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SEDOS Research Seminar, May 1996

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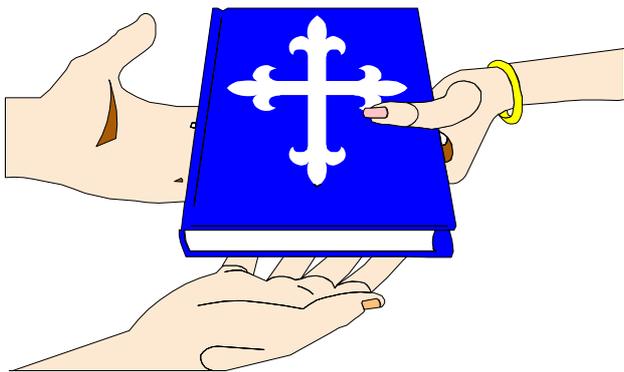
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I praise you, Father of Heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things to the wise and intelligent, but revealed it to the humble (cf. Mt 11:25).

At the end of this time of sharing in community the word of God, we have a profound feeling of gratitude! Towards God our FATHER who counted us generously among the humble-ones and who in his Son, has revealed us his wisdom. Thank you to Fr Walter and the SEDOS team for the generous and competent preparation of this meeting. They created this space for us to reflect together on our mission in the light of the Bible.



We thank Carlos, Maura and Nuria, sisters and brother for sharing their wisdom and experience. In different, socio-cultural contexts they were touched and transformed by this Word, to become servants of it.

Thank you for our Working Groups where our fraternal sharing lived and grew, in listening, mutual respect and willing reception. For the whole group and the cultural and spiritual richness present. It was a small Church where we could experience that THE KINGDOM of God is with us.

Thank you for our Catholic Church, holy and sinner, old and rigid at times, but always young and fecund through the action of the HOLY SPIRIT. Today, we love her still more!

Thank you for our peoples, poor and suffering in the whole world. Their capacity of dedication and hope are maintained by their faith and the Word. They remind us that in the different situations of "captivity" God remains faithful. "Israel my son, my elected, do not fear, I'll stay with you".

The Experience of these days now enables us to reaffirm:

— *The need to be disciples, women and men, servants of the Word, and from there, to proclaim.*

— *The value of life: the first book God wrote for humanity and for which the Bible is the grammar, or key of interpretation. A mysterious hand has lifted the curtain and permits us to feel in the World the merciful face of God, the living heart of the Father.*

— *The communitarian meaning of the Bible. It is the book of the community, creating it and maintaining it.*

— *It is our Challenge: to bring this dynamism of the Word to our communities, that the Lectio Divina may pass from the realm of the intellectual and individual, to the sphere of life and community.*

To have the courage to open our mouths, to chew and eat this sour-sweet volume... which must touch our life and transform it.

Then our dry bones will be revived, our sterile wombs made fertile, and from the tomb LIFE will rise again.

OUR RESOURCE PERSONS

Sr MAURA CHO, SOLPH

Sister Maura Cho belongs to the Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, a Korean Congregation, founded in 1932 by Fr John Morries, MM., in Pyung Yang, North Korea. She was born in Korea on 26 December, 1942. She grew up in a Catholic family and was educated at the Chon Park Moon Catholic School, from primary to high school. She went to the Sacred Heart College in Korea (BA in Social Welfare) and then to the Graduate Theological Union and Jesuit School of Theology in Berkely, California, (Master of Bible Studies).

Besides teaching the Catechism in parishes, she has taught at the Catholic High School for Boys, and the Air Force Military School for several years. — As a group worker, she organised small groups among students and worked as a facilitator. From 1971, she made the Bible Reading Guides for small groups on Genesis, Exodus, John, Mark and the Acts. In 1982 she published another reading guide to the Bible, called: “Bible in 40 Weeks”. Many sisters (5,000), priests and male religious (800) and a group of Protestant Ministers have attended her residential seminars, learning the method of the “Bible in 40 Weeks”. In 1992, she published her most recent work: a Reading Guide on Luke and the Acts, called “The Emmaus Dialogue”. Sr Maura has been involved in the Korean Catholic Bible Life Movement (CBLM) for 25 years up to the present.

Fr CARLOS MESTERS, O.CARM

Carlos Mesters, O.Carm., is a member of the Province of Rio de Janeiro of the Carmelite Order. Born in Holland in 1931, he was still only a teenager when he left Holland to be trained as a Carmelite in Brazil. After his studies in Rome and Jerusalem he returned to Brazil, where he taught both in São Paulo and Belo Horizonte. In Belo Horizonte he led the Centro de Estudos Biblicos for many years through which he played a major part in spreading Bible reading in Brazil and other parts of Latin America.

*His approach to reading the Bible unites the reading of the text with a reading of present reality and the faith of the community. His name is closely associated with the development of the biblical dimension of Liberation Theology and his many publications have given us a pastoral and exegetical approach to the reading of the Bible which is easily accessible to both those who are experts in Bible Studies and those who are not. His works which have been translated into many languages include, the seminal work, “Defenseless Flower” (*Flor sem defesa* — 1973). His most recent work presents Jesus as the formation director of his Apostles and Disciples: “Jesús na Contramão” (1995).*

Sr NURIA CALDUCH-BENAGES, MN

Sister Nuria was born in Bercellona, Spain, on 26 March 1957. At the moment she is serving in Rome as Assistant General of her Congregation, the ‘Missionary Daughters of the Holy Family of Nazareth’, founded in 1874 by Blessed Giuseppe Manyanet i Vives in Lérida. — She has a doctorate in Philosophy and Letters from the Autonomous University of Barcellona and in Holy Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute. After seven years of teaching Scripture in different institutions in Spain, she is now lecturing on the Old Testament (Wisdom literature) at the Gregorian University, the Biblicum and at Regina Mundi.

She is a member of the group of exegetes which is preparing an ‘Interconfessional Translation of the Old Testament’, and also helps a group which is revising the Spanish edition of the Jerusalem Bible. — She has been helping with the edition of the “Bíblia Catalana Interconfessional”. Sr Nuria is a specialist in Wisdom literature, particularly of the Book Ben Sira or Ecclesiastes. — She is a member of different biblical and theological Associations: e.g.: the ATE (Asociación de Teólogas Españolas) and of the AFERT (European Feminine Association for Theological Research).

THE LIBERATING READING OF THE BIBLE

Carlos Mesters O.Carm.

INTRODUCTION

I shall limit myself to what is happening in Brazil, since I do not have very much knowledge of what is happening in the other countries of Latin America. But a good analysis of eight gallons of river water, gives one an idea of the type of water in the whole river.

The source of the liberating reading of the Bible is that which the Christian people live in the Basic Ecclesial Communities. It is the way in which they draw from the Bible strength and light for their journey and their struggle and how, with the help of the Bible, they reach a new experience of God and a new vision of the transforming and liberating action of the Word of God in life.

I am going to begin this article, describing some significant facts which come from practice and, after that I shall make some observations to explain the significance of these facts for a popular reading of the Bible.

PART I

THREE EVENTS WHICH ILLUSTRATE THE PRESENT SITUATION

1st Event: COLOMBIA

It happened during the first meeting of a biblical course. There were about 25 people. On the wall was the sentence **GOD IS LOVE**. The priest asked: "Who wrote it?" A lady replied: "I did". And the priest: "Why did you write it?" The reply of the lady: "I found the wall half empty". The priest: "But why did you write this sentence?" The lady: "I found it beautiful". The priest: "Where did you take the sentence from?" And the lady replied: "I invented it myself! I found that this is what we should be living as Christians!".

At this point the priest said: "We are going to open the Bible at the first Letter of St John, chapter 4, verse 8". He waited until all had found the text, then he asked that lady to read it. She read: "The one

who does not love does not know God, for GOD IS LOVE".

It was the first time in her life that she opened the Bible. She got a shock. She did not expect to find there her sentence on the wall. She discovered that, without her knowing it, the Word of God was already in her life. Her satisfaction and joy were so great, that she hardly slept that night. The next day the Bible which she had received from the priest was full of little bits of paper marking the pages. During the night she found other familiar phrases! This very simple episode and many other similar ones reveal the following about the interpretation which the people of the Christian communities make of the Bible:

1. The Bible is accepted by the people as the *Word of God*. This faith already exists before we arrive with the Bible. It is on it that we hang all that we have to say. It is that which characterises the reading which we make of the Bible in Latin America. Without this faith, every process and every method would have been different.
2. There is under way a progressive discovery that the Word of God is not only in the Bible, but also in life, and that the principal objective of the reading of the Bible is not to interpret the Bible, but rather to interpret life with the help of the Bible. It is being discovered that God speaks today, through events.
3. The Bible comes into people's lives through another door, not the door of authority, but through the door of personal and communitarian experience. It makes itself present not as a book which imposes a doctrine from above, but as Good News which reveals the liberating presence of God in the life and in the struggle of the people. The Bible confirms the journey the people are making, and thus animates them in their hope.
4. Before, the Bible remained distant, now it has come near! What was mysterious and inaccessible, has begun to be part of the daily life of the poor. And with his Word God himself came near! It is difficult for one of us to estimate the experience of newness which all of this represents for the poor.

2nd Event: NOVA IGUAÇU, R.J.

It was a biblical meeting for Black people only. It began with everybody hearing the personal story of two elderly Blacks. A story of much suffering and discrimination. After this all together in unison they tried to remember the history of the Blacks in Brazil. In an overview there appeared on the board the long slavery with its sequence of oppression. After this, they asked for a global overview of the history of the people of the Bible. In this way, in the end, on a big parallel board, there were two stories, distant in time, but near each other in content; two stories of oppression and struggle for liberation. That was the first part.

In the second part, they decided to go more deeply into the captivity of the people of the Bible. They wanted to know how to confront this captivity, in which they find themselves today, here in Brazil. It was a study of many precious discoveries. There was a very strong identification of the group with the Servant of Yahweh, about whom the Prophet Isaiah speaks, and with his mission. They began to look at their own situation in a different way.

Observations:

1. On reading the Bible, the people of the Communities compare it with their own story keeping in sight the problems which come from the harsh reality of their own lives. The Bible appears like a mirror, "symbol" (cf. Heb 11:19), of that which they themselves are living today. In this way a profound connection between the Bible and life is established which at times can give the impression of a parallel experience. In reality, it is a question of a faith reading very similar to that which the Fathers used to do.
2. In order for this profound connection between the Bible and life to be produced, it is important; a) to have in mind the real questions which come from the life and the reality suffered today, and not artificial questions which have nothing to do with the life of the people; b) to discover that one walks on the same ground, yesterday and today; c) to have a global vision of the Bible which is connected to the concrete situation of the reader. Reading the **Bible** in this way, **produces** a parallel illumination between the Bible and life. The meaning and scope of the Bible appear and are enriched in the light of what is lived and suffered in life and *vice-versa*.
3. From this new connection between Bible and life, the poor make the discovery, *the greatest of all*: "If

God was with that people in the past, then he is also with us in our struggle to liberate ourselves. He hears our cry".

3rd Event: CABEDELLO, PB

The final celebration of the Bible meeting began with a song. Then the story of the two disciples of Emmaus was read down to: "We had hoped...!" (Lk 24:13-24). **There was a pause** to answer the question: "The cross killed the hope of the disciples: what is the cross which is today killing the hope of the people?"

Groupe

Nous croyons que la Parole de Dieu est VIVANTE, AGISSANTE.

Le coeur qui l'accueille, brûle de la partager.

Nous croyons que la Parole nous libère et qu'elle est source de joie, de paix et d'amour.

Nous croyons qu'elle se découvre en communauté et qu'elle nous permet de lire le monde avec le regard de Dieu.

Nous croyons que chaque culture est terre fertile pour faire germer la Parole de Dieu.

Nous croyons que nous sommes appelés à "la savourer", à en vivre et à être au Service de la Parole de Dieu.

Next, they continued the reading and we heard how Jesus interpreted the Scriptures for the two **disciples** (cf. Lk 24:25-27). The group divided into little groups of three, each one being Christ for the other two. They were to share among themselves when the brother or the sister, with their Word, were Christ for him or her and made their heart burn.

After about ten minutes, accompanied by a song the group gathered once again to hear how the Disciples recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread (cf. Lk 24:28-32). At that, all entered the room where they celebrated the Eucharist, the breaking of the bread.

In the end, after communion, they read how the disciples returned to Jerusalem, where the forces of

death which had raised the cross and killed Jesus were still going strong. But the two, within themselves, had already obtained the victory through faith in the Resurrection (cf. Lk 24:33-35).

Observations on the event:

1. In this event it is clear that, for a good interpretation, it is very important to create an atmosphere of faith and fraternity, through songs, prayers and celebrations. Since without this context of the Spirit, one cannot discover the meaning which the text has for us today. The "sense" of the Bible then, is not only an idea or a message which is caught and objectified by reason; it is also a "feeling" a consolation, a comforting which is "felt" with the heart.

2. There arises, little by little a new way of looking at the Bible and interpreting it. The Bible is no longer viewed as a strange book which belongs to the clergy, but is *our* book, written for us who are at the end of the ages (cf. 1 Cor 10:11).

3. Interpretation is a wide-ranging activity which involves not only the intellectual contribution of the exegete, but also, and above all the whole process of the participation of the community: group work and study, personal and community reading, theatre and other group dynamics, celebrations, prayers, recreation, etc... to interpret is, above all, a community activity in which all participate, each one in his/her own way and according to each one's capacity, including the exegete.

To conclude

There are many other events. These three are enough to indicate the new wind which is blowing to show the situation which has been reached. The practice, revealed by these events, arose throughout the years. Its seed comes from the 1940's and 1950's, when the renewal began. It must not be forgotten that all of this which we are speaking about only refers to Basic Ecclesial Communities, which are only a small minority. The great majority have another way of looking at the Bible, less liberating and more fundamentalist.

So that the journey which has been travelled during the years may appear more clearly, all of this has to be presented in a more systematic way. We shall see two aspects: the internal dynamic of the process of popular interpretation, and its novelty.

PART II

THE DYNAMIC OF THE POPULAR PROCESS OF INTERPRETATION

1. THREE FACTORS

Many factors contributed to us reaching this type of reading of the Bible here in Brazil. We highlight three of them which cannot be ignored if we wish to understand the present position.

1. The work of JOC:

a new way of seeing revelation

The method — See, Judge, Act — gradually brought in a new way of considering and experiencing the revelatory action of God in history. Before wanting to know what God is saying, one wants **to grasp** the situation of the people, their problems. Next with the help of biblical texts **one seeks to judge** this situation. This means that, little by little, what God says does not come from the Bible, but from events illuminated by the Bible. And it is they which lead to *action* in a new way. It is the method see-judge-act.

2. The Second Vatican Council and the Document *Dei Verbum*

The document *Dei Verbum* consecrated for the whole Church this new way of seeing the revelatory action of God. God speaks today through events and persons. We are able to discover what he is saying with the help of the written Word of God which gives us as a norm or canon the lived history of the people of Israel.

3. The military *coup* and the vanguard crisis

The situation of the people was one of abandonment. In 1964, the military *coup* showed that the work of conscientisation was imperfect. Vanguardism suffered a shock. The need was seen for much more meticulous and patient work with the people, respecting their culture and their journey more. The Church was the only place where one could still work with freedom without being subject to political oppression. From 1968 onward work began at the base and everywhere communities arose. The people began to read the Bible.

The most important and imperceptible factor, which influences all the other factors, is the action of the Holy Spirit. He acts in this reality and leads it. To hear what the Spirit says to the Churches!

2. THREE STAGES

During these years, three aspects had their privileged moments, one after the other. They are like three distinct objectives, which are present in the use the people make of the Bible:

1. To know the Bible — Instruction

The wish to know the Bible stimulated many people to a more frequent reading. The renewal of exegesis, the three Encyclicals of Leo XIII, Benedict XV and Pius XII, the publishing work of the exegetes brought the Bible much closer to the people. Besides that, what helped to heighten interest in the Bible among Catholics here in Brazil was the missionary vigour of the Pentecostal Churches.

2. To Create Community — Celebration

To the extent that the Word began to be known, it produced its fruits. The first fruit was to bring people together and create community. Popular biblical weeks, the publishing of the Bible in the vernacular language, celebrations of the Word, scarcity of clergy, courses, meetings, training sessions, numerous groups and biblical circles, Bible month: all of this produced a very great community excitement around the Word of God.

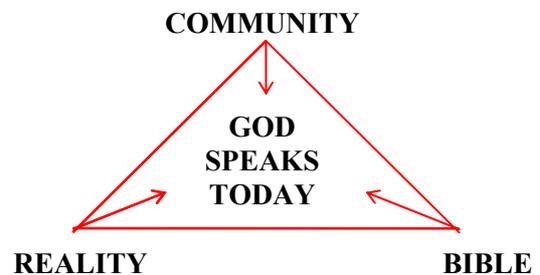
3. To Serve the People — Transform

Especially since 1968 a further step forward was taken. Knowledge of the Bible and community concern found their objective which is the service of the people. Having neither the money nor the time to read the books *about* the Bible, the poor began to read the **Bible with the only criterion** at their disposal; their life of faith, lived in community, the suffering life of an oppressed people. Reading the Bible in this way, they discovered the obvious which they had not known: the history of an oppression equal to that which they themselves suffer today; the record of a struggle for the same values which they pursue today: land, justice, sharing, fraternity, a human life.

3. THE INTERNAL DYNAMIC

These three stages are, as it were three aspects or three objectives of one and the same interpretative attitude towards the Bible. Between them there exists an internal dynamic which distinguishes the process of popular interpretation: **knowing the Bible** leads to living together in community; **living together in**

community leads to serving the people; **serving the people**, in turn leads to desiring a deeper *knowledge* of the context of the origin of the Bible, and so on. It is a dynamic which never ends. For these three aspects: one is born from the other, supposes the other and leads to the other.



It does not matter from which of the three aspects the process of interpretation begins. That depends on the situation, history, culture and interests of the community or group. What it is important to understand is that one aspect remains incomplete without the other two.

In general, in all the communities, there are people who identify themselves with one of these three aspects:

1. people who want *to know* the Bible and are more interested in study;
2. people who insist more on *community* and on its internal functions;
3. people who are more concerned with *servicing the people* and with making a contribution to politics or to popular movements.

All of this produces tension between the different groups and interests. This tension is healthy and fruitful. For example, in some places, the more intense political practice of the past years, now requires a deeper *knowledge* of the biblical text and a more intense *community living* of liberation spirituality. In other places, community living has reached its limit and requires a more engaged action in the popular movements. In other words, the tension helps to create a balance which favours the interpretation of the Bible and prevents it from becoming unilateral.

Group

We express our statement as Old Testament, New Testament and Present Testament:

When peaceful silence lay over all,

**and night had run the half of her swift course,
down from the heavens, from the royal throne,
leapt your all-powerful Word.**

**And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.
Something which has existed since the beginning,
that we have heard,
and we have seen with our own eyes;
that we have watched
and touched with our hands,
the Word, who is life.**

**We break and eat the Word together;
The Word becomes flesh in us.
And we go out together
To share the Word with others.**

(Wis 18:14-15a; Jn 1:14; 1 Jn 1:1).

