

Catholic Biblical Federation

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Bulletin

*Dei
Verbum*

**Reading and living the Bible
in the Land of the Bible * * ***

**My father was a wandering
Aramean (Dt 26:5) * * ***

**Life of the Federation:
Experiences * * ***

**From Bogotá to Hong Kong:
The Bible at the service
of the defense and promotion
of life (Bolivia) * * ***

English Edition

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is an international fellowship of Catholic organizations involved in biblical-pastoral work. The members foster mutual service among all local churches.

Translation and distribution of Catholic and inter-confessional editions of the Bible in simple language, in cooperation with Bible Societies throughout the world, is part of this service.

Furthermore, it is the intention of the CBF to promote biblical studies, support the production of pedagogical aids for a better understanding of biblical texts, and assist in the formation of ministers of the Word (such as biblical animators, lectors and catechists), suggesting ways to form Bible groups and recommending the use of both mass and group media to facilitate their encounter with the Word.

The Federation also wishes to promote a dialogue with people who believe only in human values, as well as to encourage an encounter with the sacred writings of other religions. Through such encounters, the revealed Word of God can offer a more profound understanding of God and of human life.

The Federation appeals to everyone to add their personal and community support to these great tasks.

+ Alberto Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno
President of the CBF

**"Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided
for all the Christian faithful"
(*Dei Verbum*, 22).**

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Editorial

Wish for peace for Jerusalem and all its inhabitants! Our desire cannot be other than for peace at the beginning of 1995, declared a „Year of tolerance“ by the United Nations. The Catholic Biblical Federation is preparing for its fifth Plenary Assembly on the theme, *The Word of God as the Source of Life*. „*The Word became flesh...so that they might have life, and have it abundantly*„ (John 1:14; 10:10). Our sensitivity and our efforts strive to go by these paths. *From Bogotá to Hong Kong*, in the centre pages of this number, is the section that tries to promote and illuminate this preparatory way.

With the incorporation of two new members from the Holy Land (the Ecole Biblique and the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum) come their realizations and their difficulties. We meet them above all in the context of „The Land“, always important for reading the Bible, and, in our days, very important in the context of world peace. *Reading and living the Bible in the land of the Bible* and *My Father was a wandering Aramean*, at the beginning of this issue, echo these preoccupations.

A great challenge for the biblical pastoral ministry and , at the same time, one of its greatest riches is reading the Bible in different contexts: peoples, cultures, sciences, languages, gender. Although this is the orientation which underlies the whole of this number, we meet it in a more explicit way, and in a theoretical manner in the article by Prof. Malina, in the section *For Reflection*, and also, from a more practical point of view, in the section on *Life of the Federation* dedicated to Experiences.

News about the Federation tries to interconnect the members, suggest similar actions, facilitate knowledge of the various regions and zones, provoke reactions and as much participation as possible.

Also this review should serve the interchange and spread of material and/or publications (normally of relevance to members) that can help and improve the carrying out of biblical pastoral ministry.

It is important to communicate both quantity and quality for the realization of the needs of the members of the Federation. This is one of the organs of such expression. We should not forget to use it.

Pilar de Miguel

READING AND LIVING THE BIBLE IN THE LAND OF THE BIBLE

Addressed to the priests and faithful of the little community of the Latin Rite of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, this pastoral letter takes on a great significance, whether through the historic and political horizon in which it is situated, or through the example of the updating and inculturation of the biblical message, that wishes to respond to the grave and difficult questions of Palestinian Christians.

In the synthesis which we are presenting we shall highlight the first part of the letter (the questions which are put) and the third part (the answers to the said questions).

In the Introduction the Patriarch starts from the „new hope“ which „has just arisen in the history of our country and has opened up new prospects for peace and reconciliation between our two peoples, Hebrew and Palestinian, and with the whole Arab world“. The Bible, as the „word of God...living and active“ (Hebrews 4:12) has to be „our light and our guide in the action we must undertake in the present circumstances, in our daily life, in the Holy Land“.

Questions

Faced with the Bible Palestinian Christianity is posed several questions: 1. How to understand the Old Testament? 2. How to understand, in particular, the accounts of violence, that one reads, „very similar to events in our present history and which are attributed to God“? 3. „What connection is there between ancient biblical history and our contemporary history? Is the Israel of the Bible to be identified with the modern state of Israel? What do the promises, the election and the covenant signify, in particular, the promise of land made to Abraham and his descendants?“

To prepare for the replies to these questions the Patriarch clarifies some fundamental points in **part II**: *What is the Bible and how should it be understood?* In this regard, he underlines in particular that the Bible contains „progressive revelation“, the fullness of which is in Christ; he rehearses the stages of the history of salvation in which the „pedagogy of God“ is manifested: „every

covenant (with Noah, with Abraham, that at Sinai, with David...down to the New Covenant) allows for a phase to be surpassed deeply marked by the weakness and the sin of humanity or the chosen people and begins a new period of conversion and commitment to God through reconciliation between people“.

Seen in this light, „the biblical story is the story of our salvation. In our lives as persons or as a people, we find again, in effect, the same elements and the same course of events. Revelation is the progressive discovery of God, in the picture of our personal lives, in which each one of us repeats the same stages, between falling again into sin and conversion and return to God...“ Therefore, „the story of God with the Hebrew people is the model of the story of God with each one of us, as individuals and as a people, between the call to sanctity and pardon, always renewed on his part, and sin and repentance on our part.

In part III, the Patriarch responds more directly to the questions. First of all, against those who, even today, see the Old Testament „simply as the history of the Hebrew people and a book that does not pertain to Christian Sacred Scripture“, he recalls the constant teaching of the Church: „the whole Bible, Old and New Testament, is the word of God, revealed for the salvation of the human race“. The Old Testament „remains forever the word of God and Sacred Scripture and received new light from its completion in Christ, the Incarnate Word of God“. By this means God is

revealed to all „to re-unite in fraternity and in the same economy of salvation all the peoples of the earth, among whom are the Hebrew people, the Christian people and the Muslim people“.

The problem of violence

As for the theme of violence in the Bible, Monseigneur Sabbah begins by showing that the texts that attribute it to God can be reduced to two kinds: „as punishment for particular violations of the Law, and in the case of the law of the ban (i.e., complete extirpation, see Dt. 3:6, etc.) applied to conquered people“. However, there are also numerous Old Testament texts which condemn and reprove violence. How does one understand the first category of texts? Bearing in mind the aforementioned progressive character of revelation and fundamental unity of the Bible, the reply can be expressed in five statements:

a) Recourse to violence is in relation to the sanctity of God. For example, „the law of the ban declared the obligation to extirpate idolatry and to affirm the sanctity of God and his uniqueness“.

b) Secondly, recourse to violence in the Old Testament is in relation to the idea of justice. This is applied to the use of the vendetta and to the law of retribution (lex talionis). But it is observed with respect to progress towards the commandment of love which is proper to the New Testament.

c) In the New Testament the law of love replaces the law of retribution and goes as far as loving one's enemies. Jesus proclaims the beatitude of „the meek“. The meek are made strong by their love, and also through the word of truth.

d) The force and efficacy of love, which is joined to forgiveness of one's enemies, is manifested in the cross of Christ.

e) From the struggle with material weapons one passes to the spiritual struggle as St Paul, in particular, teaches (*see Rom 13:12; Eph 6:12-17*).

Applying the discourse to the Palestinian situation, Monseigneur Sabbah affirms that religious war, besides being anacro-

nistic, „is a contradiction in terms“. „There cannot be holy war“ as John Paul II has declared. Today there are other means better adapted to safeguarding the sanctity of God and justice between men. To those who „would wish to continue to justify their struggle by recourse to the Bible“ the Patriarch says that „forgiveness and conversion of heart are the two things most necessary in these days for our country“. And he adds that, „no one has the right to invoke the word of God, who is just, good, and a lover of mankind, to justify violence“.

Chosen People and Promised Land

Coming to *the theme of election, covenant, promise and the gift of land*, Monseigneur Sabbah recalls the „religious perspective“ through which it is necessary to understand the Bible, and he states: „God has elected the Hebrew people to call the peoples of the earth to believe in God and in the Messiah that he has sent as Saviour of the world“.

