

# Catholic Biblical Federation

No. 35

2/1995

## The Jubilee of the Year

2000 \* \* \*

## Suggestions for

Reading the Bible \* \* \*

Hong Kong 1996 \* \* \*

The Bible - more than a  
book \* \* \*

## Life of the Federation:

Experiences \* \* \*

News \* \* \*

Bulletin



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

*Let Justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).*

The year of grace of the Lord is good news especially for the poor. In this year freedom is granted to every Israelite made over into slavery because of insolvency due to paying his debts, as well as the restoration of land and houses sold out of necessity. It is what Jesus sought above all: to liberate the lives of all who were threatened.

The Catholic Biblical Federation has chosen as theme and motto for its next Plenary Assembly (Hong Kong, 1996), *The Word as Source of Life*. Inspired by this we wish to respond to and associate with what many other groups have already asked and are asking, namely, the cancellation of foreign debt in the jubilee year of 2000.

In the first pages of this number we offer some texts which can help you to study in depth the theme that we are proposing. It is a selection of paragraphs from the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II, *The Approaching Third Millennium*, as well as from the reflection of the Pontifical Commission for „Justice and Peace“, *At the Service of the Human Community: an ethical consideration of the question of the international debt*, and also what is relative to this theme according to the *Final Declaration of Bogotá*, the document that picks up the lines of orientation of the Catholic Biblical Federation since 1990.

*The Word as Source of Life* is the document that occupies the central pages. Prepared by Geoffrey King, moderator of the Executive Committee of the CBF, it endeavours to be an helpful instrument for the preparation of the next assembly.

The section *For Reflection* has a more practical aspect. Professors Guijarro and Lambert recall for us those principles and elements that are basic for reading the Bible, and which it is well not forget.

Experiences, information, references to books or material are to be found in the pages dealing with the *Life of the Federation*. This space is witnessing especially to the liturgical season we are celebrating during these. Happy Easteride.

Pilar de Miguel

## THE JUBILEE OF THE YEAR 2000

### Tertio Millennio Adveniente Preparation for the jubilee of the year 2000

*In the numbers 11, 12 and 13 of the apostolic letter of his holiness Pope John Paul II. you can find an interesting biblical reflection on this subject.*

#### The custom of Jubilees

Against this background, we can understand the *custom of Jubilees*, which began in the Old Testament and continues in the history of the Church. Jesus of Nazareth, going back one day to the *synagogue of his home town*, stood up to read (cf Lk 4:16-30). Taking the book of the Prophet Isaiah, he read this passage: „The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour“ (61:1-2).

The Prophet was speaking of the Messiah. „Today“, Jesus added, „this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing“ (Lk 4:21), thus indicating that he himself was the Messiah foretold by the Prophet, and that the long-awaited „time“ was beginning in him. The day of salvation had come as the one „anointed“ by the Holy Spirit, the one „sent by the Father“. It is he who brings liberty to those deprived of it, who frees the oppressed and gives back sight to the blind (cf Mt 11:4-5); Lk 7:22). In this way he ushers in „a year of the Lord's favour“, which he proclaims not only with his words but above all by his actions. The Jubilee, „a year of the Lord's favour“, characterizes all the activity of Jesus; it is not merely the recurrence of an anniversary in time.

#### Jesus and the fulfilment of the tradition of Jubilees

*The words and deeds of Jesus thus represent the fulfilment of the whole tradition of Jubilees in the Old Testament.*

We know that the Jubilee was *a time dedicated in a special way to God*. It fell every seventh year, according to the Law of Moses: this was the „sabbatical year“, during which the earth was left fallow and slaves were set free. The duty to free slaves was regulated by detailed prescriptions contained in the Books of Exodus (23:10-11), Leviticus (25:1-28) and Deuteronomy (15:1-6). In other words, these prescriptions are found in practically the whole of biblical legislation, which is thus marked by this very specific characteristic. In the sabbatical year, in addition to the freeing of slaves the Law also provided for the cancellation of all debts in accordance with precise regulations. And all this was to be done in honour of God. What was true for the sabbatical year was also true for the *jubilee year*, which fell every fifty years. In the jubilee year, however, the customs of the sabbatical year were broadened and celebrated with even greater solemnity. As we read in Leviticus: „You shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family“ (25:10). One of the most significant consequences of the jubilee year was the general *„emancipation“ of all the dwellers on the land in need of being freed*. On this occasion every Israelite regained possession of his ancestral land, if he happened to have sold it or lost it by falling into slavery. He could never be completely deprived of the land, because it belonged to God; nor could the Israelites remain for ever in a state of slavery, since God had „redeemed“ them for himself as his exclusive possession by freeing them from slavery in Egypt.

#### The jubilee year and the social doctrine of the Church

The prescriptions for the jubilee year largely remained ideals - more a hope than an actual fact. They thus became a *prophetia futuri* insofar as they foretold the freedom which would be won by the coming Messiah. Even so, on the basis of the juridical norms contained in these prescriptions a kind of *social doctrine* began to emerge, which would then more clearly develop beginning with the New Testament: *The jubilee year was meant to restore equality among all the children of Israel*, offering new possibilities to families which had lost their property and even their personal freedom. On the other hand, the jubilee year was a reminder to the rich that a time would come when their Israelite slaves would once again become their equals and would be able to reclaim their rights. At the times prescribed by Law, a jubilee year had to be proclaimed, to assist those in need. This was required by just government. *Justice, according to the Law of Israel, consisted above all in the protection of the weak*, and a king was supposed to be outstanding in this regard, as the Psalmist says: „He delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy“ (Ps 72:12-13). *The foundations of this tradition were strictly theological*, linked first of all with the theology of Creation and with that of Divine Providence. It was a common conviction, in fact, that *to God alone, as Creator, belonged the „dominium altum“ - lordship over all Creation and over the earth in particular* (cf Lev 25:23). If in his Providence God had given the earth to humanity, that meant that he had given it to everyone. Therefore *the riches of Creation were to be considered as a common good of the whole of humanity*. Those who possessed these goods as personal property were really only stewards, ministers charged with working in the name of God, who remains the sole owner in the full sense, since it is God's will that created goods should serve everyone in a just way. *The jubilee year was meant to restore this social justice*. The social doctrine of the Church, which has always been a part of Church teaching and which has developed greatly in the last century, particularly after the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, is rooted in the tradition of the jubilee year.

## At the Service of the human Community: An ethical Approach to the international Debt Question

*Reflections of the Pontifical Commission „Justitia et Pax“  
to the Debt Question*

### Introduction

Political officials and economists, social and religious leaders, as well as public opinion throughout the world, recognize the fact that the debt levels of the developing countries constitute a serious, urgent and complex problem due to their social, economic and political repercussions. The development of the debtor countries and, at times, their very independence are endangered. The living conditions in the poorest countries have become worse, and the international financial system is going through a series of unsettling shocks.

Creditors and debtors have tried to come up with immediate - and at times even more long term - solutions on a case by case basis. Albeit insufficient and limited, these efforts need to be pursued in a spirit of dialogue and mutual comprehension, in order to see more clearly the rights and responsibilities of each party.

At the same time that current economic conditions have affected the situation of developing countries to the point that some of them, especially in Latin America and Africa, are on the breaking point because of their inability to meet their debt servicing obligations, the international financial and monetary structures are also being challenged. How did this happen? What changes in behaviour patterns and in institutions will make it possible to establish equitable relations between creditors and debtors and keep the crisis from continuing and becoming even more dangerous?

The Church shares these concerns, which are international, regional and national in nature, and wishes to reiterate and specify the principles of justice and solidarity which will help in seeking solutions. The Church speaks first and foremost to the principal agents in the financial and

monetary worlds. In so doing, she hopes to enlighten the moral conscience of the decision-makers whose choices cannot disregard ethical principles, but she does so without proposing action programmes which would be outside her field of competence.

The Church speaks to all people, especially those most in need, who are the first to suffer the repercussions of these disorders and do so with feelings of fatalism, defeat, latent injustice and sometimes revolt. The Church wishes to rekindle within them hope and confidence in the possibility of resolving the debt crisis with the participation of all parties and in full respect for each party.

The best way to tackle these serious issues would seem to be in a global perspective which would be at the same time an ethical approach. For this reason, it would seem necessary to highlight the ethical principles applicable to these complex situations before considering the particular choices that those concerned may be led to make, either in emergency situations or in the medium or long term.

The present text has made use of many studies on the international debt that have already appeared. Ethical in nature, this global perspective allows all the responsible parties, be they persons or institutions, on both a national and international level, to carry out a reflection, adapted to the situations that are within their competence.

To all those who will heed its words, the Church expresses, from the very outset, its firm conviction that cooperation which goes beyond collective egoism and vested interests can provide for an efficient management of the debt crisis and, more generally, can mark progress along the path of international economic justice.

### Ethical principles

#### 1. Create new forms of solidarity

The debt of the developing countries must be placed in a broader context of economic, political and technological relations which point to the increased interdependence between countries, as well as to the need for international collaboration in pursuing the objectives of the common good. In order to be just, this interdependence should give rise to new and broader expressions of solidarity which respect the equal dignity of all peoples, rather than lead to domination by the strongest, to national egoism, to inequalities and injustices. The monetary and financial issue therefore commands attention today in an urgent and new way.

#### 2. Accept coresponsibility

Solidarity implies an awareness and acceptance of coresponsibility for the causes and the solutions relative to international debt. The causes are both internal and external. While they are specific to each country and to each political and economic system, these causes also stem from evolutions in the international environment which depend to a great extent on the actions and decisions of the developed countries. Acknowledgement of the sharing of responsibility for the causes will make possible a dialogue which will seek joint means of solution. Coresponsibility concerns the future of countries and of entire populations, but also the possibilities of international peace based on justice.

