

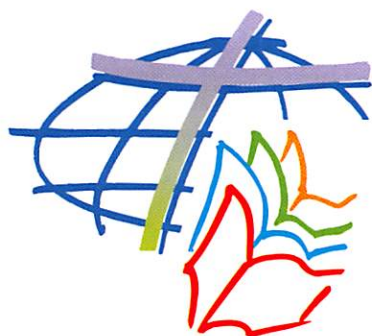
DEIVERBUM

Catholic Biblical Federation

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Bibliodrama

Bringing the Bible
into Play



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English Edition





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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,



"Do you understand what you are reading?" With this question, according to the Acts of the Apostles, Phillip approaches that Ethiopian court official who is on the way back to his home country after his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, deeply engrossed in the reading of Scripture. The eunuch answers with a counter-question, which at the same time is a request for

help with reading: "How can I, unless I have someone to guide me?" Out of this verbal exchange a dialogue unfolds regarding Israel's Holy Scripture and the significance of Jesus of Nazareth. At the end of the encounter the eunuch asks for baptism and is finally sent on his way newly baptized and rejoicing (cf. Acts 8:26-40).

This conversion story can be read as a kind of brief instruction on Christian preaching: An offer of help for a deeper understanding of Scripture, genuine questioning and open dialogue engaged at eye level, rather than condescending demands, a narrative of one's own experience and of the liberating message of the Gospel, rather than a blunt presentation of ready-made truths, community of minds and hearts based on the inner motivation of the other, not one achieved through external incentive or pressure – all of these are elements that would also go to make up contemporary and responsible biblical pastoral ministry.

Do you understand what you are reading? To understand the Bible means first of all to read the Bible. Reading is opening oneself to the message of the text whose intention is to move us as readers to concrete action. Understanding the Bible therefore always also means: allowing my life to be set in motion by the Bible, translating its message into my own life.

The new issue of the *Bulletin Dei Verbum* which you have in your hands has as its central theme a form of access to the Bible that implements this familiar biblical pastoral three-step process of reading, understanding and doing in a way that is both creative and integral: bibliodrama. The purpose of this kind of biblical interpretation is to become

playfully involved in biblical texts so as to bring experiences and perspectives of one's own concrete life context into relationship with the contents and message of Scripture. Bibliodrama as a playing out of biblical stories that reveals the close connection between the Word of God and one's own life. Concretely this happens through dynamics and motion, through representation, dance, body work, etc. For this reason, we have given this issue the title: *Bringing the Bible into play* – into the play that is one's own life, we might add.

Bibliodrama allows me to relate – to God and his Word, to my fellow actors and actresses, to the world and to myself. Bibliodrama means not limiting myself, but opening myself to the unknown – while I slip into strange and unaccustomed roles, while I build relationships to others, while I consider unfamiliar life styles and standpoints and discover positions of my own. Bibliodrama signifies letting myself in, instead of shutting myself out, openness rather than mistrust, tolerance rather than fear; it means the experience of community and plurality.

In this issue we invite you to acquaint yourself with some of the diversity of bibliodrama. At first sight the combination of articles might appear to be somewhat disparate. But this very lack of uniformity reflects the colorful variety of this artistic initiative. There is no such thing as *the* bibliodrama; instead, there is a multiplicity of different alignments and initiatives. And the contributions from the various different countries and continents show moreover that bibliodrama is by no means to be seen as something entirely isolated from other approaches to the Bible, such as, for example, *Lectio Divina*, *Lectura Popular* or scientific exegesis. There are many styles of biblical interpretation and a variety of viable options for an action-oriented reading of Scripture.

I wish you enriching reading experiences with the essays that introduce this creative approach to the Bible, but also with the other articles of this issue that report from the life of our Federation and its members.

Claudio Etti



What is Bibliodrama? A Brief Introduction

Rudi Pöhl, svd



Fr. Dr. Rudi Pöhl is a Divine Word Missionary who is currently active in the field of spirituality and the biblical apostolate at Saint Michael's House in Steyl. He conducts courses in bibliodrama and trains bibliodrama leaders, among other places in the Philippines and in Papua New Guinea.

For some time now bibliodrama has been enjoying increasing popularity. More and more people are finding deepened and enriched access to the Word of God and to their own self-understanding through this exploratory acting out of biblical texts. The following article gives a short overview on this creative way of reading the Bible.

The concept of bibliodrama is composed of the Greek words "biblion" or "biblios" which means book resp. document (or better simply: piece of writing) and "drama" for action. It is also possible to translate this concept as "biblical role-play". There is not only ONE type of bibliodrama; rather there are many types of short exercises, plays and methods known of, perhaps, from different contexts. Bibliodrama is an intensive confrontation with a Scripture text (story) in which the participants come to discover themselves and the world in which they live in and through the Scripture text.

The method of bibliodrama

With the help of a facilitator the group tries to internalize a text by way of mutual conversations, interviews, gestures, acting and taking into account their individual social situation and culture. Each participant eventually finds his/her particular role in the biblical narrative. In this way, a personal relationship is developed, the text's depths and relevance to the present day are discovered and it thus comes alive.

Hence a spiritual process starts, a process in which the personal history of each participant, the common history of the group and the faith tradition are clarified

through group interaction. At the same time the background of the Scripture text becomes more transparent. This multidimensional activity (process) helps the participants to discover and experience the spiritual power of biblical wisdom: it also helps to dissolve blocks of a distorted faith tradition, e.g. false images of God. This leads to a creative process in which the participants experience inner change, allowing new life to emerge. The individual feels encouraged to listen to the Word of God in his/her everyday life, and to live hereafter accordingly, even if these new insights lead to a change in the direction his/her life was previously taking.



Internalization of a text

The impact of bibliodrama depends on a holistic approach, a process which draws its spiritual power from listening to the Word of God with ear, heart, hands and intellect. In this way the Word of God can bring about an inner transformation and create a spiritual fertility by giving new life and by enabling to pass life on to others.

The main steps within bibliodrama

1. Presentation of the biblical text or search for the text

The facilitator presents a selected biblical text or he/she starts a process in which the group shares a text with which each participant can identify or feel at ease with.



2. Staging (finding his/her role)

The facilitator assists the participants in choosing his/her role, in accepting it, filling it out during the play, living it and finally reflecting on his/her bibliodrama experience.

3. Integration

Discovering the link between the text, the experience of the play and the everyday life situation (the link between exegesis and life-knowledge).

4. Encounter

Discovering, becoming acquainted with and deepening the various forms of inner and outer space: balancing closeness and distance, empathy and protection of self, perception of self and perception by others of oneself.

5. Open (vulnerable) religiosity

Stimulating spontaneity and creativity so that the participants can experience their own religiosity and can express this religiosity on a personal level and in contact with others.



At a workshop in Papua New Guinea

Bibliodrama works on four levels: the cognitive level (knowledge), emotional level (feeling), spiritual level (adoration) and the social level (action). Bibliodrama is not a show for an audience, but it is a happening in which the participants themselves experience the Word physically, emotionally, spiritually and socially. ■



Bibliodrama and Exegesis

Anneliese Hecht



Anneliese Hecht, a theologian and consultant at the Katholisches Bibelwerk (Catholic Biblical Association) in Stuttgart, has been actively involved in the biblical pastoral ministry for many years now. She regularly offers workshops in bibliodrama.

Bibliodrama seminars have for a long time now had an established place in the biblical pastoral ministry. The following article not only describes this approach to the Bible, but also attempts to define the relationship between bibliodrama and exegesis.

I see myself as a border crosser between the scientific exegesis of the universities and the exegetical methods that are employed in pastoral praxis. Bibliodrama has been part of this praxis since 1980.

Texts come alive

What I like about scientific exegesis is that it enables one to form a personal judgment about theological (in this case, biblical) contents through the use of established methods and devices. To acquire knowledge in transparent, retraceable, "objective" steps is a good defense against dependence on authorities who are immune to questioning, whose interpretation and explanation of a text must simply be accepted and who use this position to wield power over people. Historical knowledge and the results of methodological investigations also constitute an effective guard against reading one's own pet ideas into texts. Many biblical texts (e.g., apocalyptic texts) cannot be interpreted in a way that does them justice without considerable background knowledge. Many meanings that have been ascribed to texts in the course of their tradition history have in fact distorted their intention or saddled them with a meaning foreign to the original intent. In contrast, methodologically disciplined textual work gives rise to an understanding appropriate to the text and thus also engenders a more liberated faith.

In the last ten years I have directed many people in bibliodrama and the experience has always been the same: finally, the message really comes alive among us, finally, it really happens. And I know a good number of people – myself included – who find that their lives have been profoundly touched through bibliodrama. Patterns of behavior were able to be detected and even changed in real-life situations. Often what is discovered in the workshop sessions has an enduring beneficial effect in everyday life. Frequently the next step forward in dealing with a concrete issue or problem is found in the process that bibliodrama provides. For the group members do not just "somehow" get involved; they do so with the concrete personality they currently are and live.

In dialogue with the text

The salutary character of the text often evokes something salutary in us, if we keep ourselves open to its saving space. Many bibliodrama leaders experience an inner sense of being led and they marvel at the way God accompanies each individual on his or her own unique journey – even when the group work is done in common.

In the course of bibliodrama new, objectifiable insights into the text also seem regularly to emerge. Much that would not have been discovered through pure scientific work on the text, because the right questions would not have been asked, opens up in view of connections in the text. And finally, it is important to me, with the model I use in the practice of bibliodrama, that a balanced dialogue takes place between the Bible text and us today, that full justice is done to each side and that neither of the two gets left "out in the cold". What we come to know in a text, what we discern in it, where it wants to take us is profoundly significant. It is precisely those methods that reproduce the movements of texts that have the capacity to communicate to us very clearly something of their moving power.

Finally, it is, of course, also true that we cannot interpret the text independently of what we bring to it in terms of our prior experience, our knowledge, and the whole of



our thereby constituted personality. By our distinctive stamp and unique approach we inevitably “color in” what we notice in a text. But there is nothing wrong with this in itself, so long as the results are not put forward as a text’s “objective” message for all people.

Seed in the ground of life

For me a text that I have worked on and lived through with a group in bibliodrama is far more intensely present and vitally accessible as experienced truth than is one that has merely been subjected to scientific analysis. Its message is literally more penetrating than it could possibly be through mental labor alone.



In dialogue with the text

Carlos Mesters expresses the idea very well in the following image:

The Word of God – seed in the ground of life

The Word of God is like a seed: It reveals its meaning only when it is sown into the earth. The goal (of Bible work) is simple: Everyone involved in this work should become sensitive to the fact that God wishes to engage us in a lively and important conversation through the Bible, a conversation that has nothing to do with difficult words, but with life, which is difficult enough. The words of the Bible lose their sense if you forget that they are words of a conversation. No matter how hard you try to discover their meaning, you will never find it. The words of the Bible are like a seed: they reveal the meaning they have for us only when they have been sown into the ground of life. It is there that the Bible transforms life and the flower appears. And you see the meaning of the seed by looking at that flower.

As there are numerous ways to approach bibliodrama, the following paragraph should serve as a short introduction to the art.

What is bibliodrama?

Bibliodrama is a comprehensive term for the multidimensional, holistic Bible work that is done with mind, sense and body. There are almost as many different approaches as there are performances. It all got started some 20 or 30 years ago, simultaneously in many places throughout the world, as an instinctive response to a need for more intensive, more experiential encounter with the biblical message. Bibliodrama claims to be holistic and experimental. It is related to psychodrama. But while in the latter the therapeutic work of the individual is placed in the foreground, the action of the group being of a more supportive nature, in bibliodrama the emphasis is on the group action in which a biblical event is performed.

In bibliodrama the group with dramatic roles strives to feel its way into a biblical text and to produce a relationship between its own reality and that portrayed in the text. Identification is important here. By throwing myself into a given role I experience what it would have been like in the “today” of ancient times. Tradition and the present situation mutually interpret each other.

The written text and the “life text” of the group are at the same time in tension and in dialogue with each other; a fusion takes place. In the group process a working out of each individual’s biography also takes place, which can often lead to a crisis and should be assisted in a fruitful way by the trainer. Work will be done using very different action techniques, such as gestures, bodily expressions, dialogue, roles (identification, role change, role rotation or double role), depending on the text and the group dynamic.

Every bibliodrama school or form works also in different, sequentially ordered phases of an overall work program. One of these models, which I myself practice as a rule, will be briefly presented.

Frequent steps are:

1. General introduction
2. Work on individual motifs
3. Action
4. Evaluation
5. concluding unit (consolidation, ritual, leave-taking)

Steps 1 to 3 are each articulated in three steps: a) approach, b) thematic work, c) reflection/evaluation.



A practical example

Using the "Wedding-feast at Cana" (Jn 2:1-12) as an example, let us illustrate some of the possible steps.

1. Introductory work

This involves becoming very familiar with the text. The procedure is such as Luther once described: a text must be treated like a herb. It releases its fragrance only when rubbed or waved about. When we chew on a text, it opens up, and begins to become vibrant. We lay our first tracks in dialogue with the text, without yet settling on an interpretation.

The participants receive the biblical text in a literal translation. They walk around the room with the text and each one reads the text aloud very attentively. Parts of the text that seem important can be read many times over, each time with a different emphasis. After the reading the group stands in a circle where different turns of phrase are spoken out loud into the circle, each with a different element accented. A kind of sounding board is thus created through this exercise which does not, however, follow the text sequence, but amounts to a freely ordered venting of text segments.

In a second exercise the text is read with roles assigned to different people, in a continuous scenic setting, that is, spatial movements of the text or attitudes of the text characters are where possible reproduced. The movements are repeated a second time without the words. In the closing round of reflections, clarification is sought on a number of issues: How did the opening compare with the closing? Where was the text pointing us? Who was in relation with whom? Where were things on the move and in which direction? What did each individual find particularly striking?

Each group member acts out one more time, with a distinct and visible gesture, what he or she found particularly compelling in the text. Here the first personal starting point of a dialogue between the text and the individual takes place. With the acted-out reading of the wedding-feast at Cana, for example, it became evident that the mother of Jesus is invited and he is "only" co-invited. This means that from the text sequence Jesus makes his entry as son of his mother and on her terms, whereas she, in verse 12, leaves the scene as his follower. As the story concludes, therefore, Jesus has been released from the role of the "child" and has moved on to his own adult existence. This becomes clear when we begin to notice how in the course of the biblical narrative it is first the mother of Jesus who opens the action through her connections ("they have no more wine" – "Do whatever he tells you"), while later on it is

Jesus who sets the agenda (he prescribes what is to be done, and people look to him to carry it out).

