



# Catholic Biblical Federation

## Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Europa

### Hong Kong Plenary Assembly Follow-up: A Project for a course on "The Reading of the Bible in the Church and in a multicultural society"



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**T**he Catholic Biblical Federation (*CBF*) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to ministry to the Word of God. At the present time, the *CBF* membership includes 88 full members and 219 associate members coming from a total of 123 countries.

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

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

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

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

**Wilhelm Egger, Bishop of Bozen-Brixen  
President of the Catholic Biblical Federation**

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

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## Editorial

Come, you that are blessed, for I was a stranger and you welcomed me. *It seems to us opportune and necessary to recall this invitation, both new and novel, of the Word of God for this Europe of ours which wants to make 1997 the year against xenophobia. The biblical tradition of hospitality is paradigmatic, and yet, it does not appear to be evident: When did we see you a stranger and welcome you? ... or ... When did we see you a stranger and not welcome you? Surely these are not comfortable questions for anyone. Nevertheless, we must see the value of asking them of ourselves and responding to them, time and again with greater frequency, in a world that tends towards globalisation and yet is permanently confronted with the other.*

*The first article in this number, which is dedicated to the region of Europe and the Middle East, is not far from this sensitivity. Under the rubric that wants to carry out the commitments adopted by the last assembly in Hong Kong, the subregion of Latin America is working on a project that it wants to share with the whole Federation: reading the Bible in the Church and in a multi-cultural society.*

*The letter of the Dutch Bishops, which is reproduced in our middle pages, can bring us close to the difficulties and challenges of the biblical pastoral ministry not only for Holland but also for the majority of the secularised societies of Europe. Just as many countries will doubtless see themselves reflected in the same problems that they read about in the episcopal letter, in the same way they will recognise themselves in an experience of dynamic and motivating initiative which comes from a Spanish diocese. The ecclesial reality, like that of the biblical pastoral ministry in particular, is made up of lights and shades in Europe and the Middle East also. While something dies other things are born. In the News section we offer a panorama of something of all this.*

*We draw attention to the exercise full of suggestion of Lectio divina from an inter-cultural context and before an engraving of a biblical scene, in dialogue with art, which Rudi Pöhl, SVD, places at our disposal.*

*The participants in the Dei Verbum Second Course celebrated in Africa, have made us participants in what was for them a singular experience. Likewise from Africa, for our reflection, comes the Final Declaration of the Second Panafrican Seminar on the Biblical Apostolate. The reading from John 4:1-42, used in the Assembly in Hong Kong, was the beginning of a way that continues to inspire its journey. Now it is John 6:1-71 which resounds in a context of hunger: I am the Bread of Life. And it resounds together with another text: Luke 24: And the disciples recognised him in the breaking of bread. Would that it might be so!*

Pilar de Miguel

*P. S.: With my warmest thanks for your collaboration during these years. I send you all my best wishes, for you personally and for your ministry. As for me, it is time to return to the South.*

## CONTENTS

### Follow-up to the Hong Kong Plenary Assembly:

A project for a course on "The Reading of the Bible in the Church and in a multicultural society" 4

### For Reflection

Final Statement: Participants of the 2nd Dei Verbum Course in Africa 5

The Second Panafrican Seminar on the Biblical Apostolate 6

Pastoral Letter of Dutch bishops 9

An entire diocese studies the Bible (Spain) 11

### Life of the Federation

#### News

Austria 13

Germany 13

Italy 13

Latin Europe 13

Poland 14

Slovenia 14

Switzerland 15

Iraq 15

Jerusalem 15

Libanon 15

#### Materials

Healed by God. Encountering God in the Cave of the Heart 16

# Follow-up to the Hong Kong Assembly

## A project for a course on “The Reading of the Bible in the Church and in a multicultural society”

*Under this rubric, we will report on the follow-ups to the various aspects that were brought up for discussion by our members at the last Plenary Assembly.*

*In this issue, we discuss a project that was developed in the heart of the Latin European region and continues the ideas of Item 8.1.9. of the Final Statement from Hong Kong.*

**1)** The Second Vatican Council gave a new impulse to Bible reading in the Church in accordance with the fathers of the Council's wishes that easy access to “the Word of God” should be provided for all Christian faithful. Various approaches were suggested, but it is above all through the enrichment of the liturgical readings that a more significant contact with the Holy Scripture was achieved.

**2)** Since the Council, the biblical apostolate has developed in the context of groups that meet to study the Bible and fathom its message, to pray prompted by it and to allow a fruitful dialogue between their members' context of life and the orientations of the biblical text. The methodical approaches to the Bible and the groups' spiritualities have a great influence on the reading of the biblical word.

**3)** In this context, theological, hermeneutical, pastoral questions often arise such as: the inspiration of the Bible, advantages and limits of the reading methods (scientific and pastoral), Bible reading in a secularized, multicultural, multireligious world, fundamentalist readings of the Bible...

**4)** The pastoral agents, priests or lay people, are confronted with these issues as they seek to contribute towards a deepening of the catholic faith and the building of Christian communities in relation to the Holy Scripture. Their biblical pastoral work or biblical animation of the whole of pastoral ministry has to be underlined by a basic theological reflection.

**5)** In this context, the Catholic Biblical Federation suggests to introduce in the seminaries, ecclesiastical facul-

ties and institutes a course on “the reading of the Bible in the Church and in a multicultural society”. The content of this course might include the following elements:

**a) historical approach** of the reading and/or of the re-reading of the Scriptures

- in the Bible
- in the Fathers of the Church
- in the Middle Ages
- in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation
- in modern times and in the 20th century

**b) survey of the most important ecclesiastical documents on the Bible**, particularly:

- Providentissimus Deus (1893)
- Spiritus Paraclitus (1920)
- Divino afflante Spiritu (1943)
- Sancta Mater Ecclesia (1964)
- Dei Verbum (1965)
- The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (1993)

along with a **reflection on the use of the Bible in the ecclesiastical documents**

**c) reflection on the issues of fundamental theology** in relation to the Bible

- the inspiration of the Bible
- the status of the Bible as “the Word of God”
- biblical hermeneutics, especially from the document “The interpretation of the Bible in the Church”

**d) pastoral reflection** on the experiences with Bible reading in the contemporary world

- Bible reading methods and spiritualities
- the link between the biblical word and the words of human life
- Bible reading in a secularized, multicultural and multireligious world

**e) practical introduction** to Bible reading in groups that not only takes into account the specifically biblical elements but also group dynamics and social, political, economical, cultural issues of our times. ◆



# For Reflection

## Second Dei Verbum Cours in Africa:

### Final Statement

*After six weeks of mutual enrichment, the participants in the second course Dei Verbum, have experiences and obligations in common. They suggest several possible actions and remind various leaders of the church that their support is needed to achieve a productive implementation.*

We, the participants of the second *Dei Verbum* Course held here at Wadzanai Training Centre, and involving delegates from seven countries namely: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, have found the course to be most informative, challenging and spiritually enriching. We feel that the course was long overdue for the *IMBISA* (Inter-regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa) region.

The content of the course has been stimulating and most inspiring, and we feel well equipped with skills and material to carry back and use in our communities.

Looking back over the six weeks; there has been a metamorphosis. The seed has fallen on good soil and we feel sure that the harvest will be rich.

Our spiritual journey included sharing, self discovery, growth in love, letting go of self, living with the Bible in daily prayer, and gaining deeper insight through our prayer.