At times however, the tension is negative and leads each one of the three aspects to close in on itself and exclude the other two. Often, the journey of popular interpretation is tense and conflictual, with the risk of closing and going backwards.

4. DANGERS OF CLOSING

When the community reaches the objective of one of these three aspects (to know, live together or serve), some members in fidelity to the word, want to advance and take a step forward, and others, in the name of this same fidelity, reject the opening. It is the moment of crisis and also of grace. The group which wants to advance does not always win.

1. All the pastoral movements use the Bible and are supported by it. In the name of the Bible, the fundamentalists refuse the interpretation and opening to reality. In some places the biblical groups which close in on themselves and on the letter of the Bible, become the most conservative groups of the parish. Even the exegete can run the risk of being closed in the liberal or progressive study of the biblical text.

2. Many movements close themselves in the communitarian, the mystical, the charismatic dimension, and refuse the opening to politics. They open themselves to service of the poor (a lot), but not in the direction of transformation and liberation.

3. Being closed from the opposite side exists, although it is less frequent. The community reaches a more committed degree of service and a clearer political awareness; they see how the communitarian, the personal and the devotional can be manipulated by the dominant ideology, with relative ease, and conclude that these things do not contribute so much to transformation. For this reason it is in danger of closing itself to the social, and political aspects of the service of the people.

Although understandable, such closures are tragic, since none of the three, makes sense on its own. To get over this difficulty, it is important to maintain an atmosphere of dialogue. For, where the human word circulates with freedom and without censorship, the word of God generates liberty.

PART III

NOVELTY AND SCOPE OF POPULAR INTERPRETATION

Within the poor people's interpretation of the Bible there exists a newness or great import for the life of the Churches. An old novelty which comes from afar and which takes up again some basic values of the common Tradition! In one way or another the following seven points clarify the process:-

1. The *object* or interpretation is no longer that of seeking information about the past, but is to clarify the present with the light of the presence of God-with-us, God the Liberator; it is to interpret life with the help of the Bible. The practice and the new vision of revelation are re-discovered, described and defined in *Dei Verbum*.

2. The *subject* of the interpretation is no longer the exegete, interpreting is a community activity in which all participate, including the exegete who has a special role in it. For this reason, it is important to have in mind not only the faith of the community, but also to be effectively a part of a living community and to look for the *common meaning* accepted by this community. This effective belonging exerts a critical influence on the function or scientific exegesis, which, in this way, puts itself more at service.

3. The *social place* from which the interpretation is done, is that of the poor, the excluded and the marginalised. This modifies the regard. Often, for lack of a more critical social awareness, the interpreter may be a victim of ideological prejudices, and

without realising it, use the Bible to legitimise the oppressive system which dehumanises.

4. The reading which relates the Bible to life is *ecumenical* and *liberating*. Ecumenical reading does not mean that Catholics and Protestants discuss their differences to reach a common conclusion. That can be a consequence. The most ecumenical thing we have is the life which God gave us. Here in Latin America, the life of a great part of the population is at risk, for it is no longer life. Ecumenical reading is to interpret the Bible in defence of life and not in defence of our institutions and confessions. Now, in the present situation in which the people of Latin America live, a reading in defence of life, must of necessity be liberating. For this reason it is conflictual. It has become a sign of contradiction.

5. Here appears the difference from European exegesis. The greatest problem for us is not the faith which is in danger because of secularisation. But it is *life which is seriously at risk* of being eliminated and dehumanised. And what is worse, the Bible itself is in danger of being used to legitimise this situation in the name of God. As in the time of the Kings of Judah and of Israel, the Tradition is being used to legitimise the idols. The popular interpretation uncovers, reveals and denounces this manipulation.

6. The *method* and the *dynamic*, used by the poor in their meetings, are very simple. They do not use discursive language, made up of arguments and reasoning. They prefer to narrate facts and use comparisons. It is a language which functions through the association of ideas and whose first concern is not *to inform* but *to make one discover*.

7. *The function and the limits of the Bible* appear with greater clarity. The limits are these: the Bible is not an end in itself, but is at the service of the interpretation of life; alone it does not function and cannot open people's eyes, for what opens their eyes is the sharing of the bread, the community gesture. The Bible must be interpreted within a wider process, which takes the community and reality into account. The Bible is like the heart: outside the body of the community and the life of the people it dies and causes to die!

PART IV

CHALLENGES WHICH REVEAL THE NEW ARRIVING

1. THE FEMINIST READING

The Feminist reading questions and relativises the masculinised reading of centuries. It cannot be put aside as a passing phenomenon nor as one of the many exegetical curiosities without great consequences. It is one of the most important characteristics which have been arising from within the popular reading of the Bible. Its significance is much more than appears at first sight. In Brazil it acquires a still greater importance because of the vast majority of women who participate actively in the biblical groups and keep the struggle of the people going in many places.

2. ADVANCING FUNDAMENTALISM

In a two-week meeting, organised by the CESEP in Goiânia in January of 1991, there were more than 600 participants, from the Basic Ecclesial Communities of almost all the states of Brazil. Many young people! On the three days devoted to the study of the Bible, the line of interpretation was clearly liberating. In the conversations with the participants, however, there appeared at various times, a different interpretative attitude, in which fundamentalism was mixed with liberation theology. Especially among the young! How to explain this phenomenon? Where does it come from? From contact with a conservative line, with the charismatic line, with *believers*? Or does it not come also from the deficiencies of the liberation attitude towards the Bible? Or does it not come from something deeper still which is changing in the subconscious of humanity? For the danger of fundamentalism does not exist only in the Christian Churches, but also in other religions: Jewish, Muslim, Buddhism... There are even forms of secular fundamentalism.

3. THE SEARCH FOR SPIRITUALITY AND OUR METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

On all sides one hears and feels the desire for greater depth, for the mystical, spirituality. The Bible can, in fact, be an answer to this desire. For the Word of God has two fundamental dimensions. On the one hand it brings LIGHT. In this sense it can contribute to clarify ideas, unmask false ideologies and communicate a more critical awareness. On the other hand it brings STRENGTH. In this sense it can animate persons, communicate courage, bring joy, because it is the creative force which produces the *new*, generates the people, creates events, makes one love. Unfortunately, in pastoral practice, these two aspects of the Word are separated. On the one hand, the charismatic movements: on the other, the liberation movements. The charismatic have much prayer, but often they lack critical vision and they

tend toward fundamentalist, moralising, and individualistic interpretation of the Bible. Because of this, their prayer often lacks real foundation in the text and in reality. The **liberation** movements, for their part, have a lot of critical awareness, but, at times, lack perseverance and faith, when it is a question of confronting human situations which, within the scientific analysis of the reality, in no way contribute to the transformation of society. At times, they have a certain difficulty in seeing the usefulness of long hours spent in prayer without immediate results.

4. THE CULTURE OF OUR PEOPLES AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the myth of Tucuman, which explains the evil in the world to the Indios of the Amazon region, the guilty one is not woman but man. Somebody asked: "Why don't we use our own myths instead of the myths of the Hebrew people?" There was no reply. The same question was asked at a biblical course in Bolivia in May 1991. The participants, almost all of whom were Aymara, asked: "Why use only the Bible? Aren't our stories more beautiful, less macho and better known?" The religions of Asia, older than ours, have raised these same questions for some years. What is the value of *our* history and *our* culture? Could they not be valid as *our* Old Testament, where the *promises* which God made to *our* ancestors are hidden and where *our law* exists like "*our* teacher for Christ" (Gal 3:24). The Gospel did not come to condemn the Old Testament, but rather, to complete it and make all its meaning explicit (cf. Mt 5:17). The Old Testament of the people of Israel is the *canon* or the inspired *norm* which helps us to understand, and to reveal this deeper dimension of our culture and history, of our Old Testament.

5. THE NECESSITY TO CREATE CENTRES OF BIBLICAL STUDY IN LATIN AMERICA

The journey of the Communities advances and deepens. Little by little, from the heart of this popular practice there is arising a new interpretative attitude which is not *new*, but very *old*. It needs to be legitimised, as much from the standpoint of the Tradition of the Churches, as from that of exegetical study. The reading which is done from the standpoint of the poor and from the standpoint of the cause of the poor has its own demands. As one advances, the desire for greater scientific deepening grows accordingly. There are many biblical teachers who would like to have knowledge of biblical languages; they would like to know the economic, political,

social and ideological context in which the Bible originated; they would like to bring into the Bible the questions which today anguish the people in the living of their faith. Besides that we hear a lot about the scarcity of clergy. A greater and more urgent scarcity is the pressing need for instructors and biblical teachers capable of responding to the increasing demand for biblical formation and to the new problem which is being created because of the immense growth of fundamentalism (much more dangerous than any other -ism). Besides this, the practice of biblical reading, done in the Basic Ecclesial Communities of Latin America, has already had certain repercussions in the universal Church, for it is provoking discussions, reactions and followers in many places. This was clearly seen at the World Meeting of FEBIC, held in Bogotá in July of 1990, and at the World Meeting of the Lutheran Church, held in Curitiba in January of 1990. In the other continents there are many other signs of the interest which exists in the reading of the Bible which is done here in Latin America. Because of all this, it is important to start thinking seriously about the creation of a centre for study and biblical formation which is directed from the standpoint of the real problems which we feel here in our communities.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AND ITS MISSION AMONG THE POOR, IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORD OF GOD

Fr Carlos Mesters, O.Carm.

INTRODUCTION

An Order or Congregation is born from a need of the People of God: usually, from a situation of crying poverty. Someone, some group, hears the call and responds: St Benedict, St Francis, St Clare, St Dominic, St Teresa, St Ignatius, and so many others. A group is formed, from which is born an Order, a Congregation. In this way was born, *goes on being born* even today, the Order or Congregation to which we belong. We are challenged to bring the charism to rebirth, at each new historical moment. We are called to recreate, not to repeat.

We are always between these two poles: on one side, the reality, the need, of God's people, of the poor; on the other, tradition and our own past. Neither of the two can be ignored. Both appeal to our conscience in the name of God, but each in its own way. Tradition appeals, because it offers us a concrete form in which we should live the Gospel. The poor appeal, because they denounce some form of accumulated wealth which causes deprivation for others, including the accumulated wealth of religious tradition. For that reason, tradition needs to be constantly re-read in the light of the proclamation of the Good News to the poor (cf. Lk 4:18). Poverty brings tradition up to date!

The poor, without saying anything, just by existing, trouble our consciences — we who, in spite of our vow, have no fear of poverty as they have! In Latin America the poor are coming to have an influence on theology and the reading of the Bible. Liberation Theology is one form of reflection on the mystery of the presence of God in human life starting from the experience of the poor. The poor are coming to influence the Bishops and religious of Latin America. Since Medellin and Puebla, the Bishops ask for a preferential option for the poor. We religious are receiving a powerful stimulus to greater fidelity to the Gospel from the constantly

increasing number of communities inserted in the midst of the poor. What are we to do in practice to re-read our tradition and place it at the service of the poor?

Our tradition is our past, our origin. It is what defines us and gives us identity. It is the form under which the Gospel is presented to us. It is what we read in our journals and hear in our retreats. We cannot let go of this origin without running the risk of losing our reason for existing. No religious man or woman is insensitive to the call that comes from their past, from their saints. It is a desire set before us, an ideal to be realised.

The study of tradition in religious life over the last sixty years has brought much internal renewal. It has caused a change in our way of understanding our identity and our mission in the Church and in the world. For almost all, study of the original context of the Order or Congregation highlighted important parallels with our context today. It revealed the importance of the poor.

This questioning, coming from the poor and from tradition, leads us to re-read tradition in the light of the option for the poor, and leads very many to seek a life more inserted among the poor.

CHAPTER 1

QUESTIONS FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT

Religious life inserted among the poor is being questioned in many ways, both from within, because of a certain dissatisfaction on the part of those living such a life, and from without, by those who oppose inserted religious life, whether or not with serious reason. Let us look at some of these questions.

1. BREAKDOWN OF SECONDARY MOTIVATIONS

One of the secondary motivations at the beginning of inserted religious life came from the context of the 1960's and 1970's, i.e. the possibility of a change in society and the desire to contribute to it. The biblical model which gave inspiration and encouragement in this direction was the Exodus, liberation from the clutches of Pharaoh. But the longed-for structural change did not come about, and today, once again, it is far away on the horizon. Like the Hebrew people then, we are going into the desert, without water and without food. How can we keep alive the motivation for inserted life for the next forty years in the desert among the poor, without falling into the temptation of wanting to turn back to the full cooking-pots of the Great Discipline of Egypt? What is the meaning of inserted life today? What biblical model might serve as a source of inspiration?

2. THE TREND TO REACTION AND HEGEMONY IN THE CHURCH

In spite of the openness of the last Synod, the reactionary wind blowing in the Church puts the movement for Inserted Religious Life at a disadvantage. The institutional Church is increasingly clerical and rigid. This is a source of much tension in congregations and between individuals. Moreover, there is frequent conflict between the vision of Church which inspires the inserted communities and that which directs the pastoral policy of the Diocese. At local level, this is concretised in conflict with the vicariate, which does not agree with the religious, and which marginalises them.

3. GROWING POVERTY AND THE NEO-LIBERAL SYSTEM

Inserted religious life is totally powerless before the situation of oppression and exploitation in which the people find themselves. One question which is heard: "What can we do as religious men and women, faced with the growing number of poor who fill the city streets, without any hope of socio-political and economic change? After twenty years or more of insertion among the poor, nothing has changed, and the situation is getting worse instead of better. The forecast is that the number of poor will continue to increase". What is the point of inserted religious life? How is it possible to live gratuitously, out of love, in a world characterised by efficiency?

4. THE PROBLEM OF VOCATIONS AND THE FUTURE OF INSERTED RELIGIOUS LIFE

The first thing Jesus says when he calls to mission shows his concern for continuity: "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers!" The more conservative congregations, faithful in everything to the official directions of the Church, have more vocations. Why should that be? Religious life inserted among the poor has not succeeded so far in holding the same attraction for the young. What is it that is lacking? What are young people seeking when they enter religious life: advancement and security, or a radical living of the Gospel?

5. LIFESTYLE AND FORMATION FOR INSERTED RELIGIOUS LIFE

What style of religious life do we present to those who ask us for insertion? What stages of formation do we offer? Only those who have already made a clear choice are going to be able to live insertion in the way we live it today, and to live it together with us. Otherwise, either look for a safer place in some convent, or a more efficient function in some political movement. What style of inserted religious life could offer young people, at the same time, a response to their *personal* inner search and a response to their *social* concern, to their desire to contribute to the reconstruction of the human community? How can we create a process of gradual insertion, taking these problems into account?

6. CHANGES IN THE WORLD

Never in human history have there been so many changes in so many fields in so short a time as now in our century. Changes which express themselves in post-modernism, in Pentecostalism, in growing urbanisation, in exodus from rural areas, in the neo-liberal system, in New Age, in the invasion of interest in religion which is so marked, in the many forms of fundamentalism, in growing massification, etc. What should we say, how should we react, so that our action may not be lost, but have a definite meaning? In the face of this change at the level of the macro-organisation of the world, promoted by neo-liberalism, what should we do as inserted religious men and women?

7. INSERTED RELIGIOUS LIFE AND THE CRISIS OF FAITH

Today, religious life is being questioned. Then, many poor people who are not religious are living the Gospel better than many of us who profess to live the Gospel life. What relevance has our inserted religious life for the life of the poor with whom we live? What do we represent for them? What do they hope for from us? What do they see in us? How can we live the radicality of the Gospel in a world where it seems there is no place for such radicality?

8. THE IMAGE OF GOD

The image of God which we inherited is difficult for inserted life. Life is being so massacred, the number of excluded increases continually, violence happens among the poor themselves. Poor people exploit the poor! There seems to be a total absence of the Kingdom! To live on the fringes of the city, in the *favelas*, in the slums, in the midst of this violent and dehumanised world, is very demanding. This is what many religious men and women feel. They are not able to live this life for a long time without breaking down. They ask: "How is it possible to live consecration to a God who permits such things. Is it possible"? Others manage to continue to live among the poor for humanitarian motives and out of human commitment, but no longer for reasons of faith drawn from shared religious living. From faith alone they do not have sufficient motivation to cope with such a life. For this reason, it is urgently necessary to be aware of the limitations and deficiency in our image of God. Only a new and authentic experience of God can help in overcoming this crisis.

9. NEW CONCERNS AND VISIONS APPEAR ON THE HORIZON

Concern for ecology and the preservation of life brings an ecumenical attitude which is no longer interested in differences of doctrine and ritual, but seeks to unite persons of different creeds and religions in defence of the life God created. Holistic concern seeks to situate life in the harmonious union of nature and the universe, beyond confessional and doctrinal divisions and preoccupations. The feminist movement criticises the patriarchal vision of God which has infiltrated sectors of ecclesiastical life and which makes persons feel no longer at home in the official Church or even in the Bible, where this same patriarchal vision comes through. The awakening of non-Christian cultures poses again the question of the centrality of the person of Jesus for salvation.

10. LIFE OF THE POOR, LIFE OF THE CONGREGATIONS, NEW SPIRITUALITY

Living among the poor, the religious woman or man perceives that the frame of reference of the poor is totally different from that which animates the life of the Congregation. What has priority is the struggle for life, for survival. The more a religious is inserted among the poor, the more s/he becomes distanced from the life of the fellow-members of the Congregation, for whom insertion appears 'madness and scandal'. How can one keep going in this life without becoming disheartened? Where can one find motivation? What spirituality is most conducive to insertion, and can best help people to endure such a hard life?

All this illustrates the urgent need for a realistic spirituality, capable of sustaining and motivating inserted religious life, so that it can continue to be leaven. Such a spirituality must be born of a renewed reading of the Word of God, present in the Bible and in life. This brings us to the next point: the Word of God as source of spirituality. What biblical model is capable of reanimating, inspiring, motivating and sustaining inserted religious life?

CHAPTER 2

THE SERVANT OF GOD IN CAPTIVITY WHO INSPIRED THE PRACTICE OF JESUS. TO BE WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD, LIKE THEM IN EVERYTHING

The biblical model which has up to now most inspired the following of Jesus in insertion is the Exodus. But in the Bible itself, the Exodus was always re-read and seen again in the light of new challenges. For example, the return from captivity in Babylon was seen and lived as a new Exodus.

The conditions in which we live now closely resemble the situation of the captivity. In the captivity in Babylon the previous religious paradigms broke down and were destroyed. The people was in a situation without prospects. The crisis of faith was radical and structural and not merely situational. In what follows we shall analyse closely the biblical model of the captivity as a possible source of inspiration for the following of Jesus in insertion. This paradigm also inspired Jesus, who came to fulfil his task as elder brother of the oppressed people.

The Bible is not only a window which shows the neighbour's back yard. It is also a mirror, in which our own back yard appears. In what follows we shall look closely at the insertion of the disciples of Isaiah in the captivity of the people in Babylon. It has a similarity with the situation today, and may help us

to understand better inserted religious life among the poor.