2. Work on individual motifs

Now it is time to delve into individual motifs of the text. As a rule this will be executed in accordance with what is offered us by the text and under its guidance.

Here, for example, the group could start out as an imaginary wedding party from Nazareth, and as they walk around the room they could be discussing what the wedding-feast there means for them, why they are going to Cana, what their expectations are. Or the role of the mother of Jesus could be highlighted in three steps:

- What do we know of the mother of Jesus? Here we are asking strictly about what we know from the text: so, that she is not called Mary in the text, she is the first to be invited, she is eager to help the bride and groom, she urges her son to...
- What are our fantasies about the mother of Jesus? The participants are urged to say how they imagine her to look, her age, her motives, her character. It is brought to the attention of the group that these opinions derive from their own life experience or from earlier interpretations.
- Be Jesus' mother! The participants walk around the room attempting to reproduce her bearing. The trainer sets the framework for various manifestations: Imagine she is on her way to a party. What is her opinion of wedding parties? How does she view her son? The participants exit from the role. Once again this particular work segment is brought to a close with some evaluative comments or observations. Jesus' role is then developed in a similar way.

Then comes the first short text scene: A statement from the mother to the son: "They have no wine" and the answer of Jesus: "Why turn to me?"

The participants receive a piece of paper with various translations of Jesus' reply. The participants split up into pairs. One continuously repeats only the statement of Jesus' mother. The other responds each time with a different one of the translations of Jesus' reply. Then the roles are changed. In a second step, one participant begins with the statement of Jesus' mother and the other develops Jesus' reply with a certain freedom of expression so that a dialogue emerges between "mother" and "son". After another role change, once again both exchange their thoughts on the experience. A few observations are then carried into the full discussion circle.



3. Role playing

Sometimes role playing is then acted out in the group. These roles can take the most varied forms: groups can take over characters, a scene can be fashioned holding closely to the text with individual roles assigned, on a stage, with only a part of the group acting and the rest observers. Alternatively, a so-called "major scene" can be staged, where all the characters and motifs of the text can be chosen by everyone, even if a single role might be taken more than once. The play should help the individual with his or her own life issues that are addressed by the text, and at the same time it should also throw light on the meaning of the text.

Stage action is prepared for by a warm-up phase, which helps the participants to track down the purpose they wish to pursue in the play. But before the play begins, the trainer as a rule will question them on what they intend to accomplish on stage, what they envisage as their starting-out point.

After a short run allowing time for supervision and evaluation (so, usually no more than 30 minutes), the action will either be ended by the group itself or terminated by the trainer. The participants exit from their roles and take cognizance of their present feelings.

4. Evaluation

A painstaking evaluation lasting twice as long as the acting phase immediately follows. Here the participants sort out for themselves what insights they have won in terms of message, understanding, etc. Evaluation questions and forms supplied by the trainer help with this sorting out process.

5. Closing

The best way to conclude is by means of a ritual, or a uniquely formulated, elaborated message often based on the text. Here, for example, the "disciples" return from Cana and reflect on what has happened (the group walks around in the room). Finally, the disciples come to a halt and each makes a statement: "I believe that Jesus..." or "what I found particularly striking ..."

Such bibliodrama action requires a time expenditure of about one or two days. Without thorough evaluations or analyses so that the bibliodrama action is properly understood, it would hardly be possible for the exercise to have the proper effect, and we would not be dealing responsibly with participants who in full candor had shared their inner feelings and their life experiences with the group.

Scientific exegesis and bibliodrama

We had chosen "Scripture Text and Life Text" as a title for a conference, which the Katholisches Bibelwerk and the Theological Pastoral Institute in Mainz had offered for university exegetes on the one hand and bibliodrama trainers on the other. An effort was made to determine what kind of a relationship exists between scientific exegesis and bibliodrama. The results of our discussions were finally formulated as follows :

"The goal of scientific biblical exegesis is to make heard God's inviting address to human beings in the historically conditioned form of the Sacred Scriptures (mostly historical-critical and linguistic methods are the points of reference). Statements and interpretations of the authors of the biblical texts are examined in the light of analytical and methodically verifiable steps.

The goal of bibliodramatic biblical exegesis: God's present communication with human beings becomes something tangible through the biblical text and through integrated interaction in the group. Based on the individual's present life (and faith) text, points of contact are sought in the text and can then be pursued in the dialogical acting process with the group. The trainer offers the individual the space for doing this and encourages him/her to stay on track, to understand what is being experienced in the group and helps him/her to incorporate it into the interpretive horizon of his/her life."



A text comes alive

Areas of tension...

A tension was perceptible between the focus on Scripture text itself, whose advocates tend to be the exegetes, and the concrete experience of being addressed by the text in one's own life context, which is



very important to the practitioners of the more integrated approaches. The exegetes were somewhat skeptical with regard to some of the bibliodramatic approaches that construct roles with considerable freedom and that actualize only individual motifs, rather than the entire range of motifs in a given text. They were quick to suspect that subjective agendas were being imported into the message of the text.



Anneliese Hecht in action

Bibliodramatists on the other hand – knowing the enduring influence and transforming power of experience – were questioning the effective influence of historical-critical exegesis, which many people discard like an uncomfortable garment after they have finished their studies to return to their childlike faith. Or, they take a skeptical stance toward faith accomplishments of a kind that are actually constitutive for the biblical texts themselves. And the bibliodramatists wondered how circumscribed the message of the text was, coming from such one-sided “top-heavy” exegetes. The exegetes who need to find distance and a certain separation from the text found these lacking in the bibliodrama approach, this offering proximity and possibilities of identification in an integral process. In spite of their diametrical perspectives, however, both bibliodramatists and exegetes held each other in high esteem, also due to their common task.

.... And what they have in common

But the reflection also soon discovered things that unite. Common to both sides, the exegetes and the bibliodramatists, is the fact that the driving force behind their efforts is to make widely accessible to people the saving message of the Sacred Scriptures that have been handed down to us. Each group, with its own methods, is striving to track down the deeper meaning of the message, not the spirit of the mere letters (although it often seems so, for example, the branch of contemporary exegesis focused on the linguistic sciences).

Both are eager to make new, liberating discoveries. Bibliodrama often cannot do without information that historical-critical exegesis can deliver, if it wishes to use the text not simply as a transparency for self-experience, but as a true dialogue partner. Analytical exegesis must beware of the fact that the texts had their origin in experiences, which were articulated and addressed to a faith community and therefore require the same kind of text-congruent medium (such as a group, or community of believers) in which they can have their proper effect. A mutually complementary interpretation is necessary, one that is derived from both sides, from the past, in which the text originated, and the present, in which it must play a vital and effective role.

A new understanding, transformation and extension of what is still most often today a one-sided concept of science is absolutely necessary and here and there is already coming into being at an international level. Open discussions and getting to know all the different approaches can make something happen on both sides, bring to the other something that each side can offer the other and precisely what the other cannot offer, yet needs. This is what is beautiful, what is necessary and what is fruitful about the forms of exegesis coming from two directions – from the text and from live human beings – and that contribute to an integrated whole.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)

A previous version of this text was published in the *Journal Bibel und Kirche* of the Katholisches Bibelwerk Deutschland in 2001.



The Blessing of the Canaanite Woman: Bibliodrama and *Leitura Popular* Ten Years of Working with Bibliodrama in Brazil

Monika Ottermann



Monika Ottermann, a theologian specialized in biblical studies and feminist exegesis, has lived in Brazil since 1989. As facilitator of CEBI she dedicates herself to the leitura popular (reading the Bible in basic Christian communities).

The Center for Biblical Studies (CEBI – Centro de Estudos Bíblicos) of Brazil has been a member of CBF since 1998. It concentrates on the so-called *leitura popular* which is an exegesis of the bible by actualizing it in the framework of impoverished people's everyday living conditions. It includes a variety of methodological approaches. In 1994, this openness gave birth to the idea of a first workshop, in which *leitura popular* and bibliodrama were to be brought into contact with one another. In the following contribution Monika Ottermann gives a report about this workshop and shares her experiences of her work with bibliodrama in Brazil during the past ten years.

When I returned from the first "Bibliodrama and *leitura popular*" workshop in Guarulhos in 1994, I had conversations which started more or less like: "How was the workshop?" – "Fantastic! For me personally they were like days of reflection, even much better!" – "What did you do?" – "Well, during the first few days we spent time with the story of the Canaanite Woman!..." – "What? Four days with a single bible text? I could never take that...!"

This opened the door for a conversation which was not only limited to my talking about an excellent course, but trying to make people also experience a little what so-called "bibliodrama" really is. And I hope that you, my readers, have become curious enough to open this door for me as well. And may I enter² with some theological explanations first, which could help you to better understand what we experienced and what happened to us.

The link between life and the Bible

The word biblio-*drama* already intimates that we are dealing with the "dramatizing" of Bible texts, that it is about presentation, mainly a scenic presentation. One could also think it might be the well-known technique used in Bible courses or worship services in Brazil: one part of the group is asked to "act out" the text, while the other part look on. This brings about an approach that is more alive, more interesting and makes it easier to understand the Bible passage.

But the goal of bibliodrama is more: bibliodrama is not merely a technique to avoid monotony, to gain the attention of the audience or to overcome difficulties which many people experience when they only read or hear the text. No, in bibliodrama *everyone* is active, *everyone* is a protagonist. Moreover, it is the goal and aim of bibliodrama to visualize one's personal experience with the Word of God and express it so as not to remain stuck in historic, theological and socio-political interpretation and knowledge. Bibliodrama then is a method of linking in a radical way life and Bible. This is done not only on a *collective* level of the community and society, but above all on a very personal level of every individual person in their faith, their history and life experience, with their fears, problems, strengths and dreams.

Bibliodrama and *leitura popular*

It is important to realize that the basic approaches to the work with bibliodrama were developed in Germany and in the USA. Once bibliodrama got to Latin America, it blended with the current trends of *leitura popular*, with the principles of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's national education program, with approaches of the "theatre of the oppressed", and much more. In this way, a process of mutual challenge and reciprocal influence developed. There was an exchange and a sharing, creating new experiences and giving rise to changes – in great fidelity to the dynamics of the Word of God, which, while remaining always the same, is born anew in every person and in every situation.

The workshop in Guarulhos in 1994 was a small contribution to this process of exchange and sharing. It was



one of the first steps of this “love relationship” between bibliodrama and *leitura popular* which we wanted to encourage and cultivate with great care so that it could help each and everyone of us grow.

The workshop in Guarulhos

There were 18 participants of different nationalities and denominations in this workshop. Carlos Dreher (at the time the National Director of CEBI) was heading it. He had already experienced several types of bibliodrama sharing in Germany, and he headed the side of the *leitura popular* above all. Four experts from Germany had come as instructors of bibliodrama: Leony Renk, a pastor from a reformed Church; she had developed a style of bibliodrama based on the principles of so-called theme-centered interaction (TZI); the Lutheran pastor Reinhard Hübner and the Lutheran educator Karl Albert Kako; they both worked with a type of bibliodrama developed from youth pastoral care and Bible drama; Elsmarie Pape, a woman trained in theater and body language, who had the advantage of having spent the first half of her life in Brazil and, therefore, was well acquainted with both cultures and both languages.

In regard to denominations, the group was made up of six Lutherans, two Methodists (both pastors), and ten Catholics, both males and females being represented. We lived and experienced this ecumenical wealth in prayers and worship services in great openness but also with great care. One of the highlights was a worship service in which bread, popcorn, cheese, olives, wine, beer and lemonade were shared – a rich and joyful celebration with a lot of popular music and dance in memory of Jesus and of our Latin American martyrs who gave their lives for us.

But let's return to that first day, to the development of the actual theme “bibliodrama and *leitura popular*”. Goal of the workshop was the encounter with and sharing of both these methods; this was divided into three sections of four days each. The first section was dedicated to bibliodrama, the second to *leitura popular*, and the third aimed at trying to link and mix both methods.

Raising awareness

Every day started with physical forms of expression and body language. This was done either alone or in twos. These exercises helped us to develop a growing awareness of and sensitivity to our bodies, of the possibilities (and limitations!) of our perception and physical expression. The exercises corresponded to the topics of the particular day and the phases of the process the group was living through at the particular time. During the first

days this helped to increase our perception of the world and the people around us, as well as ourselves. It helped us to become attentive to detail and small “gestures”, to enter into a slow-motion process, to be able to better express what we were experiencing and feeling. Thus, it gave us the basis to be able to penetrate the Bible text with our whole being, without separation of “body” and “soul”, of “body” and “mind”.

Acquaintance with a text

After this we began very gradually to approach a Bible text. The participants were as yet unaware of which particular text had been chosen. Some principal words were written on scraps of paper that had been distributed in all four corners of the hall. Following our intuition we stood next to one of these pieces of paper and discussed with the others in our near vicinity various aspects of the word we had chosen. In this way, we dealt in three phases with the words *mercy – tormented – shout – withdraw oneself – dog – woman – lost – help – people – bread*. After this we split into two working groups.

So it was no surprise when the two instructors in our working group, Reinhard and Kako, asked one of our group to read out Matthew 15, 21-28, the story of the Canaanite Woman. It is the story about the significant encounter of Jesus and that foreign woman, a pagan, whose tenacity in struggling for her daughter's soundness of mind and whose mother wit³ converted Jesus from his viewpoint confined to his own nation and religion. For four days we accompanied the woman in her struggle and Jesus in his process of conversion. In this way we experienced in depth our own personal and collective struggles, our conversions and transformations – those which had already taken place and those we were still dreaming of.

In-depth experience

With ever new techniques we became ever more engrossed in new aspects of the text:

- Each person chose two contrasting words from the text (one more positive and one more negative) and sketched them on two different pieces of paper, including the feelings that they linked to these words. While repeating the words and our feelings we got ever nearer to the meaning of the text.
- Techniques used by the “theater of the oppressed” of Augusto Boal helped us to form living statues and scenic images in order to express some of these words. An example: one person thinks of the word



“tormented” and acts out this word. Another example: four persons work out how to express the word “mercy”. After every presentation we talked about our impressions regarding the acting-out of the other participants and about what we had experienced during our own presentation.