#### 3. Establish relations of trust

Coresponsibility will help to create or restore relations based on trust between nations (creditors and debtors) and between the various agents (political authorities, commercial banks, international organisations) for cooperation in the search for solutions. Mutual trust is an indispensable value which must be constantly renewed. It nourishes belief in another person's good faith, even when difficulties prevent that person from

respecting his commitments, and makes it possible to continue treating him as a partner. This trust must be based on concrete attitudes which ground it.

#### **4. Know how to share efforts and sacrifices**

In order to emerge from the international debt crisis, the various partners must agree on an equitable sharing of the adjustment efforts and the necessary sacrifices, taking into account the priority to be given to the needs of the most deprived peoples. It is the responsibility of the countries that are better off to assume a larger share.

#### **5. Foster the participation of all**

Financial and monetary officials have the prime responsibility for finding solutions to the debt crisis, but they share this responsibility with political and economic leaders. All social categories are called to acquire a better grasp of the complexity

of the situation and actively to cooperate in the choice and implementation of the necessary policies. In these new ethical domains, the Church is called upon to specify the requirements of social justice and solidarity with respect to the situations of individual countries, seen within an international context.

#### **6. Identity emergency and long term measures**

The urgent nature of the situation in some countries calls for immediate solutions in the context of an ethics of survival. The main effort will have to be brought to bear on economic and social rehabilitation: recovery of growth rates, productive investments, resource creation, equitable sharing ... In order to avoid a return to crisis situations with overly abrupt changes in the international environment, a reform of the financial and monetary institutions also needs to be studied and fostered.

## **FOR REFLEXION**

### **Suggestions for reading the Bible**

*In general one must avoid reading the Bible as a collection of arguments to prove what we want to say. This was the way the Bible was read in theology and in catechetics for a long time (for example, miracles as proof of the divinity of Jesus) bringing as a consequence a distorted vision of many of the pages of the Bible. What we have in the pages of the Bible is, rather, the privileged testimony of our ancestors in the faith, the centre of which is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We find in them more a proclamation than a dogma or a refutation. In reading the Bible we must take into account its „kerismatic“ character which makes its message „good news“ for people. In what follows I offer some concrete suggestions*

#### **1. Orientate your reading**

It seems to me very important to cultivate some attitudes that should accompany the reading of the Bible since through them we can say many things about the significance it has for us:

- Reading the text should be preceded by a short period of silence or a prayer to ask the Lord to open our mind and heart to receive the word obediently.
- The text should be read slowly and without hurry. It is not a novel, nor a periodical, but a very important text for us. It is necessary for us to give it time, to read it again and again to be sure to grasp its message.

#### **2. Read the Text in its Context**

When one reads the text one should insist that the first step always is to ask oneself what the text was saying to its first addressees. Normally the tendency is to apply it immediately to our own situation. This kind of reading projects our own preoccupations on the text, which usually results in a moralising reading, the fruit of our traditional education. The question that ought to guide our reading is: What faith experience has been gathered up in (Cont. on pg. 13)

## **Final Statement of the 4th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation (Bogota 1990)**

*The Catholic Biblical Federation asks to urge governments to announce a biblical shabbat before the year 2000, so that the foreign debts of the poorest nations of the world will be cancelled instead of becoming an eternal debt.*

(Recommendation: 8.3.5.4)

#### **Socio-economical and political challenges**

Bible centers should take into account, in a very special way, the presence of the poor in their context and should realize that God's Word today comes to us especially through them. For this, Bible groups for the marginalized people should be organized, and those engaged in animating these groups should become first and foremost, listeners of the Word that emerges from the midst of the poor. They should learn to read the Bible in a spirit of openness to these people.

A prophetic use of the Bible demands that it be read in the context of the socio-political situation. This means that commentaries on the Bible should be

prepared which throw light on, and challenge, unjust social structures, violation of human rights, situations of oppression and exploitation.

It also requires that we join with and encourage all groups and movements that are in favour of justice, peace and solidarity with the oppressed.

We also ask all those who are working in the biblical-pastoral ministry and the whole Church, in collaboration with other Churches and religious groups, to urge governments to announce a biblical shabbat, or Jubilee year, before the year 2000, so that the foreign debts of the poorest nations of the world will be cancelled instead of becoming an eternal debt.

## HONG KONG 1996

### God's Word as the Source of Life: Towards Hong Kong 1996

*The next Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation will take place in Hong Kong in 1996. It is an assembly of delegates from full and associate members of the above Federation. About 150 persons from some 70 countries will discuss the orientations that are considered appropriate for the future. This event takes place every 6 years. The last assembly took place in Bogotá (Colombia) in 1990. Geoffrey King, moderator of the executive committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation, offers a reflection which could be understood as a basic document on evaluation-orientation with a view to the preparation of the next assembly.*

### Bogotá: Text and Context

At Bogotá in 1990 the Catholic Biblical Federation continued the journey that had taken it from Vienna to Malta and Bangalore. One of the most memorable parts of the Final Statement of the Bogotá Plenary Assembly was its reflection on the Emmaus story (Lk 24:13-35). The encounter on the road to Emmaus involves the encounter of text and context. For the two disciples the text was of course the Hebrew Scriptures, the „law and the prophets“. The context was their experience of Jesus, and especially the devastating experience of his arrest and execution. In their meeting with Jesus, text and context began to illuminate one another. It happened as Jesus and the disciples walked with one another and listened to one another. The disciples began to see new meaning in the familiar texts, and those texts showed them the deeper meaning of Jesus' life, that the Christ had to suffer and so enter into his glory. This was no mere intellectual understanding: their hearts were burning within them. But still their eyes were not fully opened; that came in the act of sharing, the breaking of the bread. (5.7 - 5.15)

The result of this encounter, at once a personal encounter and an encounter between text and context, was new life. A recognition of course that Jesus is alive. And „they themselves are risen and are reborn. The cross, a sign of death, becomes a sign of life and hope.“ And so, instead of fear, courage; instead of fleeing, return to Jerusalem; instead of dispersion,

community; instead of fatalism, a critical conscience; instead of unbelief and despair, faith and hope. (5.16)

Let us note the elements here:

- encounter between text and context
- occurring in partnership and through patient listening
- giving new meaning to both text and context
- touching the heart
- perfected through sharing and community
- leading to new life.

How did Bogotá see the context? It spoke in fact of eight contexts (6.1-6.8):

(1) cultural pluralism — the Church's identity based in Christ must be constantly rediscovered in her relationship with the peoples and cultures

(2) the socio-political and economic situation — widening gap between north and south, rich and poor; patriarchal and sexist systems; violation of human rights; racial discrimination

(3) ecological imbalances — the use of creation guided by human greed rather than human need

(4) multi-religious situations — despite the problems caused by aggressive fundamentalisms, „our openness to these religions should enable us to discover our own common basis as believers in the same God, journeying towards the same destiny.“

(5) people emerging from totalitarian systems — in both Eastern Europe and Latin America

(6) new awakening of marginalized groups — groups marginalized for ethnic, linguistic, economic, social, sexist or political reasons

(7) ecumenism — towards building up communities that are based on Christian love and communion

(8) Christian communities — the Bible must become more and more the book of the Christian community; the laity in a special way must have a greater access to it.

While placing such emphasis on context, Bogotá left for further exploration the relationship between the original context of the biblical text and the new context in which we must read it.

At the same time, Bogotá spoke of a new way of reading the Bible which should give a new thrust to our biblical apostolate (7.5):

(1) from the book to the Word — the Word is bigger than the book; the Word is found in both text and context, and in the meeting between the two; we hope to make the Word alive in the hearts of all our brothers and sisters

(2) from institutional structure to creative presence

(3) from clergy to laity — all are partners in discovering and communicating the Word, as we walk together and listen to each other

(4) from private reading to transforming presence — our contexts so often summon us to work for liberation and transformation, to make all things new, to bring life where there is death

(5) from Church to Reign of God — again a recognition that God's Word transcends human boundaries, that we are called to work in partnership for the fulfilment of God's loving design for the world.

This call for a „new way of reading“ has borne fruit in many parts of the Federation grappling with the question, „What is a faithful reading of the Bible?“. This is again to raise the question of the relationship between contexts — how can we be faithful both to the text which was formed in its own context and to the challenges of our own context(s)?

### The Context Today

Virtually all that Bogotá said of the context remains true today, nearly five years later. But another frightening phenomenon has also emerged — that of fragmentation, sometimes bloody fragmentation. In 1990 we had great hopes for unification, as the Cold War era came to an end. But with the collapse of oppressive and colonizing regimes, the hoped-for new world order became a fragmented disorder. Old enmities resurfaced. In several continents, divisions based on a complex mix of race, religion and culture became the source of violent conflict. The phrase „ethnic cleansing“ made a frightening entry into our vocabulary. Sometimes this strife stemmed from legitimate desire for identity and community. Too often it was the result of exploitation of divisions by power-hungry groups and individuals. In other places differences hardened into division, as attitudes of hospitality to the stranger seemed in danger of being swamped by a wave of xenophobia. We dream of a world in which differences are welcomed and boundaries are rejected, but so often the reality is one of rejected differences and newly erected boundaries.

In the resulting conflicts many lives have been lost. But even where there is not such overt violence, poverty shortens life and deprives it of its dignity; the environment is plundered; cultures are destroyed by economic and cultural colonialism; the killing of the unborn in vast numbers is all too readily accepted.