1. "THE DARK NIGHT OF THE PEOPLE" — THE CAPTIVITY

1.1 "I struggled for my native land and won captivity". Thus speaks the song, describing the situation in which the majority in Latin America find themselves. In a meeting with religious sisters who live among the people, the captivity of the present moment was defined in this way. On the one hand, from outside: the neo-liberal system, growing marginalisation, an increasingly clericalised institutional Church, the alienation of many international religious movements, the slowness of people, and the lack of critical awareness, fostered by the media. This system has influenced people's lives so much that it has come to corrupt their sense of human relations, of power and of life.

On the other hand, from inside: lack of resistance, a sense of helplessness, a growing personal aggressiveness and the idea that one needs to be a super-man or super-woman to be able to face the situation. Consequently there is being born in people a strong identity-crisis which calls everything in question: faith, life, vocation. The expression "first evangelisation" which was used to enlighten life has become old and outmoded. It is no longer valid, because everything has changed! The new word has not yet been found. The inserted communities live in the midst of this tension, and suffer the same crisis.

1.2 The Babylonian Captivity was a major crisis in the history of the People of God. Everything was destroyed. They had lost everything which supported their faith in God: land, Temple, cult, king, Jerusalem. Their own identity as a people was shattered like a plate dropped on the floor. The people was lost: without power, without privilege, without direction. It was in total darkness (cf. Lam 3:2,6), an experience of nothingness. God seemed to have rejected his people for ever (cf. Lam 3:43-45). "My hope is gone, which came from God" (Lam 3:18). "My soul is shut out from peace; I have forgotten happiness" (Lam 3:17). There was no longer a word to give hope to the people. The old evangelisation, more than 500 years earlier, in the time of Joshua, could no longer interpret the facts. God seemed to have lost control of the world. The new owner was Babylon, which said, "For ever I shall be sovereign lady... I, and none besides me!" (Is 47:7,8). It is what the neo-liberal system which controls and dominates the world is saying today.

God, however, continued (and continues) to be present among his people with the same love as always (cf. Is 49:15); not only in the people, but in the world around, where profound changes were taking place with the arrival of Cyrus, King of Persia (cf. Is 41:2-5:25; 45:1-7) But the people had no eyes to see the liberating presence of God (cf. Is 42:18-20; 43:8). How could they be helped to discover the Good News of this new, hidden presence of God? (cf. Is 52:14-15; 53:1; 45:15).

1.3 In the midst of this bruised and disintegrated people lived the disciples of Isaiah. This anonymous group of boys and girls, men and women, is the source of one of the best experiences in the history of God's people, with whom they were carried off into captivity. Likewise without the traditional supports of faith, they did not stop believing. The crisis, instead of leading them to loss of faith or to a restoration of the Great Discipline, was for them an occasion of purification and rebirth. The challenge to them was the same as to our inserted communities:

- 1) To understand and experience the newness of God, present in history and in the life of the people.
- 2) To put it into words and transform it into Good News for the poor.
- 3) To incarnate it and express it in new forms of common life, in such a way that the people could understand its power for life. As we shall see, these anonymous disciples of Isaiah in fact rediscovered the hidden presence of God, ancient but new, and were able to transform it into Good News for the poor (cf. Is 40:9-11; 52:7-10; 57:14-18; 61:1) and to incarnate it in new forms of life. Suffering in their own flesh the crisis of the people, they became capable of helping the people to rediscover the meaning of events and the signs of the presence of God. What road did they travel? What steps did they take and what method did they use? The writings of Isaiah 40-66 are the reflection of the Good News they lived. It is there that we shall find an answer.

2. "RESURRECTION DAWN": NEW EXPERIENCE OF LIFE, OF SELF AND OF GOD

The source of everything is a new experience of life and of self which is, at the same time, a new experience of God, a new reading of the past and a critical vision of the present. These three elements: experience of God, new reading of the past, and critical view of the present, depend on each other and have a bearing on each other. They are the three united poles which encouraged the insertion of those disciples of Isaiah, women and men, and helped them to create a new way of life together, a new practice and a new method of action. Let us see:

2.1 New experience of God

The power of the experience of God which the disciples received echoes in the images they used to express what they were living. On the one hand, family-images which reveal a new personal relationship with God: God is Father (cf. Is 63:16; 64:7); Mother (cf. Is 46:3; 66:12-13; 49:15); Godfather [Go'el, saviour, consoler, defender, redeemer, liberator] — (cf. Is 41:14; 43:14; 44:6); Husband of the people (cf. Is 54:5; 62:5). On the other hand, images which reveal a new perception of the action of God in nature, history and politics: God is creator of the world (cf. Is 40:28; 51:13) and of the people (cf. Is 43:15); he is First and Last (cf. Is 44:6; 41:4; 48:12). He does not will chaos (cf. Is 45:18-19) but confronts it and conquers it with the creative power of his Word (cf. Is 40:8). He is stronger than the oppressive power which crushes the people (cf. Is 40:12-18). He liberates, saves and leads the people with his creative power (cf. Is 40:25-31, etc.). In other words, the new experience of God has effect in personal relationships (micro-analysis) and in relations with the world outside (macro-analysis). What are today the promising signs of a new experience of God, of Jesus, of life? Where and in what images and forms are they expressed?

2.2 New reading of the past

The God who made himself present in their lives was not a new God, but was the same God as always, Yahweh, God of the fathers, who had been with them in the past and continued to be with them in the present. The new experience of God gave new eyes to understand better the meaning of all that this God had done in the past. It was a new key to the reading! On the one hand, it helped to understand the errors and deceptions under which the image of God had been imprisoned by the ideology dominant in the time of the Kings. On the other hand, it was a source of light and creativity for re-thinking, one by one, all the values of the past, liberating them from errors and limitations, adapting them to the new situation, and thus making apparent their relevance for the disheartened and unbelieving people of the captivity.

Here are some central values of the tradition, reinterpreted by the disciples of Isaiah and brought back by Jesus in the concrete situation of Galilee. They have relevance for us today.

* *The people of God* is no longer one race, because foreigners are part of it (cf. Is 56:3,6-7).

* *The land*, God's great gift, will be distributed also to foreigners who live there (cf. Ez 47:21-23).

* *The Temple* will no longer be for the Jews only, but for all peoples (cf. Is 56:7).

* *The cult* is universal, and foreigners participate in it (cf. Is 56:6-7).

* *The priesthood* is no longer solely of Levites or Zadok, but also of foreigners (cf. Is 66:19-21).

* *The kingdom* is no longer the royal house of David, but the universal reign of God himself (cf. Is 52:7; 43:15).

* *The Messiah*, the anointed, and the shepherd is no longer the Davidic king, but Cyrus, King of the Persians (cf. Is 45:1; 44:28).

* *Election* is no longer a privilege, but a service to be offered to humanity (cf. Is 42:1-9; 49:6).

* *The law of God* is observed by all peoples who find light in it (cf. Is 2:1-5; Zec 8:22-23).

* *Jerusalem* is no longer the capital of Judah, but the centre for all peoples (cf. Is 60:1-7).

* *Purity* comes from God, who accepts as pure the sacrifices even of the pagans (cf. Is 66:20; Mal 1:11).

These texts are conspicuous for their courage and openness to rethink everything. They knew how to be creative. They went beyond the frontiers of the traditional and, faithful to the true Tradition, dreamed of a new world: "See how former predictions have come true. Fresh things I now foretell; before they appear I tell you of them" (Is 42:9). They sought for everything new: new heavens and a new earth (cf. Is 65:17), new Exodus (cf. Is 41:18-20; 43:16-20), new Covenant (cf. Is 54:10; 55:3; 61:8), new people (Is 43:21), new heart and new spirit (cf. Is 32:15; Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:39; Ez 36:27). A creative fidelity characterises this new reading of the past! In this way, the disciples unmasked the dominant ideology of the time of the Kings and introduced the tradition to be at home, where new events and new experiences could be accepted as faithful to the past without the risk of being condemned by conservatives as strange and heretical.

2.3 Critical vision of the present

The new experience of God and the new reading of the past, for their time, gave the people a new outlook with which to face the present situation with realism, with a critical sense and awareness of mission, and to discover in it the call of God. The situation in which the people found themselves was this: Jerusalem was destroyed, its walls dismantled and without gates. A city open, without possibility of defence. Poor people were occupying part of the land (cf. Jer 39:10). They were without political power, without independence, without an army, without a king, incapable of changing the situation. Like it or not, they were obliged by circumstances to live together with other peoples. They had no viable

alternative in order to survive. This was the reality: a *diaspora*-situation. What should they do — ignore it, fight it, or accept it?

Seen through the eyes of the time of the Kings, this situation was an unacceptable failure. The disciples, however, saw in it the beginning of a new stage. Instead of lamenting the past which they had lost, they greeted the future which had just been born with much pain. They made no attempt to re-introduce the monarchy, as Zorubabel and some of the prophets wanted to do, but accepted it as a new mission for the people in the world.

Groupe

Le groupe français a choisi d'illustrer par une parabole leur vécu de la session et ce qui les inspire pour leur ministère et le service de la parole. —

Un cadeau du ciel.

Je marchais depuis des heures sur une terre inconnue — Le soleil était brûlant — je me sentais épuisée, déshydratée. Soudain — je fus soulagée d'apercevoir au loin comme un oasis où je trouverais sûrement de l'eau pour étancher ma soif. Quelle déception! Quand je me rendis compte que c'était la mer qui était devant moi — de l'eau certes — beaucoup d'eau pour me rafraîchir le corps — mais impossible de me désaltérer. Fatiguée et déçue — je m'endors au pied d'un arbre. Un bruit sourd me fait sursauter et me réveille brusquement. Effrayée je regarde autour de moi. J'aperçois alors un fruit énorme et lourd juste à mes côtés — Il s'en fallut de peu que je le reçoive sur la tête.

Je l'ai échappé belle — me dis-je — intérieurement. Au même moment, j'aperçois au bord de la lagune des pêcheurs qui arrivent en pirogue. Je m'approche timidement d'eux — je les salue et leur demande un peu d'eau, car j'ai fait une longue route. L'un d'eux dit: Ma soeur, tu es étrangère ici — Sois la

bienvenue. Tu vois ces cocotiers qui longent la lagune, hé bien! Leurs fruits contiennent une eau douce et rafraîchissante. C'est un cadeau de Dieu. Alors l'homme prit sa machette et brisa l'écorce épaisse pour libérer la noix de coco — qu'il ouvrit délicatement. Il me la présenta en disant: "Bois doucement, ma soeur, ensuite tu goûteras à la pulpe du coco, ça te donnera des forces". Ces hommes prirent le temp de m'expliquer tout ce que le cocotier représentait pour eux. Réconfortée, je me levai pour aller plus loin. Ils me dirent: Reste avec nous — tu découvriras encore bien d'autres choses.

The wind shakes the flower, scatters its seed, and so prepares a new flowering. In the same way the violent events of the exile shook the people, scattered them like seed over the world, and prepared them for a new mission: to be light for the nations, to be Servant of God for all peoples (cf. Is 42:1,4,6; 49:6), source of blessing for all the families of the earth (cf. Gn 12:3). In this way, enlightened by the new experience of God and by the new reading of the past, the exile, which seemed to be a death-blow for the people, became for them God's call, and a message of hope and life.

These three factors: experience of God, new reading of the past, and critical vision of the present, gave inner encouragement to the disciples of Isaiah, and helped them to create a new practice and a new method of action. And today, in the inserted religious life, how is this new experience of self and of life manifested? How is it communicated, transmitted, sustained? Where, in what place and what form? How does it help us to rediscover the ancient and perennial newness of Jesus?

3. THE NEW PRACTICE AND THE NEW METHOD

A completely new way of living and of living together is being born. A new manner of being People of God. Let us look more closely at the various steps in this new practice of the disciples and verify, next, how Jesus, the faithful disciple, achieved all this in his life amidst the poor and in the proclamation of the Good News to the poor.

3.1 New attitude

In chapters 40 to 66 of the Book of Isaiah, the fruit of this experience of the men and women who followed the prophet appears to be an attitude of listening and of dialogue. From beginning to end, they dialogue, put questions, inquire, reflect on the facts (cf. Is 40:12-14; 21:25-27; 41:8-16, etc.). They hold an attentive conversation, full of gentleness and welcome (cf. Is 40:1; 41:9-10,14; 43:4 etc.). The language is simple, concrete, direct.

Because of their way of dealing with the people, the disciples do not just speak about God, but also reveal him; they communicate something of what they live themselves. God makes himself present in this attitude of gentleness and dialogue. The people realise that the God of the disciples is different from the God of Babylon, and also different from what they themselves had previously thought about God. In this way, gradually, the people's eyes are opened.

They begin to realise something of the new thing which has been happening. "Did you not see"? (Is 43:19).

3.2 New arguments

Their discouragement was due to the oppression weighing on them from outside, and to the emptiness within themselves. The disciples dealt with this discouragement by seeking to help the people to overcome it with new arguments. On the one hand they break the weight of oppression; on the other, they use arguments which fill the emptiness of heart.

To break the weight of oppression. They unmask the power which oppresses and the ideology which deceives: princes and judges (cf. Is 40:23), fortune-tellers and scholars (cf. Is 44:25), rulers (cf. Is 41:25), the nations of the world and its inhabitants (cf. Is 40:15,17,22), and proud Babylon (cf. Is 47:1-15), its idols and those who worship them, the false gods and their temples (cf. Is 40:18-20; 41:6-7,21-29; 44:9-20). Everything is analysed with irony and precision.

To fill the emptiness of heart. They help the people to read and understand in a new and positive way the world around them. 1) In the world of politics: Cyrus, who was changing the face of the earth, is seen as being led by Yahweh (cf. Is 41:1-5; 45:1-7). 2) The events of history which weighed so heavily: it is Yahweh who, through them, works out his plan (cf. Is 43:8-12). 3) The exile itself is seen as an instrument of education of the people by Yahweh (cf. Is 54:7-8; 47:6; 42:24-25). In a word, they use their common sense and make a critical analysis of reality. They unmask a dominant ideology which was a hindrance to perceiving the newness of the presence of God in the events of life.

3.3 New content

Not only do they use new arguments to break the weight of oppression. There is also a whole new content which reveals and uncovers what they did with the Good News of God. A new face of God appears in all the pages of Isaiah 40-66. There are four qualities which stand out particularly: disinterested love, creative power, faithful presence and demanding holiness. Four qualities which answer the four deepest anxieties of the human heart. Here are some of the many texts in which these traits feature: Is 40:12-31; 41:8-20; 44:24-28; 54:1-10.

To sum up: Yahweh, the God of the people, is:

1. a loving God: he reveals a goodness which promotes and liberates;
2. a strong God: he liberates with a creative power which remains in his hands;
3. a faithful God: his friendly presence has never failed, and will never fail;
4. a holy God: he asks for justice, requires fidelity and sends on mission.

Group

The Babylonian captivity is a helpful biblical image of the world today for the renewal of MISSION and for the renewal of religious life.

The experience of revelation, the discovery of the presence of God, maybe in unexpected places, is LIFE-GIVING.

We have experienced this in Savouring and sharing the WORD this week. We want to be Servants of the Word, transformed by its healing power.

We believe Lectio Divina in community is a liberating experience as Christ, Word of God, enters our personal life and our real situation.

The response to the Word of God is best seen in Mary, Woman of faith.

The people of the captivity was like a bride who, through the fault of others and through her own fault, lost her bridegroom. The sudden absence of the Beloved one drove the bride to despair. The purpose of the evangelising presence of the disciples, women and men, with the people, was to help it to encounter again, in the events of life, the loving, strong, faithful and exacting presence of the Beloved: "Your Creator is your husband!" (Is 54:5). For the face of God is the guiding light for human life, the root of liberation and of resurrection. Without it, everything is obscure! To allow the light of this face to shine through is to revolutionise life.

3.4 To capture the shining reality

From all this resulted a new practice which sought to incarnate the Good News of God in new

forms of life. The disciples sought to help the people to discover the other aspect of nature, history and of politics. At night, they took the people outside the house and asked "Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens and see: who has created all these stars?" (cf. Is 40:26). They told the story, remembered the Exodus (cf. Is 43:16-17) and called for renewed memory (cf. Is 43:26; 46:9). They pointed out political events and asked "Who is it who does all this?" (cf. Is 41:4). The answer is always the same: "It is Yahweh, the people's God, our God!"

So, gradually, *nature* ceases to be the sanctuary of false gods; *history* is no longer decided by the oppressors of the people; the world of *politics* is no longer the domain of Nabuchodonosor. Through everything, the features of the face of Yahweh, God of the people, begin to re-appear. Nature, history and politics cease to be strangers and enemies of the people, and become allies of the poor on the journey as *Servant* of God.

But the house God prefers is in the midst of his oppressed and exiled people: "I am with you"! (Is 41:10). "I exchange everything for you!" (Is 43:4). It is there that he is to be sought (cf. Is 55:6), and from there that he wishes to shine out over the world as "Light of the nations" (Is 42:6). Before this overwhelming presence of God in the world, in life, history, politics, in his own people, the disciples summon the people: "You blind, see! You deaf, listen"! (Is 42:18). "Do you not see"? (Is 43:19). This is the Good News which the disciples announce to the people: "Your God is king"! (Is 52:7).

3.5 To point out the Good News of God in the life of the people

The Good News is not a doctrine, not a moral teaching. To proclaim the Good News is to point out concrete events in which this victory of the reign of God is already happening, and interpret them in such a way that this hidden dimension of the victorious presence of God may appear outwardly. In other words, the Good News is a *fact of life*, where God is present, active, liberating his people with power, and bringing about his plan of salvation; it is a *word which discloses* this and reveals the gracious presence of God in it; it is an *attitude*, a *testimony*, a *practice* which confirms this presence; it is the whole *past history of the people* which attests and ratifies it. "This is what we have been awaiting for a long time!"

The Book of Isaiah allows the various events to appear which the disciples point out as the manifestation of the Kingdom, present in their midst:

- 1) The arrival of Cyrus, conquering Nabuchodonosor, giving hope to the oppressed (cf. Is 41:25-27);
- 2) The people returning from captivity, repeating the Exodus (cf. Is 52:7-12);
- 3) The people gathering like a flock around the shepherd (cf. Is 40:9-11);
- 4) The people rejoicing at the coming of peace (cf. Is 52:7-9);
- 5) The people reacting, holding out firmly against the oppressor (cf. Is 50:4-10).

A leading question is this: "What are the events that can be pointed out today as signs that God is coming with power to liberate his people and bring about his plan"? What should we in Inserted Religious Life do to arrive at this perception? How can we transmit it and announce it to the poor?

3.6 To incarnate the Good News in new forms of human sharing

It is not enough to point out and interpret the facts. The announcement, and the testimony of the person who makes the announcement, are not enough. The testimony of the community is also necessary. Love of God must be translated into love of neighbour. It is here, at this level that the decisive battle is waged. The men and women disciples of Isaiah struggled to combat injustice and oppression within the community. For example, the way they understand the precept of "true fasting" (cf. Is 58:3-7). They had a very specific project which directed them: a new heaven and a new earth (cf. Is 65:17-25).

For about a hundred years they had relative freedom to live this life-project. In the time of Nehemiah, about 445 B.C., they were defeated by internal contradictions, beaten by the temptation which always threatens God's plan: separating, in practice, love of God and love of neighbour (cf. Neh 5:1-5). The conservative wing of the Great Discipline came back to the fore. But there remained shining on the horizon a light which was brought back by Jesus.