Our spiritual journey also involved sharing preparations for the Mass,

prayer song and dance. In lighter moments we praised God by being fun together as we grew to know one another better.

Community building took place and we found it an exciting experience. Our conviction grew that God's word has power, and that we should evangelise through the Scriptures.

Participants have become convinced that they have been empowered to go out and spread the message of God's love.

Various programmes provided exciting new approaches. Through the various courses and *Lectio Divina* we experienced a deepening in our prayer lives which for some led to conversion.

There was power in the word, and the witnessing of people in the Churches we visited was very inspiring. We saw parishioners using their Bibles in the liturgy, sharing the Word of God, and it was alive in the young people of the parish.

They were a witness for us to follow. We were taken on excursions as part of our formation. All our visits were

community building and deepened our relationships with our fellow participants.

Mutual respect and understanding has grown. We shared meals with the communities we visited, we prayed together, and we broke the bread of life. We visited the St John's Community.

This is a well organized, Bible centred community which reflected a life style lived by these families in their homes.

The Mass was a vibrant celebration involving the participation of the entire Church - children, youth, mothers and fathers.

This was a beautiful example of the first Christian community referred to in Acts 2:37-42.

Considering the role of a minister of the word, we feel that he or she needs to involve him/herself in the following: daily Scripture reading, praying with the community (Acts 4,23-31), sharing the Gospel in Small Christian Communities, taking an active part in the breaking of bread (Acts 2,42-47), acting Gospel stories or dramatising to bring out the message in our daily life, and lastly, personal prayer, adoration and praising and thanking God (Lk 10,21- 24).

Long hours of prayer are important before a minister embarks upon any ministry (Lk 9,28).

We also shared the small responsibilities entrusted to us in our own community life. In so doing we created a wonderful unity among ourselves.

There was equality between men and women, and the dignity of women was fully respected as mentioned above.

### Recommendations to the Bishops

We feel that individuals who are involved in pastoral ministry, and with the motivation to implement the skills gained, will benefit from this course.

If possible every diocese should send one priest accompanied by two or more pastoral workers who are active in their diocese. Continuous support should be given in the field to those who have completed the course.

### Recommendations to the Priests

Being aware that most of the implementation of the course takes place in the parishes, we recommend that priests encourage the use of the Bible in the Liturgy and within parish life.

As a way of reaching the laity we propose that training workshops be held for leaders of Small Christian Communities, with regular follow-up meetings to support and encourage them.

### Recommendations to Religious Superiors

We feel that the sisters who were part of the decision making regarding their attending of the course fared well. They were personally motivated and committed themselves fully to the course.

### Recommendations to the Course Organizers

We feel that participants need to be fluent in English in order to cope and they require a certain academic standard in order to grasp the content of the course.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we take memories with us that we will treasure for the rest of our lives of a vibrant, Christ centred community where we worked together, prayed together, studied together and grew in the love of God's word.

We are extremely grateful to the organizers of the course and we ask God to bless them abundantly in their future work. We pray that *Dei Verbum* will grow from strength to strength. ◆

# The Second Panafrican Seminar on the Biblical Apostolate: FINAL STATEMENT

Nairobi, 9-15 March 1997

*45 delegates from 26 countries, who met under the patronage of the BICAM at the second pan-African bible ministry seminar, relate their experiences and the results in the following Final Statement. Here it is interesting to note the influence of the Plenary Assembly in Hong Kong along with its Final Statement, which may be recognized in the development and experience of their own seminar.*

*Whereas in Hong Kong, the members reflected on John 1,1; 4,10 and took Word of God, Source of Life, as the motif for the Final Statement, the participants at the pan-African seminar continued this same course. They reflected on John 6:1-71 and expressed their reflections in the same literary style with the theme Word of God, Bread of Life.*

## 1. The Word of God - Bread of Life

**1.1** We, 45 delegates of the Second Pan African Seminar on the Biblical Apostolate from 26 countries in Africa and Madagascar, have gathered at St. Mary Magdalene Retreat Centre, Nairobi, Kenya, March 9-15, 1997, at the invitation of the Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar (*BICAM*).

**1.2** We have assembled at the time of Lent, when Easter was already near (cf. John 6,3), when we as followers of Christ prepare ourselves for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery through closer attention to the Word of God, mindful of the example of Israel and of Jesus himself in the desert that "human beings live not on bread alone but on the every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4).

We constantly had before our eyes both the vast crowds of people on our continent suffering from hunger, and Jesus who himself had experienced

hunger, who came down from heaven as the Bread of Life and whom the disciples at Easter recognised in the breaking of the bread (cf Lk 24).

**1.3** Having enthroned the Word of God in our midst, we proceeded to study and discuss the role and situation of the Biblical Apostolate in the Church, the work being pursued by various regions in Africa, and how to initiate Biblical Pastoral Ministry in all Africa down to the grass roots level.

We reflected on various methods of Bible sharing and study, as well as the structures which enable our work to continue.

We were strengthened with a daily celebration at the two tables of the Word of God and the Body of Christ (*Dei Verbum* n. 21).

We engaged in *Lectio Divina* together on John 6:1- 71 - the Word of God, Bread of Life - and looked to the future which draws us on to greater efforts to make God's Word "known,



loved, pondered and preserved in the hearts of the faithful" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, No. 58).

**1.4** In this final statement we gather together the challenges we have experienced and commit ourselves to continue our Biblical Pastoral Ministry with greater zeal and energy.

## **2. "Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?" (Jn. 6:5)**

**2.1** It is Jesus who has led the crowd into the desert. The desert is traditionally the place of hardship and testing (Ps 95; Mt 4:1-11), but at the same time the place where people come face to face with God.

We recognise our gathering as an occasion for us to have a privileged encounter with the Word of God.

**2.2** At the 5th Plenary Assembly in Hong Kong in July 1996 the delegates reflected on the Word of God as Source of Life (Jn 1,1; 4,10).

We have taken that theme and continued the journey as we see that it is Jesus alone who can satisfy the hunger as well as the thirst of those who follow him.

**2.3** St John tells us that, in asking the disciples this question, Jesus was testing them. He waits for them to respond to the people's hunger.

This question of Jesus challenges us to take notice of Africa's widespread hunger for food, human dignity, for justice and peace, and, above all, hunger for the Word of God which is offered to us as bread of life.

**2.4** Like the small boy with the five loaves and two fish, we may feel that we have little to offer, yet we are conscious of the transforming power of that Word and we commit ourselves to the sharing of that Word of God with our brothers and sisters in Africa as a service to building communities of love and peace.

We have indeed a heavy responsibility to carry, though ultimately the success of our mission depends on the Lord.

## **3. "What must we do if we are to carry out God's Work?" (Jn. 6:28)**

**3.1** Hearing Jesus' challenge, we find ourselves asking the same question as those who crossed the lake yet again to look for Jesus. If only we had more human and material resources!

If only we had more effective structures and widespread support! We take to ourselves the solace, yet the challenge, that come from Jesus words "Believe in the one God has sent" (Jn 6:29).

**3.2** Jesus realised that so many search for, yet do not find God. He proclaims himself as the fulfilment of that longing, as the Word sent by God to give life to the world.

We recognise and accept the task to share this Word, to conscientize those who do not know and lift up those who do, by proclaiming Jesus as the Bread of Life who satisfies all our hungers.

**3.3** Faced by this challenge, we feel apprehensive because of the little we have to offer, but we perceive the power of the Word who is not restricted by our limited abilities.

We focus on the promise that he would be with us always, working with us as he did with the disciples (Mt 28:20).