This shadow side of our world is all too real. But there is also light, very real signs of hope. Often they are concerned

with partnership and community. We may consider a few examples:

(1) In the midst of deadly conflict individuals take heroic stands for life. A young boy who has lost father, brother and sister refuses to hate, because he believes that hatred is death, that love is life. A woman whose twenty-year-old son has been killed offers two Masses, one for her son, one for his killer.

(2) We have witnessed remarkable political change in South Africa, bringing with it firm hope of reconciliation. Significant, if as yet tentative, steps have been taken towards resolving long-standing conflicts in the north of Ireland and in Sri Lanka.

(3) Within even some of the violent conflicts that have just been mentioned there lies a positive and life-giving desire, the desire for identity, for genuine community instead of the unity artificially imposed by colonialism or authoritarian and oppressive regimes.

Closely connected with this is another sign of hope — the rediscovery of their culture especially by minority or colonialized groups. Again, surely, there is here a desire to be treated as partners with a distinctive heritage, a distinctive contribution to make to the human community.

(4) The cry for human rights is increasingly heard. While the human rights movement has sometimes been criticized as a product of western individualism, it is now being increasingly seen as stemming from community. The attempt of states to gain complete control over communities is resisted by communities asserting the rights of their members. Such communities look to an open society where people participate in and are deeply involved with the nation's interest and goals. Some would base human rights on the model of the covenant — human beings as coresponsible with God for the whole of creation: it follows that human beings are bound together by an implicit contract to care for each other.

(5) The desire for democracy is an expression of desire for participation, for ordinary people's being involved in the decisions that shape their lives. The United Nations Human Development Report (1993) emphasizes participation as the crucial element in development.

(6) Ecological movements can be seen as affirming a partnership, a symbiosis, between human beings and the rest of creation.

(7) The women's movement seeks genuine mutuality of relationships between women and men, instead of the entrenched subordination of patriarchy. In other words, a real partnership between women and men.

Thus we see in both the shadows and in the light the hope and desire for genuine community, for dialogue and partnership, each of which is necessary for truly human life, for overcoming the death-dealing forces in the world.

### The Word of God as a Word of Life

How then does the Biblical tradition speak of newness of life?

The metaphor of life is perhaps most prominent in the Johannine writings, as indicated in the double quotation that we have chosen to accompany our theme for Hong Kong. We need but recall a few familiar texts. What came into being in the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people (Jn 1:4). Jesus gives living water (Jn 4:10), which becomes a spring of water gushing up to eternal life (Jn 4:14). The Son gives life to whomever he wishes (Jn 5:21). Jesus is the bread of life (Jn 6:35). In the climactic sign, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Jesus is depicted as the great life-giver (Jn 11:1-46). The first letter of John sets out its theme thus: „We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...“ (1 Jn 1-2).

In the fourth gospel this „eternal life“ is something already present. The Son *GIVES* life (5:21); whoever believes *HAS* eternal life (6:47); Jesus *IS* the resurrection and the life (11:25). Yet this eternal life also looks towards an unlimited future: „This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.“ (6:40)

This life is primarily a divine reality, a share in the life of God, the living One who is the source of all life (5:26, 1 Jn 1:2). It creates a communion with the Father and the Son (1 Jn 1:3, 2:23-24). We talk about „having“ life, but the reality is one of personal relation and participation. Life in the Johannine tradition is not primarily about transformation of the world. But this life with God can only prove itself in our relations with other human beings. We cannot love God, whom we have not seen, without loving our brothers and sisters whom we do see (1 Jn 4:20-21). Life is both gift and task.

Of course, there is the further, and literally scandalous, element. If we try to hold on to life, we lose it. Only by losing life can we find it. The grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die if it is to produce a harvest (Jn 12:24-25). This saying looks forward to the Cross, and had already been expressed in the Lazarus story. Jesus gives life at the cost of his own life. Throughout the story there are references to the danger which Jesus puts himself into by going to Lazarus' tomb; the concluding verse (11:53) has the authorities deciding to put Jesus to death. But he goes impelled by his love for Lazarus and his sisters. „Nothing could underline so clearly the cost to Jesus that communicating life incurs. Nothing could bring out so forcefully the love that impels the gift.“ (Brendan Byrne *Lazarus: A Contemporary Reading of John 11:1-46* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991).

In the Synoptic gospels, the metaphor of the Reign of God functions in a way parallel to that of „life“ in the fourth gospel. The central features of the Reign

of God are familiar but well worth pondering again. „the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.“ (Lk. 7:22) No one is excluded; everyone is invited. Indeed, those excluded by society are especially invited and enabled to be included. The Reign is „described“ in parables which point to God's being able to be found in everyday reality — we live in a sacramental universe. The great symbol (in the fullest sense) of the Reign of God is the shared meal, table fellowship. Jesus takes up and expands the traditional symbol of the banquet, through the various meals that are recorded as part of his ministry, leading up to the Last Supper.

Paul's understanding of life can be grasped only in contrast to death. Death, for Paul, means slavery to sin. Death is a kind of king whose power is derived from *hamartia* (Romans 5:12-14, 17). Life, then, means the liberation of the total person from this power. . . . so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.“ (5:21) Hence, we „walk in newness of life.“ (6:4)

If in Romans Paul speaks of walking in newness of life, in Galatians he speaks of walking in the Spirit, the Spirit whose fruits are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (5:16-23). Life in the Spirit means bearing one another's burdens. (6:2) This chapter, and indeed the whole letter, ends with the assertion that what matters is a „new creation“ (6:14), not circumcision or uncircumcision. This harks back to the proclamation of 3:28 that there can be neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male or female — all are one in Christ Jesus. Paul speaks of new creation in Second Corinthians, there also linking it with reconciliation: „So for anyone who is in Christ there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see. It is all God's work: he reconciled us to himself through Christ

and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation.“ (2 Cor 5:17-18)

In the Lucan writings, death is seen not so much in cosmic terms as a power which has humankind in its grip as in terms of the concrete foes of life, especially greed. „For one's life does not consist in abundance of possessions.“ (12:15) Hence, we have Acts' ideal picture of a living community: all things held in common (with goods given according to need), spending much time together in the temple, joining in the breaking of bread (Acts 2:44-46).

We must also go to the Hebrew Scriptures to learn of the fullness of life. The Wisdom tradition speaks of God as „the lover of life“ (Wis 11:26), the creator who loves everything that exists (v.24). Hence, this tradition is constantly able to see God present in everyday life.

Fullness of life is encapsulated too in the term *shalom*, which as we know is a more all-embracing word than the English word „peace“. Leviticus 26:3-13 gives a good indication of the range of meaning — rain in season, good harvests, security, no one to make people afraid, peace, no dangerous animals, protection from enemies, God maintaining the covenant, „and I will walk among you, and be your God, and you shall be my people.“ Or again, we may go to one of the texts which was prayed over in Bogotá, Isaiah 65:17-25, with its picture of the new heavens and the new earth. Here we see long life, the fruitfulness of the earth, blessing, a God who listens and pays heed, peace among „enemies“ within the animal world. This last, the wolf and the lamb lying down together, echoes Isaiah 11:6-9, a vision of the earth full of the knowledge of the Lord. It is, of course, a vision of unity in diversity. And in the images used, the prophetic writer suggests that this unity must go beyond merely human reality to embrace the whole of creation.

Peace and justice so often are put together. The effect of justice is peace (Is 32:17). In the days of the promised king, justice shall flourish, and peace till the moon

fails (Ps 72:7). Justice and peace have embraced (Ps 85:10)

The Law is an articulation of the meaning and especially the social implications of this „life“. Keeping the law is not a way of earning God's favour. Rather, it is a way of life lived in response to the fact that God has already shown favour, has brought this people out of the slavery of Egypt, has indeed made them a people with their own land, their own identity. Anthony Campbell has expressed it very well:

In the Pentateuch, it can be argued that law has as its aim the preservation and furthering of life. The action of God in calling Abraham and in leading Israel out of the bondage of Egypt has given Israel the gift of life in freedom and independence. The further gift of the law is portrayed as guidance for the full living of that life.

We can see this in the content of the laws. Of the ten commandments, for example, no other gods, no images, not taking the name of God in vain, and observing the sabbath are all ways of keeping alive, in the reality of day-to-day living, the life-giving relationship with God. Honor your father and your mother protects the relationship between generations; it is pointed specifically toward life — „that your days may be long in the land“ (Exod 20:12). You shall not kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet are all protective of social living in community, protecting life, family, property, and the fabric of society. (Anthony F. Campbell *The Study Companion to Old Testament Literature: An Approach to the Writings of Pre-Exilic and Exilic Israel* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1989)

This understanding is found in the famous passage near the end of Deuteronomy (Deut. 30:19-20):

Therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving

to him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

### The Response of the Church

Enlivened and Inspired by God' Word the Church in different parts of the world has spoken of life and has tried to respond to the threats of death and the signs of hope that surround us.

The meeting held under the aegis of the *European Bishops' Conferences* at Freising in 1994 showed itself painfully aware of division and violent conflict:

In a world growing ever more fragmented the unifying power of God's word is needed, a power that can reach across religious, social and other boundaries to build the unity of God's people. (1.2)

The bishops of *Asia* have for two decades been grappling with these issues. In their programmatic statement in Taipei in 1974 they spoke of the threefold dialogue — with cultures, with religions, with the poor. (Taipei 9-24) Here we have an immediate recognition of context. Obvious in the Asian context is the great wealth of cultures, the presence of the world's great religions, and yet massive poverty in many places (and this remains true despite the remarkable economic growth of recent years—especially since the economic benefits have been so unevenly distributed). Implicit in this is the recognition that the Word can be illuminated, can have new facets revealed, by encounter with this context. We can learn from the cultures, the religions, the poor. Otherwise, why speak of dialogue?