Election and covenant are founded on the gratuitous love of God and they involve a responsibility. The promise of the land does not alter the fact that the land continues to belong to God: „Israel cannot become absolute master of the [promised] land“. On the other hand, „the notion of land, as promised, has undergone an evolution“ and „the earthly Jerusalem has become the image and symbol of the promised Land, which is our homeland with God“.

The fundamental question sounds like this: Does the Bible, as the word of God, confer on the Hebrew people today the right to appropriate the land for themselves and to dispossess the Palestinian people? The reply is divided into three parts based on: 1) the admission that, for the Hebrew, „this land is its holy land“, promised by God to Abraham and his descendants, the Hebrew people today find their security from the nations who have persecuted them in the Diaspora“; 2) the affirmation that, „this same land has also belonged for centuries to another people, the Palestinian people“, even from biblical times; 3) the recollection that „this is, moreover, the cradle and the place where the fundamental events of Christianity occurred“.

Conclusion: „This is the Holy Land for all believers, Hebrews, Christians and Muslims...Therefore, in the confrontation over this land, two peoples have political rights, and three religions have their religious history, and all three are physical or spiritual „descendants“ of Abraham to whom God promised the land“.

Religious issue and political issue

The final part of the letter tries carefully to distinguish the two aspects of the question and, at the same time, to connect them. It is necessary „to liberate the Bible from political manipulation“ by those who „abuse it by making it a weapon in the conflict“. Believing in the Bible means rather „inviting the two parties who do believe in it to recognize that God calls both of them to render justice reciprocally and to be reconciled with each other“. The presence of God in biblical history does not establish the basis for a political right; rather, „God wished to make the biblical story the instrument of Revelation and the story of salvation of the human race“.

If one takes the revealed word of God as a reference for political action, it means that „it (i.e. political action) should be guided by the moral principles contained in that same revealed word; principles that refer to the justice of God and to his goodness towards all peoples, not allowing that his love for one people could be transformed into injustice in the confrontation with the other people“. The settlement of political controversies between peoples, comprising property rights in the land, is regulated by international law“, which, in its turn, should be inspired by religious values.

The Patriarch concluded with an exhortation to read and meditate on the Bible either in common or individually, and he observed: „To read and to live the Bible today in the land off the Bible is a grace and a challenge“.

Pastoral letter of the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Monsignor Michel Sabbah. (November 1st, 1993)

Francesco Masetto
Parola de Vita N. 4/1994

"MY FATHER WAS A WANDERING ARAMEAN" (Dt 26:5)

This text is an extract from a lecture by Prof. Thomas M. Rossica, reproduced in the "Catholic International", Vol. 5, No. 12. The author was professor in the Ecce Homo Centre in Jerusalem. "Neither biblical programmes, including the most up to date, nor the most eloquent Vatican documents, nor the best discourses and most lucid analyses on the future of the Church can ever replace the hope, the strength and energy which is born of the Word of God."

On my visits to the United States and Canada I have noticed the massive disappearance of the Bible and the Lands of its birth from our language, culture and imagination. I can imagine that the same thing is happening in Europe. Another spiritual language is emerging which takes no account of the history of biblical redemption. I ask myself, if this is happening, is it because, among other things, we do not take account of history, so that it is losing its attraction?

My proposition is that we consider biblical history in the context of a "pilgrimage" to its origins in the Holy Land.

From Abraham, the wandering Aramean, via many biblical passages of "pilgrimage", the first pilgrimages of the first Christian centuries (Meliton of Sardes, Egeria, etc.), down to our own day, the benefit of these journeys does not cease to stand out. From many actual experiences, which I have witnessed, I can confirm how great was their help both for a better understanding of the Word and for enlivening communities and individuals.

Like Judaism and Islam, Christianity is not a European or Western religion. Its origin is in the Middle East. Its past, present and future depend upon the Christians who live in the land of its

FROM BOGOTÁ TO HONG KONG

The Bible at the Service of the Defense and Promotion of Life (Bolivia)

The concrete experiences of each country and the reflections which arise are not insignificant, in spite of the „locality“ and particularity, and are a source of suggestions and energy for other, more distant realities. On the other hand, to confirm some common signs serves to attract attention to how to proceed to future realizations. The National Department of Biblical Pastoral Ministry of Bolivia recounts some of its activities over the last few years and its challenges for the future. What follows is a selection of some of those themes.

This reflection and communication is a response to the initiative of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation which will take place in Hong Kong in the middle of 1996. The central theme of this Assembly is „The Word of God as Source of Life: The Word was made flesh ... that they may have life in all its fullness“, and the particular experience of each country in the matter of biblical pastoral ministry.

1. Month of the Bible, 1994

A. Table of Reference of this month of biblical reflection:

- Motto: „Walk before me and be blameless“ (Gen.17:1)
- Theme: The wisdom of God in the wisdom of the people
- Text for inspiration: „I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will solve my riddle to the music of the harp (Ps. 49:4).
- Directive key: Whoever reads the Book of Exodus or the prophet Amos and later reads Proverbs (Wisdom), has the sensation of entering another world: it is like leaving a political meeting and entering the family life of the home, or going from a heated union meeting to everyday domestic life. Two different worlds, although closely united together.

B. Situations in the life of the people which the Bible illuminates:

One of the richest realities of our people with regard to wisdom is made up of the fiesta, rites, blessings and typical family relations. Together this is popular religiousness. Other experiences are added to it which include the experience of the wisdom of the people: the feeling for human work, the attitude in the face of

suffering (a daily experience for our people), human love, the exercise of power in its various expressions and concrete opportunities.

So it is to be assumed that wisdom is not an evasion of life or a refuge in the face of real difficulties? Rather it is the profound attitude of being human and of the people setting themselves before reality with all its numerous problems and experiences: injustice, poverty, hunger, oppression, misery - all of which are present realities.

C. Some points that deserve to be emphasized:

The wisdom of the people is at the margin of „official wisdom“, of the wisdom accumulated in books, that of the doctor or the engineer. For their part the people are categorized as „ignorant“, a fact that the people easily internalize. Thus they have a negative attitude to the media with its elaborate language and messages.

It is demonstrated daily that the people are full of a wisdom that surprises native and stranger alike. They have a great richness of spiritual and practical formation that would be envied by professionals in any famous university. Some of these aspects we emphasize here with respect to the Bible.

1. One of the manifestations of this rich wisdom shows itself in the *FIESTA*. In it there are joined together spirit and cost-free status, celebration and obligation, grief and hope. These two tendencies exist among Christians although not always blended and on a par. We can easily separate fiesta from vital reality, religious experience from obligation.

Psalm 1 and psalm 150, the one seen through the other, and complementary, give us the authentic sense of the fiesta, prayer and perfect praise acceptable to God: the cost-free status of God and the commitment corresponding to this image of God who loves us and delivers himself for us.

2. Human work produces good things: livelihood, sustenance and growth. To this are added the benefits of being one of the central human values: the exercise of the creative and productive capacity of men and women. Work represents the humanisation of nature and its transformation towards the Kingdom of God. But in practice, work is inhuman and its product is accumulated in the hands of a few and it is not shared at the table of everyone.

Ecclesiastes 5:7-19 points the way to this double achievement of work: humanization and the sharing of goods. Happiness consists in this and it is one of the components of the plan of God.

3. „The people groan with grief, they want to revive“ is a line from one of those motivating songs. The cry of those who suffer and find no answer to their situation is a challenge to the same faith and to theology. The book of Job shows us this existential story. The misery that Job feels contrasts with the happiness of other times, and so his grief is more vivid. Only God has the answer, and one must leave him with total freedom to manifest himself without seeking to force him to submit to our whims. And this will become obvious in the Cross of Christ: a sign of death and, at the same time, of victory over evil and its consequences. An illuminating passage is Job 30:8-26, and see also Mark 15:34.

4. The Song of Songs shows us the supreme value of human love, which gives real sense to life, and opens up to us an understanding and experience of the absolute Love of God who has created and freed us.

Love is one of the interior forces of human beings that is most fruitful and freeing. Experience of it leads us to authentic human realization, to a true relationship with others, and an acceptance of the Love that God freely offers us. One of the few books of the Old Testament that gives witness to this and sets woman in her true place within creation and the plan of God, is precisely the Song of Songs. It is brought out particularly in the passage 8:1-7.