**3.4** He is with us as we, inspired by the Scriptures, interpret our life experiences and find in them new meaning.

We accept the joyful task of developing and practising with others Bible sharing and study methods by which they too can discover meaning in life and joy in the Word.

**3.5** It has been said that Africa has been catechised but not evangelised. We accept the challenge of Biblical

Pastoral Ministry to enable Christians, through an effective proclamation of the Word - in the community's liturgies, in faith sharing and the experience of Small Christian Communities - to come face to face with the Risen Lord and respond to the challenge to be Gospel people.

We draw strength from the Vatican Council's directives that the Scriptures be made accessible to all the faithful (*Dei Verbum*, n. 22), and respond to the challenge of the African Synod to build the Church as the Family of God through solidarity and commitment to justice and peace.

## **4. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (John 6: 68a)**

**4.1** The first question was posed by Jesus, the last by ourselves. Like Peter we respond to Jesus in puzzled faith.

Puzzled because we cannot grasp the full impact of Jesus' message and its implications; yet, with faith because we cling to the one who has the word of eternal life and whose words are spirit and life.

**4.2** Biblical Pastoral Ministry urges us on. We take heart when we experience the great things the Lord accomplishes through us.

Yet, we also feel the burden of this never-ending task. Thus the need to return continually to the Lord.

Through such experiences as *Lectio Divina*, we wait on the Lord who feeds that deepest hunger of our being.

**4.3** As we approach the end of the Second Millennium and the Church celebrates the years of Jesus Christ, of the Holy Spirit and of the Father, we see with Pope John Paul II the important role of the ministry of the Word in achieving the renewal of the Church as we return time and again to the Scriptures (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente* n. 36, 40).

## 5. "They said, Lord 'Give us this bread always'" (Jn. 6:34)

5.1 We see the people who followed Jesus hungry for bread. As so often in John's Gospel, Jesus pointed to a deeper hunger, which only he himself is able to satisfy.

In this context of people's deep hunger for the bread of life, the Second Pan-African Biblical Apostolate Seminar saw clearly the centrality of the Bible in all pastoral efforts aimed at satisfying this hunger. The Bible needs to be integrated into all our Pastoral Ministries.

5.2 Basic to this vision of the centrality of the Bible to Pastoral, ministry is continual and sustained on going education in the importance, nature and content of the Bible. This education is essential to our praying and sharing the Word of God.

5.3 The starting point of education in the Bible begins with ourselves. As mentioned in *Dei Verbum*, n. 23. It is constant study and prayer that brings that deep knowledge and appreciation of the Word that underlies genuine commitment to and imparting of the Word to the people who hunger for it.

5.4 Essential to educating not only oneself, but also families, Small Christian Communities and Christians in general, are suitable programmes of instruction and Basic Seminars that will ensure a good foundation for the Bible Sharing that is carried on so widely throughout Africa.

In addition to the Basic Bible Seminar and other instruction materials, more advanced courses will provide training for promoters and animators in the dioceses.

5.5 Since not everybody is a member of a Small Christian Community, we are committed to the spread of the Word through the liturgy which for many is their only contact with the Bible. We see the training of seminarians in the Biblical Apostolate and the formation of ministers of the Word to be of great importance.

5.6 The media is a powerful means of bringing the word of God to the people at large in all areas and levels of society.

Our dedication to the spread of the Word ought to give us a strong resolve to use the printed word, and audio visual media. The power and importance of the media is brought home to us when we see the use made of it by so many other evangelising bodies.

5.7 We need to be constantly aware of that large section of the population of the African continent which still lives in the oral tradition.

We are called to serve this vast multitude who share the hunger for the Word that is part of our human condition. There is need for appropriate media inspired by African traditional ways of communicating.

5.8 We are keenly aware of the pervasive spread of fundamentalism throughout Africa.

We need to be very committed to a Biblical formation of people that will help them read and pray the Bible in a non fundamentalist way. Such a formation we see as an urgent necessity for our youth who are so sadly drifting away to "born again" movements.

5.9 We all know that there can be no Biblical Apostolate without the Bible being available.

Therefore, we consider it to be a pastoral priority that translation of the Bible into various African languages be planned and organized according to the recommendations of Vatican II (*Dei Verbum*, 22) and the African Synod (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 58).

In these areas of Bible translation and Bible supply, we appreciate the good relationship with the United Bible Societies as well as the existing co-operation in many ongoing translation projects.

5.10 Structures and co-ordination at all levels are necessary for a more ef-

fective spreading of the Word of God. We therefore recommend the setting up of structures and the appointment of promoters and co-ordinators at parish, diocesan and national levels.

It is very desirable that the Bishops become fully aware of the importance of these structures in the implementation of the Biblical Apostolate Ministry and provide them with the necessary human and financial resources.

5.11 We praise the providential decision of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (*SECAM*) to establish *BICAM* for the promotion and co-ordination of the Biblical Apostolate in the region and we rejoice to see that similar structures are gradually becoming a reality in its sub-regions.

We would highly appreciate the appointment of sub-regional co-ordinators for better networking and promotion of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry which we consider a basic aspect of the Church's mission of evangelization.

5.12 The Seminar concluded with an enthusiastic commitment to the Spirit which has lived with and worked in us as we broke the Bread of the Word and the Bread of the Eucharist (Jn 6:34).

We feel we have made very important plans and recommendations which will enable the Church in Africa to be deeply renewed. We have seen the way in which to fulfil the vision of the Synod for Africa and the call for a new evangelization in the Third Millennium.

As the Family of God, may we recognise the power which comes from the Word of God as "something alive and active" (Heb 4:12). The power of God is 'for the salvation of every one who has faith' (Rom 1:16).

Let us appreciate the power of the Word and "grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory in time and eternity. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18). ♦





## Pastoral Letter of the Dutch Bishops about the challenges of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Holland

*In their pastoral letter on the Holy Bible for Bible Sunday 1994 (January 30, 1994), the Dutch bishops call to mind the positive influence of the two biblical encyclicals Providentissimus Deus (1893) from Leo XIII and Divino Afflante Spiritu (1943) from Pius XII, and especially of the constitution Dei Verbum (Vat. II) on the biblical ministry of the Catholic church.*

*Because of their concern for "promoting a culture of the Bible in our church", they call upon "everyone, who holds responsibility in our Catholic schools" to "devote their special attention to a biblical catechesis that relates the Bible to the experiences of children and young people.*

*We especially ask that priests, deacons and pastoral workers, but also boards of directors, councils, working groups and commissions at the levels of parishes, chapters and dioceses, as well as at a national level, should consider what they can do in their own circles to ensure that the Bible is given an important place in the life of the church."*

Over the course of this century, bishops, priests and lay people, competent biblical experts and enthusiastic volunteer workers in the Catholic region of the Netherlands have contributed to putting the guidelines of the biblical encyclicals *Providentissimus Deus* (1893), *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) and the Constitution on the Bible *Dei Verbum* into practice.

It is not even possible to provide a comprehensive survey of all the good that has been done in the area of the Bible and biblical interpretation: scholarly works in the seminaries and theological colleges; biblical commentaries and homily newsletters; numerous courses in pastoral centers, centers of continuing education and teaching institutions; years of feature contributions in the Catholic media, specifically *KRO* (Catholic Radio and

Television Station); and not least of all, the many Bible groups that have been working together, frequently in an ecumenical context, since the Council.