- We walked through neighboring streets looking for a symbol of that demon which torments us and our society most.
- With whatever means we had at hand we built the “demon of separation” and the “demon of capitalism”. Together we insulted them and, at least in part, managed to overthrow them.
- During a walk in twos we tried to feel our way into the heart and emotions of someone who is crying for help while the other person does not even answer.
- By means of colored sheets we expressed various moments of the confrontation and the encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite Woman.
- In a modern scene from everyday life we acted out the confrontation between a woman urgently requesting something and a man turning her down.
- We formed a figure out of clay and dedicated a poem to it – this final exercise became the summing-up for each and everyone in the group.

Roads to Emmaus

After a day off, the section dedicated to *leitura popular* began. We tried to relate to the spirit of the couple on the road to Emmaus (Mary and Cleopas, cf. Luke 24) not so much in view of the persons, but rather in applying the structure of their path to the path we would be following for the next four days.

We started off with the question: “What do we talk about on our paths? What gives us cause for worry, what makes us sad?” Thus we dedicated an entire day to tracking down and sharing our worries on a personal level, on the level of the community we are part of and on the level of our society. On the basis of many themes and problems that were similar or the same for some of us, we set up three “generative themes”⁴:

- neo-liberalism (which brings about misery, powerlessness, isolation and “hunger”)
- the cry for being accepted as a “person”
- the fear of separation

Then we chose three Bible texts, which could shed light on these themes:

- Micah 3, 1-12: neo-liberalism,
- Luke 8, 26-39: becoming whole, being a “person”
- Ruth 1: fear of separation.



Neo-liberalism brings misery and isolation

According to our interests we split into three sub-groups. All three sub-groups followed the same pattern which I will now describe, using as an example our group which dealt with “neo-liberalism”.

At the beginning we discussed the text of Micah without connecting it to the theme of neo-liberalism. We examined the conflicts, God’s position and the solution the text presents. In the scenic presentation which followed we experienced something important: many elements of bibliodrama were already present and we ourselves had already entered much deeper and more personal dimensions. The “love relationship” between bibliodrama and *leitura popular* had already begun, we could not hold it back until the third section of the workshop.

After that we looked upon our personal reality, how neo-liberalism affects the lives of every one of us. In short scenes we presented some features of these effects to the other sub-groups who had also been very much influenced by bibliodrama.

But that was not all: The experience of Emmaus shows that the word remains sterile and ineffective as long as it is not linked to concrete action. Since this is difficult to realize in a group that does not otherwise live together,



we created an opportunity which at least gave us a taste of that reality, a brief space of time in which it was possible to address the conflicts arising from living together as a group. An overview on the work of CEBI in the various regions of Brazil concluded this section.

Synthesizing bibliodrama and leitura popular

There was another day off and then came the most difficult step: to draw up a program for the following days in which we could try out the possibilities of exchange between and blending of bibliodrama and *leitura popular*. This exchange, this "cross-fertilization" of bibliodrama and *leitura popular* was important for us in order to overcome the limits and risks of each one of the two methods: *leitura popular* runs the risk of over-emphasizing the socio-cultural application of the text and of neglecting people's personal body-soul dimension. And bibliodrama sometimes gets stuck in individualistic and self-centered attitudes or aspects not necessarily related to social and communitarian reality. An exchange, a "love relationship" between the two methods offers each one of them opportunities to grow and to reflect and serve better the entirety of our social and personal reality.

We agreed that the instructors should function as advocates of both methods, bibliodrama and *leitura popular*, and that the remaining working process should be carried out within the group in its entirety. We began with an evaluation in which we expressed concrete discoveries, questions and proposals. This was followed by a panel discussion featuring Leony's, Reinhard's and Kako's approaches and that of CEBI. This theoretical part already answered many of the questions listed. On this basis, we decided to return to the two working-groups of the first section, but this time with the instructors being interchanged. The primary interest of our group was to become better acquainted with Leony's method and to understand the principles of theme-centered interaction. After this we agreed to try out the combination of bibliodrama and *leitura popular* using the story of the Canaanite Woman.

We began with the "analysis of the four aspects". This consists in collecting all information in the text pertaining to the political, social, economic and ideological (cultural and religious) aspects of the situation in Palestine at the time of the New Testament (or in another region at another time). Scenic presentations of some of the details of this research were a further step in the interweaving of bibliodrama and *leitura popular*. There were also bibliodrama techniques that helped us to transfer these details into today's reality of Brazil without slipping into naive equations. We listed the key words of

our own reality and each person chose two contrasting words and wrote down his or her associations with their respective personal and social reality. This was then expressed in a gesture and in a short sentence. After this we formed two groups which were to develop terms of expression for the concluding presentation.



The story of the Canaanite Woman as bibliodrama

"Without fear of being happy..."

During the presentation of the gestures and sentences one participant asked me to help him with his presentation of the theme "tradition versus different cultures". While I was dancing in front of him, he backed away more and more and used his arms to form a barrier between himself and me. This barrier increasingly blocked his vision. When he had finally backed into the wall and could go no further, he covered his face completely and said: "Fear of being happy!" And it would not have been Brazil, and it would not have been a CEBI group if this sentence had not led to a spontaneous burst of song from the group: "Without fear ... without fear ... without fear of being happy ...: Let Lula get 'there'! A star is rising: Let Lula get 'there' ... A hope is being born: Let Lula get 'there'!"⁵

In the following conversation this gesture and this sentence were interwoven with my sentence ("all life is sacred") and my gesture which expressed the right of all people to "a full loaf of bread" and not only to bread-crumbs (in a concrete but also in a figurative sense – life in plenitude); but they were also interwoven with those of the other members of the group: "People draw back because they are afraid to show their solidarity." – "Decentralization – the mystery of the 'multiplication of loaves' lies in sharing." – "The right of our 'Canaanite sisters' to half of the bread of their 'lords and rulers'". Because of this wealth of expressions we agreed not to reduce the group results to one common act of expres-



sion, but in a sequence of gestures moving ever further from us and turning outwards in order to receive *life* and to share it. This ended with the well-known song: "*I want to see, I want to see, I want to see the dream of many people come true. A dream dreamt by an individual can be pure illusion. A dream dreamt by us together, can be the beginning of a solution ...*"

The last day followed with an evaluation, a final worship service and, above all, with plenty of time for taking leave. We had come to the end of one of many possible ways of fusing *leitura popular* and bibliodrama and very happy syntheses of our personal experiences – syntheses which did not represent a point of arrival, but a point of departure for the everyday life of each one of us. So we committed ourselves to carrying out and elaborating bibliodrama within our communities and the organizations in which we work, and made a "good resolution" to meet again for a second phase of this workshop in the following year.

After the confrontational encounter the Canaanite Woman went home, Jesus went home – and neither were the same as before. What they had experienced together had changed them both and only with time the consequences of such transformation would show their mark. That's what happened to us, too. The experiences and adventures of this workshop had started to change every single one of us. And as time passes, I continue to discover new aspects of this transformation. This has become a blessing, making life spring forth in abundance, that challenges me to share this experience, this blessing and to pass it on to others. It challenges us to continue this blessing of YHWH and the Canaanite Woman and the blessing of Jesus who developed a very special attitude towards women.

Epilogue 2003

In the almost ten years that have passed since this workshop, three more CEBI workshops have been conducted at national level under the direction of Kako, Elsmarie, Reinhard, Carlos and Monika. In several of the greater regions and federal states of Brazil bibliodrama experiences or bibliodrama formation have become a constituent part of CEBI local work, partly in basic Christian communities, partly also in collaboration with other organizations. The *namoro* – "love-relationship" – between bibliodrama and *leitura popular* as within CEBI has become a true blessing which helps us to put the Bible more and more at the service of life, a life in plenitude, to which all people have a right.

(Transl.: Chr. Schneider-Heinz)

- 1 Unfortunately, Mark and Matthew do not call her by name (while Luke does not mention her existence at all, probably in his eyes she was not a good example for the women of his communities). Therefore, I want to keep her name written capitalized. She went down in history as the "Canaanite Woman".
- 2 When entering a home in Brazil, you usually do this by using the polite phrase "Com licença!" – "May I enter?" – "With permission!"
- 3 The Brazilian word "jeito", above all in its diminutive "jeitinho" is difficult to translate; it expresses the sensitive, well chosen, wise and clever manner in which a person acts.
- 4 Formulating so-called "generative themes" (*temas geradores*) is one of the educational principles of Paulo Freire and is the basis for the process of raising people's awareness and alphabetizing. It concerns the categorizing of problems of certain living conditions and everyday living situations that are predominant in a certain area or within a certain group of people.
- 5 The song "Sem medo de ser feliz! Lula lá ..." was one of the most important campaign slogans of the Labor Party PT (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) in the presidential elections in the 1989 and 1993 campaigns in Brazil, in which Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva lost, as he did also in the following years until he won the 2002 election. He has been the President of Brazil since the beginning of 2003.



Journeying with the Word of God Bibliodrama in Asia and Oceania

Rudi Pöhl, svd

The following article describes initial heartening experiences in Asia with an attempt to establish bibliodrama the beginnings of which lie in Europe.

The impulse came from a Philippine woman

I would like to tell the story of an adventurous journey that brought me with the Word of God to Asia and the Pacific. The preparations and first plans for this trip were made in Nemi, a small mountain town, not far from Rome. There, the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) in collaboration with the Society of the Divine Word continues to give international courses on the Bible in the English language for women and men from all countries of the world. The courses are offered once a year and since the time of the publication of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation by Vatican II it has come to be known as the *Dei Verbum Biblical Pastoral Course*. I had been working as part of a team as spiritual director of the course, together with my Dutch confrere, Fr. Wim Wijten, and a young Philippine woman, Jessica Joy Candelario. Twice before we had already invited German bibliodrama leaders to Nemi, the Catholic Annette Himmelreich and the Evangelical-Lutheran Pastor Christoph Fuhr from Cologne. On those occasions they offered a four-day bibliodrama program. Based on these experiences, it occurred to us that bibliodrama courses could be offered in the Philippines as well. The decisive impulse for this idea came from Jessica Joy, in 1998, in a Nemi restaurant, over pizza. And this idea has now become reality.

From Rome to Manila ...

Two years later I was invited by Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, svd, then General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation, to the South-East Asia Biblical Pastoral Meeting of Bible coordinators in Manila in the Philippines. At the close of this meeting I was to offer workshops on bibliodrama. The joy in the Word of God experienced at this meeting of peoples of various nationalities was extraordinarily moving and was a great gift for me. To my own surprise, I was able to lead and guide the approximately 30 participants from the

Philippines, from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Europe and other countries through the dynamics of the bibliodrama process on a common journey into a text-space. With dances to break up the monotony, a tangible awakening to the power of God's Word came into being, and people could experience an astounding openness to their own lives. The consequence of this basic experience and initial encounter with bibliodrama in Manila was that I received further invitations in the years 1999, 2001, 2002, and 2003. Two-fold results emerged from my six-week block bibliodrama courses. For one thing, the Commission on biblical pastoral ministry of the Philippine Bishops' Conference (ECBA, Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate) took active control of the project. The commission now supports the project financially, not least thanks to the extensive grants of Missio Bolzano-Brixen in South Tyrol. So, through the advertisement and coordination of the courses at the national level in the various dioceses of the Philippines, bibliodrama has been made accessible to all the Bible coordinators. A very positive development, for the Philippines is subdivided into about 70 dioceses with about 90 native bishops. A special share of the credit for this success surely belongs to Bishop Arturo M. Bastes, svd, the present Chairman of ECBA, and the General Secretary, Fr. Oscar Alunday, svd, both native Divine Word Missionaries. They are supported by a small group of lay persons, religious and priests, which is so to speak the motor for the current *Bibliodrama Basic Courses* for leaders of biblical studies in the various dioceses. To this group belongs also J. Joy Candelario, who had given the original impulse for the project in Nemi.

For two years now we have been offering basic courses, more advanced courses and courses for leaders, the last of which is at this time still in the development stage. A special program has been developed for this purpose, adapted to the special cultural needs and challenges in the town parishes and beyond them into the villages ("barrios") and ethnic groups, some of which can neither read nor write. In the last mentioned areas the lead-



ers work with elements of bibliodrama, which among other things allow much room for body work, movement, dance and role playing, so that the participants are gradually able to approach God's Word with great attentiveness. In this way, the Word becomes a healing and liberating experience even for the simplest people in their hard, everyday lives.

From the grass roots all the way up to the level of the university, e.g., San Carlos University in Cebu, a broad pallet of courses is now being offered, which interested participants are able to choose from and are indeed choosing from.

... and beyond to the Pacific

But my journey with the Word of God has led me beyond the Philippines, too. In the year 2001 an invitation surfaced from the local Church in Papua New Guinea, formally articulated by the Divine Word Missionary, Fr. George Ryfa, the national Bible Coordinator who had attended my courses in the Philippines.

Fr. George had the idea to offer bibliodrama workshops in Papua New Guinea to the most important pastoral centers, just like the ones we had worked out in the Philippines. Together with him and Joy Candelario I offered some basic courses for Bible leaders, pastoral workers and catechists, e.g. at the Divine Word University in Madang. This enabled me to learn first hand how also the people of Papua New Guinea could experience a tremendously vibrant, natural and profound access to God's Word precisely through bibliodrama.

These encouraging experiences were an impetus to still further action and planning. A year later, Fr. George and J. Joy Candelario, who came specially from the Philippines just for this, together conducted a number of basic workshops at various locations in New Guinea. Out of these, especially interested participants who were also commissioned by their bishops were recruited for an advanced course. This took place from September 14 to 20, 2003, under the direction of the same team as in the Philippines: J. Joy Candelario, Fr. George Ryfa, svd, and myself.

Bibliodrama connects people and cultures

The long journey with the Word of God that has taken us to many continents is by no means at an end. When I meet with people in a variety of local settings I am particularly delighted with the great power of the Word of

Holy Scripture. With the joyful message of the Gospel it breathes life into people's hearts and minds. It casts its spell on youth, adult women and men, as well as on groups and communities. And it brings them closer to their own lives and to the yearning to implement their own culture, rather than estranging them from it.