3.7 A new understanding of one's own mission

All this practice brought the disciples to a greater clarity with respect to their own mission: to be in the midst of the people what the people should be in the midst of humanity. For that reason, the four songs of the Servant of Yahweh speak of the mission as much of the people as of the disciples themselves (cf. Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13; 53:12).

They know that the mission is difficult and painful. Nor is it always clear. At times, it seems as though they are wasting time (cf. Is 49:4). To be faithful, the disciple needs self-discipline: every morning he needs to take time to listen to the word God wants to say to him, and which he himself is to take to those who are disheartened (cf. Is 50:4-5). He encounters much opposition, and so as not to be disheartened he must seek his strength in God (cf. Is 50:7-9). He will be persecuted, insulted, tortured (cf. Is 50:6) and put to death (cf. Is 53:3-8). His passion and death, however, will be transformed into Good News for the people, and will bring about the conversion of many (cf. Is 52:13-15; 53:10-12).

In conclusion: the experience of insertion which emerges, even today, from the writings of Isaiah 40-66, is very rich. It has much to say to us on how to live out the following of Jesus, and on the purpose, practice and manner of living Inserted Life among the poor. Taking due note of the differences, it can be very useful to make a comparison between inserted life at that time and today. The *Servant* model was born in a situation of captivity. It was born of a new experience of God and of life, in the midst of darkness. It was born of a complete stripping away of previous ideas and brought a new reading of past and present.

In Jesus, this model of *Servant* regained form and strength. He said, "the Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many" (Mt 20:28). It was thus that the first Christians understood him. Jesus was seen by them as Servant of God (cf. Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30). To be servant of God was also the title by which they identified themselves (cf. Rom 1:1): "servants of justice" (Rom 6:19); servants of God (cf. Rom 6:22).

EXPERIENCE OF EVANGELISATION WITH THE BIBLE

Fr Carlos Mesters, O.Carm.

1. INFORMATION ON THE PROJECT: “YOUR WORD IS LIFE”

2. REFLECTIONS ON THE MYSTIC WHICH SHOULD ANIMATE BIBLE REFLECTION

1. On beginning Bible Reflection you are not going to study, you are not going to read in order to have extraordinary experiences. But you are going to read the Word of God in order to listen to what God has to say to you, to know his Will and, in this way you will be able to live better the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You must adopt the attitude which the elderly Eli recommended to Samuel: Speak, Lord, your servant is listening (cf. 1 Sm 3:10).

2. To be able to listen to God does not depend on you, nor on the effort you will make, but only on God, on his free and supreme decision to enter into contact with you and to do whatever will open you to his Voice. For this, you must prepare yourself, asking Him to send his Spirit. Without the help of God's Spirit, it is not possible to discover the meaning which the Word of God has for us today (cf. Jn 14:26; 16:13; Lk 11:13).

3. It is important to create an environment which is conducive to recollection and attentive “listening” to the Word of God. To do this it is necessary to remain attentively before God during the whole time of the Divine Office. And remember: a good, dignified position of the body helps.

4. Opening the Bible, you need to be very conscious that you are opening a book that is not yours, but that of the community. In doing your Bible Reflection you are entering into the great river of Church Tradition which flows through the centuries. Bible Reflection is like a little boat that carries us down this winding river to the sea. The bright clarity which comes to us from the sea has already brightened the “dark night” of many people. Even doing your Bible Reflection on your own, you are not alone, but you will be united with brothers and

sisters who, before you, sought to meditate day and night on the Law of the Lord (cf. Ps 1:2).

5. An attentive and profitable reading of the Bible has three steps. From start to finish it should be marked by three attitudes:

1st STEP or ATTITUDE: above all, you must always have the desire to analyse: “*What is the text saying in itself?*” This requires silence. Everything within you must be silenced, so that nothing will prevent you hearing what the text has to say, so that nothing happens that will let the text say to you only what you want to hear.

2nd STEP or ATTITUDE: you must also ask yourself “*What does this text say to me, to us?*” In this second step, you enter into dialogue with the text, so that the meaning will reflect and touch your life. Like Mary, ponder on what you heard (cf. Lk 2:19, 51) so that in this way, the Word of God may live on your lips and in your heart.

3rd STEP or ATTITUDE: besides this, you must always try to discover “*What the text leads you personally to say to God?*” This is the moment of prayer, a moment to indulge in prayer. Until now, God spoke to you; now is the time for you to respond to him.

6. The result, the 4th STEP, is the point where Bible Reflection arrives at CONTEMPLATION. Contemplation is:

* to have our eyes fixed on “wisdom that leads to salvation” (2 Tm 3:15);

* to begin to see the world and life through the eyes of the poor, through God's eyes;

* and you take on your own poverty and eliminate from your way of thinking all that comes from the powerful;

* be aware that what you thought was fidelity to God and to the Gospel, in reality was nothing more than fidelity to yourself and your own interests and ideas;

* it is to already savour something of the love of God which overcomes all things;

* it is to show by your life that the love of God reveals itself in love of neighbour;

* it is to say always: “let it be done to me according to your Word” (cf. Lk 1:38). In this way, all that must be done, will be done according to the Word of the Lord.

7. In order that your Bible Reflection may not be left to the conclusions of your own feelings, thoughts and preferences, but have solid strength and be really faithful, three fundamental points should be taken into account:

1st Demand: compare the result of your Reading with that of the community to which you belong, with the faith of the living Church. Otherwise, your effort might not lead anywhere (cf. Gal 2:2).

2nd Demand: compare what you read in the Bible with the reality which we live today. When the Divine Office does not reach its objective in our life, the reason is not always due to a lack of prayer, a lack of attention to the faith of the Church, or lack of critical study of the text. Many times it is simply a lack of attention to the stark staring reality which we live today, here in Latin America. The person who lives on a superficial plane, without deepening his/her life, cannot reach the source from which the Psalms came forth, said Cassian.

3rd Demand: compare the conclusions of your reading with the results of biblical exegesis which analyses the meaning of the words. The Divine Office — in truth — cannot stop at the *words*; it must search for the meaning of the *Spirit* (cf. 2 Cor 3:6). But to want to establish the meaning of the Spirit without basing it on the Word is like building a castle in the air (St Augustine). It is to fall into the deceit of fundamentalism. In today’s world, many new ideas are being propagated, so it is very important to have good sense. Good sense helps to nurture a critical study of the *Word*.

8. The Apostle Paul gives a variety of advice on how to read the Bible. He himself was a good interpreter. These are some of the norms and attitudes recommended by him when you read the Bible:

* consider yourself as the recipient, because everything was written for our instruction (cf. 1 Cor 10:11; Rom 15:4); the Bible is *our* book;

* try to have faith in Jesus Christ, since it is only through faith in Jesus that the veil falls away and the Scripture reveals its meaning and communi-

cates to us the wisdom that leads to salvation (cf. 2 Cor 3:16; 2 Tm 3:15; Rom 15:4);

* remember: Paul spoke about “a Crucified Messiah” (1 Cor 1:23-24), “scandal for some and madness for others”; it was this Jesus who opened the eyes of some in order to perceive how, among the poor in the periphery of Corinth, the madness or the scandal of the cross was confusing the wise, the strong and those who thought they were something in this world (cf. 1 Cor 1:21-31);

* mix the *I* and the *we*, never only the *I* or only the *we*! The Apostle also mixed them, because he received his mission from the community of Antioch, and his proclamation originated from that community (cf. Acts 10:1-13).

* keep present the problems of your personal life, those of your family, the Communities, the Church, the people to which you belong and whom you serve; it was how Paul reread and explained the Bible: beginning with the problems of the communities founded by him (cf. 1 Cor 10:1-13).

9. On reading the Bible be aware that the text of the Bible is not just a window through which you look in order to find out what happened to others in the past; it is also a mirror, a “symbol” (Heb 11:19) which you look at in order to find out what is happening to you today (cf. 1 Cor 10:6-10). The prayerful daily reading is like gentle rain which softens the ground and makes it fertile (cf. Is 55:10-11). Entering into dialogue with God and meditating on his Law, you grow like a tree planted beside a brook (cf. Ps 1:3). You will not see the growth, but you will understand the outcome in your encounter with yourself, with God and others. The song says: “It is like the rain that cleans, like the fire that burns, Your Word is like this, it does not touch me without leaving a sign”.

10. A final point to be taken into account. When you do Bible Reflection, the ultimate objective is not to interpret the Bible, but to interpret life. It is not to know the content of the Sacred Book, but, helped by the written Word, to discover the living Word that God speaks today in your life, in our life, in the life of the people, in the reality of the world in which we live (cf. Ps 95:7); it is to grow in faith and, like the prophet Elijah, to experience, ever more, that “the Lord is alive and I am in his presence!” (cf. 1 Kgs 17:1; 18:15).

“Something new is happening” — can’t you see it?

This gathering has called us to open our eyes and perceive the Word of God which re-vivifies situations of decadence and death around us. —

We have seen the power of the Word of God among the poor, among our youth, giving them a feeling of confidence and generosity. —

We discovered new signs of an active presence of the Spirit which greatly fortifies our Hope. —

In a world needy of witnesses, our own communities are called to be servants of the Word. —

We touch the Kingdom of God, when we perceive the action of the Spirit in all cultures. —

As missionaries, we are engaging ourselves to respect and foster the growth of this seed.

3. SUGGESTIONS TO GUIDE DAILY READING OF THE BIBLE

3.1 Personal reading: The attitude of the faithful discipline

The Lord Yahweh has taught me to speak and I know how to sustain the weary. Morning after morning He wakes me up to hear, to listen like a disciple. The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear. For my part I made no resistance, neither did I turn away. I offered my back to those who struck me. The Lord Yahweh comes to my help, so that I am untouched by the insults. He who avenges me is near at hand (cf. Is 50:4-8).

1. Begin by invoking the Holy Spirit.
2. Slow and attentive reading of the text.
3. Moment of interior silence, remembering what you read.
4. Look closely at the meaning of each phrase.
5. Experience and ponder the Word, linking it to life.
6. Widen the vision, linking the text to other biblical texts.
7. Read it again, praying the text and responding to God.
8. Formulate a concrete engagement in your life.

9. Choose a phrase as a summary to memorize.
10. Choose a phrase that will sum it up, and memorize it.

3.2 Reading in the group: the community of the early Christians

“Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’! He then opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (cf. Lk 24:36,45). He also said: “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you, he will lead you to the complete truth” (cf. Jn 14:26; 16:13).

1. Introduction, Prayer

- * Introduction and brief sharing of expectations.
- * Opening prayer, invoking the light of the Holy Spirit.

2. Reading of the Text

- * Slow, attentive reading, followed by a moment of silence.
- * Remain quiet, so that the Word may enter into us.
- * Repeat the text in the group, the members sharing the reading, trying to understand all that was read.

3. The Meaning of the Text in Itself

- * Exchange impressions and questions about the meaning of the text.
- * If necessary, read it again and clarify it.
- * A moment of silence to assimilate all that was heard.

4. The Meaning for Us

- * Ponder the text and discover its real meaning.
- * Apply the meaning of the text to the situation in which we live today.
- * Broaden the meaning, linking it with other Bible texts.
- * Situate the text in the Plan of God as expressed in history.

5. Pray the Text

- * Read the text again with great care.
- * A moment of silence, to prepare your response to God.
- * Share in the form of a prayer, the insights and strengths you have received.

6. Contemplate, Commit Yourself

- * Express a commitment, to which the Bible Reflection has led us.
- * Sum up everything in a phrase to take with us through the day.

7. A Psalm

- * Choose a psalm which expresses all that was lived in the meeting.
- * Pray the psalm and conclude the meeting.

“They raised their voices as one and called upon God. ‘Sovereign Lord’”, they prayed, “maker of heaven and earth, of the sea and everything in them, you have put these words in the mouth of David, our father and your servant, through the Holy Spirit: why did the pagan nations rage and the people conspire in folly? The kings of the earth were aligned and the princes gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah... But now, Lord, see their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness... When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the word of God boldly” (cf. Acts 4:24-31).

4. “TO FOLLOW JESUS”, OUR ELDER BROTHER, SERVANT OF HIS PEOPLE. HOW JESUS CARRIED OUT HIS MISSION OF SERVANT

One of the oldest and most beautiful titles, which the first Christians used to interpret the Service which Jesus gave to His people, was that of defender, (*Go'el*), that is, saviour, redeemer, liberator, advocate, paraclete, consoler, close relative, elder brother, godfather (cf. Lk 2:11; Jn 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph 5:23; etc.). Jesus is seen as the eldest brother, the first born, who takes on the defence and deliverance of the members of his family. He was the close relative who came to help his brothers so that they might live once again in harmony. He came to restore community living in the way that God wanted it to be when he called his people from Egypt.

4.1 The situation of the People of Galilee — A desintegration of the social context

In the old Israel, the clan, that is, the extended family (the community), was based on social living together. It was the protection of families and people, a guarantee of the possession of land, the mainstay of tradition, the defence of identity. It was the concrete way for the people of that time to embody the love of God in love of neighbour. One of its most beautiful expressions is the law of *Go'el*, or of deliverance (cf. Lv 25:23-55). To defend the clan was the same as defending the Covenant.

In the Galilee of Jesus' time, because of Herod Antipas' government (4 B.C. to 39 A.D.), none of

this existed any more, or at least, less and less. The clan was becoming fragmented. It was no longer able to realise its objective. The need to eat and survive obliged the people to pay taxes, whether to the Government or to the Temple, to get themselves into debt, to find work, to buy goods, to welcome soldiers and give them hospitality, etc. The individualistic mentality of the hellenistic ideology, the frequent threats of violent repression on the part of the Romans and the increasing challenges of survival led families to become entrenched in their own needs. In practice, the clan ceased to exist as a factor of unity and defence of people and families. In the case of illness, plagues, poor harvests or other disasters, families and individuals were left without help, without *Go'el*. The family, now dysfunctional, ceased to be a place of welcome and sharing, and became instead an object of exclusion and marginilisation of the weakest.

This breaking down of traditional values (clan, sharing, hospitality, organisation of neighbourhoods, communal possession of land, function of 'defender'), appears in the parables which Jesus told the people. For example: the owner of land who took for himself the goods of his employees and demanded more of them than he should (cf. Mt 25:26). The unemployed workers waiting for an odd job (cf. Mt 20:1-6). The absentee landlord, who leaves everything entrusted to the farm manager or the tenants (cf. Mt 21:33). The climate of violence and rebellion among the tenants (cf. Mt 21:35-38). The people, debt-ridden and without *Go'el*, is threatened with becoming enslaved (cf. Mt 18:23-26). Despair forces the people to exploit their own companions (cf. Mt 18:27-30; 24:48). The insecurity on the streets due to assaults (cf. Lk 10:30). Corrupt employees made themselves rich and appropriated the goods of others (cf. Lk 16:1-7). Wealth which offends the poor (cf. Lk 16:19-21).

The closed attitude of families, caused by the Government policies, was reinforced by the religious ideology. The heaviness of the Temple and the Law contributed to weakening the integral structure of the clan. For example, the one who gave his inheritance to the Temple, could leave his parents without sustenance. He was no longer obliged to observe the fourth commandment which was the backbone of the clan (cf. Mk 7:8-13). The insistence on the Sabbath in the Law left the people defenceless and helpless (cf. Lk 13:10-17). The observance of the laws of purification and the preoccupation with genealogy were factors of marginilisation and exclusion for many people: women, children, Samaritans, strangers, lepers, possessed, publicans, the infirm,

the maimed, and paraplegics. Above all, the poor who were not able to know, let alone observe, all those norms (cf. Jn 7:49). The political and economic scenario, as well as the religious ideology, conspired to disintegrate the clan, leaving the local community without strength, and, as a result, it prevented the manifestation of the Kingdom.

In conclusion. In the land of Jesus, the system, whether political or religious, was so oppressive that it prevented the people from observing God's law which exhorted: "Among you let there be no poor!" (Dt 15:4). Religion, in the way it was practised and organised became the reason for exclusion for an ever increasing number of people. This was the scandal! "Because of you, God's Name is being blasphemed" (cf. Rom 2:24). "Woe to the world because of so many scandals" (Mt 18:7), because the Father does not wish to lose one of these little ones (cf. Mt 18:14). In his defence of the life of these little ones, Jesus reveals the will of the Father.

4.2 New experience of God — New experience of Mission

The new experience of God as Father marked the life of Jesus and gave him new eyes with which to understand and evaluate the reality in which he was involved. In the Old Testament God is called Father 15 times. In the New Testament, 245 times! It is in order to reveal God as Father that Jesus puts himself on the side of the little ones, the excluded, and takes up their defence. We will see just three aspects of how Jesus tried to be the *Servant of God*, defending and delivering his people:

4.2.1. *Reweaving the Social Fabric — Rebuilding the Community*

In the time of Jesus there were various movements which sought a new way of living and living together: Essenes, Pharisees and later on, the Zealots. Like Jesus, many of these formed communities of disciples, and had their missionaries (cf. Mt 23:15). But these, when they went forth in mission, went cautiously. They took haversack and money to take care of their own food. They were unable to rely on the food of the people who were not always ritualistically 'pure'. The laws of purification made sharing and hospitality difficult. They hindered life in community.

Unlike the other missionaries, the disciples of Jesus, men and women, were not able to take anything, neither purse nor haversack, gold nor silver, coppers nor money, stick nor staff, nor sandals, not

even two tunics (cf. Lk 10:1-12; 9:1-6; Mk 6:7-13; Mt 10:6-16). They were to stay in the first house where they were received in peace, and to eat whatever was offered to them by the people. They were not to go from house to house, but they were to live together in an ongoing way, and, in return they would receive sustenance, "for the labourer *deserves* his wages". In other words, they were to partake of the life and work of the people, and the people welcomed them and shared with them their food and lodging. As a special task they were to take care of the excluded: infirm, possessed, lepers. If all these demands were fulfilled, they could shout to the four winds: "The Kingdom has come!"

All this implies some very important points for the understanding of the mission of the one who proclaims the Good News to the poor:

1. They were to go with nothing. This means that they had *to depend on hospitality* (cf. Lk 9:4; 10:5-6). Thus the one who goes with nothing goes because he trusts in the people and believes that he will be received. With this attitude they criticised the laws of exclusion and showed, in practice, that they had other criteria for community.

2. They had to eat what the people gave them. They were not to live separately, with their own food and table. They had *to accept the communion of the table*. This means, in their contact with the people, they were not to be afraid of losing their purity. In this way, they criticised the laws of purification which were in force at that time and showed in practice that they had another path to purity, through contact with God.

3. They were to live together in a stable manner and not go from house to house. Like everyone, they were to work, and live on what they received in exchange, for the labourer deserves his wages (cf. Lk 10:7-8). This means that they were *to trust in sharing*. This explains the severe criticism against those who refused to receive the message (cf. Lk 10:10-11), as they were not refusing anything new, but were rejecting their tradition.