The Bible contains such riches that every era may discover new, unexpected aspects of its message for itself, although it may also happen that other, equally important aspects are overlooked at the same time.

In our day, a new awareness of the Jewish background of the New Testament has emerged. We have experienced how the inclusion of the Old Testament background in reading the New Testament may result in new depths of understanding.

For this reason, the readings from the Old Testament have an important

position in the Liturgy; they should not be left out.

At the same time, we have developed a greater sensitivity for the connections between the written texts and the actual problems of the society in which these texts were written, or in which they are read today. This has enabled many of the faithful to find an entirely new meaning in the Bible for their lives and their actions.

### Biblical Translation

Of course, much depends on the quality of the translation of the Bible from the source text. It was not until 1936-39 that the first complete translation of the Old Testament from the original sources was published in the Catholic region of the Netherlands.

In conjunction with the translation of the New Testament from 1929, this composed the so-called Canisius Bible (*Canisiusbijbel*), which was published by the Apologetic Petrus Canisius Association.

In 1947, Cardinal De Jong commissioned a new translation. At that time, he asked the exegetes involved to "study the new text more or less constantly for periodic perfecting." The new translation of the New Testament was finished in 1961, that of the Old Testament in 1966-74.

Thus, the so-called Willibrord Bible (*Willibrordbijbel*), which was completed under the auspices of the St. Willibrord Association and published by the Catholic Bible Foundation, has been available to the Catholic church of the Netherlands since 1975.

The Catholic Bible Foundation was founded in 1961 with the aim of propagating the Bible and supporting all those initiatives, which could contribute to the propagation of the writings and to the love of the Bible among Catholics. It has accomplished much over the past thirty years, to bring the Bible closer to the faithful.

Of course, the first achievement we think of here is their biblical publications, specifically the Willibrord trans-

lation in various editions: school edition, standard edition, paperback edition; in addition, there is also a translation of the Psalms that was published in 1982 and a new translation of the Gospels along with the Acts of the Apostles published in 1987.

This was included in the revision of the Willibrord translation of the New Testament in 1992.

In addition, we would also like to point out the commentaries and introductions to the individual books of the Bible, which have been published in recent years, as well as various other publications on the use of the Bible in liturgy and catechesis, including editions of the Bible intended to help children and young people learn the Bible.

## Initiatives

There are two initiatives in the area of biblical translation that we would like to particularly mention.

The bishops have declared themselves in agreement with the plans of the Catholic Bible Foundation to revise the Willibrord translation of the Old Testament over the course of the next few years to a limited extent.

With permission from the bishops, on February 25, 1993, the Catholic Bible Foundation agreed to cooperate with the (Protestant) Dutch Bible Society on the project of a joint ecumenical Bible translation, which is to be defined according to the guidelines for ecumenical Bible translations agreed on by the United Bible Societies and the Papal Council for Christian Unity.

## Concern

When we see all that has been done, we see that we have many reasons to be thankful; nevertheless, there are also reasons for concern.

The central question always remains that of the extent to which we truly place our lives under the Word of God, as it has been recorded in the writings of the Old and the New Tes-

tament. Can we say with the Psalmist with our whole heart: "Your Word is a lamp unto my feet, a light for my path"?

Living according to the Word of God presupposes that we are familiar with the Word of God.

In the encounter between God and human beings, the Bible as the written record of the Word of God in human language and the words of human beings plays a very special, irreplaceable role.

Traditionally, Catholic Christians have encountered the Bible more in the liturgy than in a personal reading of the Bible.

The drastic reduction of attendance at the mass in recent years has led to the consequence that many Catholics have hardly any contact with the Bible in their everyday lives.

Relevant studies have found that although many people have a Bible at home, most of them read it only rarely, despite all the reading aids and biblical reading plans.

## Catholic Schools

Religious instruction in Catholic schools represents the most appropriate place to acquaint children and young people with the Bible, which is not only the source of our faith, but also one of the most important sources of our culture.

As a consequence of the reduction of religious instruction in the teaching schedules in schools, the strong emphasis on individual experience in catechesis and the leveling treatment of the diversity of world views and cultures, the unique position of the Bible in religious instruction is seriously threatened.

Even though a dramatic reduction in the use of school Bibles does not allow for any precipitate conclusions about the position of the Bible in the schools, it is still a dismaying signal.

Where is our young generation yet able to become acquainted with the Bible? Where do they hear the great histories and narratives that provide direction and support to the lives of the faithful and represent an enrichment in the lives of all people?

We think that the Bible is also less present in other areas than it was a few decades ago. We have the impression that it has now become more rare for children to receive a children's Bible for First Communion or for a bridal couple to receive a so-called "family Bible" as a wedding present.

## Interpretation of the Bible

We are not only concerned that the Bible is not being read enough, we are also concerned that it is not being read in the right way. The Bible, through which the Word of God reaches us requires the willingness to listen and obedience in the profound biblical sense.

There will always be a danger that the interpretation of the Bible may be "used" to support individual views and interests. A very old tradition of the Catholic church is intended to counter this danger in that the Bible is read in the community of the church and against the background of the tradition of the church.

This obedience to the word of God is also the foundation for ecumenism. In our pastoral letter on ecumenism in 1987, we pointed out the ecumenical significance of "discussions of the word". In discussions of faith, our attention is directed particularly to Israel.

In this address, we stressed how important it is in terms of ecumenism "to allow ourselves to be taught together with other Christian communities of faith in the House of Learning, Israel, where Jesus began his preaching."

A true familiarity with the Bible is the only foundation for us to be able to work toward ecumenism together with the other communities of faith in the Netherlands. ◆



## An Entire Diocese studies the Bible

*Experiences like this from Santander can serve as a reference for knowing how to take the biblical pastoral ministry in Spanish dioceses seriously. "To begin with a knowledge of Scripture is to work with a clear vision of the future", says Valentin Martin Tejerina, author of this communication.*

As your bishop, conscious of the necessity we all have of being evangelised, and cordially welcoming the Pope's proposal, I summon you all to meet in small groups in order to listen more attentively to the gospel.

In our diocese of Santander, after careful preparation, we are going to initiate groups in all the Parishes for faith-inspired reading of the gospel, in order to allow the Word of God call us to conversion, to call us once more to community and to make us experience the presence of the living Christ in our midst.

### ORIGIN OF A PROJECT

The "Casa de la Biblia" is a well-known institution in our country through its work of diffusion and understanding of the Word of God. For years it has been producing publications and animating biblical groups which are springing up here and there as the fruit of its work.

Its project of bible groups reached the ears of the bishop of Santander, to whom it seemed interesting at first, and who later took it on with enthusiasm as a valid instrument for the pastoral project of the diocese at the end of the millennium to which Pope John Paul II has been giving great importance in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*.

In the birth process of the project a decision was first taken in the Council of Priests and it met to announce it on a very opportune date: the feast of "la Bien Aparecida" (a local Marian feast)

on 15 September 1995, a date on which the Prelate traditionally speaks to the whole diocese.

Two factors came into the operation immediately: offering the project to the priests of the diocese to put it into practice themselves in their clergy meetings, and the appointment of a diocesan team - representing the six vicariates of the diocese and the Catechetics Delegation - which would go immediately to Madrid to participate in a short course for animators and to plan the strategy of the project together with those in charge of the Casa de la Biblia.

This team - with the Bishop nearly always present - would shape throughout the year the various measures for implementing in the diocese the project of faith-inspired reading of the gospel of Mark, in harmony with prayer and conversion, making it coincide with the liturgical reading of the Word of God in Cycle B.

