IMBISA**  
**Fr. Ignatius Chidavaenzi**  
**Biblical - Pastoral Service**  
**IMBISA**  
**P.O. Box 1139**  
**Harare**  
**Zimbabwe**  
**Tel.: +263-(0)4-33 67 75**  
**Fax: +263-(0)4-33 69 09**

### **Zimbabwe**

Fr. Ignatius Chidavaenzi, coordinator of the IMBISA Biblical Pastoral Ministry came together with biblical pastoral ministry promoters from Angola, South Africa and Zimbabwe at a meeting of the sub-region of the CBF which took place

in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in March, 2000. The purpose of the annual meeting is to review the biblical pastoral ministry in the IMBISA region and to plan steps for the future.

### **South Africa**

#### **Lumko Institute**

**LUMKO Institute**  
**P.O. Box 5058**  
**1403 Delmerville**  
**South Africa**  
**Tel.: +27-(0)11-827 89 24**  
**Fax: +27-(0)11-827 57 74**  
**Email: lumko@global.co.za**

For nearly 40 years the staff of the Lumko Institute have involved themselves in issues of Church leadership and social justice. They have mainly used the printed media. With the increasing use of elec-

tronic media today, Lumko has produced its first video ("Abuse of Women: Workshops for Men about Men") which, if successful, will result in the production of videos dealing with other social issues.

#### **Biblical Pastoral Workshops**

A "Living Word of God Workshop" was organized in July 2000 by Sisters from the dioceses of Bethlehem, Bloemfontein and Lesotho at the John Paul II Centre outside Bethlehem. The course on the Old Testament followed the main events on salvation history and underlined the religious message in them for the people of Israel and for today.

An internationally known lecturer on the Lectio Divina method of reading Scripture, Fr. Michel de Verteuil, cssp, Director of the Pastoral Institute in Trinidad, will be giving seminars/intensive weekends/retreats in Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town in early 2001.

### **Asia**

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> Southeast Asian Workshop in Bandung, Indonesia**

The Southeast Asian coordinator of the CBF, Sr. Emma Gunanto, osv, was re-

sponsible for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Southeast Asian Workshop in Bandung, Indonesia held



from May 9-14, 2000. The workshop was held in preparation for the CBF Plenary Assembly in Lebanon 2002 tackling the same theme: "The Word of God, A Blessing for All Nations - Journeying together with the Word in a Pluralistic World – a Southeast Asian Perspective". The main objective of this meeting was formulated as follows: How to live the Word in a diversified world (religions, worldviews, ethnic groups, violence, poverty) of Southeast Asia, esp. Cambodia, Indone-

sia, Brunei, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and become a blessing for all.

The main papers given during this workshop dealt with the missionary dimension of the church, with interreligious dynamics, with the challenges of pluralism in a rapidly changing world and with the question of inculturation of Christian faith in Asia. Part of these papers will be published in a later issue of the BDV.

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ambc@bdg.centrin.net.id

#### **7<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in January, 2000**

Archbishop Henry D'Souza held the concluding address at this Assembly, drawing attention in particular to: the address of Archbishop Quevedo who invited the Churches in Asia to move to interiority from institutionalism and to lay involvement and participation in missionary ef-

forts; the Office of Evangelization which had reported, among others, on its biblical activities; the Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy which is planning an Asian Institute for formators; recommendations by participants to form a permanent institution for seminary formation.

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences  
Office of social communication  
CTM Bldg. 1916 Oroquieta St.  
Sta. Cruz  
1003 Manila  
Philippines

#### **Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei**

Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei celebrated their common Bible Sunday in July, 2000 which had as its theme "Jesus Christ, The One Saviour, Yesterday, To-

day and Forever". Bishop John Ha, President of the Regional Biblical Commission for these counties presided at the main celebration.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (BCMSB)  
46000 Petaling Jaya  
Selangor Darul Ehsan  
Malaysia

#### **China**

The 47th Basic Bible Seminar, conducted by Hong Kong Filipino Catholic Biblical Pastoral Ministry (HKFCBPM) took place in February/March 2000 in Hong Kong. The seminar highlighted some fundamental aspects of a Bible reading that should always be close to life. The participants were particularly inspired by one

of the papers that touched on the various ways and life situations in which the first disciples were addressed by God's powerful Word and responded to it in their own unique ways.

The four-week course counted 58 participants, and of these 52 passed the final examination.

HKFCBPM  
St. Joseph's Church  
57-61 Kwuntong  
Kowloon, Hong Kong



**Studium Biblicum  
Franciscanum  
St. Anthony Seminary  
4-16-1 Seta  
Setagaya-ku  
Tokyo 158-0095  
Japan**

### Japan

Fr. Bernardin Schneider, ofm, has been working on the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum translation of the Bible into Japanese for 44 years and is now looking forward to its completion with the

publication of the final two volumes, the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, both now near completion, to be added to the 35 volumes already published.