4. They were to care for the sick and needy, cure lepers and expel demons (cf. Lk 10:9; Mt 10:8). That is, they were to exercise their role as "defender" (*Go'êl*) and *welcome* into the clan those who were *living outside of it*. In this way, they criticised the disintegration of the clan and tried to find new ways out of the situation.

With these attitudes, the disciples of Jesus, men and women, strengthened the sharing, communion at table, hospitality and the function of *Go'él*, which were based on the clan's life in community. The main objective of their mission was not to announce a doctrine, but to testify to a new way of living together. They were to recreate and reinforce the local community, so that this could once again be the expression of the Covenant, the Kingdom, the love of God as the Father who makes everyone his brothers and sisters.

4.2.2 To open the small Family to the extended Family and so reveal the Kingdom

One of the things on which Jesus insisted most to those who wanted to follow in his mission to the poor, is to leave father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, house, land, to abandon everything for love of him and the Gospel (cf. Lk 18:29; Mt 19:29; Mk 10:29). If anyone comes to me without first giving up his father, mother, wife, sons, brothers, sisters, that person cannot be my disciple (cf. Lk 14:26). He directs these demands not only to the most courageous, but to *all* who wish to follow him (cf. Lk 14:25-26, 33). What do these very severe demands, which appear to want to undo everything, all the bonds of family life, and which are at the origins of Religious Life, mean?

In the first place, they mean what they say: the disciple, man or woman, must abandon the family, put aside everything and take on the itinerant life. This was the life of Jesus and the group of his disciples. "We have left everything and followed you" (Mk 10:28). It was also the life of the women who had accompanied him from Galilee (cf. Mk 15:41; Lk 8:1-3; 23:49). But this was not the life of the multitudes to whom Jesus gave the *same* invitation. It is impossible to imagine that Jesus demanded that all men and women from the interior of Galilee should abandon their families, their lands and neighbourhoods in order to follow him. Alas, this did not happen except for the small group of followers, men and women.

The exhortation to abandon the family, when placed in the context of that time shows another very fundamental significance. As we saw, the economic, social, political and religious context encouraged families to be inward-looking and was fragmenting the clan. Preoccupation with the family's own problems prevented people from being united in community. It prevented the clan from achieving its objective, that for which it was created, namely, to offer real and true protection to the families and people, to

preserve their identity, to defend the possession of land and to welcome the excluded and the poor. Now, so that the Kingdom of God could manifest itself, once again, in living together it was necessary to break this vicious circle. People had to surpass the narrow limits of the small family and open themselves once more to the extended family, to the Community.

Jesus himself set the example. When his own family tried to take possession of him, he resisted and said: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who were seated around him, he said: "Here are my mother and my brothers! Anyone who does the will of God, that person is brother, and sister, and mother to me" (Mk 3:33-35). Jesus broadened his family and created community. He asked the same of those who wanted to follow him, because the families could not remain closed in on themselves. The excluded and marginalised were to be welcomed once again into companionship and thus feel welcomed by God (cf. Lk 14:12-14). This was the way to attain the objective of the Law which said: "Let there be no poor among you" (Dt 15:4).

Like the great prophets of old, Jesus tries to strengthen life in community in the neighbourhoods of Galilee. He takes up again the fundamental meaning of the clan, the family, the community as an expression of the incarnation of the love of God in love of neighbour. Because of this, he asks those who wish to be disciples, men or women, to leave father, mother, wife, brother, sister, house, everything! They must lose their life in order to gain it! And he guarantees: "I tell you solemnly, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel who will not be repaid a hundred times over, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land — not without persecutions — *now in this present time* and, in the world to come, eternal life" (Mk 10:29, 30). In reality, those who have the courage to break the narrow boundary of their own family will find again, in the community, a hundred times that which they left behind: brother, sister, mother, child, land! Jesus brings to pass that which the people hoped for in the messianic times: that there be a change of heart, parents towards their children and children towards their parents, rebuild the clan, reweave the social fabric (cf. Mal 3:23-24; Lk 1:17).

This message was not accepted by the majority. On the contrary, in the measure in which Jesus fought the closing-in of families, and the ominous influence of the hellenist government's ideology and that of ritualistic religion, so in the same way,

tensions and conflicts arose. The message provoked resistance, persecution and division among their own families, father against son, mother against daughter, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law (cf. Lk 12:51-52). Some received it and others rejected it. Jesus became a sign of contradiction (cf. Lk 2:34).

Jesus was the “defender” (*Go’él*) of this people, “the closest relative”. He came to liberate his brothers so that they might live once again in harmony. Paul expressed this in the following phrase: “He loved me and sacrificed himself for my sake” (cf. Gal 2:20). Jesus did this because of the new experience he had of God as Father. If God is Father, then all of us must live as brothers and sisters.

4.2.3. *Discover, Welcome and Nurture the seeds of the Kingdom among the people*

Jesus announces the Kingdom to all! He does not exclude anyone. But he proclaims it from the perspective of the marginalised. He receives as brother and sister all those who are despised by religion and government: women, children and the sick (cf. Mk 1:32; Mt 8:17; 19:13-15; Lk 8:2), prostitutes and sinners (cf. Mt 21:31-32; Lk 7:37-50; Jn 8:2-11) pagans and Samaritans (cf. Lk 7:2-10; 17:16; Mk 7:24-30; Jn 4:7-42), lepers and possessed (cf. Mt 8:2-4; Lk 17:12-14; 11:14-22; Mk 1:25-26), publicans and soldiers (cf. Lk 18:9-14; 19:1-10) and the poor, the people of the land, the powerless (cf. Mt 5:3; Lk 6:20,24; Mt 11:25-26). Thus, the seed of the Kingdom will produce its fruit, “it re-establishes the tribes of Jacob”.

Jesus’ action for, and on behalf of, the excluded was not an isolated action, just his idea. There were people who did not agree with the exclusion which was being restored for centuries. Jesus inserted himself in this grass-roots movement of resistance, and continued it. A concrete example is his attitude in relation to women. At the time of the New Testament, the marginalisation of women was one of the main factors which led to the exclusion of the *little ones*. A woman lived marginalised for the simple fact of being a woman (cf. Lv 15:19-27; 12:1-5). She did not take part in the synagogue, she could not take part in public life. Many women also resisted this exclusion. Already, since the time of Ezra, in the time of exile, when the marginalisation of women was even worse, her resistance grew, as is seen in the accounts of Judith, Esther, Ruth, Naomi, Susanna, and the Sulamite woman. This resistance found echo in Jesus and he welcomed it. Here are some events in which the nonconformism and

resistance of women appear in their daily life and show how Jesus welcomed them.

The young woman *prostitute* has the courage to challenge the norms of society and religion. She enters the house of the Pharisee to meet Jesus. On meeting him she finds love and forgiveness and is defended in the face of the Pharisee (cf. Lk 7:36-50). The woman *who was bent* double did not care about the shouts of the leader of the synagogue. She is looking for a cure, even on the Sabbath day. Jesus welcomes and defends her against the leader of the synagogue (cf. Lk 13:10-17). The woman who was considered *impure* because of a haemorrhage, has the courage to mix with the crowd and to think exactly the opposite of the official doctrine. The doctrine said: “If I touch him he will become unclean!” But she said: “If I touch him I will be cured!” She is welcomed without judgement and is cured. Jesus declares that her cure is the fruit of her faith (cf. Mk 5:25-34). The Samaritan woman, despised as a *heretic*, has the courage to question Jesus and to change the topic of conversation which he had initiated. She is the first to accept that Jesus is the Messiah (cf. Jn 4:26). The woman who was a *stranger* from the region of Tyre and Sidon does not accept her exclusion, and knows how to argue in such a way as to change the mind of Jesus and be noticed by him (cf. Mk 7:24-30). The *mothers with little children* confront the disciples and are welcomed and blessed by Jesus (cf. Mt 19:13-15). The women who defied authority and remained close to the cross of Jesus (cf. Mt 27:55-56, 61), were the first to experience the presence of the Risen Jesus (cf. Mt 28:9-10). Among them was Mary Magdalen regarded by others as *possessed*, but healed by Jesus (cf. Lk 8:2). She received the *mandate* to bring the Good News of the Resurrection to the Apostles (cf. Jn 20:16-18).

READING THE BIBLE IN AN ASIAN CONTEXT

Sr Maura Cho, SOLPH

The following is an abridged version due to lack of space.

I. PROLOGUE

Chan Mi Jesu! “Praise Jesus!”

I greet all of you with this traditional greeting among Korean Catholics.

How do Asians read the Bible?

I do not intend to present an empirical study on how the average Asian reads the Bible. Instead, I would like to examine the way the Bible was read in Asia in its historical context. Since Asia is so huge, and its long history so rich, I can only reduce the question to much smaller ones that are easier to handle.

First, does Asia have a different tradition of Scripture reading from the West?

If so, how can we characterise this unique tradition? In answering this question, we broaden the concept of “Scripture” to include the Oriental scriptures throughout history, that have made a significant impression on the heart of each Asian. The history of Asian scriptures is about 2,000 years older than the history of the Bible in Asian soil. Asia has had its own scriptures (wisdom literature) for a long time. Great sages have appeared. This tradition that is deeply imprinted into the Asian language, culture, and heart is not something that can be changed easily.

Second, how did Asia pick up and read the Bible, when it finally came to the East?

The history of the Bible in Asia began roughly in the 16th century. There were previous occasions when the Bible was introduced into Asia, but it never lasted. Now, in dealing with this question, I am going to limit my attention to the case of the early Korean Church.

First of all, I will present the method Asian Sages used to the Asian Wisdom Books.

These Sages have not only witnessed and met the Light of Wisdom, they have also left guidelines on how to read the scriptures. Their teachings are practised not only by those who profess to be the disciples of these Asian Sages; indeed, their wisdom itself and their guidelines to attain such Wisdom, either through meditation or from study of the Scriptures, have become part of the Asian language, culture and tradition. These Sages have taught us how to ‘meet’ the Scriptures with the entire body. They taught that scripture reading, as well as meditation, should be done in ‘**silence**’ and ‘**namelessness**’. The exact meaning of this claim will be clarified later.

The second part of my paper deals with the manner in which simple people with a child’s heart read the Bible. ‘Reading’ is actually a misnomer. They *ate* the scrolls of the Bible (cf. Rv 10:10).

The Asian Sages mentioned in the first part taught that the ideal way to attain Wisdom is by aligning one’s heart with the heart of the Scriptures and the author. But throughout history, few were able to attain the level of Wisdom these Sages of the Asian Scriptures attained. However, there were tens of thousands of martyrs who attained Wisdom by carrying the Cross and following in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. Most of them learned the Good News from reading the Gospel in Korean, or heard homilies presented by fellow lay leaders. Ultimately, Bible reading was done through the Cross. They went through severe torture, imprisonment and martyrdom. These were the ones who learned how to read the Gospel in utter silence and selflessness. The only difference from the gifted disciples of the Asian Sages was that they met the Word physically through their suffering and perseverance.

They obtained silence and namelessness through aligning themselves to the Cross of Jesus Christ. The Cross was their Bible. I am going to present their cultural and religious background, values and experiences and the fruit of their love.

II. THE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

1. A SOUND OF SHEER SILENCE

The ultimate purpose of Bible reading is to have an encounter with God. Therefore the method of Bible reading should not be too far away from the way of encountering God. In the great Asian tradition, the way of encountering the Truth is exactly the same as the way of reading the Oriental scriptures. Thus, before we discuss how Asians read the Bible, I should like to refer to the story of Elijah.

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (cf. 1 Kgs 19:11-13).

The story of Elijah is the story of each one of us especially if very afraid, disappointed, and sad for the sake of God's work. Elijah had zeal for God, but the Israelites had all forsaken the covenant with Yahweh. He thinks that he is the only prophet left, and yet he, himself, is being pursued by Jezebel. He stood on Mount Horeb where God in revealing Himself to Moses had instituted the covenant with the Israelites. There, although he saw powerful phenomena Elijah saw with his inner eye that there was no Yahweh.

In the above Scripture passage, God asked the question at least twice: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And Elijah answered it in exactly the same manner. He repeatedly said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of Hosts... I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away". It is as if Elijah and God were not in perfect communication. It sounds as if Elijah was too occupied with his own thoughts that he did not grasp why God kept on asking him the same question: "What are you doing?"

Actually, isn't this the type of question parents ask children who seem to digress the wrong way? "What are you doing, son"? It takes time before the son finally realises that the mother was not genuinely interested in what he was doing but was more concerned with where he was heading. He suddenly gets the true message and abruptly "wakes up".

Then, the Scripture says, there was a 'sound of sheer silence'. The silence here is not limited to the silence of external noises. As a matter of fact, all inner thoughts, feelings, passions, and zeal itself, no matter how well intentioned, were in a state of absolute silence. Then Elijah finally recognised the presence of the Lord.

Elijah immediately went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. The Scripture says that Elijah hid his face with his mantle in the manner Moses had hid his face (cf. Ex 3:6).

Hiding one's face in Eastern culture means that someone humbly lets himself become 'anonymous', that is 'without a name'. I say 'without a name', because a 'name' in the Eastern culture, which the Hebrew people also shared, symbolises 'own' pride, fame, authority, majesty, renown, glory, and self-independence. In comparison, Christians hide under the mantle of Jesus, and use the 'Name' of the Lord instead of their own.

Scripture says that Yahweh told Moses, "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (cf. Ex 33:20). Indeed no man can see Yahweh as long as he tries to encounter God as a self-independent being recognised and respected by his own 'name'. In his anonymous self, with a mantle of humility covering human 'glory'; one can indeed have an encounter with God like Moses and Elijah did.

Thus, Elijah met the Lord in "sheer silence" and in total humility of "namelessness". Truly, "sheer silence" and "namelessness" seem to be what characterise the state of mind of all of those who have been privileged to encounter God in person.

Now, I am going to talk about the sages and martyrs in Asia who seem to have shared in the same spirit as Elijah; namely, "silence" and "namelessness". In a certain sense, there were many other Elijahs in the East as well as in the West. In the West, St John the Baptist was another Elijah whose coming was predicted according to Jesus Himself (cf. Mt 11:14).

2. THREE SAGES IN ASIA

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; (Rom 1:19-20).

In Asia, there have been many great souls who have experienced the presence of “I AM” like Elijah. “I AM” was the ‘nameless’ Name by which the Lord revealed Himself to Moses (cf. Ex 3:14). “I AM” was not the Name Hebrew people wanted to know and to tell the world that this God is the God of the Hebrew people and the Hebrew people only.

Consequently, Moses asked the nameless Lord about His Name, as the representative of the Israelites: “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you’, and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ What shall I say to them?” (cf. Ex 3:13).

The Lord did not give the kind of name that Hebrew people wanted to know. The Hebrew people knew that. So they do not pronounce “Yahweh” when they read the Scriptures in order not to profane the nameless “Name”. But some did fall away from the true meaning of the tradition. Even though they made sure that they would not pronounce “I AM WHO AM”, their hearts were pompously saying secretly, “I actually know Him. I know his name is Yahweh that no other nations know”.

Thanks be to God, the Asian Sages I am going to introduce in this section never claimed that they knew the Name of the Nameless One. Thus in all humility and honesty, Lao-tzu called the One, the “Nameless”, (“Tao” is not a name in Lao-tzu. It is nameless. The first sentence in his *Tao-te-ching* is that “If Tao can be named it is not Tao”), and Buddha addressed the One as Sunyata: the “Void”. With an acknowledgement to them, Asia did not err in creating an “inner” false image of God, or in calling upon the Name of the Nameless in vain (Ex 20:4-7). To some they may look like ‘atheists’ since they do not seem to have the temple of “God” where they worship Him. They do not ‘define’ God, or give any name to Him. To others they may sound like ‘polytheists’ since they say their Nameless One is everywhere. I would sincerely recommend those to “come and see” (Jn 1:39, 1:46, 11:34) Asia in total silence and humility before forming any opinion as to what these Asians were saying.

Thanks to God, Christians have many Saints who have all met God in ‘sheer silence’ and in the humility of ‘namelessness’. These have entered the Kingdom of Heaven since they knew and believed in Jesus, the Son of God, who came out of the Kingdom, and went into the Kingdom ahead of them. Indeed, our Lord taught that the least in Heaven is greater than John the Baptist, another Elijah, who is the greatest among those born of woman (cf. Mt 11:11). The Asian Sages like Buddha, Lao-tzu, and Confucius had never met the Word that became flesh. But in their utter silence and humility, they certainly saw the Light, and did not turn away from it. Truly they were in the same spirit as Elijah.

Buddha, Lao-tzu, and Confucius, the three most important sages of the East lived between the 6th and 5th century B.C. It is interesting to note that the period in which they were enlightened and were teaching their wisdom, coincided with the dark age of the Babylonian captivity for the descendants of Israel. Thus, at the time God’s chosen people had turned away from God and had become captives in Babylon, the wind of enlightenment was blowing in the East. This wind was going to make a notable impact on the manner people face nature and the universe and on how one relates to one’s neighbours. Truth was waiting until there was ‘utter silence’.

But the ‘silence’ of all thoughts, emotions, desires, and will is only the beginning. In the state that the Buddha reached, ‘all of a sudden’ his own self was not there. When the eyes, the ears, the heart, the will, the thought stops every conscious activity, then there is no ‘subject’ that is differentiated from the outside reality. This is called the state of “non-existence of self”. In that state, the high barrier between the self and outside, visible and invisible reality, no longer exists. And only in this state of “non-existence of self”, or “namelessness”, can one truly see the invisible Truth. It is not that the person has obtained the Truth. Rather the Truth was always there, but now the person can see what he could not see before. He was blind before due to all sorts of movement and preoccupations, but now he can see! (cf. Jn 9:25).

III. KYUNG (CHING, scripture) READING IN ASIA

Wisdom writers in the Orient knew that there was a limit in trying to convey wisdom in written characters. Wisdom, by definition, is beyond the grasp of the normal intellect. A Wisdom book is called *Kyung* in Korea, or *Ching* in China. In Chan Buddhism,

there is a parable about people who only look at the finger of a monk instead of at the moon to which he was pointing. Asian Sages understood that their own teachings had to be transmitted in writing, as a tool. But even then they had the wisdom and foresight to warn future readers in advance that they should not confuse the writings with the Truth itself. The *book* is only a ‘finger’ pointing at the Truth. Thus, they spent a lot of energy on instructing their future disciples the proper way to read the scriptures. How considerate they were! And what selfless love they had for their future disciples!

The reading method taught by the Asian Sages is summarised below. The first thing to note is that the principle of reading is the same as the principle of meeting the “Wisdom”. One should maintain “utter silence”, and remain “anonymous”. First, “utter silence” means that one should calm all one’s thoughts, emotions, desires, and passions. Second, they should remain “anonymous” and “self-less” in facing the Truth contained in the book. If one tries to analyse the “dead letters” in an egocentric way, one becomes the ‘subject’, and the book the ‘object’, there is no unity between the self and the book. ‘Self’ tries to be in the driving seat, and so resists becoming humbly ‘anonymous’.

As an analogy, we can compare this with the critical remarks Jesus made as regards the Pharisees’ manner of reading. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees saying, “*You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me*” (cf. Jn 5:39). Look what was happening at the time. There was the Wisdom, the Light, the Truth, and the Eternal Life standing in person in front of the Pharisees. But the Pharisees, even with the seemingly good intention of “finding” the way to eternal life from Scripture, could not recognise the Life Himself who was standing right in front of them!