On the first Sunday of Lent an icon was presented, which will function as a logo for the project, with one part detachable, for those who wish to register for the Bible groups in their parishes. Logically the homily would contain echoes of the previous year's "Aparecida".

Apart from one or two parishes in the Torrelavega region, the first reply was not very positive. On the other hand, there was enthusiasm among priests who liked this method of approaching the Bible.

As a matter of fact, priests were going to play an important part during these months, when, on the one hand, they would receive a new communication inviting them to choose animators for the Bible groups in their parishes, and, on the other hand, when they would meet in their vicariates to review the year's pastoral work and outline that for the coming year.

The enthusiasm of the priests was felt and it encouraged the diocesan team which, with the bishop at its head, together with the regional vicars and the representatives of the Casa de la Biblia and the 'Editorial Verbo Divino' met in the Abbey of Cóbreces to finalise all the details such as the Calendar for the Pastoral Project for the Diocese for the next three years.

On the last day of the meeting all the clergy of the diocese were present so that the chain of transmission in the diocese would work in a co-ordinated and systematic way.

The most optimistic calculations of this meeting would overflow as soon as the inscriptions for the Course for animators scheduled for the middle of September began to reach the Secretary of Catechesis in the second fortnight of June.

From that moment on it would be a race against the clock to organise this course, in view of the fact that the inscriptions greatly surpassed the number of animators foreseen. In the end space was found for all by multiplying the lecture-rooms and extending the hours of the professors.

The result was some 400 animators, mostly lay people, who now had a month ahead of them to transmit their enthusiasm in the parishes and to get started as great a number of Bible groups as possible.

The 13th of October last was the date chosen to begin to get the project under way with a widespread delivery to families of a simple edition of St Mark's gospel.

It was done during the course of the Sunday Masses, with the possibility

of completing this delivery at home in the most convenient way for each parish. For the third time - the second time was the feast of "la Aparecida" this year - a homily of the Bishop was read relating to this project.

Likewise some liturgical helps and a big poster with the logo of the project were made available. This was the final call to get the people together into the groups, and from this moment on, the Bible groups had to be established and begin meetings.

## OBJECTIVES

At the meeting in Cóbreces the objectives of the diocesan pastoral ministry for the coming years were drawn up:

- to promote a faith-based reading of the gospel in harmony with prayer, conversion and community in order to facilitate the personal encounter with Jesus Christ. It seeks to strengthen personal faith and the discovery of the Church as mystery. In the year of Jesus Christ, according to *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, insistence will be placed on the virtue of faith and on the theology and pastoral aspect of baptism.

- To strengthen the community fabric of our parishes, by improving our catechesis, our liturgy and our charitable action. Here one is seeking to function with normality and efficiency, beyond roles and projects, parochial pastoral councils, so that personal faith may be capable of being transformed into community and the Church as mystery into a Church as communion.

- To boost the witness of lay people in the world so that personal and community faith might be transformed into committed faith, and the Church as mystery and the Church as communion into the missionary Church. To this end, special attention is devoted to new families, to the promotion of new Catholic Action, and to intensifying projects concerned with help for the poor.

We have here a full programme of evangelisation which takes its inspira-

tion both from *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, and the Pastoral Plan of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, "*That the world may believe*". This course is going to work intensively with Bible groups, but it also seeks to continue.

In fact, already there are well-shaped plans for the coming years. In summary, the priests are being encouraged to try out beforehand what they are going to recommend pastorally to their faithful, and live out this year in their priestly meetings the theology of Confirmation, which is the theme which will be confronting the diocese next year, that of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, what is being asked of the priests will be a double task: on the one hand, to accompany the faithful in a faith-based reading of the Gospel of Mark and, on the other hand to submerge themselves in the realm of the Spirit through a faith-based reading of Acts, as a clear testimony of the out-pouring of the Spirit and a sign of hope for a Church that believe and which wants to be converted into community.

## MATERIALS

The whole pastoral assembly will not be able to achieve its object without good foundations and, in this case, the foundations are the materials which the Casa de la Biblia is going to place at our disposal.

Materials that will not come exclusively from a laboratory, but which will be passed on precisely by the diocesan team which will touch up the small details and take note, above all, of the connection which acts of life can have with the Cantabrian reality.

They will have to be basic materials which come from life and which are accessible to ordinary people and, at the same time, allow for a higher level. The experience and deepening will be different in each case according to the reality and composition of the groups.

On the other hand, the team from the Casa de la Biblia has, on various occasions, travelled to Cantabria to

come into contact with the real situation. This is important because it is the starting point. This methodology involves four steps: we look at our life, we read the text, we look again at our life, we pray and celebrate.

To bring about this dynamic we rely on the following materials:

- The Bible. In our case a simple and special edition of the gospel of Saint Mark, prepared for the event, which facilitates the locating of passages for ordinary people.

- A pamphlet for each participant which contains the dates of the meeting for the year, which can be a maximum of fifteen or a minimum of nine, or something in between. The first meeting revolves around Mark 1:1. The second session will have as its objective Mark 8:27-30 and will turn upon two questions: Who do people say that I am? Who do you say that I am? Six sessions will follow, one on the literary division of Mark, which will split into more options. And the meetings will end with a session on Mark 16:1-8: the return to Galilee.

- There is a guide for each group animator which follows the same order as the pamphlet with appropriate recommendations for each theme.

## BIBLICAL JOURNEY

At present there is enthusiasm. And the most enthusiastic, without doubt, is don José Vilaplana, who recently uttered the words that head these notes. He has done the animator course and is going to put it into practice in one of the most significant places in the city: the Barrio Pesquero.

He is passing on his dynamism and enthusiasm to us all. He is trying to cast his net in such decisive sectors as the confirmed young people and professional people from 40 to 50 years old.

The connection of these sectors to the Bible groups cannot yet be gauged. But there is, without doubt, hope in the diocese and the Sower is going out to sow his seed. ◆



# Life of the Federation

## News

### Europe/Middle East

#### Austria

#### Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk

We are online! Maybe you would like to visit us, maybe you are looking for some texts of Originals ... Or what is happening in Österreichischem Katholischem Bibelwerk.

This is our address:

<http://www.user.xpoint.at/oekb/homepage.htm>

Hannes Schreiber

#### Germany

The *Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk* has published the following materials:

- Anneliese Hecht; *Zugänge zur Bibel. Methoden für Gruppen. Schnupperkurs*

For more information:

Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk  
Silberburgstr. 121  
D-70176 Stuttgart  
Germany  
Tel.: 49-(0) 7 11-6 19 20-34  
Fax: 49-(0) 7 11-6 19 24-44

#### Italy

#### The Bible in Four Years

The bishop of our diocese spoke at the pastoral conference in Brixen on September 5, 1996, and his lecture

included the following suggestion for preparing for the coming millennium: "A good preparation for the year 2000 would be to read the entire bible by the year 2000."

Now truthfully: Is there anyone who has not nurtured this wish deep in their heart at some point?

We have all read sections from certain writings, entire books/epistles, often even the whole New Testament ..., but the entire bible from Genesis to Malachi, from Matthew to St. John's Revelations?

Any number of people may have started out with this intention, but in the end it is often no more than a good intention.

The Society for Catholic Education and the chairman of the pastorate of the bible for our diocese, Dr. Hanjörg Rigger are offering "The Bible in Four Years", with which they not only wish to encourage people to read the entire bible, but also provide the needed competent assistance.