5. The theme of power has been and will always be one of the most complex and difficult problems to resolve from a perspective of joint participation and equality in the human community.

Authority, the concrete form of the exercise of power in a social organization, has precisely this ambiguity: to be a service to the people or to be transformed into a means for exploiting and oppressing those who rely on the persons who guide them in their co-existence and interchange.

The book of Wisdom draws attention to this reality: Wisdom 1:1; 6:1-11.

The Bible instructs us along these lines:

- All power comes from God, the first and the last Sovereign; all wisdom comes from him (Wis.9:1-12; 15:1-3; Isaiah 48:12);

- Whoever governs should seek only to do the will of God (Wis. 9:13-18); God helps those who govern to do so with justice and holiness;

- Just as God gives priority to the poor and the little ones, so too, those who govern should prioritize their service in favour of the lowly and those without power (Wis 6:6-8).

Through reflection on Wisdom, which is expressed in judgment, living and breathing, in the people themselves in their daily life and their fiestas, there is awakened in the people a creativity and a sense of value of their culture and their spiritual religiousness and fruitfulness.

This was one of the inspired songs:

I believe in God, I believe in God,
as I believe in friendship and in love,
as I believe in hope,
in lament and in laughter,
most of all I believe in God.

I believe in God, I believe in God,
as I believe in the rain and in the sun,
as I believe in the morning,
in the wind and in the mountains,
most of all I believe in God.

I BELIEVE IN GOD,
MORE THAN MY HAPPINESS
AS WELL AS MY SORROW.
I BELIEVE IN GOD,
AND I DON'T KNOW
IF OFTEN I DESERVE HIS LOVE.

2. The Great Challenge of our Cultures and the Bible

As we have already mentioned, Bolivia is a multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural reality: the Andean Zone (principally Aymaras and Quechuas) and the tropical zone of some valleys and plains, with a diversity of ethnic groups, among whom the Chiriguano-Guaraní stand out. Each one of these groups represents a challenge for the pastoral ministry, and, in particular, for Bible reading. Many of them are well defined peoples with their own organization, culture and religion.

Clearly they are not cultures in a pure state but in a permanent dialectical tension between their own cultural experience and that which comes from the dominant sectors. In other words, the members of whichever culture of our country tend to function according to the particular schemes of their ancestral cultural tradition: this is what they interiorise from birth and in the bosom of their families and community. But, at the same time, they see themselves bombarded, and, in part, attracted by the western schemes of the dominant society. Where these two meet many things function from a logic of survival, expressing itself in native or western categories, according to origin or location.

Urban culture is highly influenced by intrusive culture, market forces of consumerism or individualism. This will be a great challenge for reading the Bible and for a process of evangelization.

It is within this framework that we are creating, even though in a rather basic form, a reading based on, and coming from, original and new cultures.

2.1 Bible and cultures; bases for a distinct reading

Always searching for certain keys for Bible reading from the numerous cultures of our country, we started a workshop in 1990, with the help of a qualified biblicist. What follows are some important and illuminating points that indicate to us some directions in which to take this reading.

1. The Bible and the Gospels were experienced, assimilated and communicated in and through a certain culture situated in the Mediterranean basin of the Middle East. It is from these codes, symbols,

language, forms, styles of life and relations with the land, of the persons among themselves and with God...that we receive the Good News and „transpose“ (an expression of Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no.63) the Message for ourselves today, also in and through particular living cultures.

2. We understand culture as the plan of life of a people, which is expressed through the language and made concrete in economic production and political organization. Religion is located within, at the heart of the aforementioned plan, and it is what gives meaning, directs the use of instruments and indicates the destination of the products. This means that in the plan there is always the dimension of God. In human life He is always the supreme authentication of a plan.

3. Theological arguments which orientate the process of a Bible reading starting from cultures:

- God is Creator: this affirmation underlines two important aspects:

a) the Bible shows us that created things are like the body of the Word. To penetrate the structures of life is to gain the Word. The Word situates itself in life. And so, the incarnation is not only an act accomplished in Jesus, but a process which begins before Jesus and which, in him, reaches a decisive and most radical moment;

b) man and woman are the summit of creation. In us God is contemplated because we are his image: we are the other side of the coin: God and the human being.

- God calls the prophets and the sages to rise up in defence of life. And so the place for listening to God is the historical experience. He is here, in life, he is a saving energy, the centre of all vital energy. He is a stimulus for living for the future, for carrying on in spite of failures.

- God is manifested in Jesus: in Jesus we are not the image of God, but his sons (and daughters). Jesus is characterised by being the Word of the Father, and if we are sons and daughters of God, we also are the Word of God in actual life. And so there is no reason to leave life to live religiously, but to grow more deeply within it and direct it to its fullness in Christ.

4. Anthropological arguments which point to this meaning:

- The human person is capable of listening and of learning. That gives the individual the capacity for relationships, the capacity for asking oneself and asking others about the meaning of life and other things.

- The experience of life is the experience of being in the world. It is affirmation through conscience as opposed to the world and the call to transform it.

- We are and we make the world when we come to perceive it, and in this perception, in a reciprocal way, the world is perceived in itself and humanised.

- When the world is perceived in itself there arises in a person a search for meaning and the answer to fundamental and ultimate questions.

- Experience teaches us that life is not the final answer. The highest expression of life is the person, which is a constant *WORD EVENT*.

- And the word is always a summons and not an explanation; that is to say, the word „calls“ one to live. And so there are persons, who, through their special capacity for listening and perceiving, draw attention to opening the eyes of all to the world and to history, and finally to transcendence.

- The process of life is found within itself. It is not necessary for us to go outside it to find the reason for living. Therefore the word of life does not come to explain itself but to affirm itself, and to be a permanent invitation to draw near to the origin of life. And so, if we are faithful to this call, we shall experience life as a Mystery. And God will be the real point in which life is concentrated. We are a gift of life, and each one of us is called that life may continue to be a gift of God, of the God of Life.

5. What we have stated takes us on to the *EXPERIENCE OF FAITH*: a faith that has its anthropological dimension (entrusted, accepted, affirmed, witnessed by others) and its theological dimension (free, knowing, responsible adherence to the divine person who reveals himself, to Jesus who makes known to us the Father and the Spirit which calls us to the historical fidelity of the Covenant).

6. So then, what purpose does the Bible serve? The centre of our faith is not the Bible but Jesus and his experience of life, death and resurrection. The whole New

Testament interests us not for itself, but as a means for drawing us close to Jesus. The Old Testament becomes valid for us in so far as Jesus identified himself with the history of the Israelites. For example, we assert with it that the centre is not the exodus, but the Passover of Jesus, and the exodus interests us in so far as Jesus interpreted his Passover from the Exodus.

The Bible becomes for us a model and reference point because it is the testimony of experiences of a people that has discovered God in life, and so is a mirror for us today. Reading the Bible teaches us that God speaks in life. It is like a school where we learn to listen and to discover God in life and for life.

And so the Bible:

- helps us to see that the centre of the revelation of God is the experience of human liberation;

- helps us to see that there are not two histories, sacred and profane, but only one human history in which people draw near to or remove themselves from God.

- With the Bible we learn that history is an open way to the future, and we are responsible for the construction of that future.

7. The Bible is a written document of the testimony of the Word experienced and communicated by a specific people, the Israelites to the first Christians, beginning with the death and resurrection of Jesus and Pentecost. Thus the reader, before the Bible, should draw close to the experience which has produced the texts, and should synchronise with the experience engendered by the Bible.

This involves a process for reading the Bible:

- bearing in mind that the Bible, by itself, is incomplete; it has to be completed by our experience, because the Word of God is more than the Bible and our own experience;

- through perception of the experiences of the biblical authors we arrive at the vivid reality of the Word, and also to our own reality today;

The Bible interests us because, indeed, it *MANIFESTS* that salvation is here, as a human possibility; and because it *CALLS* us to take on and set in motion that

possibility. It interests us because it is the *REVELATION* of the processes and deep structures of life. From there its permanent actuality and contemporaneity, because it manages to secure the depth of the human being in its very roots, refers it to the Source and Author of Life.