In this way bibliodrama is also able to work against that false pressure of globalization that thinks it has to level everything in multi-culti-happiness. The people who experience bibliodrama can still truly rejoice in the presence of God amongst humankind, for they are able to bring to expression that which touches and grips them at the core of their being. I keep hearing over and over again the astounding expression: "How powerful is the Word of God and how touching and moving is the incarnate Word through its Spirit!"

The international team between the continents has also won considerable courage and strength through this journey with the Word of God. Team spirit and team work require a deeper source in order for a project like this to succeed. Bibliodrama is but one path to this source that never runs dry, the Holy Scripture.



Bibliodrama connects people and cultures

And now?

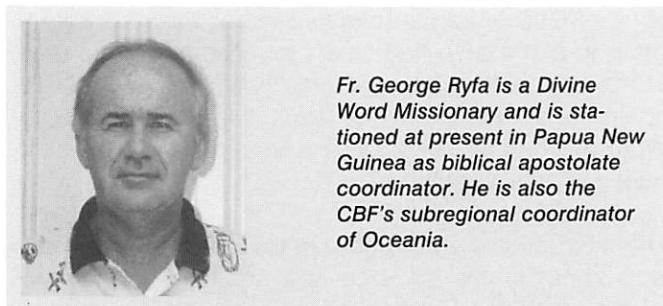
Where will the journey from Papua New Guinea lead next? For a long time now we have been hearing from more and more voices that express an invitation to Indonesia. If the bibliodrama leaders now coming out of the Philippines and Papua New Guinea can combine forces to offer their help in Indonesia, then this is indeed an invitation – and at the same time a challenge.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



The Word Alive through Bibliodrama Experiences from Papua New Guinea

George Ryfa, svd



Fr. George Ryfa is a Divine Word Missionary and is stationed at present in Papua New Guinea as biblical apostolate coordinator. He is also the CBF's subregional coordinator of Oceania.

First steps have been taken, and some encouraging results can already be seen: bibliodrama step by step makes its way in Papua New Guinea. The following article reports on some encounters in bibliodrama workshops in Papua New Guinea.

It has been the vision of the biblical apostolate in Papua New Guinea to promote the Bible and introduce pastoral approaches so that the WORD may become more relevant in the lives of people and communities.

The past three years or so this vision has slowly been taking shape through an approach called bibliodrama, an experiential way of interpreting the Word of God in our lives. Since 2001 I have conducted bibliodrama workshops in various places in Papua New Guinea.

Since then close to 200 pastoral workers, catechists, religious and priests have been spiritually enriched by this approach and inspired to create more venues for people to encounter the Word. For many of them, bibliodrama was an opportunity to get in touch with themselves and with their own faith journey. It enabled them to appreciate more the richness of their culture and discover the Word expressed in many of their customs and traditions. Despite the diverse cultures in Papua New Guinea, the workshop also allowed them to grow in community with one another. Through the different elements of bibliodrama such as dances, exercises, liturgies, sharing and personal quiet time, the story of the Word became their story and a continuing story as they journey together.

Below are some of their impressions from the workshops:

- "Bibliodrama is a unique and motivating approach in discovering deeply the insight of Scriptures through gestures and sculptures."
- "In this workshop, I discovered for myself that I can get in touch with myself, with God, my inner being and other people around me."
- "The bibliodrama is a possibility to counter the crisis of traditionalizing my faith."
- "It has helped me reflect on my own life through the Word of God as well as letting the Word come alive for me. That is, through openness of letting the Word speak to me."

The very first facilitators' workshop was held in Lae September 14 to 20, 2003 with 18 participants coming from all parts of Papua New Guinea. The workshop aimed at equipping them with skills in facilitating and utilizing bibliodrama elements for liturgies and different formation programs. It also paved the way for the participants to share cultural dances from the different regions and to gradually develop a more contextualized bibliodrama for Papua New Guinea. Through them, it is hoped that the approach can be spread to more communities and to different church settings. After this fruitful week, the bibliodrama team headed off to Goroka for a retreat with bibliodrama elements to be conducted with religious and priests.

The dream continues ... to make the Word the foundation of faith life in Papua New Guinea ... allowing the drama of life (with all the uniqueness Papua New Guinea has to offer) and the drama of the Word to become one ... ■



Bibliodrama and *Lectio Divina* in Practice

Sr. Emmanuel Gunanto, osu



Ursuline Sister Emmanuel Gunanto is the foundress of the Angela Merici Biblical Center in Bandung, Indonesia. Since 1996 she has served as coordinator of the Southeast Asian subregion of the CBF.

What can I write on bibliodrama? We invited Fr. Rudi Pöhl, svd, for bibliodrama workshops after the Workshop of the Southeast Asian subregion in Manila. That was the first time bibliodrama entered Asia.

Most of the time I am involved in courses and biblical animation, however, the groups are too big to make bibliodrama possible, so I use bibliodrama elements in *lectio divina*. Here is an example of how we do *lectio divina* with bibliodrama elements. This I have done with our Youth Bible Club, with approximately 20 participants, 20 to 25 years old.

First step: Reading and understanding

- We read John 6:1-15. One lector reads the whole text. Then we take turns to read it, one verse each, several times.
- We study the text. Who, what, where, when, why, how? Special attention is given on 'who' - and what each is doing. Questions if any.
- The text is read again.
- Silence. Each one picks a sentence, learns it by heart and envisages the gesture while saying it. Everybody stands up in a circle. Each one says his or her sentence with the gesture. All of us imitate her or him.

Second step: Meditatio

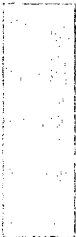
- We keep silence to meditate. Where am I in the story? Considering my situation now, where can I find myself? In Philip, Andrew, the boy, the crowd, or even the grass they sit on, the loaves of bread given, eaten and giving life?
- We take position according to what we have found.
- We meditate in that position. "Here I am Lord, I am Andrew."
- We come together and share.

Third step: Oratio and contemplatio

- We pray silently.
- We close with shared prayer and a song.

Some reactions of the participants may show how powerful bibliodrama can be in changing and renewing our lives:

- "I am like Philip, giving comments, offering no solution, no way out. I am drawn to the little boy to give something, yes, all that I have."
- "I am the grass, downtrodden, on which people sit and feel comfortable. At least I am happy I can be of some use, even be useful. Jesus tells me to keep growing and keep making people feel comfortable."
- "I have not forgotten. In that story I was bread, broken and eaten for the life of the people. My life has become so meaningful since then."



BIBLIO-
DRAMA

“Bibliodrama is *Lectio Divina* on Stage”

Rudi Pöhl, svd

Lectio divina which has been rooted for centuries in Church tradition is still today, or precisely today, an up-to-date and intense way of reading the Bible. It aims at a deeper experience of Scripture and one’s own reality by transforming the impulses experienced when reading the Bible into concrete action. In this goal *lectio divina* corresponds with the aims of bibliodrama as the following comparison will show.

The Dei Verbum Courses of 1995 and 1996 which were held at Nemi, Italy, had a four-day sequence of bibliodrama as part of the curriculum. During the evaluation phase one of the Asian participants gave a short defini-

tion of bibliodrama which caught my attention. He said: “Bibliodrama is *lectio divina* on stage”.

What does this mean? Against the background of *lectio divina* in practice which was also part of the course at Nemi, bibliodrama was a very true-to-life experience for the participants. In other words, it was an interactive method similar to personal sharing of faith experiences expressing what *lectio divina* reflects regarding our relationship to God and our fellow human beings. This short definition prompts us to compare the structure of the process of the two methods in the table below.

Lectio divina
READING (LECTIO)
Reading the Bible text

- In various Bible-sharing methods *lectio divina* is a repetitive and at the same time deepening element used in progressive steps when meditating Holy Scripture.
- As in bibliodrama this can mean reading of the text in common, either silently or aloud.

Bibliodrama

Becoming acquainted with the text

- After some exercises in physical forms of expression the participants either propose a Bible passage or work on one already chosen.
- This is followed either by a meditative dance, a song or a prayer to introduce the

Reading of the Bible passage

- This is woven in various ways into the bibliodrama process during the different phases.
- Possible variations: one participant reads out the text; the group reads it together; each person takes turns to read one verse; the same reading method is used by which the rabbis would read the Torah together with their students; walking around freely and reciting the text in the group; etc.

MEDITATION (MEDITATIO)
Meditate alone the text which has been read

- “Chew around” on the text in the sense of reading it again and again like “chewing the cud” (*ruminatio*).
- Study and elaborate the text also by reading parallel passages.

- Observing the text**
- The next step is to determine the main roles and the minor roles (central questions are: Who takes on a role? What is relevant?) in consensus.
 - After another reading (*lectio*) the participants express their observations regarding the text. Central questions are: What struck me? Where did I get sidetracked? What did I not understand? Where are there paradoxical statements?
- Setting up the room**
- Another step is setting up the room which will later be used for acting bibliodrama. Here, too, another reading (*lectio*) could follow.



	“Casting” ❑ I choose my role from one of the main or minor roles in the text elaborated beforehand. I then try to get acquainted and to identify myself with it. ❑ Following the invitation of the leader I come “on stage” when my role is called for. This is a very intense method of meditation which helps one to penetrate not only the text but also its space. In this way, one is able to accept God’s personal invitation and to let the Word dwell within.
PRAYER (ORATIO) Let the Word of God flow into prayer as a first answer to God’s invitation.	Interaction ❑ Different types of interaction (word-person-faith-experience-body-soul-expression) can take place between the instructor and the participants by means of gestures or dialogue (question and answer method), combining the answer in faith and prayer. ❑ This experience can be heightened either by more free expression or by in-depth stages directed by the instructor. It may, for example, find expression also in the liturgy by a powerful celebration of the Word praising God as individuals and as community.
CONTEMPLATION (CONTEMPLATIO) Dwelling in the Word, sensing and experiencing God’s loving presence, letting Him watch over me until I feel the impulse of continuing my journey or setting off anew.	Committed inactivity ❑ By listening within and contemplating the figure of my role in connection with the other role-players, a form of committed inactivity is created before the bibl drama-acting actually commences. ❑ This time of silent contemplation prepares me to search for answers of faith in my own personal life.
ACTION (ACTIO) Return to life from the depths of within and search for my own concrete answers to the Word of God by means of my decisions Put words, prayer, inner prompting and free decisions into action.	Acting out bibl drama (acto-drama) When acting bibl drama, an <i>acto-drama</i> comes about, i.e. action and the release of inner and outer impulses, feelings and thoughts. At the same time, I am making myself vulnerable through my openness and love for the Word of God. However, I also take on the responsibility for my thoughts, words and deeds. Whatever happens on stage is afterwards reflected and evaluated on at least three levels (time permitting). This is done in the group and under the instructor’s direction. First, the level of personal and mutual experience (central question: how did I experience myself?). Second, the level of faith (central question: what has this to do with my faith?). Third, the level of the written text (central question: how did I experience myself and what moved me in this particular text? Which message do I take with me?) In this way, we experience very vividly our lives “as a stage” (<i>vita-drama</i>).



Both methods of Bible-reading help deepen the experience of the Word of God in one's own life. It is also possible to blend different modules if the instructor is familiar with both methods. Bibliodrama refers not only to the external stage, but also to the inner stage. The

stage on which the Word of God is enacted is the stage of life (*vita-drama*) where one's personal life and faith are interwoven, each granting space to the other.

(Transl.: Chr. Schneider-Heinz)





BIBLIO- DRAMA

Awakening Long Forgotten Life Experiences Bibliodrama at the Sixth Plenary Assembly in Lebanon

Fr. Oscar Alunday, svd



Fr. Oscar Alunday, a Divine Word Missionary from the Philippines, is Executive Secretary of the Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate (ECBA) of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

Within the Forum on "Creative Methods and Forms for Proclaiming the Word" of the Sixth Plenary Assembly in Lebanon, Fr. Oscar Alunday, svd, offered a workshop on bibliodrama. The following article reflects some of the impressions and experiences gained during the Lebanon meeting.

Moving as one body

The volume of the music increased from a modulated tempo to a resounding meditative piece until everybody in the church made a long queue of one hundred and fifty people moving forward to the rhythm of the "Pilgrim Dance". The delegates put their right hands on the left shoulder of the person fronting them while their left hands were pressed to their chest. Moving as one body the "pilgrims" made three forward steps starting with the right foot and swaying backwards on the fourth count. The chain of lay people, religious, clergy and bishops connected to each other and moving forward down to the conference hall was a flowing "river of humanity" being led by the one carrying the Bible – the Word of God. In fifteen minutes, the participants gathered in a big circle around the enthroned Bible as they made individual gestures of veneration. The dance is an element of bibliodrama.

The medium is the message

The Bible that was enthroned at the opening of the assembly unfolded itself as a blessing for all. The delegates from the member organizations of the Catholic Biblical Federation coming from seventy nations were

linked together by a bond of solidarity and commitment to the biblical pastoral ministry. The right hand of the delegates that connected them to the persons in front of them were hands that linked them to other partners in the biblical pastoral ministry (i.e. the Catholic Biblical Federation). Other people follow and share their talents and services (e.g. member organizations). Some more friends strengthen and encourage faltering companions (e.g. Episcopal Conferences). There is need to pause and rest for a while (fourth step) for deeper reflection. Plenary Assemblies are meant to be the fourth step (in the "Pilgrim Dance") with a backward motion so that we can make three forward steps to carry on with the implementation of the Final Statements. The left hand that was pressed to the chest was a heartfelt expression of the sincerity and dedication of all the biblical pastoral workers. Their zeal for reading and studying the Word of God is manifested in the depth of their prayer and courageous witnessing. The "Pilgrim Dance" which was our medium that accompanied the Bible Enthronement at the opening rite was a preview of the whole Assembly and somehow captured the message of the biblical apostolate as a journeying with the Word - as a centering on the Word, it being a blessing for all. The movements and actions are bibliodrama elements.

Reading the Word by dancing the Word

The Final Statement cautions us to the fundamentalistic reading of the Word as the intended meaning of the biblical text is taken in an exclusively literal understanding without taking into consideration its cultural trappings. Fundamentalistic reading negates the development of language, vocabulary and human culture. It does not recognize that Scripture has several levels of meaning. It does not allow other ways of reading methods in order to grasp the deeper meanings. It does not consider that the search for meaning takes place within a community in dialogue.

Reading and speaking are not the only skills in understanding a language. Dancing and body movements are physical ways of language expression. Thus danc-



ing the Word of God can deepen one's understanding of the Bible as the Book of Life – the book of movements.