1. READ THE SCRIPTURE WITH YOUR WHOLE BODY AS ONE EYE

Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness. Therefore, be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light (cf. Lk 11:34-36).

What is meant by the above adage of ‘reading the Scripture with the body as one eye’ can be explained

in two steps. First, one should not rely on the natural ‘eye’ alone in reading the Scriptures. Second, reading should be done in the manner that the whole body meets the author behind the Scripture, and the spirit behind the author.

Regarding the first aspect, one should not use the natural organ alone. The natural sight mentioned here is not simply physical eyesight. Rather it is the intellectual faculty of perception. ‘Eyes’ stand for the intellectual faculty of perception even in the case of the Bible verses above. Truly Middle Eastern culture is not much different from that of the East! The intellect teaches people how to analyse. Unfortunately, the intellectual faculty of man is limited as it is programmed to look at matters only from an egocentric perspective. People honestly try hard to grasp the truth in their heart. But as long as they remain in the driving seat, they are inclined to develop seriously biased views, looking at the Scriptures only from a ‘subjective’ angle, no matter how hard they try to be ‘objective’. A prejudiced view means that one judges or discriminates between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, between ‘heaven’ and ‘hell’, or between ‘life’ and ‘death’ from one’s own perspective, and cultural background, but, principally from egoistic self-love.

Secondly, regarding the entire body’s encounter with the Lord, one should literally meet Scripture, eat, and taste the whole content of it with one’s whole flesh, soul, and spirit. In the Oriental reading method, there is no difference between metaphysics and ethics. It is based upon the holistic approach. When the whole flesh, as well as the soul and spirit, meet the Light — the flesh can be awakened as much as the soul or spirit. When the flesh is fully awakened, it no longer obeys the command of lust but the command of the True Light.

Asian *Kyung*, or *Ching*, is literally the warp or the vertical threads of a loom. The warp, *Kyung*, alone does not make a fabric. Fabric is woven only when the horizontal threads, or weft, are fed into the loom. In this context, reading is the encounter between the weft and the warp, i.e. Scripture and the whole body. The ultimate state of the body’s encounter with Scripture is the “union” of the body with Scripture, and its authors. There no longer exists two because they became one body. There is only oneness. In Buddhism, this state of “union” between the two entities is called *sam-mae-kyung* (*samadhi*). *Sam-mae-kyung* is the spiritual state where the high wall that divides the self from the rest of the universe becomes “broken down”. In such a state of perfect “union”, I become the universe and the universe

becomes me. As applied to reading, in *sam-mae-kyung* (*samadhi*), I become the scripture, and the scripture becomes me.

2. MAKE YOUR HEART BECOME LIKE A CLEAR MIRROR

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Mt 5:8).

The principle of scripture reading can also be explained using different symbolism. The human heart was originally like the clearest mirror or water that reflects everything in its pristine state. But if the mir-

ror becomes dull, then it reflects a distorted image. Thus one cannot see the wisdom and truth hidden in Scripture, if one's heart is not like a clear mirror or pure lake water.

The first thing to do, then, is to "silence" all the noise made by the faculty of the intellect, emotion, and will. But the most important thing to do, is to free the heart from self-centredness, and to become 'without name'. Only then can one see clearly the truth contained in the Scriptures.

Group

The Group thanks the Lord for the richness of ideas and experiences freely and simply shared. As a result, we experienced a mutual enrichment in joy and unity during the four days spent together.

We were deeply impressed by the 'mystical' experience and vision of Sr Maura Cho, by the profound and illuminating research of Fr Carlos Mesters, and by the clear, logical and competent exposition of Sr Nuria Balduch-Benages, which brought us back to a more familiar way of reading, studying and approaching the Word. The presentations of Sr Maura and Fr Carlos faced us with some disconcerting challenges which will continue to question us for some time to come.

Some of the following ideas were underlined and brought to the fore during our group work:

+ We have to abandon a too intellectual way of approaching the Bible and find a way that is more related to the experience of life.

+ We have to learn to discern the presence of the Word in people and in events and to respect the timing and

the rhythm of God who patiently presents us with his Word.

+ We must find a just equilibrium between knowledge, experience and heart in listening and proclaiming the Word: and that in a context of fraternal sharing in community.

+ We have to become servants of the Word, sent into the ways of the world, without human security and control, ready to share and to depend, to teach and to learn, despite exclusion, the prejudice of people, of ideas and experiences.

+ The servants of the Word should exercise the Power (given to them by authority, personal capacity or circumstances) as a service of the Word for the good of sisters and brothers.

+ Echoing the words of Fr Carlos, the group appreciates a feminist reading of the Bible and hopes that such a reading will become expression of that "feminine genius" which should make, according to the Pope, a remarkable contribution to the development of understanding the Bible and lead to the promotion of a "new feminism".

Matters of ‘the heart’ can only be transmitted through the ‘heart’. In the terminology of Chan Buddhism, this is called ‘*Iee-sim-jun-sim*’, meaning literally ‘communicate what is from the heart through the heart’. *Kyung* has been written by the language of the ‘heart’. Hence, one needs to utilise the faculty of the ‘heart’. An ordinary person has lost the faculty of listening with the ears of the ‘heart’. A person who looks at the outside world using only his self-centred eyes cannot see the Truth as the Truth would see itself. Human beings have lost the faculty of ‘heart’ that directly understands the heart of others because of their spiritual blindness. But people who love each other do understand the ‘heart’ language of another. A mother understands the heart of her baby, and the baby understands the heart of its mother. Even in Catholicism, there has been a tradition of understanding scripture by ‘*lee-sim-jun-sim*’. The only difference is that in Christianity, by revelation, the Holy Spirit replaces the rather ambiguous concept of ‘heart’. Thus, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation says that “...Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred Spirit in which it was written...” (from *Dei Verbum*, n. 3:12). This means that the Scripture that was written in the Holy Spirit should be read and interpreted only in the Holy Spirit. Asian teachers do their utmost to help their disciples to ‘resurrect’ the dead faculties of the heart. They ‘opened’ the heart of their disciples, in the manner our Lord Jesus had opened the ‘mind’ of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:45).

3. IS THE ASIAN READING APPROACH TOO SUBJECTIVE, OR NOT OBJECTIVE ENOUGH?

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (cf. Lk 24:27).

From the Western perspective, the Asian approach to reading the Books of Wisdom can be criticised as being too ‘subjective’, and lacking in ‘objectivity’. Yet from a truly Asian perspective, the differentiation between objectivity and subjectivity itself is the symptom of a sinful man who lives in the illusive realm of self-centredness. When a man is freed from the realm of self-centredness, there is no such thing as the ‘subject’ or ‘I’. If there is no ‘subject’, then there is no ‘object’, nor ‘objectivity’. To such a person, the two — subject and object — have truly become one.

Moreover, one should note that even the New Testament is full of a seemingly ‘subjective’

interpretation of the Old Testament by Jesus Christ himself, Paul, and the other Epistle writers. Yet Asian Sages will not call such an interpretation of Scripture ‘subjective’. Yes, it certainly is a “personal” interpretation. ‘Personal’ interpretation is not the same thing as a ‘subjective’ interpretation. A person who is truly free from self-attachment, obtains ‘personal’ understanding by fully experiencing the Scripture with his entire person — the flesh, soul and spirit. It was exactly this kind of personal experience toward which the Asian teachers tried so hard to guide their disciples.

IV. THE SEED OF THE BIBLE THAT FELL ON KOREAN SOIL

A sower went out to sow the seed (cf. Lk 8:5).

1. THE CULTURAL SOIL OF KOREA

A. The Country of Morning Calmness

The ancient name of Korea was *Cho-Sun* that means ‘Morning Calmness’. In ancient Chinese literature the country is identified by its people with white clothes. The colour white symbolises the colourless tone of the morning sun-light.

You will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (cf. Lk 1:7-79).

The above verses from the Benedictus of Zechariah mention the sunrise. They also mention the journey of peace, the *shalom* (peace) that the Light from the dawn will guide the Israelites. *Shalom* was also the first word used by the risen Lord. It was as if he was saying, “Look at the sunrise! Look at this resurrection! Have no fear any longer. The darkness of death has finally been conquered!” Can this be the same kind of peace that has been experienced by Koreans who have always enjoyed watching the sunrise from a high mountain, drawing utmost peace from it? The first Korean faithful must have done the same thing. Some records indicate that they went to a high mountain during the hours of darkness for their retreats.

I would like to invite the missionaries who want to understand Koreans to climb a high mountain in darkness, to witness the dawn. It would be one of the

best ways to experience what the people of this country love most. There is nothing that compares to watching the sun rise from the horizon of the East Sea. Koreans were so lucky to have the East Sea toward the East. Zecharias, and even Jesus must have witnessed the magnificent sunrise from the high mountain of Zion; but they did not have the sea on the east.

Please close your eyes and imagine yourself to be in utter darkness on a high mountain. You face the East Sea from a high peak. Everything is pitch dark. You cannot tell where the ocean starts. You have climbed the high mountain in the dark for almost six hours since midnight. Everything is quiet. Utter silence! Even birds do not make a single noise. Then suddenly the birds start to chirp. The animals start to make noises. Then look! A huge red and bright circle starts to rise from the end of the East Sea. And the light from it starts to break away the darkness. The darkness does not seem in any way to compare with the Light. The darkness that was so overwhelming is being melted away without having even a chance to make a fight (cf. Jn 1:5). Look! What was utter darkness is no longer darkness. You can see the ocean, and you can see the seashore, and the earth. You look around, and you see the trees, and the mountain which surrounds you. What wonder! How awe-inspiring! And you suddenly begin to experience 'peace', the kind of peace you had never experienced before (cf. Jn 14:27). It is as if the light from the sun has also broken down the darkness — the worries, the sorrow, the disappointment — that have been ruling you for so long in your mind (cf. Jn 16:33). Now finally you see everything clearly. There is nothing really to worry about, nothing to fear. What is darkness and worry, compared to this awe-inspiring Light?

Koreans have always identified themselves as bright, calm, and peace-loving people. The concept of peace in Korea is beyond the usual meaning attached to it: namely, the reconciliation between the opposing parties. Their peace encompasses the inner peace, the inner tranquillity, and the inner joy, the kind of peace one experiences watching the sunrise. It is amazing that the Korean's concept of peace is very similar to the *shalom* of the Israelites.

B. Traditional Korean Virtues

Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy

of praise, think about these things (cf. Phil 4:8).

Koreans have traditionally honoured and loved Truthfulness, Goodness and Beauty. But, most important of all, they have cherished the virtue of 'fortitude'. They would sacrifice their lives in order to be truthful, good, and to look 'beautiful'.

Truthfulness means being truthful to what man is meant to be from the beginning. It also means the obedience to the following five commandments: Loyalty to the superior, filial piety to parent, trustworthiness between friends, courage as a warrior, and finally generosity toward all people. They respect those who sacrifice their lives for the cause of truthfulness. Those who practice the traditional virtue of 'fortitude' until death are not only the followers of a religious faith. Even atheist gangsters often sacrifice their lives simply from loyalty to their superior, or being faithful to their fellow gangsters. Until recently, many college students, including some Communists, have sacrificed their lives in the bloody fight against the military dictatorship.

The criterion of Goodness is whether a certain type of behaviour is helpful to the community or detrimental to it. The ancient Korean word for 'good' is 'dyot-da' (now *chot-da*). The etymology of the word comes from 'dop-da' which means 'to help each other'. On the other hand, the word for 'bad' is 'na-pu-da'. Its etymological root is 'na-pun-i-da' that means 'to assert only me'. On the other hand, beauty is based on a harmonious relationship of the parts in relationship to the whole. For example, when every person, thing and nature is in harmony within a community, it is beautiful. If every part of a face is in perfect harmony, then the face is beautiful.

This traditional attitude of Koreans toward truthfulness, goodness, and beauty is certainly not egoistic. Yet, in its raw form, those who practice these traditional virtues are not necessarily 'ethical' or 'holy' from the aspect of more advanced virtues. When the concept of the community to which each person attaches himself is limited to a small sect, then the entire society can be thrown into partisan warfare. But when people are directed to consider themselves as part of the bigger community, then the traditional virtue of fortitude will benefit that larger community. When the bigger community happens to be the invisible Kingdom of God, then they will end up becoming the bravest of warriors, who will not mind picking up the cross and following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. In this sense, Koreans have cherished the idea of becoming knights for the Lord,

following the example of St Ignatius of Loyola, a former secular knight who turned into the bravest spiritual warrior for the Kingdom of God.

C. Religious Background

Throughout 5,000 years of history, Korea has been influenced mostly by the shamanistic worship of *Ha-nul* (Heaven). About 2,000 years ago, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism — the three main religions of East Asia — were transmitted to Korea. Due to the Korean characteristics of openness and creativity, Koreans have established their own version of each of these religions. They excelled in each, and were most faithful to and persevering in each one due to their traditional virtue of loyalty, trustworthiness, and, most important of all, fortitude.

2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

...As when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance (cf. Lk 8:15).

A. Encounter with the Good News

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (cf. Mt 5:6).

The Good News to the Koreans was first proclaimed to Confucian scholars. During the late 18th century, a group of prominent Korean scholars came across the Christian books written in Chinese. They were the people who were hungry and thirsty for the Truth that would set them free. When they read the books, their hearts burned within them and their eyes were opened (cf. Lk 24:31-32).

The historical background of the period is important. During the whole period of the Cho-Sun Dynasty (1392-1910), the official religion (or philosophy) was Neo-Confucianism. Confucianism originally aims at cultivating virtues that noble men should practice, in order to establish an ideal kingdom. The Confucianism in 18th century Korea was no longer serving its original purpose. Instead, it was being used as a tool to prolong the political and bureaucratic power of the ruling class. Scholars were debating on 'empty' philosophies with no practical value (cf. Col 2:8). For example, they were debating on the origin of human nature, the principle forces behind the whole universe, etc. The virtues of old Confucianism were replaced by formal rituals.

Thus, a group of prominent scholars professed that they would pursue knowledge and truth that makes 'real' sense. All of these belonged to the highest *Yang-ban* class. But they had been cast out of the main political stream after a long history of continuous political warfare among the leading *Yang-ban* class. Those scholars in search of a new truth were called '*sil-hak-pa*'. *Sil-hak* literally means 'study of what is real'. Henceforth, some proceeded to study Western science, philosophy, and religion. This was how they came across the Catholic literature.

B. Church Founded by the Lay Apostolate

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation... no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:10a,11).

Laymen introduced the Catholic faith into Korea, and they founded the Korean Church. The manner Catholicism entered Korea through laymen is unique in the whole of Church history. But this foundation was not different from the foundation of the House of God laid in Rome, in Peking, or any other place in the whole world. It was Jesus Christ Himself! The Word of God they encountered through the Chinese Catholic literature was the very same Jesus Christ. This we can confirm in the Holy Spirit, looking at the fruits from the spiritual House that was built. As we shall see, the House withstood all sorts of bombardment from destructive forces.

In 1784, Lee Sung Hoon was sent to Peking by the early primitive community consisting of scholarly leaders. There he was baptised and given the Christian name of Peter. Thus he was to serve as one small rock to be used in laying the foundation of the Korean Church. Right after Peter Lee's return from Peking, the other scholars were baptised by him. They were named after John the Baptist, Xavier, Ambrose, and Augustine, and so on. After their baptism, they formed a Christian community and began to practice Christianity according to what they studied from the books: they observed Sundays and Feastdays reading the Gospel of the day. They spent time together in meditating, praying, fasting, and in practising the Christian virtues.

The Korean lay leaders, who had heard the Good News wanted to experience the special Gift of God called the Seven Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Eucharist. So they established a Hierarchy similar to that already established in the West. This they did solely based upon the knowledge they ob-

tained from the books. Consequently, they elected Kwon Ill Shin Francis-Xavier as their Bishop and Lee Sung Hoon Peter and ten other leaders of the Church became priests.

The elected Bishop was in charge of the overall administration of the Church. All the unordained 'priests' proceeded to carry out their ministries. They dispensed the Seven Sacraments and preached the Good News with great success. This they did in good faith, and their work bore substantial fruit during the two years of their unordained Hierarchy. They taught catechism and baptised more than 4,000 converts throughout the country 11 years before the first missionary priest ever set foot in Korea in 1795. They celebrated Mass and dispensed the Sacraments of marriage, reconciliation, and anointing of the sick, following the description in the Rites book.

Meanwhile, doubts began to arise among them about the validity of their Hierarchy system. So they decided to seek consultation from the Bishop in China. In 1789, they sent a letter written by Peter Lee to Peking. In it he explained how he ended up saying Mass on behalf of the congregation, and how they eventually ended up with ten more priests. When they learned, to their dismay, that they had erred by establishing their own Hierarchy, they publicly confessed their errors in front of the whole congregation. The virtues of humility, and obedience they practised are still carried on among all lay leaders in Korea.

C. The Church Assisted by the Missionary Arm of the Mother Church

...And another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it (1 Cor 3:10b).

From that time on, the Korean Church made great efforts through constant prayer to invite ordained priests. When the missionary priests finally came to Korea, they were respected and loved as spiritual Fathers. Many laymen were martyred because they had either invited, hidden or protected foreign missionaries. When Fr James Chou entered Korea as the first missionary priest in 1794, he discovered to his amazement that Christianity was deeply and widely rooted in the good soil of the Korean faithful. By the time Fr Chou was martyred in 1801, the congregation had grown to more than 10,000.

After the martyrdom of Fr Chou, the Church was again left without any priests until Fr Yoo Bang Jae came from China 32 years later. Then three French missionary priests including Bishop Imbert arrived in

1836. During the 32 years the Church was without any priests, the Cho-Sun Church continued to send numerous petitions to Peking, and to Rome. For example, one petition letter to the Pope Leo XII was written by Yoo Jin Gil Augustine in 1823, but was delivered to the Vatican in 1825. In his letter he describes the situation of the Cho-Sun Church in the following manner: "Even after the martyrdom of Fr James Chou, the Cho-Sun Church had experienced continuous persecution. The faithful have decreased to only about the total number of 1,000. These remnants are attempting secretly to spread and witness to the basic teachings of Christianity. Yet, due to the slowness of our understanding, the basic teaching of catechism alone, no matter how truthful it is, does not produce good fruit, and the door to God's grace has been closed to many for a long time.... We petitioned many times to our Bishop in Peking, but he could not send any priest who could revitalise our soul and burn our heart again through the dispensation of the Holy Sacraments".

Korean Catholics identify priests as *sin-bu-nim*, that means the 'spiritual father'. This identification of the priest as their spiritual father is not an honorary title with no serious meaning attached to it. The way in which Koreans relate to their priests, is exactly the same as that they relate to their own father. The only difference is that the spiritual father will nurture them spiritually. Thus they obeyed and honoured the priests with their traditional virtue of filial piety. They practised the fourth commandment: Honour your father and mother. This tradition has contributed vastly to keeping the whole Body of Christ as one.