2.2 Reading the Bible from the point of view of cultural identity

Between 1989 and 1992, two ecumenical organizations (CTP, Centre for Popular Theology; CEPITA, Ecumenical Centre for Promotion or Investigation of Andean Theology), and other related groups with the same objectives, conducted some workshops for re-reading the Bible from the starting point of the Andean cultures. An example from one of these workshops is the psalm which follow. We respect their content and expression. They address an experience in the form of prayer.

Re-reading of Psalm 22

„Psalm 22 is similar to what we live in our country and in Latin America in general: it speaks of the cry of the people.

The psalm is divided into three parts: it begins with the cry, next there is the central affirmation: „Lord, I believe that we are together“, and finally there is a commitment to carry on with the strength of God. We have re-written psalm 22 reflecting our reality.

Apu Wiraxocha!

Why have you abandoned us?

Without power, without rights,

without land, asking for alms.

The white man oppresses us,
like a fox he destroys us.

He calls us „black scum“, he makes fun of us,
he insults us as „lazy Indians“.

Your sons are ruined
by the wickedness of the Whites.

500 years we are strangers

in our own land; You were the same
since [the days of] our Fathers.

The Pacajes, Ayo Ayo, Omasuyos
and Kollas, Yungas, Karangas
and other brother peoples.

Our people name you, Achachilas,
Pachamama, Tíos, Wiraxocha, Inti Tata,
Phaxsi Mama, Uywir Marcani.

Give us strength like our ancestors:

Tupaj Amaru, Tupaj Katari, Bartolina Sisa,
Zárate Wilka, Santus Marka T'ula and
many others.

Joined together we will a great river,
a million millions we will rise up.

Apu Wiraxocha! Equalizing Father, still wealth and happiness preserve us. You cause to fall from on high k'aras and mistis, we will be your arm and you will be in us, Aymaras, Quechuas, Tupi Guraraníes, we will have Pachakuti, from Kollasuyo to Tawantinsuyo."

3. Conclusions and New Challenges for Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Bolivia

Christianity and the Church, as its visible organization, need a constant and permanent confrontation with what is non-Christian (the world, society, history, cultures, social changes...) in order continually to re-define its identity and its mission. This is, and ought to be, a dynamic attitude open to the historic process in which our peoples live, to whom the revealed message has to give ever new and hopeful responses so as to nourish their march towards new conquests of progress, liberation and realization.

The process of reading the Bible with the oppressed people, which we try to do in Bolivia, wants to help, among other things, to construct *PASTORAL BRIDGES* which support the essential being of the message and of life: bridge between the Gospel and the cultures, between base ecclesial communities and the people of God in general, between pastoral ministry to the masses and pastoral ministry to groups and/or small communities, between ecclesial structures and the deep faith of our peoples, between expressions of faith and its sources, between those who hold power and the poor majority who do not manage to satisfy their fundamental needs... in a word, we seek to establish bridges between the difficult reality of oppression, injustice, marginalization and the pressing aspirations of *DEFENDING AND PROMOTING LIFE*, and making that life *EXIST IN ABUNDANCE IN CHRIST FOR THE KINGDOM*.

The initiatives embarked upon over the last few years to consolidate a way of biblical pastoral apostolate in our Church, and as a service to the people, is showing some success and is setting us new challenges. The preoccupation that accompanies every project undertaken is the same: to take on and accept the life of our people, so that they may grow in hope, faith and commitment.

1. The action of God is always made manifest in a response to the needs of his people. Thus II Isaiah begins: „Comfort, o comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem..that her penalty is paid“ (40:1-2). That means that God reveals his love that advances and liberated his people.

2. The exodus is a founding experience, and from its root always there arises a new people which, converted to its liberating God, will always be a sign that He is in the midst of oppressed humanity that fights and resists oppression.

3. Our original people always experienced seeds sprouted and grown from God's plan: an egalitarian, fraternal society organized on a foundation of justice and love, without any poor. This will be a clear manifestation of the deep experience of the covenant with Yahweh.

Therefore, there is not, in God's mind inequality and oppression as the norm, but as being the fruits of the sin of infidelity to his plan. Meditation on the formation of the People of God illuminates the search of our indigenous people for unity, justice and peace.

4. The denunciation of injustice, the call to live in a new situation of equality and rights, and the nourishment of a strong hope in God who take the side of the poor, the orphan and the widow..makes prophecy always a vocation and mission of the Christian in all times and places. „Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, „Bring something to drink““ (Amos 4:1).

5. True Wisdom (hokmah) has its origin in the *DEFENCE, PRESERVATION, COMMUNICATION AND PROMOTION OF LIFE*. It is, therefore, the **wisdom of life** that seeks to cultivate correct relations with God, with others, with oneself and with creation. It takes account of the fact that in things, history and the cosmos one ought to seek God before all, „the God who is with us“, in order to do his will.

These conclusions and the requirements of the complex reality in which we live, present us with *NEW CHALLENGES* for the future. The biblical pastoral apostolate, in the near future and the long term, will need to take account of the following:

a. The long term, fundamental disquiet which the Church of the new evangelization has, and the processes of the *INCULTURATION* of the Gospel which is assumed, if, in truth, it seeks to be faithful and obedient to the Spirit in these times of renewal, change and crisis.

b. For the rest, it is well known, at least in our case, that the challenge of the old and emerging cultures is one of the most demanding and grave realities. Our bishops rated it as a „historical debt“ with relation to the original peoples (cf. the contribution from Santo Domingo).

This problem not only demands dialogue on equal terms, but also the development of a unique creative capacity in order to bring about a reading of the Bible in and from the original and new cultures, in which the particular indigenous culture is the principal subject and protagonist of its Bible reading and the discoveries that it makes in the process.

c. At the level of the global pastoral ministry of the Church the challenge is to discover and give value to the Bible as „the soul“ of catechesis, theology, preaching, and every act of service by man and woman.

d. Along the lines of the contribution of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, we wish to stimulate the creative capacity of our biblicists and catechists to find new and more fruitful ways of reading the Bible which will open up the reality of the cultures and permit its growth and liberation.

e. We believe that there is a great struggle to be made against fundamentalism, within and outside the Church, which impedes getting near to the root and the essential spirit of the Bible and its message. We have to plumb even more the depths of the principle that teaches us the true Bible: God speaks in life and we must learn to listen in life, by reading the Bible in and from reality.

f. The Church has to be the real and open space in which all cultures meet one another for the single objective: *CONVERSION THAT LEADS TO LIFE* and which builds bridges of communion and peace in diversity.

Cont. from pg. 8

without expecting her to change in any way. And in the end, by actions rather than words I was able to bring her around to my point of view. From these humble beginnings I was able to bring my husband into the Christian fold at long last. And with this newly found strength I strongly encouraged my youngest son to read verses from the Bible while praying, as soon as he could read. He started with Proverbs. This arose his interest to such a degree that one verse became one chapter, one chapter became several chapters and eventually he was reading freely for his own pleasure and knowledge.

This simple practice of reading the Bible as a way to enhance his reading skills became a tremendous benefit and comfort to him during his school life and continued into university where he became an active member in Church activities including teaching Sunday school. He became a kind of father confessor for his friends, many of whom would come to him with their problems and daily concerns. He was always able to help them in his quiet concerned way, guiding them through their worries.

After his graduation he entered the army to do his national service at a time of extreme tension on the Korean peninsula last spring. Sending a son away to the army at such a time was terrifying for us and was of great concern for friends and family alike.

However, he showed none of this concern, he was even confident. His faith in God and the comfort he had found in the Church had given him endless strength. He would often write letters saying that he is enjoying the army experience and it is helping him to grow. He knew deep in his heart that God was not going to allow any conflict on our peninsula, that God would protect us, that we were safe in his love and mercy.

Here now I see what can be accomplished by the simple idea of a child reading his Bible regularly and not just saying prayers. The child learns to love the Bible, is comfortable with it and, as a result, finds love and comfort in God.

Through this personal experience, they naturally become passionately active in the spreading of God's Word. Furthermore the Church herself must find many and various ways for their young members to become easily acquainted with the Scriptures.