Delegates dancing the "Pilgrim dance"

Dancing as an element of bibliodrama widens the dialogical aspect of the biblical text with the life text of the individual reader. The relaxing effect of the dance movements prepares the individual to go back to her/himself to discover her/his present situation. One's life text (life situation) is where the scriptural text (biblical text) is lived. The scriptural events are relived and lived in the life text of the individual as member of a community. In bibliodrama, the process promotes an "attentive, respectful and honest reading of our own life situation with which the biblical word will be entering into a dialogue".

Bibliodrama workshop

Opportunities to share some creative ways of proclaiming the Word of God were happy moments for the facilitators and the participants. The willing participants came from Asia, Africa, Trinidad, Latin America and Europe. To them, bibliodrama experience in Lebanon provided them with an opportunity to relive scriptural realities in their lives today. Here are the comments and realizations of the participants in the bibliodrama workshop:

- "I was able to walk through the Holy Land without traveling to the Holy Land. I realized that the Holy Land is not something out there but it is in me."
- "This approach made me more aware of who I am. I normally study the Word of God but in bibliodrama the Word of God studied me."
- "The drama of my life (life text) happened a long time ago in the drama of the Bible and the drama of the

bible (scriptural text) happens in my life everyday. I saw the dramatic link even more realistically in biblio drama."

- "This approach works well for both the facilitator and participants. As facilitator I learn to discover who I am in the process as the participant deepens self-discovery more seriously. The method becomes a spiritual retreat."
- "The experience challenged me to love my cultural ways of expression in our traditional dances and rites. Now I will look seriously into the movements of the Word in our dances and music. I realize that dance is a powerful agent of the Word."

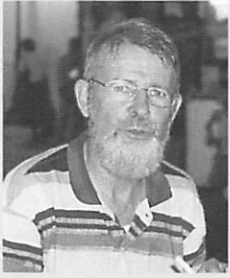
The few hours of sharing the bibliodrama experience in the Sixth Plenary Assembly in Lebanon left unforgettable memories and awakened long forgotten life experiences among the participants. These remembrances were enkindled because of the centrality of the Word in bibliodrama. The Word-text cannot be deposited only in the book of the Bible but the Word has to germinate in the life text of individual human beings in different cultural environments. Bibliodrama in Lebanon had a special memory – it widened a better understanding of the scriptural text and enhanced self-understanding to the life-text of the participants. Lebanon is indeed a fertile land for different approaches to the Word of God. ■





Bibliodrama as a Retreat for Clergy

Martin Jäggi, smb



Fr. Martin Jäggi, a Swiss missionary of the Bethlehem Mission Immensee, has been a qualified trainer in bibliodrama since 2002 and works at present in the parish of Barlig, Mountain Province, Northern Philippines.

Are there opportunities for priests to encounter God's Word in a new and spontaneous way aiding them in experiencing their faith at an even deeper level? One answer to this can be found in the following article. Fr. Martin Jäggi, smb, has written a report on his experiences during a spiritual "bibliodrama retreat" which he and Ms Jessica Joy Candelario of the Philippines offered on suggestion of Bishop Francisco F. Claver, sj, for the diocesan priests of the Apostolic Vicariate Bontoc-Lagawe.

As I had undergone some facilitator's training, my original plan was not at all to "preach" a retreat. I had just suggested offering a basic bibliodrama course for interested priests to provide some firsthand experience of bibliodrama so that they would be able to assess the potential of this pastoral tool. Then they would support their catechists, teachers and other church workers to make use of and become proficient in it. During a Vicariate meeting while I was distributing the invitation to such a basic course the bishop himself came up with the idea that our annual retreat might be done in the bibliodrama-way. – Why not?

Early September we met again in Baguio with Ms Joy Candelario from Manila whom I had asked to help me with her expertise in facilitating. Joy had related some experiences with seminarians, trainees to the priesthood, but not with a priests-only-group. We were both rather scared, because we had good reasons to expect quite an amount of resistance. Oftentimes in facilitators' workshops it was reported that with the support of the priest bibliodrama would flourish, whereas rather more often

priests would "spoil the broth", probably because they felt threatened by things they did not feel familiar with.

Bibliodrama and spirituality

In my introductory remarks I tried to situate bibliodrama in the context of present-day spirituality discussions: Both sides belong to the full picture, but probably all of the participants were brought up under strong influence of the redemption-centered side.

Salvation/redemption-centered spirituality	Creation/incarnation-centred spirituality
Something is wrong!	All HE created is very good!
Think!	Feel!
Improve! Try harder!	Enjoy!
Sacrifice! Deny yourself!	Praise God!
Left brain	Right brain
Dogmata/truths	Faith-stories
Scientific definitions	Symbols/comparisons
"For all eternity" – distant	"Here and now" – immediate
"Masculine"	"Feminine"
Accessible to: an elitist intellectual mind	Children/"the small ones"/everyone

All those familiar with bibliodrama will agree that it is a great help to strike a balance between the two opposing approaches. A little bias in favour of the right side of the list will, however, do no harm.

The subject: "The temptation of Jesus"

We started by visiting some key places of Jesus' life journey, choosing our favourite place and sharing in triads



after some interviews of at least one person to each of the chosen localities.

After these first steps we proceeded to the main text and main topic: Mt 4,1-11, the Temptation of Jesus, our outline designed by Fr. Rudi Pöhl, svd, Steyl, the Netherlands. We approached the text by using different ways of reading (solo-, verse-, phrase-, group-, echo-, silent etc.). Then all were asked to think of gestures to further express a word/phrase/action and to act it out, with the whole group following suit.



Joy Candelario

The afternoon was devoted to a warming-up phase, some stick dances and partner exercises. We returned to the text, looking at the context of the temptation story as the hinge between John the Baptist's call for change of heart/conversion and Jesus resuming John's message, calling disciples and announcing the new spirit of the kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount.

In the eucharistic celebration the gospel text was read out by three actors: a narrator, Jesus and the devil. The bidding prayers were done through gestures of temptations, failures and successes. All responded by the Taizé song "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom".

A surprising reaction

A first feedback/sharing revealed an amazingly strong feeling of solidarity in the group. To my big surprise the first vote of support came precisely from the one who, I had feared, would contribute only with scathing, cynical remarks. Young priests felt encouraged by the matter-of-

fact involvement of the elder clergy (including the bishop, the oldest of all). Middle-aged participants expressed contentment to participate in a retreat speaking to mind and heart and offering both challenge and enjoyment.

On the second day we focused our attention on the landscapes of the story: desert, temple-wall in the city and very high mountain. The participants chose one of these locations and expressed how it felt to be there. Next they met as a group and created a vignette, i.e. they expressed the characteristics of their chosen place and how they felt in it.

I experienced the proposed decision of all to choose the role of either Jesus or the devil as quite dramatic. The devil's group outnumbered by far the group of Jesus. Gestures to mark essence or actions of the character chosen showed a wide variety.

The first hour of the afternoon was devoted to another warming-up exercise with sticks, giving some hints for cooperation-balance-teambuilding. The dialogue between Jesus and the devil on the question "To whom does the world belong?" proved to be rather demanding. Few dared to enter the stage, nobody convinced by their own argument.

The time before the Eucharist was given to private reflection. We suggested that they made use of either an empty chair or an Egli figure in order to dialogue with "the other me", the dark side within oneself. Some approached a confessor for the sacrament of reconciliation.



Bibliodrama involves ever more people in the Philippines

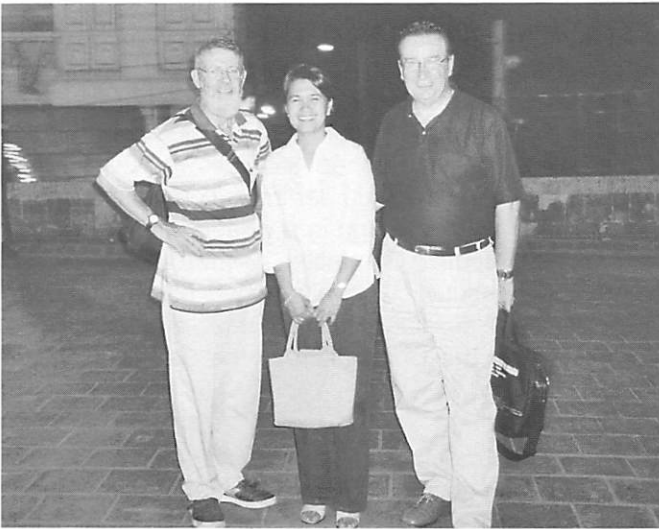
The last day made us build up to the highlight, the full play of the temptation story.



The outcome: A positive experience

During these three days I got the impression that a couple of miracles had happened: the astonishing cooperation of just everybody, the readiness to take some risks, to tread on unknown territory, to be led and directed by a rather young woman. The atmosphere was relaxed, open, and friendly. Some experienced that it might pay to look at one's dark side and gain more energy for the tasks/struggles ahead. All participants belonged to the Cordilleran Indigenous Peoples. Dancing comes very naturally to them. To link dancing with biblical work and worship seemed to be pure pleasure.

In his final contribution the bishop connected this bibliodrama experience to the pastoral policies of the regional local churches: building ecclesial communities. A basic ingredient of these communities is Bible-sharing. He noted that for the first time the priests practised this sharing of God's Word among themselves in such a creative, enjoyable way. "Hineh mah tov uhma naim shewet achim gam yachad" we danced and sang and enjoyed: "How good it is, how pleasant, where the people dwell as one" (Ps 133,1). ■



Fr. Jäggi, J. Candelario and Fr. Pöhl (from left)



Life of the Federation

Meeting of the Executive Committee in the Archabbey of St. Ottilien, Germany

For the second time since its election to office in Lebanon in 2002, so within an unusually close timeframe, the Executive Committee (EC) of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) met in July 2003. The primary reason for this renewed meeting after the Sixth Plenary Assembly was the election of a permanent General Secretary. Prior to this an exhaustive worldwide search for candidates had been conducted, followed by a correspondingly time-consuming election procedure. All the member institutions and committees of the CBF were informed of the results of this election in a written communication dated July 30, 2003 by the Moderator of the Executive Committee, Bishop Arturo Bastes, svd. Alexander M. Schweitzer, whom the Executive Committee had named General Secretary ad interim during its December 2002 session, has now been elected as permanent General Secretary in accordance with the Constituion of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

Of course the Executive Committee used the meetings also to address other central questions of the CBF and to make decisions on accumulated issues that required attention. An important point on the agenda was the continuation of work in preparation for the Congress on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II in the year 2005 in Rome. The EC made some basic decisions on questions of the contents as well as the main speakers and it worked on suggestions for the further planning of the Congress. The Preparatory Committee, which was commissioned by the EC to move forward with the detailed planning, met for the second time in Rome on October 20, 2003.

The EC meeting took place in the Archabbey of the Missionary Benedictines of St. Ottilien in Germany. This is the motherhouse of a Benedictine Congregation which has a presence in almost all the continents of the world and whose service to the Word of God is realized in the combination of monastic life and the work of evangelization. The *genius loci* of the Archabbey and the warm hospitality of the community contributed in no small way to the very harmonious and focused way in which the entire meeting was conducted. The decisions that were made as well as the entire atmosphere of the meeting were marked by great unanimity of spirit. With the help of various means of communication between the upcoming meetings, which will be more spread out in the future, this good work will continue to be carried forward for the well-being of the Federation. The next meeting of the Executive Committee is planned for early 2005, in Bogota, Colombia.





AFRICA

Kenya: The AMECEA Pastoral Institute – God’s Family in Miniature

To provide qualified advanced training in the pastoral field and opportunities for a spiritual renewal in East Africa – such are the goals that the AMECEA Pastoral Institute (API) in Eldoret, Kenya, has prescribed for itself. Since 1988 it has been an Associate Member of the CBF. On a recent visit CBF General Secretary, Alexander M. Schweitzer, was able to gain a good impression of this unique institution which he describes in the following report:



The AMECEA Pastoral Institute, API for short (the abbreviation AMECEA stands for the Association of the Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa), was established in 1967 at Ggaba, Uganda, where it was at home for nine years. In 1976 it had to be moved because of the unstable political situation to Eldoret, the center of North Kenya, 320 kilometers northwest of Nairobi, where it still has its seat today.

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The API is thus far the only institution of the Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa whose program of pastoral education is directed exclusively to those laity, religious and clergy who have been active for years in pastoral ministry and who have a corresponding experience in theory and praxis. The goal of the Institute is “to provide high quality pastoral training and spiritual renewal opportunities”, as expressed in its mission statement.

Learning and living under one roof

A nine-month “residential course” is offered in Eldoret. This means that the participants live under one roof from January till September. During this time, they study, learn, live, work and celebrate together, thus constituting a kind of large family. This community oriented training concept not only favors a focused study atmosphere. At the same time it enables people to have personal exchanges and contact with the customs and characteristics of cultures foreign to their own. For not only the African continent as a whole, but also most of the individual countries of Africa are marked by cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. In this way true community is fostered.

The subdivision of the community into smaller cells also contributes to the intensification of community life. This practice reflects the reality of the African Church, which also draws much of its vitality from the so-called “Small Christian Communities”.

Pastoral ministry in theory and praxis

As many as 50 course participants can be accommodated in the API. In 2003 there were exactly forty individuals active in the pastoral ministry from all the countries of the AMECEA-region and from Zimbabwe who completed the training program. Regular feedback from the course participants to the AMECEA-team helps the program to remain up to date and targeted to the concrete pastoral needs of the local churches in East Africa.

The most important topical areas covered by the course are Pastoral Theology, Pastoral Communication, Pastoral Counselling, Catechesis, Spirituality, Liturgy, Scripture,



Pastoral Anthropology and Development Studies. Some concrete contents of the studies on Holy Scripture include, for example, an introduction to the various methods of Bible reading, sensitization to the central role of the Word of God in the lives of Christians, an ecumenical reading of the Bible, work on some central themes of Holy Scripture and how to experience the biblical story as one's own personal story.

Alongside the study events the program provides for regular on the spot operations in the form of pastoral practica. The emphasis here is placed on the themes of biblical pastoral ministry and inculturation. Finally, common celebrations in which the daily liturgical as well as the various cultural feasts are celebrated together, and common work, ranging from cleaning and dishwashing to helping out on the farm are all regular elements of the nine-month program as well.