On the other hand, the responsibilities of the spiritual fathers need to be emphasised a great deal, too. Due to almost blind obedience to, and dependence on, their spiritual father, the level of spirituality of the priests affects greatly the spirituality of the entire Church. Korea has been blessed to have the early missionary Fathers who willingly gave up their lives for the Kingdom of God. When the faithful had witnessed the martyrdom of the first missionary fathers, their love of their spiritual fathers grew even stronger.

Meanwhile, in 1836 three faithful Korean boys were chosen and sent to the Seminary in China in order to fulfil the dream of Korean priests. One of the three was St Andrew Kim Dae Kun who was ordained as the first Korean priest in 1845. After many attempts, he was finally able to re-enter his country as an ordained priest. Within a year of his ministry in Korea, he was captured by the Government and exe-

cuted at the age of 25. His tremendous love for God and his great sufferings for the faithful kindled the love of all Korean Catholics. This year, 1996, is the 150th anniversary of his martyrdom.

Of the three boys, one died in China due to illness. The third one, Fr Choi Yang Up, was finally ordained in 1849, much later than Kim Dae Kun, but he was able to minister in Korea for many years until he passed away through illness. Though he was not a martyr, his life of ministry was the life of carrying the cross of self-sacrifice.

D. Persecutions

Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward (cf. 1 Cor 3:12-14).

The first persecutions took place in 1791, because of the refusal to participate in the traditional ancestral reverence rite which was regarded as idolatry by the Catholic Church. As a matter of fact, many of those young scholars who initially led the Church turned away from Christianity at the news of the persecution. Threat of death must have silenced every passion they had for the external benefit of the new religion. Some had to confront and decide whether to choose parents or an invisible God. When the parents of Lee Sung Hoon, one of the early leaders found out that their son was practising this evil religion that denied the traditional rite of the ancestral reverence, his father attempted to commit suicide out of utter shame, which led the son to stop practising the strange religious sect. But eventually many young Christians, including Lee Sung Hoon, went back to the Church, and were subsequently martyred. There were still many others who stayed within the Church with fortitude and were martyred.

What the persecution did was to burn out any as yet immature zeal for the outward sign of Christianity which the recent converts had. The Lord, though he could bring down fire from heaven and consume his enemies (Lk 9:54), kept silent. And they had to face the invisible God in this utter silence. Had they not heard the voice of the Lord who spoke in the middle of the utter silence they could not have faced death so courageously, when all that was needed in order to remain alive was simply to deny Christianity. The fairly benevolent

Government was ready to forgive all the prisoners' previous sins, only if they denied the false religion.

Some scanty evidence shows that the martyrs' testimonies were almost an exact duplication of the Scriptures, homilies, or the essence of Catholic faith, as found in the Christian books they learned by heart. Does this mean they were simply mouthing what they had memorised earlier? Absolutely not! Examine all the testimonies made by Jesus Christ Himself. Wasn't he repeating the Old Testament verses in most cases? The testimonies of the martyrs truly reveal that the Word and the Truth as taught in the books had become 'one' with those martyrs. They were taught by the Word of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit recalled those teachings at the moment they were needed most. In Truth, the martyrs had been nurtured by the Word of God.

There were four Great Persecutions as well as many smaller ones all over the country. During such a long period of persecution since the birth of the Church, what was the main force behind the remarkable faith of the Koreans? As we will examine in the rest of this paper, the Word of God was indeed playing the most important role. During one hundred years of persecution, tens of thousands of people were martyred. In 1984, on the 200th anniversary of the founding the Church, 103 martyrs were canonised. Among them were six French missionaries. There are still numerous martyrs who have not been canonised yet. They still remain 'silent' and 'nameless' in the manner they carried on their lives in the Lord.

3. GOD SPEAKS IN KOREAN

The Korean language system is totally different from the Chinese one. Moreover Chinese characters are so hard to learn that the illiteracy level was very high even in China. In 1492, Korean characters called Hangul was invented by the young scholars specially commissioned by King Sejong to invent phonetic characters to translate verbal Korean into writing. One of the purposes of inventing such phonetic characters was to make it easy for the average person to read and learn from books. Indeed, Hangul is so easy to learn. It was so easy that learned Koreans looked down on people who read or wrote in Korean. Only women and the lower classes of society used it in those days. But Hangul certainly played a crucial role in spreading the Gospel so rapidly to all classes of people.

Whenever and wherever there were no clergymen available, the early Korean Church could not rely on

just the Liturgy of the Word for their Sunday service. In addition, the Gospel was used in daily meditation and prayer. In the process, the early lay leaders soon realised that access to the Gospel and the spiritual teachings written in Chinese was limited only to the privileged males who belonged to the highest social class. Thus, they saw the need to translate those books in Chinese, so that any Korean could learn from these books.

Consequently, from the very beginning of the faith community, Chinese literature began to be translated into Korean. The translation ministry made up of scholarly lay leaders began in 1787, only three years after the founding of the Church. Within two years, books written in Korean were being distributed to outlying country districts. This fact is corroborated by a Government document of the time in which the Cho-Sun Government officials express great concern at the least educated being attracted to the Western religion through the books written in Korean.

Of the 120 kinds of Chinese Christian book, 87 had been translated up to 1801. Though as yet there was no complete translation of the Bible, the faithful were reading and learning by heart the collection of the Gospels from the liturgical books. The books were being copied by hand. During the persecution, many hid the books like treasures, and would not reveal the location of the books even on pain of death. This is how some of these valuable books were recovered from secret places in some old houses in the country. The official Government Records show that the Christians were reading such books together even in the prison.

Sung-kyoung-jik-hae, after the title of the Chinese version, was one of the most important sources of the Word of God. The original title of this book is believed to be *Sung-kyoung-jik-hae-kwang-ik* after the titles of two Chinese books mentioned above. This book combined most of the contents of the two Chinese books. The book was meant to be the collection of Gospel readings that fall on Sundays and Feastdays, and thus omitted the retreat guide portion of the *Sung-kyoung-kwang-ik*.

Group

Gathered together from various countries in Asia, Europe and the Americas, we were able to bring our experiences of life and mission to the challenge presented to us by speakers from 3 continents:

***- to interpret LIFE in the light of Scripture (Carlos)
- to receive the Word in silence, with our whole selves (Maura)
- and to find a way to both taste and share with others this Word of Life (Nuria)***

Our group was also challenged by the image of the institutional Church — and our congregations — as the “empty tomb”. While such an image evokes sadness, we also see the empty tomb as pointing to the Risen Lord and feel ourselves called to discover the presence of the Lord in the world today by the power of the Spirit.

Choi Chang Hyun, the author, completed the book in 1790. Though he did not belong to the highest class, he was well educated. He was one of the first converts reached by one of the early scholarly church leaders, Lee Byuck. He was a Chinese translator working for the government and served as the head of the laymen's organisation under Fr James Chou until he was martyred in the 1801 Great Persecution. He used to do the homilies as well.

Hwang Sa Young wrote about him in a letter to the Bishop of Peking in the following manner. Hwang's letter consisted of 12,000 Chinese characters on a silk cloth scroll that was only 38 cm by 62 cm (15 in. x 35 in.). Hwang was martyred because of this letter:

Choi Chang Hyun is a man of few words with a pure outlook. If anyone who doubts the faith, or is otherwise depressed, sees his face, that man begins to realise that his own suffering and problem — no matter how big it looked before — is not really something terrible or difficult. And just by listening to a couple of words from him, one's heart feels relieved. His teaching on the essence of the faith is so clear-cut and interesting that, even though he obviously has no plan to make his teaching interesting, and only speaks whatever naturally comes to his mind, the listener could not help enjoying his homilies without ever getting tired. And since his words so deeply penetrated the listener's heart they became very big spiritual benefits to the people...

Sung-kyoung-jik-hae was only one of many books translated or written in Korean by the early Korean Church. The total number of Korean books in existence by category was as many as 83 books in 128 volumes according to the Government list of

censored books in the 1801 Great Persecution, (the number of copies made increases exponentially). Most of the early Christians in Korea had never seen a priest, nor received Holy Communion, yet their faith was deeply rooted by their readings and hearings. Really their "faith [came] from what [was] heard" (cf. Rom 10:17).

4. THE FRUIT OF THE GOOD NEWS

...and they bear fruits with patient endurance
(cf. Lk 8,15).

The early Korean Church was begun by learned scholarly people who were mature enough not to look for a superstitious messiah. They had zeal for social reform, the study of Western religion, as well as a genuine thirst for Truth. The Church then expanded to include converts from many different classes of people. Among these recent converts, there must have been people who were looking for a religion as a means of obtaining what they were seeking: physical healing, material satisfaction, worldly success, a happy life after death, mental comfort, and so on. What is puzzling is why Christianity did not die out despite a series of horrible persecutions. As we shall see throughout the rest of this paper, it was the Lord Himself, who alone can do things that are impossible. The Lord, the sower of the Good News, was the One who helped the Korean Church to bring forth a rich harvest out of the Good News.

A. Love, Joy, and Peace

The fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (cf. Gal 5:22-23).

The Korean Church brought forth such fruits of the Holy Spirit. The most important fruit was Love. Love for God and love for neighbour are the two greatest commandments (cf. Mt 22:37-39). Out of this, joy, peace, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control flowed. Joy and peace of the faithful was one of the most prominent characters of the martyrs. Many non-believers, astonished to witness the serene joy and peace of the prisoners even unto the moment of their martyrdom, were led to inquire about Christianity and to become converted themselves after hearing the Good News.

B. Challenge for Love of neighbour — Practice of Equality

And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself (cf. Mt 22:39).

Christianity provides quite a different view of human dignity because God created every human being, and God loved them all with a love immense enough to sacrifice the life of His only Son for all sinners. Many converts who joined the Church through the evangelisation effort of the early scholarly lay leaders were attracted by the actual practice of equality by even those who belonged to the highest *Yang-Ban* class.

What prompted the early scholarly lay leaders to practice equality from the beginning of the Church? A Korean book entitled *Sin-Myung-Cho-Haeng* (*First Step to God's Commandment*) that was frequently read by the early Korean Christians wrote about fraternal love as follows:

God created man in the likeness of His image, and adopted all as His children. This is so that all people may love each other universally like brothers for the sake of the Lord. Such love should solely be based upon the dignity of man. It is based on creation by God not on the personality, talent, or virtue of a specific person.

They obviously read that God is the creator of all human beings and, as a matter of fact, of all creatures. They also learned that God who is the Father of Jesus Christ is also the Father of all people who believe in Him. They also learned that God sacrificed His own Son to save sinners, not only the righteous! Thus any intelligent man who learns about this basic teaching of the Church can come to the conclusion that, if God created all, then all human beings should be treated as equal. But what is remarkable is that these scholars immediately practiced what they learned from the Gospel. I strongly believe that the Asian tradition of disciplined reading, that demands meeting, eating, and practising the Scriptures with the whole body, played the most important role in this regard. In addition, these scholars were those who became so disenchanted with the empty philosophy of the main stream scholars of the time. They also belonged to the politically oppressed because of their surnames, or their birth places, etc., even though they were from the *Yang-ban* class. Thus, their heart was with the oppressed and the underprivileged. Consequently, the first thing they did was to translate the Chinese books they read into the Korean language in order to spread their knowledge even to the unlearned lower classes and women. The second

thing they did was to practice equality. Korean Catholics traditionally address their fellow faithful as friends (*Gyo-woo*) or brothers or sisters. They opened the meeting places to women, and the low-class people which was strictly prohibited at the time. Some went so far as to release their own slaves. For example, Kim Kun Shin liberated all his slaves in 1790. This was 104 years before the law prohibiting private ownership of slaves was issued in 1894.

In the 18th century, Korea maintained a strict social class system. There was severe discrimination against lower class people. Lower class people were not allowed to be educated, and were precluded from professional occupation that guaranteed power, and money. Women were also heavily discriminated against. The Cho-Sun Government at the time was outraged to learn that in this foreign religious sect, women and men, higher class, and lower class people could remain in the same room. They compared these Christians to animals who do not know any shame.

The wide circulation of Korean Catholic books, coupled with the actual practice of equality by the early Christians, was one of the main factors for the rapid spread of the Good News, despite a series of persecutions. Some upper class converts immediately began to practice equality.

Women also played a very important role from the beginning. Kang Wan Sook Colomba was one of the devoted lay leaders. She was martyred with many other 'anonymous' women.

This practice of equality among the early Korean Catholics needs to be compared with the cause of equality that was being called for in the West at the same time as the Korean persecution. While the West was fighting for *Equality, Liberty, and Fraternity* fuelled by hatred against the governing class, and love for individual rights which caused the French Revolution, the Christians in this small country in the Far East were practising equality fuelled by totally different motives. In Korea it was the virtue of love, that results from obedience to the Lord's commandment, which eventuated in the silent and anonymous revolution of equality.

C. Challenge for Love of God — Carrying the Cross

You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (cf. Mt 22:37).

From its birth, the Cho-Sun Church was challenged to obey this commandment to the ultimate degree of perfection. People had to choose between life and death. Tens of thousands were martyred throughout the series of persecutions. What led them to deny their very lives for the sake of the Name of the Lord? A traditional value system that honoured truthfulness — loyalty to the king, filial piety to parent, trustworthiness between friends, courage as a warrior, and generosity toward all — coupled with the traditional virtue of fortitude, must have played the most important role. But the community that would rather die for the sake of truthfulness than deny it was no longer a small community; they belonged to the greater community of the Lord. The Lord taught them that He is the eternal King to obey, the Father in Heaven was their true father to honour, friends in the Catholic and Universal Church were their friends to keep their trustworthiness, the spiritual Kingdom of God was their country to fight for, and all the sinners were the people they needed to love.

What the series of persecutions did was to force the Korean faithful to choose between the Lord and the secular king, or between the Heavenly Father and human parent. The martyrs were those who chose the Lord instead of their secular king, and the Heavenly Father over their parent (cf. Mt 10:37).

The spirituality of our early martyrs needs further study. This is a difficult task since there are not many written records on them. Whatever record exists is from very indirect sources. For example, criminal investigation records provide some hint, but they were written from the perspective of the government prosecutors. Moreover, there obviously was no reason why the prisoners had to explain what they were experiencing internally and spiritually. One very important source for early Korean Church history is *L'Histoire de l'Eglise de Corée* (History of Korean Catholicism) written in 1874 by French missionary Dallet. His writing was based on the collection of the Korean French missionaries' letters and their reports preserved in their Archives.

But even from a very limited source of information we can clearly see that early Korean Christians were being fed generously by the Word of God. And the risen Lord and the Holy Spirit had opened their eyes in the manner the risen Lord opened the eyes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:31). Let me quote from Dallet's own writings.

Even with such a long period of imprisonment, they lived lives that shook everyone including non-Christians... At night they turned on the lamp, and read the Scripture together, and offered prayers aloud. Nearby residents who could hear them from outside could not help feeling strange. They were wondering from where those prisoners were drawing joy, peace, and harmony.

What scriptures were people reading even while they were imprisoned in 1815? We can guess that it must have been the *Sung-kyung-jik-hae* written by Choi Chang Hyun. Let me finish this section with another quotation from Dallet:

The Lord who is the Way and the Life completely transforms the heart of people who receive the Word. This Word makes the coward the bravest knight of the Lord, and the idol worshippers Saints, providing them with the courage to be able to say boldly "No, I cannot betray the Lord". to the government officials, and even to their secular king. Such a thing has never been heard of in the East. This Word makes those ignorant people to know who the true Lord is, and what man has been called to. These two are most important Truth that people had to know and live in.

V. EPILOGUE

Whoever does not follow me carrying his own cross cannot be my disciple (cf. Lk 14:27).

We Christians have read the above Scriptures for so long. It is surely the most serious challenge given by our Lord that we should bear our crosses and follow after our Lord. This is the one theme that we should always carry with us whenever we go into prayer, retreat, meditation, and contemplation. I myself can confess that no matter how I try to avoid it, I always fear the heavy burden of the cross. No matter, how much I remind myself of the great consoling words of our Lord, that his yoke is light (cf. Mt 11:30), I still feel the heavy burden of the cross, and to make things worse, feel useless and guilty considering my hesitance, impatience, and cowardice. At such moments, I recall our martyrs, especially St Kim Dae Kun Andrew, and obtain consolation, and encouragement.

Any disciple of Jesus is the one who bore his cross and followed after Jesus. Let us for the moment forget all the information we know about what the cross is like, and become like a little child who never

saw a cross. Let us call it the 'thing'. 'Disciple' means pupil. Jesus is the teacher. Then 'bearing the thing and coming after the teacher' should mean going to the class room. The 'thing' then is the textbook that students carry. Thus setting aside for the moment what we know about the 'cross', this 'thing' must refer to the book, that is the Bible itself.

Indeed, the 'cross' was the very Bible that all the martyrs carried with them in their private 'retreat' with our ultimate retreat master, Jesus Christ. He Himself had gone through the retreat of utter silence and selflessness on the Cross. He alone can guide us through it. The cross indeed summarises the whole Bible, the whole prayer, and the whole retreat that all of us has to go through. In the cross is the silence, namelessness, faith, hope, and, most important of all, the Love. In the cross is the seed of Resurrection.

Indeed, there is no difference between the cross and the resurrection. The cross is the resurrection, and resurrection is the cross. All becomes one in the cross. I become Jesus, and Jesus becomes me in the cross. And the Holy Trinity is in the cross. In those moments of agony, and suffering, the Korean martyrs, who were not learned but like little children, learned the whole Truth in the Bible from the crosses they were carrying. In their crosses, they followed not only the example of Jesus Christ but also the scripture reading guidelines by the great Asian sages.

Let me finish this paper by delivering a letter written from a prison in Cho-Sun in 1896, right before the prisoner was martyred. He had written many letters in Latin, and in Chinese. But this letter was the only one written in *Hangul* since it was addressed to his unlearned 'friends' and 'brothers'. This young man was only 26 years old at the time. His occupation was a priest. His name is none other than St Kim Dae Kun Andrew. This letter, I believe, was addressed not only to his Church members, but is being addressed to every Christian. His message is very simple, but very authoritative. His exhortation is very direct, and goes right to the core of the message. It is such a short letter, but it encompasses every Truth revealed in the Scripture. Truly this is an Asian who learned and practised not only the whole teachings of the Holy Church but also all the learning guidelines of the Asian sages:

To my Gyo-woos (friends). My beloved friends, the Lord of Heaven has created the Heaven and Earth in the beginning, and created us human beings in the likeness of his image. Silently meditate where lies His purpose and intention. Everything around us, if

you think hard about them, is empty, and pitiful. If our eyes are not opened, and we cannot know the Lord of Heaven who is our Creator, and the only One that truly exists, while we are in this chaotic and empty world, what is the meaning of our being born and being alive? Solely by the Grace of the Lord, we were born in this world, became baptised, and obtained the adorable new (Christian) name as a member of the Holy Church. But if we do not bring forth the fruits that are proper for the new name, what is the use of having such a name?...

Even our Cho-Sun Church, since the spreading of the Holy Church to this country, has been bruised and battered by the repeated windstorms during the last 50 to 60 years, but our Brothers in the Lord still survive....