Perhaps a better word than dialogue is „partnership“, since dialogue can too easily suggest merely an exchange of spoken or written words. Whereas the bishops deliberately spoke of a „dialogue of life“. In the context of poverty this dialogue means:

... a genuine experience and understanding of this poverty, deprivation and

oppression of so many of our peoples. It demands working, not for them merely (in a paternalistic sense), but *with* them, to learn from them (for we have much to learn from them!) their real needs and aspirations, as they are enabled to identify and articulate these, and to strive for their fulfilment, by transforming those structures and situations which keep them in that deprivation and powerlessness. (Taipei 20)

Once again, we see the pattern of the Emmaus story—walking with, listening, despair turning to hope, new life. And of course part of what we bring to this dialogue is the Word of God, embodied in part in the biblical text, embodied in part, we hope, in our lives.

Very much in continuity with Taipei, the bishops assembled in Bandung in 1990 described mission in these words:

... mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a being with the people, as was Jesus: „The Word became flesh and dwelt among us“ (Jn 1:14). Therefore, mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. (Bandung 3.1.2)

Notice the inclusive formula—presence, solidarity, sharing and word.

The insights of Bandung were further developed by the Bishops' Institute on Interreligious Affairs, meeting in Thailand in 1991. They spoke of God's „dream for the world“:

[Jesus] spoke of the dream through the image of God's Reign and described it in parables often of life and growth or of reconciliation. We may describe the dream as one of people and communities fully alive. That fullness of life is ultimately communion of life among individuals, among communities and with God. (BIRA IV/12, 9)

At the most recent general conference of CELAM (Santo Domingo, 1992) the Latin American bishops recommitted themselves to working for „integral development“, with the poor as their main concern (31). They saw the urgent necessity to promote and protect life from the many attacks to which it is subject (31). They called for inculturation, especially in the context of urban culture, and for „particular attention to the authentic incarnation of the Gospel in the indigenous and African-American cultures of our continent“ (32). The Emmaus story provided the bishops also with inspiration: Jesus draws near those on the road, walking with the victims and the marginalized; he opens up vistas of hope that go beyond mere temporal messianism; the ultimate gesture in which he is recognized as the risen and living One is the sign of the breaking of bread (17-23). Hence, the importance of solidarity (as opposed to control) — „people helping others to bear their burden and sharing with them their own aspirations“ (46).

The themes of life, dialogue, partnership and especially inculturation are prominent in the Message of the *African Synod* of 1994. The Synod speaks of evangelization as bringing about new life in Christ (9). Evangelization means first proclaiming the Good News of salvation realized in Christ and offering it to all (10). But evangelization is not limited to proclamation. Evangelization is a dialogue of love of which inculturation of the message is a necessary second moment (13). Dialogue is about relationships. The intrinsic value of a community is the quality of relation which it makes possible. The Trinity itself is proposed as a „model“ for such relationships (20)

Hence, the Synod points to the need for dialogue with African traditional religions (21), with Christian brothers and sisters (22) and with Muslims (23). Dialogue with Muslims is described in terms reminiscent of the „dialogue of life“ — collaborating „in working for the peace and justice which alone can give glory to God“; „as servants of his Life in human hearts and in human communities, we

are bound to give to one another the best there is in our faith in God, our common Father“.

At the conclusion of its Message the Synod calls for renewed partnership between women and men. It sees the alienation of women as one of the major forms of the structure of sin (65). To women should be open not only the vocation of wife and mother „but all the social careers from which traditional and modern society tend to exclude [them] without reason“ (66). Thus, women will be able to be participants in the bringing about of full human development (69), or, as we might rephrase it, the bringing about of fully human life.

The concern for life has also been prominent in recent teachings of *Pope John Paul II*. In 1993 the Pope participated in what he called „a celebration of life“, the World Youth Day held in Denver, Colorado. In his address to the participants he pointed to two apparently contrary signs of the times — widespread disrespect for human life, on the one hand, and the vitality, the liveliness, of youth and communities, on the other. On the one hand, „the sacred character of human life is denied... the weakest members of society are most at risk: the unborn, children, the sick, the handicapped, the old, the poor and unemployed, the immigrant and refugee, the South of the world.“ On the other, „young people from every corner of the world, in ardent prayer you have opened your hearts to the truth of Christ's promise of new life. Through the sacraments, especially penance and the Eucharist, and by means of the unity and friendship created among so many, you have had a real and transforming experience of the new life which only Christ can give.“

Thus the Pope points to common prayer and to friendship in community as places where life is to be found. But this is true only if such prayer and friendship is outward-looking: „...you understand that Christ's life is not for you alone.“ The „Gospel of life“ must „penetrate the fabric of society, transforming people's hearts and the structures of society in order to

create a civilization of true justice and love.“ In living and preaching this Gospel of life, the Pope continues, Jesus „went in search of the men and women of his time. He engaged them in open and truthful dialogue, whatever their condition.“

In his address on the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, the Pope spoke of dialogue in terms of inculturation. He linked inculturation to incarnation and to unity in diversity. The mystery of the incarnation is the mystery of the divine and human in a determinate historical life. „The earthly life of Jesus is not defined only by the places and dates of the first century in Judea and Galilee, but also by his deep roots in the long history of a small nation of the ancient Near East, with its weaknesses and its greatness, with its men and women of God and its sinners, with its slow cultural evolution and its political misadventures, with its defeats and its victories, with its longing for peace and the kingdom of God“ (7) Rejection of incarnation means clinging to a false notion of the Absolute. „The God of the Bible is not an absolute Being who, crushing everything he touches, would suppress all differences and all nuances. On the contrary, he is God the Creator, who created the astonishing variety of beings 'each according to its kind' as the Genesis account says repeatedly (Gn 1). Far from destroying differences, God respects them and makes use of them (cf 1 Cor 12:18, 24, 28). (8) We may note, then, some common themes emerging from these teachings coming from many different parts of the Church, in particular:

(1) the Word comes to life always in a context, or to use other words, the Word must become flesh in order to dwell among us. This enfleshment (incarnation) comes about through dialogue of life (sharing in life) with cultures, religions, with the poor

(2) this Word that comes to life is a life-giving Word — a Word of hope, a Word that is a transforming presence in the death-dealing situations of this world, a Word that gathers living communities

(3) implied in both the above points is the importance of partnership (through dialogue, through the formation of communities). Partnership involves unity in diversity. Hence, it can be a powerful witness and force for overcoming the divisions (sometimes murderous divisions) which plague our world.

### The Response of the Catholic Biblical Federation

Precisely these three points constitute our theme for the Hong Kong Assembly of 1996 — The Word of God at the Service of Life: Toward Unity in Diversity — and its accompanying texts — „The Word became flesh ... that they might have life and have it to the full“ (Jn 1:14, 10:10).

This theme seems particularly relevant in the setting of Hong Kong, where the church has expressed its mission in terms of being a *BRIDGE*. The most obvious sense of this image is that of being a bridge between the universal church and the local church, so long oppressed, in China. But surely also a bridge between the Gospel and the ancient culture of China, and indeed (given Hong Kong's economic centrality, technological advances, and youthful population) a bridge between the Gospel and contemporary culture. Bridge-building is about dialogue, ultimately about the forging of community.

We are likewise encouraged to reflect and act upon this theme by the Document of the Pontifical Commission on the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church. The document characterizes the objective of the biblical apostolate as „to make known the Bible as the Word of God and source of life“. (IV C 3) It acknowledges the important role of basic communities, focussed upon the Bible, with the threefold aim of knowing the Bible, creating community and serving the people. While the role of exegetes is a necessary one, there is reason to rejoice in seeing the Bible in the hands of people of lowly condition and of the poor; they can bring to its interpretation and to its

actualization a light more penetrating, from the spiritual and existential point of view, than that which comes from a learning that relies upon its own resources alone (cf. Matt 11:25) (IV C 3).

Inculturation, and hence unity in diversity, is encouraged. The biblical message has to take root in a great variety of terrain. This involves first *translation*, which is always more than transcription but something involving a change of context: concepts are not identical and symbols have a different meaning. Then comes *interpretation*, „which should set the biblical message in more explicit relationship with the ways of feeling, thinking, living and self-expression which are proper to the local culture.“ From there comes the formation of a local Christian culture. Inculturation is never a one-way process, but rather a process of mutual enrichment: the treasures of diverse cultures allow the Word of God to produce new fruits, while the light of the Word illuminates both the harmful and the life-giving elements present in each culture. (IV B)

This incarnational vision has immediate implications for the building of community. Our Federation is especially conscious of the power of God's Word to be the centre around which community is gathered, to be the source of a community's nourishment. It is also in community that we come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of that Word, as we share our experience of God and of those key moments of our lives in which we become conscious of God's presence. Such a community is enriched by a diversity of gifts. It is a place where differences are respected and boundaries disappear.

In a place like Hong Kong, the venue for our Assembly, where Christian believers are a small minority in society, people can hardly fail to be conscious of the fact that community to be inclusive and outward-looking (to be bridge-building) will have to move beyond the basic Christian community to basic human community. That is true of many other places beside Hong Kong. We continue

to struggle with the question of how a community can be at once Word-centered and at the same time inclusive of those of other faiths who hold sacred other Scriptures. This question must surely surface in the Plenary Assembly and in the preparations for it. We are encouraged to face that question honestly by Jesus' preaching of a Reign of God that is greater than any human community and indeed by Bogotá's challenge to move from the book to the Word, and from private reading to transforming presence.