Elizabeth Kim
cheung-Ja, Korea

The Power of Positive Thinking

Method for Courses on Scriptural Praying

The method comprises the following steps:

1 Setting out the theme

a. We all come from a quite specific inner situation. This is a given for the human person and presents an ongoing set of problems. This expresses itself in thoughts, feelings and relationships.

b. One has to learn to tell the difference between positive and negative thoughts, feelings and relationships. For that one must have certain criteria. Ultimately the biblical criteria for this is love. For us, thoughts, feelings and relationships which are inspired by love are positive. However, those which are characterised by egoism we call negative. By way of example, such a distinction is portrayed very clearly in the first psalm. Today there is a huge number of books on the market which speak of the *power of positive thinking*. In them, profit is presented as the criterion of positive thinking. Scriptural quotations are used as a tool in order to achieve this profit. One must repeat them as often as possible in order to achieve certain success. Ultimately success means personal redemption.

Biblically speaking, love is the criterion of the positive power. This is a gift of God. It has the dimension of the personal relationship between God and the human person. With this biblical criterion we discover the negative in our thoughts, feelings and relationships. We discover our inner situation, the set of problems which we deal with in our courses.

In the courses to date the following problems have been dealt with: mistrust, powerlessness, discord, frustrating prayer, depression, unhappiness, agitation, loathing, misunderstanding, lack of identity, lack of freedom, illness, fear, feelings of inferiority, remoteness of God, superficiality, ignorance, moralizing, eccentricity, self-abasement (or lack of feelings of self-worth), arrogance and pride.

2. Meditation

- Silence: this is obligatory for all participants.
- Relaxation: the leader can suggest steps for physical and spiritual relaxation, for all those who want to join in, voluntarily.

- The participants are made aware that God is in their midst. Each one devotes himself to private prayer, which is quite personal to him.

- The participants open themselves to the positive thinking of God. Based on the participant's inner need for help or his existential, personal need, he should open himself to God with the help of a piece of scripture which he has found for himself or which the leader has suggested. The piece of scripture which expresses God's personal love for us can be repeated frequently.

3. Activity

It should detail the following:

a. Attempt an anthropological, psychological and theological analysis of the problem of negative thinking, negative feelings and negative relationships.

b. Highlight perspectives which will lead to a new harmony.

c. Give pointers to a correct reading of scripture as a search for inspiration, to find a personal way out of the problem with the help of scriptural prayer.

4. Personal work in silence

At the top of a piece of paper each participant writes:

a. on the left side „-“, in the middle „+“ and on the right side „WG“ (=Word of God).

b. Under „-“ each one writes in note form what occurs to him in terms of negative thoughts, feelings and relationships.

c. Under „+“ he notes down what will lead to the desired goal in his thoughts, feelings and relationships.

d. Under „WG“ he writes (in single words or whole sentences) what can help him and inspire him from the Sacred Scriptures, in order to find in personal prayer a dialogue with God, always moving from the negative to the positive. To this end one seeks words from scripture in private, in silence and meditation. First of all one recalls the texts which one knows by heart. After that, one can look in the Bible and finally the leader reads his chosen text on the theme. After that each person considers for himself which texts are suitable for his situation and can close his personal spiritual wound. He dwells with the respective texts, meditates and deepens them in personal prayer and finally writes them down. Parallel to „-“ and „+“ one should find at least a keyword or a sentence from Sacred Scripture as a help to prayer and reflection.

For reasons of discretion, if the participants sit close by each other they can write down their keywords under „-“ in code so that their neighbours cannot understand.

5. The personal spiritual conversation

In the mornings, after lunch and in the evenings, there is the opportunity of speaking personally with the leader and of going to confession. A well made outline under „-“, „+“ and „WG“ can make a good basis for discussion and at the same time facilitates the conversation.

6. Group work

Five to six people, but no more than ten, form a discussion group. It has the task of discussing simpler questions with each other, of formulating more difficult questions, setting them down on paper and presenting them to the plenary session.

7. Plenary discussion

The course leader answers the group's questions; he enables the participants to contribute their own or to propose new questions.

8. Meditative singing

Various Canons

9. Timetable of the event

A weekend course begins on Friday evening with the first theme, the second is dealt with on Saturday morning, the third in the afternoon, the fourth on Sunday morning.

The day begins with morning prayer (30 minutes) and closes with evening prayer. Before the evening meal all groups arrange the common celebration of the Eucharist.

10. Homework

At the end of the course each participant notes down for himself the answers to the questions:

- Which scriptural quotations will I use in the future for my personal prayer?
- Which themes can I suggest for further courses?

11. Practical

The leader of the course must provide enough copies of the bible for those who come to the event without a Bible.

Dr. Rudi Konclija,
Slovenian Biblical Association

An experience of „Lectio divina“

This exercise is a goal-orientated „Lectio divina“, that is, directed at a particular group and for a specific purpose.

The group: a parish team active in the apostolate of the Word (catechists, animators of Bible reading groups...).

The purpose: to help them understand better their own task in the faith and to involve themselves in it with great confidence in the paternal presence of God.

Hymn: it is useful to begin with a hymn, which may be, at the same time, also a prayer adapted to the theme. For example, „Blessed are they who listen...“. The hymn creates union and concentration. It will be good to allow space for a hymn at the end of the reading also: a hymn that fits in with the theme that has been developed, or one of thanksgiving to God, or one of confidence...

Reading the passage: it is appropriate to do this out loud (using the same reader) at least twice during the „Lectio“; then, at the end, by everybody together, sotto voce, so as to commit the text to memory.

Choice of passage: should be done with care and in good time. The aim I set myself is to help people to understand better their own task as „Servants of the Word“. Therefore, I choose a passage that fits this theme: not too extensive, easy to understand, rich in doctrine and emotionally intense. The Pauline letters offer much material of this kind. Besides handing on to us personal experiences deeply lived and suffered, besides communicating to us, with immediacy, his profound convictions of faith, the Apostle places before us ecclesial situations and problems that are not far removed from our own.

From the passages available I like best 1 Thess 2:7-13 for its antiquity (in some ways it is the beginning of the New Testament) and because St. Paul is writing to persons converted to the Gospel for only a short time and already a prey to persecution.

From the First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians (2:7-13)

„We were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright and blameless our conduct was towards believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

We constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, *GOD'S WORD*, which is also at work in you believers.“

Reading Guide

1. After the opening hymn, *First reading of the text.*

2. Guided reflection

Before the reading, announce the passage thus: „From the first letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians“. The passage, therefore, is the work of a man. In fact, it belongs to the oldest writing of the Apostle, addressed to the Christians of Thessalonica. Paul was writing from Corinth, about twenty years after the death of Jesus. He had preached for too short a time at Thessalonica and had to flee from there because of a persecution. He would have wished to return there to instruct the Thessalonians further in the faith and to support them: and the community, scarcely formed and still so fragile, was being subjected to persecution.

After reading the passage the reader then proclaims solemnly, „The Word of God“. In Paul's words, therefore, we believe now God's message. And we remain seated, while we listen, (in our heart we are already on our knees), because the

Creator, is speaking to us, the Lord Almighty, Friend, absolute Good, the One towards whom we journey day and night. I wish to identify my whole self with this truth. Certainly, I do not see him with my eyes, but I know that he lives here. And he speaks to me. In his presence I wipe from my memory everything else, preoccupations, projects, persons. More than everything else possible I pay attention to him who speaks to me, my partner in conversation.

Why does the Lord speak to me? Why does he love me? The Holy Bible is his „gift“. Through this book, God takes care of me personally. He instructs me. He makes me a gift of his wisdom. And what does he say to me in this passage? Those same things that he intended to say then, through Paul, to the Thessalonians.

Paul communicated to the Thessalonians, as good things of inestimable value, some reality of faith. Such things, through Paul, the Lord God was saying to them. Now, the Lord is saying these same things to me. Here are some of them:

- After the example of Paul, when I proclaim the gospel, I become the voice of God. I do not proclaim the words of men, but the Word which is truly God's. I collaborate with God who acts in the heart of whoever listens to me...

- Paul gives the gospel without personal interest. He loves with the heart of a father and mother. He is the model that God presents to every „Servant of the Word“. Hence, me too, now and for the rest of my life.