Church as God's family

As a "small church community" API is also able to survive because it can cover at least a part of its own food requirements through its own farming industry. Moreover, in the near future a solar installation sponsored by funding from the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart will be put into operation. It will help to significantly diminish the costs for energy and electricity. Through such measures as this the Institute is assuring itself a partial economic autonomy. Beyond this, the API supports a library and in its own publishing house (Gaba Publications) it issues two periodicals. The scholarly journal *African Ecclesial Review* (AFER) is primarily aimed at making Christ's message relevant in African contexts, while the monograph series *Spearhead* is designed to make the scientific publications of the API available to a broader public.

The common life in the Institute is designed to reflect the "Church as God's family", which the Synod for Africa is promoting as a model church for the African Continent, according to the Director of API, Benjamin Kiriswa. This is also supposed to be a tangible and visible sign of the effective influence of the spirit of Vatican II.

The AMECEA Pastoral Institute has a beneficial influence – far beyond the borders of Kenya and even beyond the borders of East Africa. Besides the personal ongoing training of the course participants, which benefits the local churches involved in a direct way, the API program also has a beneficial effect in terms of its being a consciousness builder. It is sensitizing the Church of Africa to the importance of a well-grounded, and in particular a biblically well-grounded pastoral ministry. And from the enduring contacts among the growing number of course graduates, an ever more dense and inclusive network is beginning to emerge which supports the important coordination of biblical pastoral initiatives and thereby enables a more lasting influence and more effective efforts.

Further information

Course length and scope: the annual "residential course" normally begins in mid-January and finishes between the end of September and mid-October. It includes a total of 35 weeks with about 700 hours of lessons, and is divided into different segments: Nine obligatory courses, about seven workshop-modules, and pastoral practica (about four weeks). Certificate/Finals: For a successfully completed study program a "Diploma/Certificate in Pastoral and Development Studies" is awarded. □



Mozambique: First Biblical Pastoral Workshop

Mozambique is slowly emerging from its many years of suffering and needs much support to encourage the Christian communities in their efforts to make the Word of God the centre of their lives.



From June 22 to 28, 2003, a biblical workshop took place in Maputo. In fact, it was the first biblical workshop ever held in Mozambique. In spite of their determination to start biblical activities immediately, the participants foresaw some obstacles that were going to hinder their efforts in promoting the biblical pastoral ministry. Some possible measures to be taken were also agreed upon. Papers were given on the following themes:

- The situation in Mozambique: The Bible in the Christian Communities of Mozambique (Martinho Maulano, diocesan pastor)
- The biblical foundations of ecclesial offices (P. Conrado Klich, svd)
- Offices in the biblical pastoral ministry (P. de Araújo Abreu, svd)
- Bible Circles (P. Gervásio Ronchi, svd); The key for access to the Bible and to *leitura popular* (Sr. Rosil F. Bueno, ssps)
- Information on the organizations that support the biblical pastoral ministry: BICAM and CBF, and on the biblical pastoral ministry in Africa (Sr. Euphrasia Simati); Verbum Bible and Lumko (P. Porfirio José, svd); CEBI and its publications (Sr. Teresinha Terre, Daughter of Saint Paul)
- Measures for the promotion of the biblical pastoral ministry in Mozambique; common final document (redacted by an editorial team)

As a result of the work groups and plenary discussions the participants submitted the following declaration (plan for measures to be taken):

We, the participants of the seminar on biblical pastoral ministry in Mozambique are convinced that the Word of God is truly the foundation and the highest guiding principle of our Christian life and of all forms of pastoral ministry. We therefore commit ourselves to the following measures:

1. To inform the bishop and the pastoral secretariat of the diocese about this Bible seminar.
2. To promote biblical pastoral ministry in the diocese.
3. To hold meetings: a yearly one at the level of the ecclesiastical provinces; every two years at the national level
4. To awaken love for the Word of God by spreading the Word ourselves and making it known.
5. To introduce the biblical service office into all the dioceses and to anchor it officially in the Bishops' Conference.
6. To ask the Bishops' Conference to undertake the necessary steps for reception as a member of the CBF.

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Challenges

1. To convey a knowledge of the problem, the importance and the urgency of biblical pastoral ministry.
2. The shortage of personnel and material resources.
3. The great distances that complicate work in biblical pastoral ministry.
4. To move from a pastoral practice centered simply on sacramental ministry to one that includes true work of evangelization.
5. Lack of coordinators at the diocesan and national levels.

Measures to insure the continuity of this work

1. The establishment of diocesan and parochial teams that will maintain the dynamic of the biblical pastoral ministry.
2. Organization of Bible meetings and Bible courses at various levels in the dioceses and parishes.
3. The obtaining of means of communication that will support exchanges of experiences related to the biblical pastoral ministry.
4. The implementation of a yearly Bible Week (from the Feast of Christ the King to the first Sunday in Advent). The Sisters of Saint Paul could assume responsibility for this initiative.
5. In order to carry forward the work of this seminar, the President of the evangelization committee with provisional effect has installed a National Bible Secretariat to which at the moment the following persons belong: P. Manuel de Araújo Abreu, svd, P. Gervásio Ronchi, svd, Rev. Mário Maloquiha (Nampula), Rev. João (Tete), Sr. Rosil F. Bueno, ssps.

Ghana: Dei Verbum Course 2002

Nineteen delegates from seven dioceses and five religious congregations participated in "Dei Verbum Ghana 2002", a six-week biblical pastoral program offered by the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) in collaboration with the CBF. The course was held at the Catholic Conference Centre in Adoagyiri-Nsawan from November 4th until December 13th, 2002. It was designed for biblical pastoral ministers and for others already engaged in various fields of the biblical apostolate. Resource persons offered workshops in the History of the Biblical Apostolate in Africa, the Practice and Implementation of Bible Sharing Methods, Community Building, the Kingdom of God, the Church as Communion of Communities, the Pastoral Use of the Bible, the Psalms, Luke-Acts, Creative Bible Reading, and *lectio divina*. The daily encounter with God's Word, with the resource persons and with each other enabled the participants to face the problems and struggles of life armed with the Word of God, a mighty weapon for people when taking control of their own lives.



The course inspired the participants to collaborate with others in spreading the biblical apostolate into every corner of the Church and into all Church ministry. They hope to promote a network of biblical pastoral ministers which will extend to every diocese in the country and which will encourage activities such as the Enthronement of the Bible, Bible Weeks, and the publication of literature on the Bible.

The next Dei Verbum Course in Ghana is planned to take place from August to September, 2004.

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D. R. of Congo: Dei Verbum Course held at the Centre Liloba, Lemba

The Centre Liloba was founded in 2000 by the Divine Word Missionaries (many of whose provinces have been CBF members for years). It is situated at Lemba, in the near vicinity of Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Centre Liloba aims at promoting individual and group Scripture study and provides a forum for sharing and reflection for all participants. Since its foundation the Centre Liloba organizes conferences, seminars and biblical study and reflection courses for religious, priests and laity.

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Their first Dei Verbum course was also the first to be carried out in French on African territory. Before this, Dei Verbum courses were being offered in English in Zimbabwe and in Ghana. All of these courses were modelled on the traditional Dei Verbum Course offered annually by the Divine Word Missionaries in cooperation with the Catholic Biblical Federation at Nemi in Italy.

The French-speaking course took place from July 20 to August 31, 2003. It was titled "God and His Blessings in Our Society". In all, twenty one persons from eight dioceses of the Democratic Republic of Congo – priests, religious and lay persons – took part in this forty day Intensive Bible Course. The subjects of the course were chosen after having taken three important aspects into consideration:

- Scripture studies for a better understanding of the Word of God: The subjects covered the entire Bible to show the mainline theology of Sacred Scripture. The purpose was to help the participants to become better acquainted with the person of Jesus Christ and his message after having gone through both Old and New Testaments. That helped to provide them with a comprehensive idea of the Scripture.
- Interiorization of the Word of God: The subjects also contained practical methods such as Bible sharing, study of Psalms, Lectio Divina and time for personal reading in order to help the participants interiorize what they had learned.
- The communication of the Word of God: That was the final goal of the course – that the participants could share with others what they had learned and interiorized. For this, seminars such as Basic Bible Seminar (BBS), Growing in the Word of God and communicating the Word of God by music and dance are very useful.



One of the principles of the course was to organize it with the help of local clergy. All except three professors hailed from the Democratic Republic of Congo itself. They were either parish priests or professors in the major seminaries of Kinshasa.

The outcome of the course was very satisfying. The final results can be seen from the projects and programs created by each person. The projects were simple and easy to put into practice with local

resources. For example, organization of the BBS for community leaders, organization of biblical conferences, teaching bible sharing methods and Lectio Divina etc.

There were also some difficulties to be faced during the course. The most important was the disparity in the intellectual level of the group. The group consisted of priests, pastoral animators who had at least three years of training, and the others who had hardly enough



biblical knowledge to understand the classes. Secondly, the standard of living in the villages is so low that many cannot afford to buy a Bible for themselves. There is practically no transport or communication facilities in the villages, so even the most goodwilled person is extremely restricted regarding mobility.

But as a conclusion it can be said that the course was a success and all those who participated in it gained from it. The next Dei Verbum Course will be held in 2005 and the invitation will be extended to other French-speaking neighboring countries. There are also proposals from the participants to organize it on regional levels. ■

AMERICAS

Costa Rica: Fifth Biblical Pastoral Meeting for Central America

The 5th Biblical Pastoral Workshop for Central America took place from February 3 to 7, 2003 in La Garita, Alajuela, Costa Rica. The workshop was entitled "The Word of God – Source of Peace and Solidarity in Central America" and was directed by Fr. Manuel Villarreal, the zonal coordinator for Central America. The subregional coordinator of the CBF for Latin America and the Caribbean, Fr. Jesús Antonio Weisensee Hetter, was also present. A main introductory lecture was given by Fr. Pablo Richard. With the help of the two beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount on the clean of heart and the piece makers (Matt 5:8ff), he spoke on the theme "One who listens to the Word, creates peace and solidarity".



The meeting offered rich opportunity for mutual exchanges regarding experiences in the work of biblical pastoral ministry in the different countries of Central America. A concluding clarification summarizes the most important results of the meeting and at the same time discusses some prospects for future work. This and further information on the meeting may be found in *La Palabra Hoy* 107 (2003), the journal of the Subregion of Latin America and the Caribbean.. ■

Venezuela: First National Bible Congress

The first National Bible Congress of Venezuela took place in Caracas from March 1 – 3, 2003, the immediate reason being the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Bible School of SOBICAIN (Sociedad Bíblica Católica Internacional), the international Catholic Bible Society of Venezuela, which has been an Associate Member of CBF since 2002.

The theme of the meeting was "Our Task as God's Children for a Biblical Pastoral Ministry which renews Christian Life". The 72 male and female participants – representing symbolically the disciples sent out by Jesus (cf. Luke 10) – worked at themes important for the Church of Venezuela. These themes were addressed in five key lectures and 20 workshops. Among other things they reflected on the analysis of the present religious and social situation of the country as well as on questions dealing with the native Afro-

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American and Creole cultures and religions, intercultural exchange, feminist theology and the role of women in Venezuela. The question of the meaning of the Bible and different methods of Bible-reading were also dealt with. A detailed report on what led up to the meeting, its course and contents can be found in *La Palabra Hoy* 109 (2003), the journal of the subregion of Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as on the homepage of SOBICAIN.

Cardinal Ignacio Velazco celebrating Mass

The Congress issued the following Final Statement:

All peoples read and interpret biblical texts against their own cultural backgrounds in their own new way; at the same time, however, they read and interpret their own culture in the light of the Bible. For this it is necessary to preserve the different cultural environments with all their popular history and folk wisdom. Bible and culture complement and enrich each other. Over and above this they re-create the joint historic memory of our peoples. In this context our aims are the following:

- SOBICAIN and other institutions endorse and support workshops, courses and seminars on the multi-cultural reality of Latin America and its specific hermeneutic relevant forms
- All communities recognize the cultural dimension as part of Bible-reading (specific hermeneutics).
- Studying the original Bible languages should be made possible and detailed guide lines for the application of symbols as a means for a better understanding of the biblical texts should be elaborated.
- Many more workshops and meetings showing the close proximity of the Bible to the sacred traditions of our people should be offered

The juxtaposition between life and the Word strengthens our commitment to rediscover and respect the dignity of women. Therefore, we propose

- to include in the curriculum of biblical theological centers gender-specific issues and feminist hermeneutics in order to elaborate and emphasize the role of women, so that men and women together may fulfill God's plan;
- to prepare and hold workshops for Bible-reading from the gender-specific perspective in order to find different ways of access to a new image of women.

Latin America has shown to the world that its people can read the Word, that it has been blessed with wisdom and that the Bible is for everyone. The Bible illuminates life. From this follow our recommendations:

- promotion of youth encounters with the Bible even before the formal Church catechesis;
- sharing with brothers and sisters of other denominations who want to participate in our common prayerful reading of the Word; here we need to make efforts that this kind of reading finds its place in the various Christian groups.



- clear presentation of the present situation regarding the Word of God in order to show paths to peace, justice and social development;
- promotion of courses and work-groups held by the Ecumenical Bible Network of Venezuela (REVIVE) in popular Bible-reading.

We deem it important that when we offer religious education to our people, we emphasize the intrinsic historic character of prophetism and the deepening of both prophetic dimensions – condemnation and hope. It is of equally great importance that our institutions recognize the value of the Word in this prophetic endeavor, so that our hope may lead to action. Our recommendations in this area are the following:

- Organization of working committees and days of encounter for an in-depth study of prophetism in Venezuela in the light of the Word;
- research into prophetism in Venezuela;
- publication of a pastoral Bible as a study text taking into account the cultural specifics of Latin America in order to be able to better respond to the needs of our peoples;
- SOBICAIN will provide in Venezuela a systematic academic training in Bible study by means of institutions on university level;
- evaluation and verification by SOBICAIN of the implementation of these resolutions passed at this First National Bible Congress. SOBICAIN will also be responsible for the organization of the next Congress in two years (2005).