Finally, we come to some questions for reflection, which may serve as part of our preparation for Hong Kong:

**(1)** In your context, what does „fullness of life“ mean? What in our culture constitutes the „good life“ (in the deepest sense of that term, not in the superficial way in which it is sometimes used)? Do we have some cultural symbols or images that „capture“ the meaning of the „good life“? How do other religious traditions in our country understand „fullness of life“? What are the threats to life in our context? What is most needed in your context for building „a world at once more human and more divine“?

**(2)** In what ways does the biblical tradition enrich, qualify or correct this concept of „fullness of life“?

**(3)** How has God's Word been a source of life for you and for your community? In what ways have you found biblical/pastoral ministry to be life-giving? For yourself? For others? Please try to remember specific and concrete experiences.

**(4)** Have you had an experience parallel to that of the Emmaus disciples in which text and context have illuminated and enriched one another, in which the Word has taken new flesh through dialogue/partnership with aspects of your culture, with members of other faiths, with people suffering from poverty, oppression, marginalization? Have different gifts, different traditions, different experiences led to the building of community?

(Cont. from pg. 6) this text? When we read the Bible we are seeking precisely this: a faith experience that helps us to understand and broaden the horizon of our experience of the faith in a new situation. We have simple means for orientating the text:

- We inform ourselves about the customs of that epoch; use maps; orientate the text historically with the help of introductions, commentaries, etc.
- We note that in the Bible we find ways of speaking and writing that are distinct from our own (parables, miracle stories, pronouncement stories ...).

We need to remember that the Bible is an embodied word and that in it we must distinguish between the perennial message and what was proper to its own culture (massacres, violence, discrimination against women...). The best criteria for knowing this is to read all the texts from the message and the life of Jesus, who is the centre and the key for reading the whole Bible.

### **3. Read in order to understand Life**

After this first reading of the text it is necessary to expose our life to the interpellation of the message we have discovered. We do not read the Bible to know more about it or for curiosity. We are convinced that in the Bible God has left us fundamental clues for orientating ourselves in life: we have the word and the life of Jesus, the history of the chosen people with its sages and prophets ... but all this has to be interpreted today in concrete life. Therefore, the second reflection we must cultivate is never to read the text without asking ourselves how it applies to us. This supposes:

- that we be well aware of what happens around us; that we are attentive to life, to the things that happen to us and to the people around us, to the signs of every epoch.
- that we let the message we have discovered in the text speak freely and be like the rain that always fertilizes the earth.
- that we are disposed to allow ourselves to be addressed by the message we have discovered.

### **4. Prayerful Reading**

The Bible should be read in the spirit in which it was written. Through it God

speaks to us, and in order to listen to him we have to be attuned. This means that our reading should be done in a climate of prayer. And that implies:

- opening our hearts sincerely in order to grasp what God is saying to us through his word deposited in Sacred Scripture.
- responding to God through supplication, thanksgiving, reflection ... thus completing the dialogue which he began. For we listen to God when we read his Word and speak to him when we direct our prayer to him.

### **5. Community Reading**

It is very important that personal reading be completed by community reading. The Council has helped us to discover the value of community and this has an important application for the Bible, the interpretation of which is not a private and personal matter, but a community one. The Christian community is the addressee of this Word and, therefore, it is in community reading that we discover better God's message for us today. In community reading various charisms and sensibilities are set in motion in order to discover with greater plenitude the message of the Word of God, for the various contributions made from diverse experiences of life explain the richness of Scripture with more clarity than does individual reading. Liturgical reading is the best expression of this community reading.

### **6. Committed Reading**

Reading the Bible cannot be simply an intellectual or aesthetic exercise; it has life as its goal. When we approach the Bible to read it we bring the additional burdens of our life and the life of those around us. By discovering the message and allowing it to address us by itself, we discover that the Word of God offers us many times a choice of life, a path of conversion. To refuse to follow this path or to stray from the commitments it imposes brings about a breaking off of the dialogue with God. Normally, when our reading the Bible does not bring about a commitment, then each time it happens it is made more difficult for us to understand what we read and why we read the Bible.

Santiago Guijarro

## **The Bible - More than a Book**

### **Dealing with Holy Scripture**

The Bible's uniqueness is expressed in its very title, for - oddly enough - it has none. It was not written for any publishing-house and provided with a comprehensive or for that matter sensational title. Consequently it was simply called „The Book“ - which is precisely what the word „bible“ means, The Bible is a book. The Bible is *The Book*.

What does it mean to say that the Bible is a book, to say indeed that it is more than *The Book*? It means that, like the Burning Bush, the Bible is intended to be the place where God reveals himself, the signpost pointing to our encounter with His Love-Made-Flesh, Jesus Christ.

The Russian Orthodox Archbishop, Anthony Bloom, tells how the Bible became for him - a former atheist and Communist - the place where he encountered Christ:

„As I was reading Mark's Gospel (I hadn't yet reached Chapter Three) I suddenly got the impression that there was somebody on the other side of my desk. I was so certain that it was Christ who was standing there that I have never since been able to forget it. That experience became the turning-point of my life.“

This testimony sounds - and indeed is - dramatic, but fundamentally it describes the experience intended for everyone who reads the Bible. The gospel is a love-story. It invites the reader to look at it prayerfully until the One about whom „all this has been written“ reveals His closeness to him.

If, the, *that* book is more than a book; if it is a means of encounter, then it is only reasonable to ask myself: What do I need to pay attention to if I want to encounter someone genuinely and positively, so that he can appear and reveal himself to me and can encounter me as the Other?

Experience shows that we make a good job of meeting the Other as he would have us meet him. Doctors, therapists and sensitive human beings have to be

aware of how to encounter the other person in a genuine and helpful way.

This experience led to the question: What does scripture itself say about how it would like to be encountered? Surely there can be no better instructions about how to deal with the Bible than those given by the Bible itself? And there are lots of these. Probably the best known of them is found in the phrase: „The written letters bring death, but the Spirit gives life.“ (2Cor.3:6) Here I am told that I can draw life or death from scripture, depending on how I encounter it.

What follows is a list of scriptural passages in which the Bible describes how it would like us to encounter it.

It is possible, I think to deal with these passages in different ways:

- I can allow the words to have an effect on me. I can perhaps read and consider the whole of the context in which they are found.

- I can deal with the question of consciousness which I have raised from time to time.

- I can question myself about my personal experiences in dealing with the Bible and how this has changed in the course of my life. I can compare notes with others.

- In a playful and imaginative way I can see the Bible as though it were a person and describe its character, and so on.

1.,„And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us“ (John 1:14).

All the words of scripture point to God's Word of love - JESUS.

2. „These signs are recorded that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ“ (John 20:31).

Does my interpretation strengthen faith, hope and love?

3. „The Word of life..we are declaring to you..so that you too may share our life“ (1John 1:1,3).

Does my interpretation promote growth in the Christian community?

4. „It is plain that you are a letter from Christ ... and written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God“ (2 Cor. 3:3).

Do I see the gospel alive in my own and in other's hearts?

5. „You know how to read the face of the sky, but you cannot read the signs of the times“ (Matt.16:3).

Do I try to live out the gospel in daily life?

6. „... the written letters bring death but the Spirit gives life“ (2 Cor.3:6).

Is my understanding dull and spiritless and do I cling to the letter of the law?

7. „Scripture says ... said Jesus ... the Devil said ...“ (Luke 4:1ff)

Do I quote scripture in diabolical fashion or after the manner of the Logos?

8. „The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword..“ (Hebrews 4:12).

Do I allow myself to be judged and supported by the Word of God?

9. „You must do what the word tells you and not just listen to it“ (James 1:22f).

Does the Word shape my life and behaviour?

10. „He shaped for them a mouth and tongue, eyes and ears, and gave them a heart to think with“ (Ecclius 17:6).

Do I use my hear when I meditate or do I simply analyse things?

11. „Every day they studied the scriptures to check whether it was true“ (Acts 17:11).

Is the Word the house where I dwell and do I take time to study it?

12. „You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory? ...“ (Luke 24:25ff).

Communion with the Word is also communion with those who are suffering.

13. „As scripture says: Who can know the mind of the Lord, and so who can teach him? But we are those who have the mind of Christ“ (1 Cor.2:16).

The Self has to be inspired by the Spirit, otherwise there is incomprehension.

14. „Do you understand what you are reading?; How can I unless I have someone to guide me?“ (Acts 8:31).

Others are there to help me to understand.

15. „Let the reader understand“ (Mark 13:14).

Discrimination, effort, good will and care are necessary.

16. „... Tell them in the name of God that there is to be no wrangling about words..“ (2 Tim.2:14).

Disputes about the Word of God are not inspired by the Holy Spirit.

17. „[Paul] makes some points in his letter hard to understand“ (2 Pet.2:16).

We too ought to exert ourselves in order to understand.

18. „And indeed everything that was written long ago in the scriptures was meant to teach us something about hope ...“ (Rom.15:4).

It is by the „fruits of the Spirit“ - patience, encouragement and hope - that we discover the proper way of dealing with scripture.