3. Listen to the passage once more.

4. Silent and personal dialogue with God.

I reflect upon those words that I feel to be mine, that I love. I want to make them seep into me. Oh that they may become profound convictions within me, part of myself. Then I speak to the Lord, possibly taking advantage of the psalms: „Guard me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings...“.

5. Choral reading, all together, sotto voce.

6. If it is appropriate, a sharing of ideas. Final hymn.

Giuseppe Danieli
Parole di Vita 4/1994

The Word of God in the Kenge Savana, Zaire

W. Triebel, a Divine Word missionary, responsible for part of the Kenge savana, has begun a programme of biblical studies by correspondence. This programme was prepared in the diocese of Gagnoa, on the coast of Marfil. He has translated it into kikonga and adapted it to the local situation. In the new parishes in his territory there exist fifty lively ecclesial communities. In each of them he has started a group called Emmaus for this biblical formation.

The work is carried out in two parts. In the first part the selected text is read, studied and shared, after an expert from the parish has presented it. What follows is very simple. After a prayer to the Holy Spirit the text is read twice after addressing two basic questions:

1. Is the Word which we have just read concerned with our life today? How? We reply with examples.

2. What decisions can we take for living according to the will of God revealed in the Word which we have just heard?

The group commits itself to do what it can practically during the week.

In the second part each person works on the text personally at home, helped by a questionnaire on the chapter being read. He or she replies to this questionnaire in an exercise book, received previously for personal work, and sends it to the parish. Godelieve, a Salesian sister of the Visitation, corrects the replies carefully. This aspect of the work is important because the participants feel recompensed for their efforts.

The final question to be answered is always a personal one: What has attracted attention most in the Word read, shared and studied. This is the most interesting and most important part of the course. Willy Triebel has been impressed by the seriousness of the commitments of some of the participants. Of the seven hundred who began, four hundred have persevered.

RUTH, „THE FRIEND“

[Ruth said] „Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go I will go; where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die - there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you“ (Ruth 1:16-17).

In general terms cultural relations demand different pastoral approaches according to different contexts, Evangelization of the culture will be very different in Latin America, Asia, Africa or Europe. In the West evangelization of the culture requires a very varied pastoral strategy. A way connecting faith and culture may find itself following the tracks of Christianity present in people's lives and in artistic representations: the Christian roots of western culture allow one to find new shoots on the old trunk of the faith. This „trawling“ includes, among other actions, the discovery of biblical information which continues to reside in contemporary mentality and culture.

One would scarcely think that a very recent film, which had notable commercial

success, and the novel on which the film was based, could reflect important parallels and kinship with a biblical book. Nevertheless, this seems to have happened in a specific case. In 1993, the film *Fried Green Tomatoes* - nominated for two Oscars - was one of the box-office successes of the year. Exploiting the attractive force of the film an important editor used the novel of the same name as an advertising promotion in a narrative collection of works written exclusively by women, offering it as having a certain tone of modernity. Both works are a free rendering of the book of Ruth.

Many viewers, and other such readers, will have identified with Ruth and Edie, the protagonists of the story. It is easy to suppose that the majority of them are

unaware of the biblical inspiration and dependence on both works. The principal themes addressed in the story are: friendship, the role of women, the crisis of industrial society, the charm of the rural and simple life, racism, and the problem of death.

Thinking about juvenile groups, secondary school pupils or a parish group of a certain cultural level, the following activity could be organized. In the first phase of work, some days in advance, one group would be charged with *reading the book of Ruth* (it would not take more than an hour); a second group would go deeply into *A reading of the novel* by Fannie Flagg (some 400 pages of large print); and a third group would study in depth *the film* by Jon Avnet. For this first part definite *KEYS OF INTERPRETATION* would be set out. After a reasonable period of time they would consider the results in common, seeking biblical parallels and dependence, and, no doubt, finding some interesting discoveries and surprises.

The Book of Ruth

Narrative Characteristics

A masterpiece of Hebrew narrative, the book is characterized by concentration more than extension. There is a linear development of the plot. Dramatically it is constructed in four central scenes: the return to Bethlehem; work in the harvest; the meeting of Ruth and Boaz; the birth of the son.

Three characters stand out: Naomi (the mother-in-law), Ruth (the foreign daughter-in-law), and Boaz (the relative who provides the succession). The central characters are highlighted by two minor characters: contrasted with Ruth is the daughter-in-law who withdraws; contrasted with Boaz is Elimelech. Very important is the chorus which is provided by the neighbours, the reapers, the councillors and the women friends of Naomi.

Naomi sets the story in motion and at the end receives, as matriarch, a grandson. Ruth seems to be the executor of the plans of her mother-in-law.

Socio-cultural information

The story is set in a rural, village environment. It reflects many agricultural customs and usages. It gives information

about the role of women, the concept of the family, etc.

The legal background of the plot serves to study in depth, in the *Law of Redemption* and *the Levirate Law*, a number of family and economic implications.

The matrimonial model is far removed from the contemporary Christian model, and approximates to the situation of polygamy. Fecundity is not necessarily associated with the nuclear family. A son who is born has a (biological) father, but his family setting will be that of the maternal grandmother: „A son has been born to Naomi“ (Ruth 4:17). Through Ruth, Naomi fulfils her destiny to be a mother in Israel.

Religious interpretation

The express purpose of the Book of Ruth is religious. God is an indirect and remote protagonist in the story. Yahweh is the „giver“ of good things, who, through Boaz provides a son for the first husband who died childless, a grandson for Naomi and an illustrious house for Israel (the house of David).

The theme of the continuance of the descendants is present in the whole work. The tale pertains to the Davidic tradition, since, in it, is preserved the record of the ancestors of David (Ruth 4:21-22) in the city of Bethlehem. It is possible to interpret it along the same lines in Christian tradition (Matt. 1:5).

Another possible reading of the book of Ruth would connect it with the book of Jonah serving to correct the exclusive (racist) tendency of Israel by incorporating foreigners into God's plan of salvation.

Fried green tomatoes (Fannie Flagg)

Narrative Characteristics

The main value of the novel is its narrative construction. Mrs Threadgood - the narrator and apparent witness of the events - reports, many years later, on the life of a small village in the United States and the friendship of two young people, Iddie and Ruth. Together with the old woman's reports press cuttings seem to be inserted from *Dot Weems' Weekly*, family gossip from the life of a village about the time of

the rise of the railway. The narrative never presents a remote character; it internalizes and ends up by being intermingled with the protagonists of the fiction.

The unfolding of the plot is not absolutely linear. In trying to localise and date the episodes related, one can play around with them, measuring out the information and presenting it in an arbitrary way. The course of the events is altered depending upon narrative interest.

The apparent intrigue, before a mysterious assassination, an artificial element added to the intimate tone of the account, does not manage to change the novel into a political work. The person assassinated serves to bring out the figure and values of Iddie (his presumed assassin and rival) and Ruth (his wife).

Socio-cultural milieu

The narrative section dealing with the decade of the thirties brings out the situation of socio-economic crisis and the possibility of a having a happy life through human values, especially through love, friendship, solidarity and interpersonal encounter. The narrative section on the eighties manifests the crisis affecting society, especially the crisis of a society of masculine values (consumption, stress, etc.).

The most outstanding note of the novel is that determined by *love between women*. In contrast to conventional marriage and family (which is not despised in the account) there is offered the possibility of a family (with offspring) without a male.

The theme of racism acquires a secondary importance and reinforces the central message: the weak (women/Negroes) end up by winning.

Justice (i.e. partial) is presented ironically.

Religious interpretation

The novel recognizes (in the section dealing with the thirties) a religious world view, an environment of citizens respecting the values of *Religion*, a characteristic proper to American society. On the contrary, the absence of transcendental elements is characteristic of the section dealing with the eighties. Moral teaches that a memory that lives on can find meaning from one generation to the next. The deep convictions of Ninny (who

interprets her whole life from faith) fertilises the life of Evelyn which lacks meaning. This does not mean precisely that Evelyn has a religious conversion; it is sufficient to show that her life acquires new meaning.

The specific theme of the narrative is the anxiety that Ruth experiences because of the love she feels for Idgie. A false „religious“ sublimation makes her life this love relationship (this desire) with a sense of guilt, admitting as natural the ill treatment by her husband as an expiation for her „sin“. This is the most awkward aspect of the account.