ASIA / OCEANIA

India: New Bible Centre Mumbai Inaugurated

The new Bible Centre of the Catholic Bible Institute Mumbai was inaugurated by Cardinal Ivan Dias, Archbishop of Bombay, on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25th, 2003, by celebrating Mass in its new premises in Bandra, Mumbai. The Centre contains an air-conditioned classroom for 25 students, a computer room, a chapel and a library and will be used for some of the programmes offered by the Institute which is popularly known as "Bible College". This Institute was started in 1979 in a Jesuit villa at Versova, but lost its premises in 1985. Since then, it has been functioning by renting rooms in various retreat houses.

Besides evening sessions, one-day seminars, weekend retreats for lectors, and a once-a-month certificate course (lasting 10 months) on biblical themes, the main programmes offered are a two-month residential course held twice a year in February/March and July/August covering every book of the Bible. The courses are mainly in English but also in Konkani and Hindi. The latest residential course which started on July 1st drew 16 students - the full capacity - from all over India and Mauritius to the Institute. On August 23rd well-earned certificates were distributed to the participants for successful completion of the course. Six hours of class, six days a week for eight weeks and final exams make the certificate "well-earned" indeed!



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Indonesia: Basic Bible Seminar in Bandung

The offer of a Basic Bible Seminar at the St. Borromeo Hospital in Bandung, Indonesia, has encountered an overwhelming reception. The impulse came from a participant in a Bible course regularly offered by the AMBC (Angela Merici Biblical Center) and within a very short time over a hundred and fifty doctors, nurses and other hospital workers had signed up to take the course. What united them all was the desire to acquire greater familiarity with the Bible and to receive answers to their open spiritual questions. Because of the unexpectedly high number of applicants the decision was made to offer the seminar twice. The first group met from August 16th to 18th; the second from September 20th to 22nd. But the three days of common learning, prayer, and mutual exchanges were only the beginning. Since that time many of the participants have been meeting in regularly scheduled smaller Bible circles to listen together to the Word of God and allow it to have an affect on their lives, not least as lived in their ordinary work day. □

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EUROPE / MIDDLE EAST

Italy: Dei Verbum Biblical Pastoral Course in Nemi

In August, 2003, 31 men and women from 13 countries seventeen priests, nine sisters, one brother and four lay people (two male, two female) arrived in Italy to participate in this year's "Course for Ministers of the Word of God" from August 25th until December 13th at the Dei Verbum Biblical Pastoral Center in Nemi.

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The course is intended for both male and female lay people, religious and clerics, who have already been involved in the biblical apostolate and biblical pastoral ministry on diocesan, national or regional levels and who will continue working in this field. Specifically, it aims at forming them into ministers of the Word involved in out-reach programs, who are promising and effective multipliers, and who will be assets in "networking", which is so very necessary today in pastoral ministry, and in the field of biblical apostolate in particular.

Resource persons from around the world give workshops on topics such as the Minister of the Word, the Church's Approach to Sacred Scripture, God's Word in Stories, Jesus and the Gospels, the Psalms, the Book of Revelation, the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Luke, the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, the Kingdom of God, *lectio divina*, Lessons from the Lumko Institute, etc.

All participants are required to produce a biblical pastoral "project" that they can actually use in their future ministry. Dei Verbum is not simply another renewal program or sabbatical course but a training program for biblical pastoral ministry. Acceptance is contingent upon the recommendation of a bishop, religious superior, or director of a Catholic Church institution who wants to make use of the participant's training for future church ministry. Participants must have a good command of English and a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent. The age limit is 60, however, some exceptions are possible.

The next Dei Verbum course in Nemi will take place from August 26 to December 13, 2004. Deadline for registration is April 15, 2004. Further information and application material can be obtained from Fr. George Koottappillil, svd. □



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Germany: 70 Years of the Katholisches Bibelwerk

The Katholisches Bibelwerk (Catholic Biblical Association) celebrated its 70th anniversary with a Bible Festival in Regensburg on September 27, 2003. The Bible itself was, of course, the focal point of the celebrations. The various contributions for that day emphasized the fact that the Bible is not Holy Scripture only for Christians. The Tübingen professor, Karl-Josef Kuschel, spoke on the biblical tradition of Abraham, which could form a common basis for dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims. After many years of working with the Book of books, the Director of the Bibelwerk, Dr. Franz-Josef Ortkemper, remarked that for him the Bible is still "as exciting today as ever".

It was a small circle of lay persons and priests who founded the Katholisches Bibelwerk in 1933. During the Third Reich it was forbidden. The work, however, was carried on in secret. In the meantime the Katholisches Bibelwerk has become such an important part of the life of the Church in Germany that its absence would be unthinkable. Many Christians, Protestants as well as Catholics, discover the lands of the Bible and of early Christianity and the fascinating world of the religions world-wide with the travel agency "Biblische Reisen", which belongs to the Bibelwerk. Alongside respected scientific series, the Katholisches Bibelwerk Publishers produces above all literature devoted to the understanding of the Bible for more general audiences, e.g., a popular Commentary on the New Testament. A Commentary on the Old Testament will be published soon. A wide variety of biblical-pastoral literature is also currently being published. The Katholisches Bibelwerk has devoted itself above all to the interpretation of the Bible. Three periodicals that are among the most prominent biblical journals in the German-speaking world serve this purpose: "Bibel und Kirche", "Welt und Umwelt der Bibel" and "Bibel heute". Besides these publications, a basic, as well as a more advanced course on the Bible have been developed.

The Katholisches Bibelwerk is attempting to train as many (full-time and part-time) collaborators in the parishes for Bible work as possible. Numerous courses on methods of Bible work have taken place in the last years and they continue to enjoy great demand. The collaborators of the Katholisches Bibelwerk are always on the road in the German dioceses to introduce people to the message of the Bible and to help them enjoy reading it. From a small beginning 70 years ago a flourishing Bible movement has come into existence. □

Annual Meeting of the Central European Subregion

The annual meeting of the Central European subregion of the CBF took place from September 1 to 4, 2003, on Krk, the largest island of Croatia. Participants from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Rumania/Transylvania, Slovenia, Croatia, Austria, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands enjoyed the hospitality of the local Carmelite community. In line with the custom of the subregion, the scale of the meeting this year was relatively small; only the directors of the Biblical Associations, so the representatives of the CBF Full members, were present. For this reason the agenda was limited to national reports on activities of the past year, discussion of planned projects in the subregion and the report of the General Secretary from the Federation and the General Secretariat. The reports and discussions made clear that in the past year an astounding number of projects were successfully brought to function or tackled and that the activities of the subregion are on the increase.

The Year of the Bible, which in 2003-2004 is being celebrated in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (but also in France which, however, belongs to the Southern and Western European subregion) deserves special mention. The Year of the Bible has brought and is bringing with it many additional events and is enjoying a hitherto unknown public inter-



est, which is particularly clear from the great popularity of the special offers and the overwhelming echo in the media. The participants on the island of Krk evaluated this fact also as a sign of a new and growing interest in religious matters in Europe. The Croatian Biblical Association took the initiative of the German-speaking countries and France as a model and also called for a Year of the Bible in 2003.

The directors of the Biblical Associations of the subregion made use of their meeting also took stock. The following is a list of a few of the projects and activities of the past year which have been carried out in or for the countries of Eastern Europe:

1. Organizational and financial support for the establishing and equipping of the Biblical Associations (Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Rumania/Transylvania)
2. Creation and/or bringing up to date of libraries with biblical-theological and biblical-pastoral literature (Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Rumania/Transylvania, the Ukraine, Croatia, Bosnia)
3. Ongoing further education event in biblical science: Colloquium Biblicum every two years in Vienna
4. Biblical-pastoral advanced training courses for multipliers (Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Italy/South Tyrol, Slovakia)
5. Annual courses in German for co-workers of the Biblical Associations and for biblicists of theological faculties from July to September (for all Eastern European countries)
6. Concrete special projects:
 - Bible editions (Kaldy Bible in Hungary; Bible in Romanes for Romanies; New Testament for Bosnian refugees; Hungarian Bible for Rumania/Transylvania; Bible for the Hungarian minority in Slavonia)
 - Translations of biblical literature (Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia)
 - Biblical periodicals (Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary)
 - Biblical pastoral commentaries (Hungary, Czech Republic, Croatia)
 - Synopsis (Slovakia)
 - Introductions to the Bible (Slovakia, Hungary)
 - Biblical pastoral correspondence courses (Croatia, Slovenia, Poland)



The Central European subregion of the CBF is marked by a great variety of languages, cultures and ethnic peoples within a small geographical area. More importantly, however, it is marked by the totally different political-historical backgrounds of the countries in East and West, based on the decades long separation of the region by the Iron Curtain. In the course of their yearlong collaborative work, the members of the subregion gained insight into the completely different ecclesial situations; they were

able to form Church in a way that transcended cultural, linguistic and economic borders; they managed to establish a community marked by mutual respect and sustained by the solidarity of the wealthy with the materially disadvantaged partners. It means a lot to the members of the subregion that this fruitful collaboration is continuing even today, thirteen years after the fall of the Iron Curtain. ■



New Collaborator in the General Secretariat

Those of you who began the reading of this issue with the *Editorial* have already noted that the *Bulletin Dei Verbum* has a new editor, and the General Secretariat of the CBF a new collaborator.

Since September of 2003 Claudio Ettl has been responsible in the General Secretariat for the areas of publication, projects and public relations. The editing of the BDV, whose editorial direction he holds in common with the General Secretary, but also the supervision of all other publications including those of the Internet thus also number among his principal tasks.

The fact that this position has been vacant for almost two years has had a number of adverse effects: the delayed appearance of the BDV is only one of the consequences of this bottleneck. Once the matter of permanently filling the position of General Secretary was clarified following the Sixth Plenary Assembly, we made an all-out effort in the search for a new colleague, and finally came up with one.

Claudio Ettl was born in 1967 in Lima, Peru, spent a few years with his family as a child in Spain and is a German citizen. Here we will list only a few of the important data from his biography: After graduation from high school, Mr. Ettl spent several months as a collaborator in Benedictine mission stations in Kenya and Uganda and was involved in church project work. He did his advanced studies in theology in Augsburg, Jerusalem, Würzburg and Munich; his doctoral thesis in exegesis is concerned with the question of presumed anti-Judaism in the Gospel of Matthew. Having been assistant to the chair for Exegesis of the New Testament and Biblical Hermeneutics (Prof. Dr. Hans-Josef Klauck) from 1998 to 2003 he can look back on a number of years of teaching activity in the realm of biblical science/New Testament. Besides his academic activities Mr. Ettl has been engaged in the area of biblical pastoral ministry, among others in the fields of adult education, youth work, parish work and the ongoing education of priests and pastoral agents. Expert knowledge in the realm of Internet coupled with experience in journalism and public relations round off his qualifications for the position in the General Secretariat of the CBF. Mr. Ettl is married.

We are delighted to have found in Claudio Ettl the long yearned for new collaborator – and at the same time also the urgently hoped for relief – in our team in the General Secretariat. You, the reader of the *Bulletin Dei Verbum*, now hold the first fruits of this collaboration in your hands.

Alexander M. Schweitzer
General Secretary



New Members

Full Member

In September 2003 the Federation was joined by the

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Associate Members

As decided by the Executive Committee during its meetings in Terni, Italy, from December 8 to 10, 2002, and in St. Ottilien, Germany, from July 18 to 21, 2003, the following new Associate Members were welcomed to the Federation:

AMERICAS

1. Comisión Bíblica Diocesana (COBIDI) de la Diócesis de Mar del Plata, Argentina

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COBIDI runs a Bible School and organizes Bible workshops and provides for the distribution of Bibles and New Testament editions at affordable prices. It promotes Lectio Divina as a method for individual and community Bible reading. Efforts are made to promote a catechesis based on the Bible and the organization of a Bible Day and Bible Month in the parishes. □

2. Movimiento de la Palabra de Dios, Argentina

San Juan 2831
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Website: www.mopal.org/es/

This Church Movement, which - in canonical terms - is a private association of the faithful, approved by the Diocese of Quilmes (CBF Associate Member), has 3,000 members in Argentina, Paraguay and Ecuador. Priests, consecrated lay persons, families and young people belong to the Movimiento. Its major activities are evangelization ministry, building of communities which live the Word of God and development of methods of biblical prayer. The Movimiento runs three schools in Córdoba, Buenos Aires and Castelar, two retreat houses and a pastoral school for the formation of group coordinators and animators. It is active in 21 dioceses in Argentina. □



3. SOBICAIN Argentina

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SOBICAIN (Società Biblica Cattolica Internazionale) was founded in 1924 and has been recognized by Pope John XXIII in 1960. The objectives of SOBICAIN according to their Constitution are to promote the personal encounter of people with the Bible through participatory reading, study and meditation, to prepare popular Bible editions in the context of different social situations and cultures, and to promote special Bible editions for mission countries. SOBICAIN Rome has been an Associate Member of the CBF since 1991; SOBICAIN Venezuela has been affiliated since 2002. SOBICAIN Argentina supports the biblical pastoral ministry in Argentina through a school and correspondence courses for biblical animators. The organization accompanies 2,000 students in their formation. □

4. Hermanas Dominicas de la Presentación – Provincia de Bogotá, Colombia

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This province has 382 members committed to pastoral parish work in Colombia, Nicaragua and Cuba. Bible reading is of essential importance to them and they foster it especially in their ministry with the poor. □

5. Departamento Catequístico Arquidiocesano (DECAR)

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Publication: MENSAJE

The group has been working for ten years in the biblical pastoral ministry of the Archdiocese of Asunción. Its major activities include visits to parishes and schools, biblical formation courses, production of study material, weekly radio programs, participation in meetings and workshops at national level, preparation of a Bible Week (including materials) and formation of biblical pastoral animators at a higher level. □

6. Instituto Bíblico Pablo VI, U.S.A.

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E-mail: ibipablovi@netzero.net
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Review: Semilla
Radio program: Conociendo las Escrituras

The Instituto Biblico Pablo VI started as a Summer Institute during June and August, 1998. Since then 219 students have received their diploma. The programs are mainly offered to parish communities in collaboration with the parish priests. The institute is a member of the National Association of Hispanic Priests in the U.S. and of the Hispanic Ministry of the Diocese of Orlando. It is in contact with the Universidad de Santo Tomás in Colombia and the Universidad Católica de Ponce in Puerto Rico. Courses which are being offered are a two and a half-year course and a one year specialization course in different areas (e.g. Biblical Theology, Marian Theology, Pauline Letters, Prophetism) as well as a six-trimester formation course in Sacred Scriptures. The institute tries to foster a new dimension of pedagogy in spreading the Word of God answering the needs of formation in biblical studies for leaders in the parishes, Small Christian Communities, prayer groups and other movements in the Catholic Church. Above that the institute organizes Bible Days, a Hispanic Festival, Bible Weeks etc. □

ASIA / OCEANIA

1. Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of the Eucharistic King, Philippines

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Since its beginnings in the 1930s one of the main priorities of the Congregation has been pastoral work at parish and barrio (village) level, mainly in rural areas. To prepare qualified catechists for the "grass roots level", the St. Benedict Institute (SBI) was founded in the early 1960s. It later became affiliated with the Divine Word College in Vigan. The SBI benefited from the near vicinity of the Immaculate Conception School of Theology, the Interdiocesan Major Seminary of Vigan run by the Devine World Missionaries, inasmuch as several seminary professors taught at SBI. In return, the Directress, Sr. Henrietta Sebastian, was the first woman to teach at the seminary. Sr. Henrietta was also the co-foundress and staff member of John Paul I Biblical Center in Vigan. She also initiated the Basic Bible Seminar which has been translated into many languages and is being used effectively in many countries outside the Philippines. The Prioress General, Sr. Miriam Alejandrino, is the first Filipina to earn a licentiate at the Pontifical Biblical Institute and a doctorate in biblical theology at the Gregorian University. She gives courses at the Seminary of Davao and at the SBI and is involved in a new translation project of the Bible into the local Visayan language. □

2. St. Paul's Book Centre, Kandy, Sri Lanka

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The St. Paul's Book Centre translates and publishes a great variety of Bible related literature, among them a Bible Atlas and Bible study material. The first Catholic Bible Study Correspondence Course in Sinhala was launched in January, 2003. Furthermore, plans have been made to set up a Bible Study Resource Center in Kandy with a choice of Bibles for reference, Scripture reference books, commentaries, Bible study material and a full audio-visual centre with PCs and datashow projectors. The Resource Centre will be located in the rear of the book centre.