Willi Lambert SJ

## LIFE OF THE FEDERATION

### Experiences

#### Teaching Sacred Scripture in China

*Interview with Maria Ko by Francisco Mosseto for Parole di Vita (2/1994). Professor Maria Ko will be one of the chaperons at the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the CBF in Hong Kong.*

Maria Ko Ha Fong, Daughter of Mary Auxiliatrix, Hong Kong, studied the Science of Education in Turin and Theology in Münster, where she obtained a doctorate with a thesis in the field of

New Testament exegesis. She is professor of Sacred Scripture in the Pontifical Faculty of the Science of Education, *Auxilium*, Rome, and in the Holy Spirit Seminary College of Hong Kong. From

February to June, 1993, she was sent to give courses in Sacred Scripture in the Seminary of Shanghai, China.

*Sister Maria, the fact that a catholic religious is teaching in a seminary of the Patriotic Chinese Church represents a new development. How has it been possible?*

It is not entirely new. In fact, with the politics of religious liberalization promoted since the 80s, the attitude of the Chinese government with respect to the Catholic Church is more open and more tolerant. In the last decade some 20 seminaries have been reopened with the approval and protection of the State. The one in Shanghai is the biggest both as regards structure and the number of seminarists. At the moment there are some 140 young men in formation for priesthood, coming from 8 regions in China. It is also the first seminary to get permission to invite foreign professors of theology for short periods of teaching. Although, until now, the number of those invited has been very limited and the criteria for choosing personnel are rigid, the willingness for openness and dialogue on the part of China is unquestionable.

The Church in Hong Kong sees in this a sign of hope and a promising way for the future of the Church in the great mother country. On the eve of the step to be taken in 1997, the Christians of Hong Kong want to live this change as a *kairós* (favourable time) of salvation, assuming with responsibility the role of *bridge* between the universal Church and the Church of China.

The increase in the formation of clergy and of Christians in China is deeply felt by the whole Church in Hong Kong as an urgent priority. The effort which has been and is being made in this direction is, in truth, worthy of praise. Even the Church in Taiwan is involved and actively collaborating. Resources and initiative at various levels are converging on this project. My service in the Seminary of Shanghai placed in this context. We are all embarking on this historical hour: Chinese Christians throughout the world; it is a call to unity and solidarity in the spirit of the Gospel.

*What is your impression in relation to the life of Christians in the People's Republic of China?*

Whoever has contact with the Church in China cannot but feel astonishment, emotion and deep admiration for the interior strength and tenacious vitality of that Church, which has never had an easy life and even now is faced with enormous difficulties. There are some 5 million Catholics, a minority of little relevance in the midst of a population of one thousand two hundred million. Like all religious organizations the Christian community is also subject to State control in all details of its expression.

One understands, in this abnormal situation, for the most part separated from the path of the universal Church, how the faith of Chinese Christians, however authentic and strong, has remained elementary and underdeveloped from the point of view of content. The renewal of Vatican II is almost completely unknown to the mass of the faithful. The liturgy is still celebrated in Latin. To possess a Bible is a privilege of very few. The way is wide and arduous, but the signs of hope are plentiful. The Lord is working marvels also in this bastion of humanity. He, who can raise up children of Abraham even from stones, will not lack imagination to invent new means of bringing to birth and creating his children in this hard-crusted land, but rich in hidden resources.

*... and with respect to the Seminary where you taught?*

The problems are many and serious: shortage of professors and formators; a sound structure is lacking as are organic frames of reference in the way of formation; there is no *ratio studiorum*; there is a lack of books and aids to study.. In short, there is an enormous disproportion between the formation of the seminaries and the real requirements of future ministers of Christ in the complex society of China today.

But the situation is improving rapidly. Seminarians, for the most part, come from old Catholic families. In addition, they have a simple family education which is sound, rich in values and human warmth. They are intelligent young men, open, committed, with great ideals and a sincere desire to prepare themselves well for their future mission.

*Do your students have a definite preparation in the biblical field? What*

*is your interest and your attitude in relation to the Bible?*

I believe very few have had any direct contact with the Bible before entering the Seminary. Only since 1968 have we had a complete translation of the Bible in Chinese, a translation made in Hong Kong by a group of Franciscan biblicists. In China, until a few years ago, the Bible could be disseminated among Christians only clandestinely. However, last year, the government gave the nihil obstat to the edition of the Bible in China. With the help of the Bible Society and the support of the Church in Hong Kong a first edition of a million and a half copies has been printed in Beijing.

In general, everyone has a certain familiarity with the better known episodes of the history of Israel and the events of the life of Jesus, but it is a fragmentary and superficial knowledge. The situation is comparable to Europe in 1800. The presence of the Bible among Christians is mediated by narrative transmission, above all in informal catechesis. In the use of the Sacred Text doctrinal and exhortative prospects prevail. The gradual evolution and qualitative leap that has taken place in the Western Church in this century in the approach to the Bible, is taking place in these years, in China, in an intense and accelerated way.

It is a singular and marvellous experience to accompany these young men on their journey of discovering the Bible, from a knowledge of listening to accounts to a direct and impressive reading. No great effort is necessary to enter into the perspective of historico-critical study, but above all, they grasp, with particular sensibility the unitary plan of revelation.

*The texts of the Old and New Testaments, are they not very remote from Chinese culture?*

I would say that it is just the opposite. The Jewish biblical culture is closer to Chinese culture than is the western Hellenistic culture. We want to be able to demonstrate this in the future with studies in depth. The Chinese people are used to remembering their long history of 5000 years, of feeling themselves inheritors of a valuable sapiential tradition, of letting themselves be guided by the life and experience of their ancestors, of meeting

in the classical texts the criteria and frame of reference for their own moral conduct.

Therefore, it is easy to read the history of salvation and to have a feeling of mystery, but be really involved; to see in the biblical personages of those ancestors in the faith the life that is continued in that of their children. Thus it is easy to create a fusion of horizons between subject and object in the reading. Reading a text one does not seek, in the last analysis, understanding of the content, but to allow oneself to come to grips with it, to let it have an impact, to let it be read. I believe that these cultural predispositions lead us closer to what Vatican II in *Dei Verbum* exhorted all believers: it is necessary *in Scripturis manere*, that is to say, *get inside, live in* the Scriptures. Among the various literary genres of the Scriptures, we Chinese feel a particular attraction and harmony with the narrative and sapiential genres, the parables, metaphors, symbols, etc. But these are reflections that I have at an intuitive level. Everything should be verified by and founded upon studies that, in truth, are worth the effort.

*You, certainly, have frequented churches and have met with Christians also outside the Seminary in Shanghai. What problems does Christianity present in China, from the point of view of the Bible. Is it disseminated? Is it read? Are their books and meetings that allow it to be better known?*

The Bible is very much sought after, above all by the young generation. At local church level there are coming into being, in many parts, interesting initiatives for making the Bible known. In different parishes groups form spontaneously for *lectio divina* and for simple participation in and reflection on the Bible. I would wish „that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere“ (2 Thess. 3:1), also in China.

#### **Will you return to Shanghai?**

For my part I wish that with all my heart. Already, at the end of last year, besides Shanghai, four other seminaries obtained permission to invite professors from abroad. There is room and work for many labourers. And besides, it is marvellous to feel oneself a little *accomplice* of God who works such wonders.

## **Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Prison in Peru**

*An experience offered by Mercedes Ramos M.N.D.A. of the Department of Catechesis of the Archdiocese of Lima (Peru).*

The work which we carry out in prisons is done by pastoral agents who work in these centres. These courses are given at the „Miguel Castro Castro“ Prison. To date we have 187 internees who have followed and are still following the course. The majority are accused of crimes of terrorism, many of them unjustly.

I would like to highlight the case of one of these internees, *CARLOS TURRIN VILLANUEVA* (36), arrested for subversion. He got five years. He came to know the light of Christ thanks to the work of the pastoral agents.

His heart was touched by God and he decided to follow the course, „Biblical Initiation“, which consists of a number of pamphlets with very elementary ideas on the Bible. All the time he relied on the support and encouragement of Sister Madeleine Wartelle, who is the link between the prisons and the Department.

After completing the first course he showed interest in going deeper into the Word of God and continued with the course from *SOCABI* (Société Catholique Biblique, Montreal, Canada). He began to become a pastoral agent himself among his companions. He formed a Pastoral Advice Council with other inmates in the prison. He began eagerly to disseminate what he had discovered.

His old ideological companions tried to win him back but his love for and conversion to the Lord was stronger. He remained faithful, although he did have moments of weakness.

Thanks to his initiative the Bulletin „Siembra“ (Sowing) is now being published, which is edited thanks to the collaboration of CEAS. The prisoners themselves write the articles, and they can verify that, thanks to their knowledge of Christ, they have another view on life.

## **Experience and Youth in Rosario/Argentina**

*Recently we had the pleasure of welcoming in our office in Stuttgart D. Hernán Pereda and Carlos Romualda Brun, C.P.C.R. WE came across an article in Word Event (I.10.1980) in which he was explaining his biblical pastoral work. He was explaining there his Scripture courses based on audio-visual communication. At present he is resident in Madrid and is still interested in this media, both for pastoral ministry in general and biblical pastoral ministry in particular. He praised the work of the CBF and predicts for it an interesting future always and when the members manage to put to use all its possibilities and do not see it as an overarching structure but as a channel for communication and for sharing resources. Personally he considers that it has been a great help.*

*For this reason, perhaps, he came accompanied by D. Carlos Romualda Brun. He is one of the successors in this work and, at present, he is reflecting on its future:*

#### **The Word is very near to you (Deut.30:14). Search for a Parochial Project.**

Finding the way to describe and make good use of this „nearness“ of the Word of God is a constant challenge and an aim that many have achieved with success. In my case, I intend to avail myself of the work already done, but, fundamentally, my search is stimulated

by an experience of parochial mission which has filled me with suggestions. Here I can tell you only what this „parochial mission“ is about and some of the suggestions that occur to me, given that I am at the beginning of my search.