## Latin America

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### Meeting of the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee of the Latin America and Caribbean Subregion (FEBIC-LAC) met last May in Bogota, Colombia. A few of its many activities, accomplishments and projects that might be of general interest to the affiliated members of the CBF are worthy of mention here:

Publication of a guide for biblical ministry in Mexico (Episcopal Commission for Biblical Ministry, Full Member)

The fruitful work of Fr. Michael de Verteuil in the promotion of *lectio divina* (Director of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center, Trinidad, Associate Member)

The engagement of a number of associated members of the Federation in Argentina in the area of the training and formation of pastoral assistants (Program Bible 2000, Bible 2001).

The incorporation of a "*prayerful reading*" of the Bible in programs of formation of catechists and of adults in Brazil.

The planning of a meeting for all of Latin America in the year 2002, organized by the department of Catechesis of CELAM and FEBIC-LAC.

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### Peru

"Biblical ministry, a necessary way for every Christian and every Catholic" was the title of a paper presented to the École Biblique et Archéologique Française (associate member of the CBF) by Fr. Felipe Huaipar Farfán O.P. in the course of the colloquium "The Biblical Science 60 years from the death of Fr. Lagrange". In this paper Fr. Huaipar tells of the many activities he has conducted in the area of biblical ministry in Peru since 1963: radio broadcasts, articles in the local press, courses of various levels, Bible weeks, expositions, organization of

Bible centers. All of these experiences led him in 1981 to the founding of a Secular Institute for the biblical-pastoral ministry: the Missionary Sisters of Holy Scripture (*Hermanas Misioneras de la Sagrada Biblia* – an associated member of the Catholic Biblical Federation). The sisters of the Institute are currently working in a variety of Bible and educational centers in Peru. Their primary aim is to insure that the Word of God reaches the various levels of the population, in a language that is simple and close to life.





## Argentina

Six Argentinian member organizations of the Catholic Biblical Federation have launched an intensive course "Bible 2000" for collaborators in the biblical ministry (animadores bíblicos populares) which was given for the first time in February/March 2000. The motto of this course is: Journeying as a people with the power of the Word (caminando como Pueblo con la Fuerza de la Palabra).

The focus of the fourteen day event is personal access to God's word; the start-

ing point is the practical life-experiences of the participants. On the basis of this personal reading (what does the text mean for my/our life?) the participants are then introduced to a sociological and spiritual reading of the Bible; they receive a kind of introduction to the Old and New Testaments and to questions of methodology. The second intensive course is planned for February 2001 under the motto: Reading the Bible in Community (Lectura Comunitaria de la Biblia).

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Populares (TECEPE)**  
Avda. Calchaquí 1027  
1879 Quilmes O.-Bs.As.  
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+54-(0)11-42 50 5432  
E-mail: tcp@sion.com

## Europe

### Czech Republic

In the report of the Czech Catholic Biblical Association the news can be found that the Pastoral Centre of the Diocese of

Pilsen is offering biblical literature and has in the last five years sold more than 1600 Bibles.

**Biskupská Konference CR**  
**Ceské katolické biblické dílo**  
Kanovnická 14  
370 01 České Budějovice  
Czech Republic  
Tel.: +42-(0)38-635 21 09  
Fax: +42-(0)38-635 21 09

### France

The Latin European Subregion of the CBF is sponsoring a colloquium on the biblical ministry (colloque de pastorale biblique), which, as part of the preparation process for the plenary session in Beirut, is addressing the theme "La pastorale biblique au carrefour des cultures" (biblical ministry in a multicultural context). Papers and ensuing discussions will be devoted to themes such as the challenge arising from modern pluralism,

intellectual and religious dialogue, the Bible on the free market of the media, various approaches to the Bible, etc.

The colloquium is especially geared to members of the sub-region; but coordinators of the CBF as well as all members who are interested in the theme or who are involved in preparations for the plenary session are also invited.

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The Catholic Biblical Federation (*CBF*) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to ministry to the Word of God. At the present time, the *CBF* membership includes 90 full members and 217 associate members coming from a total of 126 countries.

The activities of these organizations include the preparation of Catholic and interconfessional Bible translations, the propagation of Bibles and in general the promotion of a deeper understanding of the Holy Scripture.

The *CBF* promotes the biblical pastoral activities of these organizations, provides a forum for the world-wide sharing of experiences in the field, searches for new ways of bringing the joy of God's Word to the faithful throughout the world. The Federation seeks collaboration with the representatives of biblical scholarship as well as with Bible Societies of various confessions.

In particular, the *CBF* works toward the promotion of the reading of the Bible within the context of concrete life situations and the training of ministers of the Word in this direction.

The ministry to the Word of God is ministry to the unity of and communication between human beings. A world which grows together with the help of modern communications and yet continues to show signs of hate and destruction needs more than ever words of peace and of fellowship with God and with each other.

**Wilhelm Egger, Bishop of Bozen-Brixen, President of the CBF**