The Neustift Bible Center and Provincial Fr. Dr. Georg Reider OFM, docent for Christian spirituality and pastoral theology the College of Philosophy and Theology in Brixen have also declared their willingness to collaborate on this program.

#### Orientation

The orientation of the program "The Bible in Four Years" is simultaneously academic, communal and spiritual:

- **Academic**, because understanding the bible requires knowing something about its context, its historical background and its manner of thinking.

- **Communal**, because the Bible is addressed first of all to a community, to the People of God.

- **Spiritual**, because only those people will be able to understand the bible as the Word of God, who begin more and more to live from the bible and to pray with it.

#### Course Offering - For Whom?

"The Bible in Four Years" is offered to everyone who would like to be better informed, who wants to perceive, increase and responsibly live their life of faith in the light of the Word of God; everyone who does or wants to do more than just minimal service in the church; anyone who is prepared to accept an obligation to the Word of God and enter into processes of change.

#### Latin Europe

#### The Latin Europe subregion's meeting in Maredsous

The Latin Europe subregion of the CBF met in the Abbey of Maredsous, on October 11-13, 1996.

On the agenda:

1. An evaluation of the Vth Plenary Assembly of the Federation held in Hong Kong at the beginning of July (see Interface n° 96/62 3rd Tr. 96): from now the members would like that a clearer distinction be made between the technical part (General Assembly) and the pastoral one (Biblical Pastoral Congress).

2. They would like to promote the presence of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry in the media (especially the radio and magazines).

3. The subregion wish to come into contact with Romania, the Middle East subregion (generally French speak-

ing), the few members of the North America subregion (USA, Canada) as well.

4. A leaflet explaining why it is a matter of urgency to hold a roman synod on the Word of God in the Church and in the world will be offered.

5. A file will be drawn up by each member on the ideas and the wishes in view of a serious revision of the liturgical lectionary.

6. To make people aware of the biblical meaning of the jubilee year is necessary everywhere.

It could be done in the light of a mediatized reflection on the "cancellation of all debts" (and other real signs of "reconciliation").

7. In the coming years, the subgroup will attempt to confront the practice in the biblical area with the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on The interpretation of the Bible in the Church.

This will be the specific theme of our next meeting which will take place in London, on October 10-12, 1997.

## Poland

Here is some brief information about the Polish Bible Association:

I have already provided a report on the program "Bible Study Groups in Primary Schools", which is a kind of experiment that we are conducting in one of the largest communities in Warsaw.

The program includes over 300 children between the ages of 13 - 15 years.

They meet in their schools every week (outside normal school hours) for bible study.

There will be a competition in May, but we consider this an "enticement" rather than an aim in itself.

The participants who are able to demonstrate the most knowledge of the bible (approx. 20) will be rewarded with an extensive, attractive trip.

Originally, a bible study trip to Greece was planned, but because of expenses, now they will probably travel to Medjugorje.

The Bible Association is primarily concerned with training the leaders of these bible study groups.

We publish educational aids and have a training course for the leaders every month.

The bible study groups are lead by religion teachers, theology students and co-workers from the Bible Association.

In February, we organized a large meeting for the participating school children.

Now, one year after the start of this experiment, we can say that we will not be concerned with directly practical work (organizing large meetings), but rather we will focus on training qualified leaders, because the most important opportunity for formation is to be found in small groups.

In the next school year, the program will be expanded to include other communities in Warsaw as well. We plan to publish practical aids for each session every month.

In order to simplify the financial side of our work, we are currently involved in establishing a foundation.

There are now 15 people working at the Bible Association, all of them volunteers.

If we are successful with the foundation and are able to find donors, as we have this year for the bible study groups, I would like to see that one co-worker receives a small salary, so that she can devote more time to this work.

At the same time, we are already in our second year of regular weekly bible seminars for college students.

## Slovenia

On September 20, 1996, Bishop Egger took part in the presentation of the Slovenian translation of the Holy Bible.

During the scholarly symposium that was held on this occasion, the Catholic Biblical Federation was mentioned as one of the supporting organizations that made this translation possible. Bishop Egger gave a brief address.

I would like to congratulate the Christians and the people of Slovenia on the completion of the Slovenian translation of the Bible.

The Catholic Biblical Federation as a federation of the organizations commissioned with the biblical apostolate by the Bishops' Conferences of different countries, and of which I am the president, is especially pleased by the success of this endeavor.

We are pleased that this end has been achieved through cooperation among different Christian confessions.

The Bible is a book of the Christian churches, and it is a book belonging to all of humanity.

The completion of the Slovenian translation will make a reference point of culture and history accessible and may continue to serve as a source of inspiration for faith, peace, compassion, culture and history.

Through each new translation, the Holy Word of God is given a new voice: in the expressions of a particular language and culture, within a particular framework of understanding, in a particular context of life.

In this way, the Word of God and God Himself comes to the people.



The conclusion of this translation marks the achievement of an important goal.

Now, however, the work of translation must continue.

This translation is entrusted to the people of this country, to the Christians and the Churches.

The next task is to continue to translate this message into life.

The translation must be continued, so that the Word of God may find a place in the hearts of men and women, so that they may become a living Bible.

And so we hope that many people will follow this living Bible to the written Bible and to Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

We are happy that this translation has been completed; but we are even happier that there are people who are willing to carry on the work of translation to form a living Bible.

## Switzerland

### Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk

The *Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk* has published the following materials:

- Christa Breiing/Daniel Kosch; *Gott mit allen Sinnen erfahren, Ein ganzheitlicher Bibelparcours zu den fünf Sinnen: Schmecken - Tasten - Sehen - Riechen - Hören*

- Daniel Kosch/Rita Volkart-Troxler; *Gemeinsam die Bibel lesen und erleben, Lebenssinn und Lebensstil, Weggemeinschaft mit Jesus im Lukasevangelium, Dossier Nr. 2*

For more information:

Bibelpastorale Arbeitsstelle SKB  
Bederstr. 76

CH-8002 Zürich  
Switzerland  
Tel.: 41-(0) 1-2 02 66 74  
Fax: 41-(0)1-2 01 43 0

## Iraq

We received a report from the Theological and Biblical Centre for lay people in Baghdad which is under the patronage of Mgr. Dahdah, the Latin bishop, and run by the Dominican Fathers.

About 800 persons attend this centre among whom there are 300 regulars.

Those who follow these courses (Bible with the Father Kop, a Dutch redemptorist who speaks Arabic) are state servants, retired persons, students at university, students preparing the secondary school examination, etc.

These people's hunger for the Word of God is obvious.

There is a project of a serious month long training course in Baghdad and in Mossoul. May the Lord help us!

Paul Féghaly

## Jerusalem

### The Centre for Biblical Formation ECCE HOMO

You wish to take a year's sabbatical or six months for a serious and in-depth biblical retraining:

- Come to the Source, in the heart of Jerusalem, to the Centre for biblical formation run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion.

- You will enjoy an integrative program including courses and excursions, with the collaboration of Jewish and Christian biblicalists, especially teachers of the Biblical School of Jerusalem, of the Pontifical Biblical Institute

and of the Christian Centre of Jewish Studies "St Peter of Ratisbonne", etc.

This program places the accent on up to date study of the Word of God, re-read in the context of the Land, the People and the Jewish Tradition out of which it was born, in order to get a deeper understanding of Jesus and his message.

Biblical retraining: open to all, priests, religious, and lay people who wish to deepen their knowledge of the Word of God and of the Holy Land.