\* **The Week of Spirituality:** This work has been going on for about twenty-five years in some dioceses in Argentina and Uruguay and has no other purpose than to

help the parish to evangelize itself. In five days - Monday to Friday - in one way or another the Kerygma is proclaimed and shared using a simple method of reflection in small groups and in common. It must be said that what happens during the week, its success or failure, depends, for the most part, on its preparation. In fact the two or three months that precede it are fundamental. There the people of the parish themselves, under the guidance of a member of the animating team, see to it that nobody within the parish boundary does not find out about this meeting, and is visited at least twice to be invited. Experience tells us that here already is one of the fruits of the mission, that is to say, the commitment of many people who, in twos, bring a message of hope (and which simply, in principle, is no more than an invitation to attend this week). During the meeting there is a day devoted to the Sacrament of Reconciliation since there are many people seeking it after having received the proclaimed Word.

- It is certain that it is one thing to work in this way in a rural area and another to work thus in an urban area. Nevertheless, the objective can almost always be achieved if one is mindful of the adaptations that are suited to each place and each pastoral situation.

- During my two years in this pastoral task there has been a lot of satisfaction, just like that of the whole working team. For example, just seeing the people, who, after a long time, accept the message and begin a new way of life, grateful to those who have made it possible, people who otherwise, according to their own testimony, would not have come near simply because no one had ever invited them.

#### \*Some Reflections

The details of the method and the testimonies of some real meetings with the Lord could follow, but, what is to be said about the suggestions that I found there? For example, as the week unfolded I always preferred to give a more important place to the Word of God, to favour a deeper and more frequent contact with it, so this led me to reorganize the content of the week or to want to propose a complementary week to this one.

- We may speak also about an important problem which is the „aftermath“ of this

week. Normally it is the parish priest who has to create, if he does not have one, a structure that allows the growth of many who, during this week, have recently embarked on a Christian way and of those who are continuing on it, that is to say, to offer a catechesis, a necessary complement to the Kerigma.

#### \* Another Direction

Here it is that I ask myself whether the biblical-liturgical catechesis at the Sunday Eucharist has its place, and we could say, it is a priority. But one must also take into account that the growth of persons is not only at the formative level, that „they may know more“ and that „they may practise more“, but that it implies, without exception, a process of accompaniment in all dimensions, for example, the theme of the family, interpersonal relations, etc. I believe that

it is only from these real experiences of our daily life that can we draw near to the Word and truly listen to it, and the Sunday celebration will be necessarily a true celebration. I want to say, herewith, that I believe it is necessary to introduce this „parochial biblical project“, to draw attention to it in some way, in relation to the „progress“ of a group; this leads one to take account of the form, the time and the place of the encounter with the Word. But one must always avoid that the Word is „one more theme“ among others; on the contrary, it must be given a central place as animator of all pastoral ministry.

- I am grateful for the contact begun with the Federation because it will allow me to get to know the efforts of many who are concerned about this area, and will enrich me for serving better the encounter between God and humankind.

## News

### Africa

#### Lumko/South Africa

The different activities of the Institute ended with an international course on Pastoral Ministry. There were 38 participants from 18 countries. The participants had the opportunity of learning and trying out the vision that Lumko has on the Church and Pastoral Ministry in general, in which the Bible is the principal source of inspiration.

Likewise courses have been offered for the whole region of the Episcopal Conference of South Africa. Some questions of international character have reached as far as Brazil, Venezuela (from where the Lemko publications will soon be coming out in Spanish), the Philippines and Ethiopia.

Don Anselm Prior represented the Episcopal Conference of South Africa in Harare (International Consultation on Biblical Pastoral Ministry in the region of the IMBISA - interregional meeting of the South African Bishops). As a result of this meeting the possibility is being contemplated of the Lumko Institute offering, in the future, the course on *Dei Verbum* in South Africa.

#### Nairobi/Kenya

*The Pastoral Use of Scripture* is the course being offered by Hekima College for this year. 16th February: The Foundational Document, *Dei Verbum* (*Vat.II*, Ch.6). 23rd February: Small Christian Communities and the Bible - *The Lumko Method*. 2nd March: The Use of Scripture by the New Religious Movements and the Problem of Fundamentalism. 9th March: The Catholic Biblical Federation and the *Final Declaration of Bogotá* in the last Plenary Assembly (1990). 16th March: *The Lectionary* of 1969, its content, objective, successes and failures. 23rd March: *Dei Verbum*, gestation and antecedents and its first 25 years. 30th March: *Lectio Divina*, history, practice and relevance. 6th April: The Bible in Africa: Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagasca, Panafrican Association of Catholic exegetes and other current practices. 4th May: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*: the importance of the recent document from the Pontifical Biblical Commission for the Biblical Pastoral Ministry. 11th May: Final Synthesis.

#### Sudan

El Obeid: From 1st - 7th May a course was organized on different ways of using the Bible.

Juba: The third biblical seminar for women had as its theme: The Bible and Evangelization. 62 attended and all (who were qualified women) took an active part throughout its 10 day duration. The effects drew attention to themselves in the Catholic diocese of Juba so much so that the men also asked to have their own seminars. Some women from other Christian churches want to join the group of Catholics at future seminars. They have set up permanent groups and chosen their own leaders.

The course for young people on the Bible and Evangelization attracted 31 participants and took place from the 4th to the 10th of July. There was a great deal of enthusiasm among the participants (male and female) and they were keen to have another course.

## America

### Bolivia 1995/Dominican Republic 1996

The Intensive Course on the Bible (CIB), of itinerant character, took place this year in Bolivia from 15th June to 12th December. The key subjects to this course have to do with the inculturation of the gospel and the Indian cultures (i.e. through Indian eyes). It attempts a dialogue between history, wisdom and customs of both biblical and Indian peoples.

From Bolivia the CIB will go to the Dominican Republic in 1996. This time the course will be in the Caribbean and its key subjects will centre around identity, resistance, women, Negroes and spirituality.

## Asia/Oceania

### Bandung/Indonesia

The month of September is the national Month of the Bible. This year the theme will be: „Do not say, I am only a youth; for to all to whom I send you you shall go“ (Jer. 1:7). The principal theme for Bible Sunday for the coming years will be: „New Evangelization in Society“. 1996: according to the prophet Amos;

1997: according to the prophet Isaiah; 1998: according to the prophet Hosea.

The festival of The Bible in the Diocese is still being celebrated successfully after five years. 75% of the parishes are participating.

The Angela Merici Bible Centre functions as a Diocesan Commission for Biblical Pastoral Ministry. Nevertheless, it also offers its courses, material and other services in other dioceses. For more information: Emmanuel Gunanto, OSU, Jln Supratman 1, Kotakpos 1840, Bandung 40018.

### Bombay/India

Evangelization does not consist only in proclaiming the Gospel as if this had been already definitively formulated. Before everything, it is endeavouring to understand it in the various cultural and social contexts in which it has to be announced. The use of dance in the Church in India seeks first of all to understand the Gospel; only in the second place does it have the function of proclaiming it. This is what Francis Barboza, SVD thinks about dance. More information on this can be found in BDV 30.

It is possible to get hold of 7 videos (VHS) of between 45 and 60 minutes' duration, whose content corresponds with a series of biblical themes in Bharata Natyam dance (e.g., the last supper, the temptations of Jesus, Jesus is crucified, etc.). Also there are postcards with the more important postures of this dance, as well as a book on the theme: Francis Peter Barboza, *Christianity and the Dance Forms of India*, Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi, 1990.

The films can be obtained in Germany: Vivianne Schulte-Wormann, von Bodelschwinghstrasse 25, 49179 Osterkappeln, Tel. (49)5473/1414, Fax 8389. In Italy: Roberta Arinci, Abirami Studio, 60 via Palmanova, 20132 Milan, Tel. (39) 2-26112099, Fax 02-2547951.

### Meeting of the Subregion of Southern Asia in Katmandu/Nepal

Representatives of the full and associate members of the CBF from the subregion of Southern Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) met together

with the Secretary General, Ludger Feldkämper, in the Ashram of Godavari from 20th to 24th February 1995. The most important aim of these days was to encourage collaboration in biblical pastoral ministry. With pleasure and satisfaction we were witnesses to the variety and creativity of the efforts made for the proclamation of the Word among our people, which is a minority living in the context of religious plurality. Also we had the opportunity of familiarizing ourselves with the young church of Nepal.

We took special account of the lines and orientations of the last Plenary Assembly in Bogotá (1990), *The Bible in the New Evangelization*, the theme of the next Assembly in Hong Kong, *The Word of God as Source of Life*, and the recent document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (April 1993). Our region has concentrated on the formation of the laity. New initiatives are being taken for the formation of women and young people. Circumstances are such that although there is a desire to get involved in these areas, frequently they are not recognized nor encouraged.

Audiovisual means and the arts in general are being used more and more as channels for circulating the biblical message.

More and more groups of families and other kinds are interested in Bible reading. It is necessary to help and to lead these groups, who can have difficulties from individualistic reading or moving towards fundamentalism. It is a problem that is spreading rapidly.

Inculturation of the Word of God is another important feature of our sub-region. The meeting has also helped us to take account of the efforts being made, from the ecumenical perspective, in the field of translations and publications of the Bible.

Looking to the future, we feel ourselves stimulated by the theme of the next Plenary Assembly. There are many circumstances which threaten the life of our countries (violation of human rights, violence, unjust socio-economic systems...). But also there exist abundant signs of life within the traditions and different cultures of the people (respect for every class of life, the importance of „being“ as opposed

to „having“, a more holistic (integral) moral sense in general ...).