Fried green tomatoes

(Jon Avnet, 1992)

Narrative characteristics

The fundamental support of the film is the cinematographic technique of flashback. A narrator presents the events that are evoked successively. The fragmentary presentation of the story and the successive incursions into the past and present time - without apparent order - demand remarkable attention from the viewer and, at the same time, provide the film with a dramatic force - alleviated by well aimed comic gags - and a final outcome that responds to a moral reading of the film. The superposition of two stories, one from the present and the other from an earlier happening gives a role to historical memory: a tale that is remembered and not consigned to oblivion provides the viewer with both strength and gracefulness.

Evelyn (Katty Bates, Oscar 91) is „a woman too young to be old and too old to be young“. She lives frustrated by being overweight, lacking security in herself and ill-treated by her husband. In a home she makes the acquaintance of Ninny (Jessica Tandy, Oscar 90) a sprightly old woman, who tells her the story of Idgie (Mary Stuart Masterson) and Ruth (Mary-Louise Parker), two young women from her town in Alabama (where the film is shot).

The artificial construction and simple development are, together with the interpretation, are the most valuable; not in vain was the film nominated for an Oscar for the best adapted script and for the best supporting actress (Ninny).

Socio-cultural information

On the one hand, the setting of the film throws into relief the Great Depression in America: the pre-war situation of poverty, hunger and social tension. On the other hand, it brings out the crisis of the eighties, characterised by an existential emptiness and a profound crisis of values.

Very evident is the marked feminine character of the film. With an intermediate option it presents a model of woman-woman, as opposed to woman-doll (stereotype of the twenties) or the liberated woman (stereotype of woman in the eighties). The woman-woman, symbolized in Idgie, redeems one, Ruth, physically assaulted and tortured by her husband and one, Evelyn, also assaulted (psychologically) by a society and a husband which make her into a temperamental and useless fat woman. The family model proposed breaks the family stereotype. The house is ruled by women. Maternity is highly valued, but men „are not necessary“.

In the cinematographic script there is no allusion, implied or explicit, to a *friendship between women*. The large cast of the film goes against this sense.

The weak (women, Negroes, the aged, crippled, marginalised...) are the real forces. In the face of aggression, depression, death, the poor are the real winners.

Religious interpretation

Indirectly, two models of religion are presented. The film (continually sprinkled with religious facts and expressions) favours a natural religion, perfectly healthy and fully integrated with human values and far removed from ecclesiastical approaches. Along with this model (sometimes mocking itself, but without derision) is a model of official religion. Ruth is the daughter of a pastor, who wants to save Idgie and ends up by being saved by her. She is a woman who accepts suffering, but will end up by rebelling against that image of God and will begin to fight for herself. Evelyn, for her part, resolves her anguish before her own death through the witness of faith that Ninny communicates to her and through her own shared action on behalf of the friend.

The film does not aim at being religious despite being inspired by values which

intermingle the religious and the human. Biblical facts inspire the life of Ruth and Idgie and in their turn communicate meaning to the existence of other women many years later. The religious aspect is treated with respect and the work recognizes how the Bible can help to change people's lives.

Elements for inquiry and discussion

Once the groups are acquainted with their task, the following script can serve as a hinge for inquiry and as a help for discussion in common.

The thematic elements that each work presents should be highlighted, differences of treatment required for adapting narrative language to cinematographic form, and, overall, ascertaining the references to the Bible and to faith that are present in the works.

- General aspects of the work that stand out.
- Pick out references to the socio-cultural environment.
 - Work, economy;
 - Justice.
- Family models present.
 - Types of family that are criticised, types that are proposed.
 - Appraisal of motherhood.
 - Role of men; role of women.
- Feminine models present.
 - Feminine aspects that are criticised and those that are valued.
 - Model of the woman promised.
- Concept of friendship.
- Treatment of the theme of death.
- Appraisal of racism and xenophobia.
- Religious allusions present.
 - Image of God.
 - Image of Jesus.
 - Image of the Church.
 - Priestly image.
 - Relationship of faith/life.
 - Biblical references/allusions.
- Particular emphases of biblical, literary and cinematographic language.
- Other facts/information to be taken into account.

Juan Carlos García Domene
Reseña Bíblica n. 3/1994

NEWS

Africa

Kinshasa, Zaire

The members of the coordinating committee for biblical pastoral ministry are faithful to the weekly meetings. At the next one we will meet Fr. Luyeye, the new coordinator of the archdiocese of Kinshasa, with whom we will talk about our projects in the biblical pastoral ministry.

W. Bach has a new brain child, *Kotanga Bible na Famille*. He has also finished *Luke* and, along with G. Mudiso is seeking to make a revision of „Ta Parole - Ma Lumière“. For our part, the translation *Kotanga Biblia o Libota* is almost finished.

He met me in Kintambo, in the parish of St. Francis Xavier, with the members of the Basic biblical Seminar (SBB) who had gained their diplomas. At the end of the seminar, fifteen of the participants enrolled for biblical courses that take place once a week. They will be future coordinators. There is going to be a new SBB, this time with thirty-three participants.

Xene Sanchez
Kinshasa

America

Montréal, Canada

The biblical newspaper *Parabole*, communication medium of the Société Catholique de la Bible (which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1991) has been changed into a biblical review after a laborious process. The first number of the new *Parabole* corresponds to September/October, 1994. It emphasizes the relation *LIFE-BIBLE* considered from the point of view of actual reality. This work of „reconversion“ may be of interest to and serve to help other organizations or groups in other places with their own publications.

The team responsible for its transformation took into account the opinion of the readers through carrying out a survey to that effect, as well as consulting experts in media communication. They studied different publications offered on the market. They analysed the social climate and the phenomenon of „de-christianisation“.

After all this work and reflection, *Parabole* is re-born, with the vocation of forming and informing all those who are interested in the Bible in the full sense. It seeks to bring themes together in a more accessible way, as much by choice and variety of articles as by its treatment of them.

The core of each number will be a „dossier“ which will take up an important part of the review, and the rest of it will be shared among more varied features (some articles, Bible and society, Bible and the new religions, etc.).

Parabole wants to register itself by its specific biblical content in a broad perspective of education in faith within the whole pastoral ministry.

Asia / Oceania

Karachi, Pakistan

Khuda Ka Kalam has been a project of the Catechetical Centre since 1992. It is a translation from English into Urdu of the series *Word of God*. The series is three volumes of commentaries on passages from Scripture which are used in the Sunday liturgy and the more important feasts of the liturgical year. It was prepared originally in Shillong (India) in 1982 and became a „best seller“ not only there but also in other parts of India.

Bishop Patras Yusuf of Multan took the initiative and saw to it that „The Word of God“ was made available in Urdu. This translation, known as *Khuda Ka Kalam Year A* (in two parts) was completed in 1993. This Centre published Year B in February 1994.

The first part of Year C was published in 1992 and the second part was completed this year.

Women in society and in the Church is the theme that the Centre has chosen as a priority for the year 1995. The Centre wishes to share in this work with the *4th World Conference of Women*, which will take place this year in Peking, China. The Centre considers that it can contribute other elements on the subject: among other aspects, the recovery of feminine figures in the Bible as a source of inspiration for a new and creative feminine spirituality; ecclesial renovation and growth, which is felt to be important and necessary today in Pakistan, in the whole world and in different societies.

Europe / Middle East

Madeira: Seventh Bible Week

Madeira's seventh Bible Week on „Women in the Bible, in the Church and in Society“ took place from 5th-9th September 1994, and was an event for the whole island. It was accompanied daily by the media of social communication, radio, press, and television. It was, without doubt, an important time for the women of Madeira who saw themselves con-firmed in their constant work for the service of the Church and society.

Portugal: Forty year of „Biblica“

The biblical pastoral movement of Portugal celebrated this event with some satisfaction which was also echoed plentifully in the media.

The review *Biblica* was founded at the same time as the publishing house Difusora Biblica with the objective of spreading and making known the Word of God, of educating Catholics in the knowledge of Christ and so of preparing new Christian communities. Basically this is what it has continued to do in spite of every kind of difficulty including economic ones. The theme was: „The Bible was born from life, life is born from the Bible“.