EUROPE / MIDDLE EAST

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Publication: Maison de la Bible

Maison de la Bible is a non-profit organization, founded in 2002. The purpose of Maison de la Bible is to help Christians better comprehend the message of the Bible and to inform them about current biblical research work in language easy to understand. Their target group are all committed people interested in the Bible. Maison de la Bible is a real stronghold of information, selection and coordination of different biblical disciplines: exegesis, pastoral ministry, catechesis, etc. It participates in the collaboration for the National Day of the Bible in Belgium. Maison de la Bible publishes a bulletin (six issues per year) covering rubrics such as biblical research, biblical formation, testimony, catechesis, book reviews and information on courses. The editorial committee consists of a group of well-known exegetes and professors in Belgium. □

Photos

Special thanks go to the following persons for their photos:

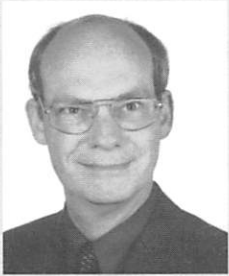
Moïse Adekambi: 31; Cecilia Chui: 24/1; Bernardo Favaretto: 35; Anneliese Hecht: 6, 7, 9, 10; Karl Albert Kako: 14; Theo Kersten: 24/2; Jolly Mudakkampurath, svd: 32; Monika Ottermann: 11, 13; Rudi Pöhl, svd: 4/1-2, 5, 17, 22, 25, 26/1-2, 27; Renu Rita Silvano: 36; Manuel Villareal: 34.



FOR
DISCUSSION

“From Beginning to End” Reflections on Biblical Reading

Thomas P. Osborne



Dr. Thomas Osborne worked for many years in a leading position with the Service Biblique Diocésain in Luxembourg. From 1996-2002 he served as coordinator of the CBF's subregion of Southern and Western Europe.

1. Introduction

For a number of years now I have had the honor and the joy of working on the Bible with priests, religious and laity professionally engaged in pastoral ministry, together with other interested individuals. I offered an “initiation to the reading” of certain biblical writings: The Gospel of Luke in 2001, the Acts of the Apostles in 2002 and the Gospel of Mark in 2003. In part the idea was inspired by a similar project launched by Joseph Stricher of the Biblical Service “Évangile et Vie” in France.

Biblical reading tends to center on a word (“Parole de Vie”, for example) or on a precise text, often taking into account the immediate context in which it is heard (choice for the liturgy or for catechesis). Alternatively, it may take the form of an “introduction” to a particular writing, with general observations of a synthetic character, and perhaps with a closer look at a few individual texts. Rarely, however, does the project of biblical reading bear on a text as a whole, in a way that is focused, both in terms of the time spent on it and the level of intensity applied. It is as though one were to study a symphony of Beethoven by listening to a few select musical measures or by attending a lecture of musicology, on the compositional procedures employed, without ever taking the time to absorb the beauty of the work as a dynamic whole. It is precisely this approach of a focused reading of the whole of a biblical writing that we have privileged in these cycles of initiation, which have recently been named “Bible meetings” (rencontres bibliques). Basically, it is all very simple: we read a biblical writing “from beginning to end”.

2. Method

- 2.1 Prior to the first meeting, the participants are requested to read the whole of a biblical writing from beginning to end, if possible at a single reading. For the case of Mark this would mean two hours, or slightly more than that; for the other Gospels somewhat more. This first global encounter with the biblical text gives the individual reader the possibility of a direct contact with the writing in its materiality and its internal dynamism. One gathers first impressions, features of the text that surprise or challenge, and connections are made between different elements of the text. This is the beginning of the work of committing the narrative to memory.
- 2.2 The next step is to re-read the whole writing, section by section, either in group session or by oneself. This second reading, based on an overall outline of the work, attempts to bring out the units of meaning (indicated by various literary devices), without, of course, denying or neglecting the transversal relations that exist between different sections of the work, even those that are far apart from each other. The outline itself and the special text divisions that result from it reflect as much as possible the material indications in the text that come gradually to one's attention by dint of reading and re-reading. Of course one can be induced to modify the plan as originally conceived in function of new discoveries. Why so much attention to the plan or outline of the writing? The principle is simple: in order to gain a proper insight into the significance of a letter, one must delimit the word in which it figures and identify the language; to understand the meaning of a word, one must delimit and identify the sentence in which it is situated. The same holds true for a sentence within a paragraph and a paragraph within a given writing as a whole. The various contexts play a capital role in the determination of the meaning of a particular element in the biblical writings, as they do in every literary text, every musical or artistic work.
- 2.3 The reading approach is active and critical. Every repetition is noted. These indicate that a theme or a motif



(something of less importance than a theme) are being reprised, developed, deepened. Noted, too, are the geographical, temporal and social frameworks in which the characters present themselves and in which they move about. One also takes note of the main character and the secondary characters, friend or adversary of the main character. One notes how the narrator of story functions. Does he intervene in the text to comment on events or does he retain a more discreet role? One observes the changes (of situations, of characters). What has changed between the beginning and end of a narrative (of the narrative as a whole, of a particular episode)? One attempts to discover how and for what purpose the author appeals to the reader, whether he does so explicitly or only implicitly. All of these questions (and many more as well) enable the reader to progress toward a new discovery of the narrative and to enter into the dynamic movement of the text. In this sense, the reader accepts to become consciously engaged along the road marked out by the text.

2.4 The possible meaning of an extract, of a section, of a work as a whole, comes to life gradually in the mind and heart of the reader or the reading group. These readers or groups are located in particular cultures, are faced with problems of their own, engagements and concerns that demand their attention, but may be very different from those of the author of the biblical text. Taking very seriously the chronological and cultural distance that separates them from the biblical text, the reader at the beginning of the 21st century is concerned to favor the spirit of discovery, surprise, questioning, rather than a simplistic, immediate, utilitarian or ideological application of the text. In this sense, it amounts to a reading that favors the search for meaning rather than a final determination of how a text applies to life.

2.5 By dint of reading and re-reading the biblical work, the reader absorbs the biblical narrative into his memory. This becomes a kind of "fictitious" world from which the reader can draw nourishment for his own vision of the world. It becomes a point of reference with which he can enter into dialogue, a "holy story" ready to receive the narrative of the reader's life and of the world he inhabits.

2.6 Naturally, when this contact of individuals engaged in the pastoral ministry of the Church with the texts that are the sources of our Christian faith takes place, questions and fundamental insights arise with respect to the contents of our faith, with the way we live in Christian community in our contemporary world. These "challenges" which come from the biblical word

invite the participants to reflect together and in simplicity on their pastoral practice and on its fundamental orientations.

3. Some requirements for launching this kind of biblical reading

For the type of reading described above to become a success, the following qualities are required:

- ❑ a certain regularity, a perseverance in reading
- ❑ an interest and curiosity for the biblical narrative
- ❑ a capacity to read intelligently, actively, in an engaged and creative way, which implies a very sustained attention to the biblical text in its materiality.

One must accept the fact that a complete understanding of a given text will not come all at once:

- ❑ sometimes, one must be prepared to research some basic information that one lacks because of the cultural difference between the milieu of a text's composition and our world of today;
- ❑ sometimes, the narrative itself intentionally leaves a question open, or in suspense, thereby inviting readers to continue their search, within the biblical text or elsewhere.

For this reason, a large opening should be accorded to symbolic language. One should accept the fact that a narrative does not necessarily express itself in an exclusive and univocal way, but that its meaning can unfold simultaneously at different levels.

4. Advantages

The advantages of this type of reading are numerous:

- 4.1 First of all, it respects the intention of the biblical authors (cf. Dei Verbum 12). With respect to the Evangelists, their primary concern was certainly not to furnish the Christian communities with an anthology of liturgical readings, anecdotes, catechetical instructions or texts designed to support theological positions. They first of all intended to offer their readers paths of faith that unfold through the biblical narratives. These catechetical journeys gradually deepen understanding, through the repetition of motifs, the formulation of questions, the progressive search for answers throughout a narrative globally conceived.



When Vatican II, citing Saint Jerome, reminds us that "ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ", it is not simply directing us to a wisely selected collection of biblical texts but also encouraging us to read the four Gospels in their integrity, and more generally the Bible as a unified whole.

4.2 This approach allows the reader to take into account the wide variety of images utilized in the biblical works. It introduces us to the richness of symbolic language. This challenges every reading that seeks to reduce the signification of the text to a single level of meaning (see above no. 3). This approach prevents us from objectifying images that have no meaning except when viewed as approaches to a reality that always transcends our horizons, an interconnected network of images in search of truth. The reader of Luke's entire work (Gospel and Acts of the Apostles) should connect the image of the Spirit dove (Lk 3:22) with that of the Spirit wind, fire, sound and communication (Acts 2) in his search for the profound reality of the Holy Spirit. It is obvious that this reality surpasses and transcends each of these images taken separately.

4.3 One can say that the reader is formed through his progressive and global reading of the biblical writings. His deepened and repeated reading enables him to construct his memory of the biblical narrative and to gradually construct a reference narrative within which he can insert his own life story. One could speak of an increasingly profound involvement of the reader in the biblical narrative which he is always in process of discovering, by identifying now with one and now with another of the characters, by discovering paths of life which illuminate his own, by taking his distance with respect to other characters or narratives... With the aid of this subjective memory (= relative to the active subject the reader is) an "imaginary" world is created, one which nourishes our vision of the world, of the human community and of the Christian community.

4.4 This approach seems to me very useful to the extent that it counters the "fundamentalist", authoritarian and one-dimensional readings, but also in contrast to those readings that seek to impose immediate, simplistic understandings and applications characteristic of fragmented readings. To read the Bible in fragments, selected in function of particular criteria, is to run the risk of an ideological reading that shrouds our particular point of view with the mantle of divine authority. The point of our approach, still in line with the Council, is to open Holy Scripture as widely as possible to Christians (Dei Verbum 22).

4.5 This reading summons the reader to consciously assume his responsibility in the reading and interpretation of the sacred text as well as in the life engagement that flows from it, but at the same time to acknowledge the limitations both of his reading and of his commitment.

4.6 Finally, and this is not without importance, this reading approach bears its most abundant fruits when it takes place in a group setting. It enables the biblical word to create and sustain the community not only with reading but also with a sharing of faith and of life. In this way one re-discovers in a tiny way the "Word of God" dimension of these ancient writings, the creative Word which enters into dialogue with our human lives, which addresses us and offers us consolation and orientation.

5. Conclusion

The idea of proposing a reading assignment for the Catholics of our Christian communities for the next five years and offering them the help necessary for this undertaking would be interesting, useful and even a matter of some urgency. My suggestion would be that within this time period they be asked to read and work through in order, "from beginning to end", the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of John. I can think of no more effective way to nourish our Christian vision of life at the beginning of the third millennium.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)

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The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to the ministry of the Word of God. At the present time, the CBF membership includes 91 full members and 227 associate members coming from a total of 126 countries.

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

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

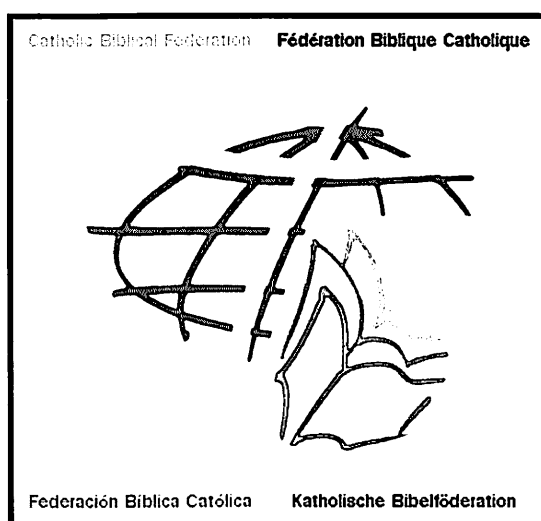
In particular, the CBF works towards the promotion of the reading of the Bible within the context of concrete life situations and the training of ministers of the Word in this direction.

At the beginning of the third millennium Holy Scripture can be viewed as the great textbook of humanity. Especially in times like this the reading of the Bible not only helps the Christian community to grow in faith and love, but it can and should also offer to the whole world those words of brotherhood and of human wisdom that it so desperately needs. This is the great challenge that the Catholic Biblical Federation sets for itself.

Vincenzo Paglia, Bishop of Terni-Narni-Amelia, Italy, President of the CBF

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