- Six month or year long courses
- Guided visits of the Holy Land
- Possibility of accommodation

Further information:

Centre de Formation Biblique,  
Ecce Homo,  
P.O. Box 19056  
Via Dolorosa, 41  
91190 Jérusalem, Israël  
Tél.: 9 72-2-6 27.72.93  
Fax: 9 72-2-6 27.67.97

## Lebanon

Our Biblical Congress on St John's Revelation was a success as were our previous congresses.

There were about 96 participants. The lectures were of a better standard than last time.

Father Édouard Cothenet of the Catholic Institute in Paris gave us very good lectures and we are grateful to him for his presence among us.

The next congress will be held in 1999 on the theme: St John's Gospel.

All this doesn't prevent other activities taking place in each country of the subregion.

Perhaps a mini-congress for Lebanon will be held next year during the Christmas holidays.

Paul Féghaly

## Materials

### Intercultural Experiences & Lectio Divina relating to Biblical Woodcuts

*Over the past few years, Rudi Pöhl, SVD, has linked pictures by Sister Sigmunda May on biblical themes with the tradition of the Lectio Divina.*

*This is all done in conjunction with the spiritual counsel of women and men of various nationalities and cultures. Reading the image, the word, the life situation, and finally meditating on this together. Praying with the image, with the word and with life, in order to meditate and pray with joy in the end.*

*This is the procedure we present today using the example of the picture of Samaritan woman and the corresponding text (John 4, 1-26).*

**Sr. Sigmunda May**, born 1937, Franciscan in Sießen, is an art teacher in Stuttgart, Germany.

*She has been creating series of woodcuts, usually black and white, a few with more colors, since 1973. Since 1975, more and more people have become acquainted with her work through numerous exhibitions. All of her pictures revolve around people who have been touched by God, moved, healed or sent out along the path of love. The language of the woodcut compels the viewer.*

**Sr. Christina Mülling**, born 1958, Franciscan in Sießen, is a teacher in Stuttgart.

human - spiritual life and encounters with other people, without having met or become personally acquainted with the artist or author.

The initial basis for this is the external impression and the inner response to these encounters.

Only later have I met and engaged in dialogue with these creative women and men.

It was a similar case with the twenty woodcuts on the bible by Sigmunda May with texts by her fellow sister Christina Mülling in the newly published book: *Von Gott geheilt. Holzschnitte zur Bibel*, Don Bosco-Verlag, Munich 1996, p. 96.

I was delighted to discover that over half the pictures in this book were previously unknown to me. The title of the book *Von Gott geheilt* ("Healed by God") expresses biblical figures' "experience of God in the Heart's Den" in a way that reflects the life of the human beings of today and tomorrow in a state of despair and hopelessness.

They are healed by God, liberated, called by God's touch, voice, word, fire, sign, compassion, love and tenderness to set out on a new path.

The text of the book is written with great insight and contemporary relevance, a sign that both women are responding with images - the Word of God - to real life situations, that they are able to communicate and interpret God's message to us human beings well.

In the preface to the pictures, Ch. Mülling addresses the experience of despair in our day, which stretches between the heedlessness of God (*ungodliness* in the text) and a most profound *yearning* for meaningfulness, between imparted injuries and a search for shelteredness and love, between wholeness and redemption.

Ch. Mülling believes that people may find an honest answer in the *images of people in the bible*, who are every

### The setting for encountering God through the pictures:

I have been working with the biblical woodcuts by Sister Sigmunda May, OFS, for over ten years in the apostolate of spiritual guidance for individual retreats, Ignatian Exercises for men and women, working with various target groups, such as youth groups,

communities of novices and those preparing for the novitiate, and in the last six years primarily with courses for spiritual and biblical renewal for religious and laity from five continents.

As it has happened many times in my life, I took pictures, texts, books, music in hand and integrated them gratefully and fruitfully in the framework of my





bit as hurt and disappointed as we are.

However, these biblical images do not stop at the neediness and despair of human beings, but rather they point toward new paths leading into light, into hope, into transformation and redemption.

The same is true for us and in our hearts, if we are willing to consciously-unconsciously allow ourselves to be touched. The Old and the New Testament are full of such images of redemption and hope.

Whether these images are of the Prophets or the person of Jesus, crowds gather around them in order to regain contact with life that is well and unbroken, to be liberated and to experience salvation.

Yet how can we be touched by God here and now, that we may become more whole and more saved - may be redeemed in the midst of despair?

If Holy Scripture promises us this message and places it before our eyes, where are the paths and doors that lead us there?

“One possibility is the way that leads through pictures. Pictures are compressed words.

They may often access our feelings and our subconscious more directly.

They are able to open gates to the inside, through which we may be moved by the Word's message of salvation, with the Word of God made flesh Himself.

Pictures provide a way of addressing the power of salvation in human beings as a whole, of speaking to a person in their most inner center.

When an observer approaches a picture and the message it reveals with gentle care, they are admitted into the experience of God of the people of the Old and New Testament.

In this way, pictures may become a redeeming experience of God in our own lives.”

This is the statement made by Ch. Mülling in the introduction.

I can only reiterate this statement, as I have observed the different experiences of being touched and healed by God in small steps from the picture through the Word of God into the *deeper layers of life* while using the pictures both in spiritual guidance and in the guided individual process of redemption of the Ignatian exercises.

In the last three or four years, I linked Sigmunda May's woodcuts with the pedagogical method of meditation of the steps of the *Lectio Divina* and used this in the spiritual guidance of women and men from different nationalities and cultures.

Again and again, I experienced it as a gift to see how people particularly from Asia and Africa were led so directly and with such vitality along the path from the picture - especially biblical images of women and men - to Holy Scripture and then into the depths of their own lives, and how compassion, healing and joy were sparked and grew into flames in the spiritual searching and growth of different individuals.

## Approaches and Steps:

### Lectio - Reading

#### on reading the picture:

I attempt to approach the picture peacefully, openly, calmly and read in it: from the outside to the middle, or from the middle to the edge.

I pause, get myself out of the way, allow myself to be moved, touched, until the picture is very close to me.

The picture can wait, it allows me time, and I may take whatever time I need.

I need courage to open myself to the expressive power of the picture with humility and not to resist it, because that is the only way I may receive a message I can read, which would otherwise remain hidden from me.

Let us take the picture on page 41 as an example, “If you would ask of me ...” (on John 4:1-26).

I consider the whole picture, let it affect me as a whole, and as soon as I am ready to set out on the path to the encounter, I choose my starting point in the picture: at the edge or in the middle, for example.

This particular woodcut, this picture from the Gospel of John, will probably lead me to go directly to the middle and move toward the edge from there.

On the left there is a man with a halo, gesticulating hands and fingers.

His body is leaning, yet at the same time, it stands monumentally firm on the ground.

He is turning questioningly, yet with loving attention to a woman.

The woman wears her hair down and carries a pitcher firmly in her hands. She seems to be trembling slightly, starting to turn away.

Perhaps she is about to run away. And yet she is completely present, tame, touched and listening.

Just hands and fingers are used, one finger in particular.

One long finger points to the neck, the opening of the pitcher.

And what story do these eyes tell? Vis-à-vis alone - that is when eyes speak most clearly.

Their mouths seem to be more reserved.

Attention is directed here to the pitcher filled with water. - What does this pointing finger want: instruction or help?





Does this private conversation involve a secret between a man and a woman at a clandestine meeting place?