We are convinced that the biblical pastoral ministry has an existence marked by a fresh and personal experience of Jesus Christ, the Word who is the source of life and who urges us to share that experience (see John 1:1-3).

## Europe/Middle East

### Rome

On the 15th December 1994 the annual meeting took place of the region of Rome with the participation of all the delegates. We joined on this occasion by the

Secretary General of the CBF, Ludger Feldkämper, as well as by Anna Nguyen Thi Loan from Vietnam and Isaac Eshun from Africa (participants in the Course on Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Nemi).

After mutual introductions and a time of prayer, we had the opportunity of seeing the video „Listen and Proclaim“, which the Secretary General had produced on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the CBF. Thus we were able to understand better what the CBF is, what its objectives are and where it is going.

The second part of the meeting consisted in communications from the majority of the members.

For each text there is offered an overall vision, fundamental information, some questions that point the reader towards what is essential and some clues for reading that help one not to take the wrong route.

c) **ANCIENT ORIENT:** the theme is set in the context of the Ancient Orient furnishing dates that allow one to compare similarities and differences in the biblical text with relation to surrounding cultures. Thus we discover that Israel, on the one hand, saw itself influenced by its surroundings, that is to say, the land it walked upon, whereby it was set bodily in its milieu, and, on the other hand, that it knew how to maintain its identity by scorning everything that went against its faith experience.

d) **THEME:** once the facts are analyzed the work offers a synthetic vision of the theme in question. From the analysis we reach a synthesis by an eminently inductive method. So we come to an overall vision but we do this by beginning from objective facts and not by creating a theory in a vacuum.

e) **QUESTION:** from the theme dealt with there is always a controversial aspect chosen which lends itself to debate and which is confronted with skill and courage. Here are some of the topics confronted: Faith and science; the Patriarchs and history; the Exodus; the Bible and history; the Pentateuchal traditions; wars in the Bible; the miracles of Elijah and Elisha; prophecy and preaching; was the Exile a punishment?

f) **CONTINUOUS READING:** in order to have a fuller perspective of the texts analysed, but so that the inexperienced reader does not get lost in the biblical wood the reading of some chapters or some book is recommended so as to get a better idea of the whole. Besides, this way a direct reading of the biblical text is assured, a thing that should never be forgotten.

g) **PRAAYER:** finally, treatment of the theme acquires a prayerful attitude which places the reader in the vital position from which the Bible is written and from which he or she must have access to the Word of God so that we can grasp its authentic message.

## Books and Materials of Interest to the Biblical pastoral Ministry

**Lire l'ancien Testament. Une Initiation (1<sup>e</sup> PARTIE): Avant l'Exile, Evangile et Vie, Paris 1994, 144 pag.**

*Review by D. Jaime Asenjo (I.D.T.P. Bilbao, Spain).*

As the title and subtitle state, this book is an initiation into the Old Testament. It uses material that helps to open up a way into this complicated and unfamiliar path. In fact, to accompany believers and introduce them to an understanding of the faith of **ISRAEL** such as it appears in the Old Testament is an arduous task, and, for that reason, all the more necessary.

The book consists of 8 chapters whose titles are: 1-Origins, 2-The Patriarchs, 3-The Exodus, 4-Deuteronomy, 5-From Joshua to David, 6-From Solomon to the Exile, 7-Amos-Hosea-Isaiah, and 8-Jeremiah-Ezekiel. It seeks to offer an overall vision (not an exhaustive journey) of the Old Testament, making use of its basic themes to achieve this.

Perhaps the most positive and original aspect of this work is its inductive methodology starting from concrete texts. And so, we present this method in a more detailed way. Both the form and the

background receive adequate and modern treatment, but what calls attention is its pedagogy.

As far as the foundation is concerned, the themes this work addresses are those basic to the Old Testament (although it does not treat of those from the Exile to the New Testament, which will be dealt with in a second volume due out in September 1995), and its treatment of them is correct and up to date within the brevity imposed by the nature of the book.

As regards method, all the chapters follow the same pattern:

a) **PRESENTATION:** each chapter begins with an overall presentation of the theme chosen by way of introduction. It prepares the reader for what follows; it tells the reader what the theme of the chapter will be.

b) **TEXTS:** next it focuses on three or four significant texts of overall relevance. I think it is fundamental to start from concrete texts. In fact, there are many „initiations“ on the market which deal with a thousand details of the Bible without analysing a single concrete text. This book avoids any treatment of the Bible without reading it.

The whole work is sprinkled with diagrams and explanatory pictures done with great pedagogical care, which helps the understanding of the theme.

This book is the first part of a work of at least two volumes: Part 1, Before the Exile and Part 2, From the Exile to Jesus. Publication of Part 2 is announced for September 1995. We await it with eagerness.

**Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm,** *Responses to 101 Questions on the Psalms and Other Writings:* Job, Song of Songs, Esther, Lamentations, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, Proverbs, Ruth, Qoheleth), Paulist Press, 1994, New York.

Many people who study the Old Testament stop at the Law and the Prophets, forgetting the rest of the history, which is also very important. The author replies to questions most asked about these writings. He does this with great pedagogy and in a language accessible in all fields, paying attention to the latest exegetical studies and interpretation. One can see that it is the fruit of much experience of a practical and direct pastoral biblical approach.

**Megan McKenna,** *Not Counting Women and Children* (Forgotten Stories of the Bible), Orbis Books, 1994, New York.

This is a book that endeavours to record and narrate less known stories from both the Old and New Testaments. But it does this from the sensibility of today's readers, trying to explain and modernize their significance. Its appeal is to a wide public, including those who have already come to the Bible. It is a good tool for the Biblical Pastoral Ministry. There is also an introduction where the author explains what it means to read the Bible today. In a simple and serious way it sets out in broad outline the ecclesial doctrine under discussion.

**Maura Cho,** *Emmaus Bible Dialogue (The Gospel of Luke)*, 1993. This is a guide for reading the Gospel of Luke adapted for groups, with a precise metho-

dology, and from a perspective of biblical and spiritual theology. It is written in Korean and is the fruit of the experience and enormous work of this wellknown expert in biblical pastoral ministry in the Korean situation.

**The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.** We reiterate the importance of getting to know, studying and disseminating this document of the **Pontifical Biblical Commission.** We draw attention to some recent publications of this document, some including commentaries, which are easily available. It has been edited in Spanish for Ed. PPC, 1994, Madrid. In French it has been edited recently by Ed. Cerf. among the collection „Documents des Eglises“. In German it is to be found in number 115 of the collection „Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls“ of the German Episcopal Conference (1993). Also the review Bibel und Kirche has dedicated number 4/1994 to this subject. A text and commentary in English by Joseph A. Fitzmyer S.J. has recently been published by PIB (Rome) in the „Subsidia Biblica 18“ series.

**Carlo Buzzetti,** *4 per 1, un unico brano biblico e vari „fare“* (A single text and various tasks: A practical guide to hermeneutics and biblical pastoral ministry), Ed. Paoline, 1994, Milan.

The meaning of the title 4 by 1 would be four approaches to the same text: exegetical, theological, meditative, catechetical and homiletical. It is a book based on pastoral experience and in teaching that tries to help to situate what is proper to each one of the approaches or tasks. A practical aspect is in the form of 6 examples (3 from the O.T. and 3 from the N.T.).

The same author also published *La Bibbia e la sua comunicazione* (Turin, 1987, Ed. LDC) This book is concerned with the phenomenon of communication from a linguistic point of view which is applied to the Bible and its use in biblical pastoral ministry. It also analyzes the international organizations dedicated to that effect, an example of which is the Catholic Biblical Federation.

**Francesco Rossi De Gasperis/Luciano Pacomio,** *A pregare s'impara pregando* (Ed. Paoline, Milan, 1994. In collaboration with the Catholic Biblical Federation, Rome.

Following the directives of „Dei Verbum“ according to which Sacred Scripture must play a central role in the whole of pastoral ministry, the CBF in Rome organizes meetings on prayer based on Sacred Scripture. This book records the meetings of 1992-1993, directed by De Gasparis (Psalms) and Pacomio (John).

**John Wijngaards,** *My Galilee, My People* (Three stories filmed in Colombia), *Together in My Name* (Stories filmed in Kenya, England and Brazil), *I have no Favourites* (Three stories filmed in Indonesia), *Walking on Water*. All these books endeavour to show a way for living today with much emphasis on biblical content. With cartoons and reading guides and a simple and modern pedagogy they are very useful for adult groups especially and for young adults. They are also produced on video, each one of 75 minutes' duration. This centre works especially with audio-visual means and its fundamental philosophy is the possibility of putting God into a secular world. They are prepared in various languages. The author can be contacted through Housetop Services Limited, 39 Homer Street, London W1H 1HL. Tel. 171 4029679; Fax; 171 7232668.

**Xabier Pikaza,** *Para vivir El Evangelio. Lectura de Marcos*, Ed. Verbo Divino, 1995, Navarra, Spain: Avd. Pamplona, 41-Apdo.34, 31200 Estrella.

This book is an invitation to live and read the Gospel, following the most strange, amazing and fascinating text: that of Mark. One can read it as a non-believer if one is seeking to know Christianity from the inside. One can read it as a friend of good literature if one wishes to recreate in one's life the text and the dramatic path of Mark. It is also a book for those Christians who are already committed; those who having opted for Jesus wish to know better and to understand the gospel for themselves at first hand.