Lebanon: Fourth Biblical Congress

The fourth Biblical Congress of the Middle East sub-region of the Catholic Biblical Federation took place in Saydet-el-Bir, Jall ed-dib, Lebanon, from the 22nd-28th January, 1995. There were about seventy participants coming from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, Mauretania, and the Holy Land. The majority were priests and religious (male and female). The small number of lay people was regrettable, but the presence of seven bishops from different rites was considered a sign of encouragement.

The book of the Acts of the Apostles was studied under the theme, „Pentecost for all times“. Throughout all these days reflections of great quality on exegesis, interpretation and application to our times were sown like seeds.

Two other documents were also presented: „The Interpretation of the Bible

in the Church“ from the Pontifical Biblical Commission, and „Reading and Living the Bible in the Land of the Bible Today“ by Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

The presence of the media stood out like a curious observer. One of the TV networks gave the Congress five minutes coverage. A book of all the contributions will be published.

On various occasions the next General Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation was mentioned, which will take place in Hong Kong in 1996. Also mentioned was the way the next congress, which takes place in 1997, will be organised. The book to be studied will be the Apocalypse. The reason for this choice is not to be sought in the growing interest of the sects in this literature, but in the situations of oppression and persecution present in some countries; to these people the book wants to give hope.

- in the *appraisal* the pedagogical elements are highlighted: the aptness or otherwise of the approach and the value of the content with regard to the intended reader (pastoral workers).

- in the *illustrative guide* section account is taken of six facts: 1. age; 2. level of formation; 3. catechesis; 4. methodology; 5. degree of interest; 6. personal reference. All this is based on numbers and symbols (or abbreviations).

At the end of the book there is an „Index of works by abbreviation“. The numbers which come after each abbreviation refer to the numeration of the books evaluated in this work (1-100).

Jaime Asenjo and Víctor Morla (Eds.) & Collaborators, Instituto Diocesano de Teología y Pastoral, Zabalbide 92, 48006 Bilbao y Editorial Desclee de Brouwer S.A. (1993), España.

Bogotá Assembly

Awareness is growing more and more of the centrality of the Bible in the lives of Christians today. Therefore it is important to provide tools for persons and communities. This is the objective of this simple book which gathers together the *Final Declaration of the Bogotá Assembly* of the Catholic Biblical Federation, along with some guides and methodology for reading. It is directed at Catholics in Malaysia; nevertheless, it can be of use anywhere.

The Bible in the New Evangelization. Published by the National Office for Human Development, 528, Jalan Bukit Nanas, 50250 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Dei Verbum in a popular edition

This is an edition of the Conciliar Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) in everyday language, taking into account the structure of the spoken language. It is the effort of the catechist D. Javier Castillo Arroyo, an effort which reveals fidelity to the original text and great respect for simple people,

BOOKS AND MATERIAL OF INTEREST TO THE BIBLICAL PASTORAL MINISTRY

100 Books at the service of Bible study

The Reason for this Work

When our pastoral workers endeavour to form themselves well in the biblical field or when they wish to bring the message of the Word of God close to those they are teaching they meet with a difficulty of their own: the enormous profusion of all kinds of publications present in bookshops with regard to the dissemination of biblical material.

In order to guide these pastoral workers through the dense forest of biblical bibliography, the Institute of Theology and Pastoral Ministry of Bilbao got together eight collaborators to offer one hundred books in Spanish (original

or translations). They selected from a plethora of publications one hundred works of recognized value such as biblical material for beginners or for wide distribution.

This work endeavours to offer a service to pastoral workers by examining from various angles (content, pedagogy, readership) the greater part of current material in Spanish.

Aspects of the Book.

Each work is presented and commented upon under three headings: presentation, appraisal and illustrative guide.

- in the *presentation* a brief review of each work is offered, focusing, above all, on the content.

particularly peasants, in whose environment he has carried out his pastoral work.

Dios nos habla como amigo (God speaks to us as a friend) and N.2, San Pablo y Comisión Episcopal de Catequesis y Pastoral Bíblica de Perú, Apdo.1859, Lima 100, Abril 1994. La Biblia y la Nueva Evangelización.

The Word of God (Dei Verbum)

The Constitution on Divine Revelation is at the service of those who are going deeper into the Word of God. It is very important to have materials available for its study, as well as the constitution itself, in language which is accessible all the people of God everywhere. This is the object of this simplified version available to the people of God in India.

Word of God, The Commission for Christian Life, The National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore 560 084.

The Archdiocese of Kuching (Malaysia) has also produced a book in simple English and a corresponding methodology which provides a way into the Constitution, Dei Verbum. *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (A Document of Vatican Council II in controlled English).

What is the Bible for? (Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church)

In the first part there is a general reflection on the Pastoral ministry. The second part deals with the question of the being and the task of the biblical pastoral ministry and its corresponding place with respect to other forms of pastoral ministry and its relationship with them. One part of the third section is a reflection on *the essence* or nature of Scripture and the other part is a *reflection on its task*. The fourth part is a synthesis, and the fifth part is made up of a compendium of materials (dynamics of reflection) for the pastoral

ministry, which tries to help the reading of this book in working groups.

Cesar Mora Paz, *Para qué la Biblia*, Comisión Episcopal de Pastoral Bíblica, Lindavista 109, Col. Tepeyac Insurgentes, México, D.F.

Women's initiative in the post-exilic period

This is the report of the workshop organized by the Diocesan Biblical Commission of Quilmes (Argentina) entitled: „*Woman, Memory and Resistance of the People*“ - *Women in the Post-Exilic Period*, which took place from 4th-6th March, 1994, under the guidance of the biblicist Sandro Gallazzi (Macapá, Brazil). After reading Song of Songs, Ruth, Qoheleth, Judith...from this perspective, it is possible to say that there is a tradition in the Old Testament, which Jesus takes up again, which is Good News for women, and which creates a situation of hoping for good news.

TECEPE, Taller de creaciones populares para la evangelización y educación, Avda. Calchaquí 1027-1879 Quilmes O (Argentina)

Tools for access to the Bible

The bulletin of biblical information (BIB), published in *Evangile et Vie* and *Equipes de Recherche Biblique*, (N.43, December 1994), offers some thirty titles, in French, which allow for people with no biblical training to approach and to begin reading the Bible (Old or New Testaments). In BIB, N.41, published the previous year, there appeared a list of tools for biblical animators.

A selection of 92 programs for studying the Bible (*Picking the „right“ bible study program*)

This work, in English, is intended to help those (alone or in groups) who want to study the bible but do not know where to begin because the market is saturated with all kinds of programs.

Many of the Bible study programs on the market have a strong fundamentalist bias. This work does not consider any of those.

It contains 92 programmes and a series of 13 studies currently on the market. It explains the kind of person for whom each programme is best suited, and lists the 15 most popular programmes. It also mentions if there is an audiovisual system. All these aspects are analysed, as well as others: subjects, authors, reissues. There is a sheet with each programme, and each sheet is perforated to facilitate copies and use.

Macrina Scott, Acta Publications, 1992, 4848 N. Clark St., Chicago, USA

My first steps with the Bible

This work is the fruit of the pastoral experience and biblical teaching of the author, *Mario Montes Moraga*. It is an elementary course in biblical initiation and useful for the biblical formation of communities and groups or apostolic activities. The publication of two other books will follow: *Your Word gives me life*, a basic course on the Bible with seventy study themes; and, *Faithful to the Word*, a reflection on biblical texts which lay the foundations of key aspects of our faith, or which are interpreted erroneously by fundamentalist groups.

Comisión Episcopal Nacional de Catequesis, Dpto. de Pastoral Bíblico, Ed. Conec, San José de Costa Rica, 1994.

La Biblia de América

This is an adaptation of the translation made in Spain and published by *La Casa de la Biblia of Madrid*. To prepare this Spanish American edition a group was formed composed of Carlos Aguilar Retes (México), Mario Alvarez Gómez (Colombia), Santiago Silva Retamales (Chile), and Horacio Simian-Yofre (Argentina) with the purpose of representing the various linguistic areas. Santiago Guijarro Oporto and Miguel Salvador García are directing the project.

Editoriales: Verbo Divino, Atenas, Sígueme, PPC, Spain