The well seems to suggest that it must be a public place, though. Yet the two of them are completely alone. There is a roof above their heads. The architecture of this well provides shade in the heat of the day.

The space around the well is decorated with a thick rope like a garland for a wedding, festively surrounding a pair of lovers.

Two figures with a wonderful well in the middle. On the far end - to the left of the woman - the rope has a large hook. It must be the pulley for the deep well.

The whole scene takes place in a valley surrounded by mountains on the left and right, and there is a bright white sky above.

There is something missing in this picture of a well: the pail for the well! It is not hanging on the large, strong hook. That is lying on the ground. The pail has come unhooked.

Certainly, it cannot be the clay pitcher. Is it a picture riddle?

### **on the reading of the Holy Scripture:**

Read! - Now read the text John 4: 1-26, on which the woodcut is based. Here it is important to read not only with your eyes, but to read the text word for word, read the text references.

Here, too, there is a movement or an approach to the center and an opening for the story.

Here, words and images may leap into view, fall into my heart, impress themselves in my memory, so that I am touched, moved, come into far closer contact with the biblical figure and the dynamics of the message.

Now it is God's turn to speak. This *Lectio*, guided by the light of His Holy Spirit, leads to inner hearing.

Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman aims to open the ear of my heart.

Beyond the text and the words, it also helps me to better see, hear, discover the interrelationships of human life.

What do I *read from* the text now? What do I *hear from* it for me? Really listening must lead to compliance. Am I prepared for that?

Reading and particularly this reading (*Lectio*) of the Word of John thus helps me to read a more profound yearning and God's invitation to me. Reading and reading again then leads me down the steps into the heart's den.

### **on reading my life situation (*Lectio vitae*):**

Once I have set off reading with the picture and the text of John 4: 1-26 along the way, I cannot help but read in the book of my experience of life and faith and delve into it.

It may be that a particular chapter of my life along the way to this point has been illuminated and bears the caption: "Thirst of my soul", or "Lord, your love has charmed me", or "Give me to drink", or "Speaking with a woman at the well" or "My unquenchable thirst for true love - who can still it?"

I let the images and words rise up, which these memories bring to light, and I read them without holding on to them, without analyzing them ..., and then I let them go again.

Perhaps one of the many images with or without words rises up in me and becomes so clear that I can feel not only me and my friend again, but I can even sense precisely the point that was not only important to me then, but is still just as important here and now: it is my thirst for true love.

I want to be able to drink of this water, to tell of the water of this woodcut, the water of John's text. I pause for a moment here, and then I let this image go as well.

## **Meditatio - Meditation**

### **Reading and meditating *picture - word - life situation* together:**

It is good to return to the *picture* now.

This time, I can read and meditate from the edge to the middle, from the surface into the depths.

Now the picture goes beyond the black and white and the lines and surfaces, and it begins to live and takes on more movement and a dynamic form.

I may allow myself to be led freely now from the reading into the atmosphere of the scene.

What is there about this picture that touches me now?

What happens inside me when I view this full-blooded man Jesus and the Samaritan woman thirsting for life and love?

Does this picture hold a special message for me, something it wants to tell me in detail or as a whole? I may not yet be able to name it. Yet I know that this message has a distinct name?

If I now return to the text, read the text again, repeat aloud a few of the words, sentences from before and listen to their echo, chew them over again, savor the taste of them, even partake of the words and thus entrust myself more and more to the words, to the picture, then I experience in a way that is more alive, more conscious what the difference is between emptiness and fullness, hunger-thirst and satiation, hurt and healing, imprisonment and liberation ...

This Word of God that I stammer, chew, drink, that burns on my tongue and in my heart, this living Word heals, liberates, teaches new ways of trusting, of forgiveness and of service.

It is pressing to grow in me and to ripen and to be born - just as Mary held and pondered it - until it may step out into my life, my actions.

And this lets me experience how actual pictures and the Word of God may become effective in me, if I allow them not only to touch me and to speak to me, but even to become wholly incorporated in me, to become nourishment, to become the means of healing and redemption, and to become the strength of life here and now along my way through *everyday* existence.

In this way, my book of life is not written only by me, but also bears the handwriting of His signs and wonders, which has its own special character.

Often it is not easy to recognize and interpret these characters-signs as God's handwriting.

## Oratio - Prayer

### *Pray the picture!*

In the further course of pausing a moment, the picture becomes my picture and parable.

Now I enter into the scene between Jesus and the Samaritan woman myself. The well is in the background and I am in the foreground.

Jesus approaches me and speaks directly to me: "Give me to drink ... If you would ask of me ..." Perhaps the Samaritan woman leaves me alone with Jesus for a short time, for she is in a hurry to tell the others in the village what she has learned; the disciples will hear for themselves what has happened here.

I am alone with Jesus for a few minutes and the scene with the clay pitcher, with the water repeats itself, but in a way that is different from what I had probably expected ...

Where has the pail gone? Do I need one? From where does Jesus draw this water that quenches all thirst? That quenches people's thirst for life and love? Could his pail be: talking with people? - The prayer to the Father?

### *Pray the Word of God!*

I read John 4:1-26 and read the picture, and I let both combine to become a fountain.

My response, my talk with Jesus is devoted to his request and he himself will show to me who he wants to be for me.

I may use words or gestures to express what I have learned along this path of the Lectio-Meditatio.

The Spirit of Jesus and the Word of Jesus set me free to comply with his request, his message, his call, his initiative, as from one friend to another.

Here it is no longer a case of cautious considerations or carefully choosing my words; instead, the fountain of joy, of liberation spontaneously becomes visible to the outside through repeated joyful praising, thanksgiving, dancing or repeated asking.

I let his presence fall onto me like light.

### *Pray Life!*

The response to Jesus' request is compressed in my life to the point where it becomes a single stream of water spurting out from the deep well: upwards, outwards, toward the sides.

The water flows over on to other people, who are just as thirsty, hungry and want to be sated.

Joy, thanksgiving, consolation, healing and redemption, maybe even tears - in the presence of Jesus they flow out to his disciples, to "my men, my women", to my friends, those I have had and those who surround me today.

Life is transformed through his image, his Word, his water of life, that *HE* will give to me from now on ...

## Contemplatio - Contemplation

### *Pray and taste!*

Now it is a question of the *harmony of doing and being*. The fountain streams out and flows into peaceful prayer. I look at *HIM* and *HE* looks at me - with loving attentiveness. In the heat of the day, I "gulp, drink" again and again of his life giving words.

Finally, thirst is quenched, because the beloved has tasted the words of the loving one with joy, with fervency and with a letting go of self. The conversation at the well becomes peacefully flowing spring water for the many.

Here the thirst of my life is transformed into the fullness of life, the fullness of life into a fountain of love for people who are thirsting and seeking God with their whole hearts. In other words: God's love will create new life through me.

This fountain, this water should not be poisoned. It should bring life and healing and liberation everywhere where I may be a fountain among people. Thus, what I must do now is to protect and keep safe in my heart's den what I have seen, heard and tasted.

From out of this heart's den that collects, holds and ponders all words, I may now proceed along the way to people in Asia or Africa, in Europe or Latin America ... drawing strength for their social, political, economic, spiritual poverty and need.

Ultimately, this path leads through the Via Dolorosa through Golgotha through death to the Father, whom I may see from face to face, and who will also show me who I have been for others, for his Son, for my sisters and brothers.

Perhaps I have been for them a living woodcut of God, a visible Word of God, a living epistle from Christ, a Lectio Divina - Lectio Vita for non-Christians ...