Persecution is the trial permitted by our Lord of Heaven. You can surely store up virtues and merits if you win victory over the Evil and the world. Do not be afraid of the calamity, Do not lose bravery, do not retreat in serving the Lord, but only follow in the footsteps of the Saints to the Glory of the Holy Church, and prove that you are the loyal and faithful soldier of the Lord, and the truthful citizen of the Lord in Heaven! ...

My beloved friends, I anticipate meeting you in Heaven, and together derive eternal joy from limitless Blessing. I will receive you there with the warmest embrace.

Acknowledgement

This paper is the joint project of many people surrounding me. It so happened that I was the one who was invited to present the paper at the conference. So I am using my name not to surprise anybody. But truly this particular work could not have been done by me alone. From the start I knew that I am not the expert on Asia, even on Korea. There are many competent scholars who have devoted their whole lives in the area of Asian religion, culture, philosophy and history Asia is so huge and is composed of so many cultures and countries. It has more than 5,000 years of written history. Thus I simply reckoned that no one at the conference will expect to hear any scholarly work from me anyway. They just want to know my personal hands-on experience, so I took the assignment lightly. Then the Servants of the Word around me began to convince me that I should not deal with this matter

so casually. You are representing the CBLM, you are representing the Martyrs, you are representing Korea, you are representing Asia, and so on.

Thus I could no longer be simply myself. I am expected to perform what is beyond my capability! On the other hand, this means that I am going to get all the support and help from my brothers and sisters. To complement my weaknesses, I had to rely on the help of a number of people throughout the whole process. Fr Chong Yang Mo Paul (So Gang University,) Prof. Cho Kwang Ignatius (Koryo University), Lee Young Kyul Luke (Chief editor, LWS), Han Youn Hi Susana (Servant of the Word-housewife) and Chong Uoon Hee Magdalena (Servant of the Word-housewife) have provided me with a veritable mountain of books and reading material, and consulting.

Thus, forgetting the fact that I cannot put the whole group as the co-author, I solicited a great deal of help from others. Still others prayed for me and for this project. I cannot acknowledge all the names of people whose knowledge, and meditation I borrowed from, but there is at least one person I cannot pass by without acknowledging. Augustine Dong Lee has lived in the U.S. during the last twenty years and became one of the first 'Servant of the Word' in 1988, right after finishing our first Genesis programme in the U.S.

Since the paper is going to be presented in English, he agreed to be not only of the translator but also the 'editor' of the pieces of material and books I was going to provide him with. Due to the difficulty of translating Asian 'mystical' tradition like Buddhism, Taoism, etc., into English, I had assigned that part of the project to him. I tried a couple of times, then I concluded that I would rather concentrate on the story of the Korean martyrs. The paper is still being presented in my name, but I cannot fail to acknowledge the authorship of Augustine on the Asian part. I believe the readers will be able to judge the insight and devotion he has brought into the project as a sincere gift to all the readers. It was a physically strenuous work for all of us. But no matter how much energy it drew out of us, we kept on being replenished with energy and wisdom. May the Name of the Holy One be praised.

THE BIBLE IN PASTORAL WORK — Experiences from Korea —

Sr Maura Cho, SOLPH

I. PROLOGUE — It Is the Lord!

He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some". So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea (Jn 21:6-7).

Chan Mi Jesu! which means Praise Jesus! I would like to greet you as the Korean Catholics greet each other "*Chan Mi Jesu!*"

This afternoon, I am going to share with you my experience of the Bible Apostolate for 25 years. Tomorrow I shall speak about the Asian reading of the Bible.

The Bible, that is, the Word of God has become the core element of the Pastoral Work in Korea since the 1970's. I was asked to introduce the Bible in Pastoral work and my experience of this field. Since I have been with the 'Catholic Bible Life Movement' (CBLM) in Korea since its birth, I am familiar with this movement. Thus the CBLM has played only a very small role in the whole pastoral work. It consists mainly of lay people who love the Word of God but also includes priests, and religious. They are called the "Servants of the Word" whose mission is to facilitate Bible groups.

What the CBLM was doing during the past 25 years, and why. What is our goal? Where are we headed to? It is not that hard to explain what we have been doing. But I could not help feeling so helpless when I was trying to answer the remaining questions. This is because I finally realised that most of the things we did were not the result of any careful pastoral planning. During the last 25 years, as I look back, everything took place almost as if it were by accident; albeit a serendipitous one.

However, one mystery still remains. Despite of the fact that our ministry was not a well-organised one, we know of many people whose lives have been changed through their experiences with the CBLM

which has grown very fast, as we will show in this paper. What was it that gave the 'life' to CBLM? The answer was: "It is the Lord!" (Jn 21:7).

There were also many nights with 'no fish' at all. Invariably these were the nights when we forgot that we were simple servants. These were the moments of temptation when the father of the lies would beguile us, saying, "Look what you have accomplished".

II. CATHOLIC BIBLE LIFE MOVEMENT (1972 — present)

1. BIRTH OF THE CBLM AND THE SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP (SOLPH)

Since its birth, the CBLM has been sponsored by the Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help which was founded by Fr John Morris, M.M., at Pyoung Yang, North Korea in 1932. As the first native Religious Order in Korea, evangelisation of the country has been its mission. There are 405 Professed Sisters and 83 Novices at present.

In the early spring of 1971, I wrote a simple reading guide on Genesis that was centred on the theme, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gn 1:31). This one verse, "God saw that it was very good", had truly changed my life during the winter of the previous year, when I was deeply depressed due to my lung disease. When I came across this verse, the Word of God simply penetrated into my whole being, and delivered me from my depression. One simple verse that I probably had passed by many times in the past but without recognising the living Word, who said, "Indeed, it was very good".

When God completed each creation, he simply said that it was good (cf. Gn 1). And "God saw everything that he had made" including the human beings, He saw "it was very good!" This not only liberated me from self-pity, anger, inferiority complex, and sense of guilt, but it also gave me freedom and power to "forgive" others (cf. Jn 20:23). If God created everyone, and "saw that it was very good". This single Scripture verse had changed not only my

life but also the life of many others. Many participants of our CBLM met and experienced the same powerful Lord who sees everything is good, and who forgives everyone.

The Novices of our Congregation were the first group to go through the Genesis programme. I formed small groups for Bible reading and sharing among the Novices and trained them. The Novices then became the first ‘Servants of the Word’, whose main function is to facilitate small group Bible sharing. The Genesis programme went extremely well touching the hearts of the young Novices, as well as our professed Sisters.

‘Joy’ has always been the immediate fruit of our programmes. What took place in our Congregation was repeated again and again as we reached out to young college students, and later to more mature men and women.

2. BACKGROUND BEHIND THE CBLM

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field (cf. Mt 13:44).

The Korean Church was founded on the Bible ministry. In the absence of the clergymen, the Church could not but rely solely on the Gospel reading and meditation as the source of spiritual grace. Early Church lay leaders saw the importance of the Word of God, and diligently translated Chinese Catholic books into Korean. Nevertheless, after 100 years of severe persecution, most of the descendants of the early Christians had moved to the remotest countryside, or into the mountains. The great tradition of the Bible reading in Korea gradually disappeared.

In the meantime, missionaries who came to Korea after 1900, once freedom of religion was allowed, led the Church mainly relying on the Sacraments. De-emphasis of the Bible does not seem to be a phenomenon that was unique in Korea, either. At the time, the Catholic Church was shying away in general from the ministry of the Word. The vernacular Bible was not in existence in most countries.

As a result, the Korean Catholic Church with such a valuable tradition of Bible ministry seemed to have run out of the wine that rewards Christian life with joy, the kind of joy that makes one sell everything one owns to buy the very source of joy

(cf. Mt 13:44). In the absence of joy, many of the guests in the Eucharist Celebration could not be truly grateful (*eucharistos* in Greek).

Our Lady of Perpetual Help must have noticed the wine was running out, a long time before any of us noticed. She went to her Son, and told him, “They have no wine” (Jn 2:3). Then mother of our Lord told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you to do” (Jn 2:5). Then our Lord Jesus ordered the servants to “Fill the jars with water!” (Jn 2:7). The Second Vatican Council was the response of Mother Church, and the Servant of the Servants of the Lord. The Fathers of the Council promulgated the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), and on Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) among other things.

It was a response to the thirst for the Word of God. And, most important of all, our laity with such a rich tradition of martyrdom also responded. Everyone began to fill the jars with water, not knowing what would come out of it. The Church immediately embarked on the vernacular translation of the liturgy rites, and of the Holy Bible. Both Catholic and Protestant scholars participated in this translation project.

From the inception of the CBLM, all participants diligently studied the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Dei Verbum* with great fervour. We were much moved when we met the visible sign of the Apostolic Tradition in the document. It was filled with all the wisdom of our ancestors. Most important of all, we could sense the immense Love for the flock by the Holy Church, and our Lord Jesus Christ. When we drew water out of the jars, even before we had faithfully filled all the six jars, we could taste the sweetness of the wine. We were overwhelmed with joy at the healing power of the Word.

Individual programmes of studying, meditating, and living that were developed by the CBLM, as we will show in the following sections, were never the result of careful planning. We moved almost spontaneously as we were prompted. As I look back, I can not but feel thankful to our Lord Jesus, our Blessed Mother, and St Joseph that they caught us in time before we stumbled and nourished us. Otherwise, unlearned little children like us could have ended up like runaway teenagers, or like those likened to rocky ground “who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, but having no root in himself, endures for a while, and when tribulation or

persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away” (Mt 13:20-21).

3. GOALS OF CBLM

A. On-going Bible education of Catholics

So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ (cf. Rom 10:17).

At the time the CBLM was being formed, there were virtually no organised programmes that taught the Scriptures. The CBLM read the signs of the times (cf. Mt 16:13), and began to preach the life-giving Word through the Bible to the existing Catholics in order to strengthen their faith.

B. Integration with the Holy Liturgy

But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with the proper disposition, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should co-operate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain (cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium, n. 11).

The Holy Liturgy can become a meaningless ritual if the faithful do not come to it with a proper disposition. The CBLM clearly saw that study of the Word prepares the hearts of those who participate in the Liturgy, and that it became the deposit of God’s mystery stored up for us. Conversely, Liturgy was providing the Spirit that opens the heart of the faithful, so that they can understand the meaning of the Scriptures more clearly. Most important of all, the Liturgy which sometimes looked like a mundane repetition of rituals became a joyful and healing experience, when the faithful became enriched with the Word.

C. Campus Apostolate

The first target lay group aimed at by the CBLM was *élite* college students. This was because, in the beginning, the Bible ministry required people with significant learning ability. Our goal was to train those youths to become “Servants of the Word” and, through them, to minister to other groups of people. I believe that this tradition of forming the core group out of youths is owed to our early Korean Church ancestors. At the time of the establishment of the Korean Church, young scholars in their late twenties and early thirties were the initial core group.

The formation of the first CBLM core group may have indeed been the sign from Our Lord approving our untraditional style of starting with youth. Since its inauguration, the CBLM has been blessed by a lot of great youngsters who brought their enthusiasm and ability to learn with enormous speed, and became the valuable source of input in fine-tuning our ministry.

D. Proclamation of the Word of God to Catholics outside Campus

Backed up by the initial core groups of facilitators, our next goal was to reach out to the whole spectrum of adult Catholics. Mothers, fathers, factory workers, cab drivers, small-scale fish market retailers, prisoners, and isolated poor have been ministered. New programmes had to be developed to minister to different classes of people with different needs and backgrounds. Some did not have time to be engaged in in-depth study. Some prisoners were not allowed to have pencils at all. Some were so occupied with making a bare living that even study time was a luxury.

E. Outreach to Non-Catholics

Some of our programmes like ‘Bible in 40 weeks’ have been used as textbooks for some Protestant brothers as well. Our monthly Scripture magazine “Living with Scriptures” has a wide variety of readers, and writers. Protestant ministers write regularly. Among the readers are included Buddhists, and Protestants.

F. World Mission

Our Lord clearly instructed his disciples in the duty of world mission, by saying “Go out and spread the Gospel to the end of the earth” (cf. Mk 16:15). We believe that the same world mission that the Lord entrusted to the poor fishermen was also entrusted to us. The CBLM among Koreans has already been established in countries like the U.S., Germany, and Spain. They minister mainly to local Korean immigrants. But translation work has been initiated by soliciting the help of bilingual Servants of the Lord.

Our immediate goal is humble. In Korea, there are already many foreign labourers from the Third World countries. We also have many foreign missionaries. The formation of core groups out of these *élite* Religious is the first step. In the U.S. there are many Korean-American *élite* college students. The formation of core groups out of these who speak

fluent English will help us greatly to reach out to foreign brothers and sisters. First, we need to translate and/or rewrite the Korean version of the programmes into foreign languages. There is still a long way to go, but “for humans it is impossible, but not for God; all things are possible with God” (Mk 10:27). This paper by itself is the example.

4. THE SERVANTS OF THE WORD FOR CBLM

“Come and see a man who told me everything I did! Could he not be the Christ?” (Jn 4:29).

By experience, we placed much importance on the formation of the first core group of the Servants of the Word. From the beginning up to now, the training of the Servants of the Word is the most important task of the CBLM.

I was ministering to small groups of less than twenty from each city. But the treasures ‘stored’ in heaven were returned gradually. Now we have a Bible Centre in Los Angeles with two full-time Sisters at the centre, and three more serving at the local parishes. About 330 Servants of the Word have served the small groups in the U.S. for the last eight years. About 2,500 have participated in our small group Bible reading programme since 1988.

The Servants of the Word, including the lay people and the Religious, who have participated in our programmes and committed themselves to spreading the Word of God have been the main driving force for the CBLM. Many took up this role, that demands a great amount of self-sacrifice, because they were touched in one way or another by the Word. The Word came to them with enormous healing power and they experienced joy and excitement that they had never experienced before.

Jesus, wearied as he was with his torturous journey, asked a Samaritan woman who came to draw water for a drink (cf. Jn 4:6-7). The woman did not recognise who he was. But she could not help speaking out to this Jewish stranger her deeply rooted anger at the racial and sexual discrimination she had endured. “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jn 4:9) When she finally perceived vaguely that this man must be the Messiah, or at least a prophet (cf. Jn 4:19, 25-26), she immediately went back to her people to tell them the good news. Thus many Samaritans, who initially believed in Jesus because of the testimony of the woman — “He told me all that I ever did” (cf. Jn 4:39), — came and listened directly to Him. But look

what the townspeople said to the woman later: “It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world” (Jn 4:42).

Group

During this SEDOS Seminar on “Bible and Mission” we have heard the word of the Living God proclaimed to us in a powerful way by our speakers. We have listened to this word in the sure silence of our hearts, broken and tasted it in our small group, and have experienced our hearts burning within us. We long for Our God and for the coming of God’s Reign.

We believe that Evangelisation is primarily through witnessing with our whole life. Jesus is the message and we live this message as we interpret it in our faith communities for each other, and for the people we live with. We allow the word of Jesus to live in us and to shape us.

Our whole world is “God’s Context”. We recognise today movements in our world that seek to embrace all peoples, all cultures in their diversity as ONE. This is the Unity Jesus prayed for: that all may be one. We understand incarnation as God’s Spirit bursting into diversity in Our World. We see in this, that God’s Reign is much wider than “traditional Church” but which includes it.

We image ourselves as a new community of brothers and sisters within the family of God: compassionate, caring, respectful, and active in promoting love for God and for each other. We rejoice in, and affirm our diversity, and we embrace each other in the unity we experience in God. We look forward to the contribution of all peoples, all nations, all cultures, to open us up to new images and understandings of our Great God. God, who is our Mother and Father, the ground of our being, the source of all creation.

Often, many of the Servants of the Word, including myself, have gone through severe anguish for not being appreciated for what we have done. Some participants express their gratitude for our efforts to guide them to the Word. But some people who got to know the Lord through our testimonies, and through our zeal to run to tell them the exciting news, do not

seem to thank us at all. They would simply say that, “It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves” (Jn 4:42).

As we look back, the two most important elements to our success seem to hinge upon the following: First, the gift of joy coming from the Lord. Second, and the most important of all, is humility. People like myself went through many dark periods of feeling ignored, looked down upon, and not being appreciated. Thus, all of us who are called to be the Servants of the Word invariably go through the three great mysteries of the Rosary: Joy first, then Sorrow and finally, the Glory.

Our Lord encompasses everything. Aided by His grace, and the tender loving care of our Blessed Lady, the Servants of the Word of the CBLM were able to accomplish what they never could have done alone. Below I will introduce the spiritual goals of the CBLM.

5. SPIRITUAL GOALS OF THE CBLM

The Spirituality as well as the key elements of the CBLM are expressed in our ‘fish’ logo. This symbol incorporates seven Greek consonants. These seven elements are: (1) In the Lord Jesus Christ, (2) through the Holy Spirit, (3) in the Word of God, (4) we believe, (5) we pray, (6) we practice, (7) and we proclaim the Good News.

The four steps of “to believe in, pray, practice, and proclaim” the Word of the Lord, has been inherited from our early Korean faith ancestors. In the great Asian Tradition, the scriptures (*Kyungs* in Korean) were never read as the object of knowledge. Rather read by the whole body, not just the brain, it was supposed to be enlightened by the Light of wisdom. Thus one believes in, prays, practices, and proclaims the Word of God, led by the Light that not only teaches, but also guides our manner of life. The CBLM has inherited this mode of reading the Bible since its inception.

A. To believe in the Word of God

And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.... And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience (cf. Lk 8:13, 15).

Scripture is filled with many parables regarding ‘seeds’. ‘Seed’ is a mysterious thing. It looks as if dead. Nothing moves. Some seed is rotten, and completely dead. But other seed, even though appearing to be lifeless during the Winter period is mysteriously alive. Such live seed can prove its life only in the Spring and only when it meets the right farmer, and the right soil. Farmers have faith in the seed’s life through years of experience. They can even tell good seed from bad.

Our Lord also taught us a lesson in faith from the parable of the mustard seed in the following manner: “Because you have little faith. For truly, I say to you, if only you had faith the size of a grain of mustard seed, you could tell that mountain to move from here to there, and the mountain would obey. Nothing would be impossible to you” (Mt 17:20). Asian farmers will understand this parable in the following manner: the mustard seed believes that s/he h(er)imself will become the big tree. The seed may not be intelligent enough to understand the mystery fully. But the seed believes, because it believes in the farmer. Had the experienced farmer not known definitely that it would become a big tree, why would s/he have bothered to sow the seed in the beginning?

The Servants of the Word believe in the Word that they have received, and they are also going to distribute it to others. They are confident that the seed of the Word will become a very big tree, and produce lots of fruit.

B. To pray ceaselessly

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (cf. 1 Thes 5:16-18).

Without constant praying, the seed of the Word that people receive with joy will not survive the time of temptation and trial (cf. Lk 8:13).

The early Korean Church ancestors kept the seed of the Word in the rich soil of faith nourished by constant prayer and had fortitude even during the most heinous persecutions. Koreans love the simple prayer of the Rosary. It is one of the spiritual inheritances which we received from our simple ancestors. Through the Rosary, they understood that the joyful mystery is followed by the sorrowful mystery.

The Rosary is one of the most powerful prayers for Koreans especially during the time of trial. In anticipation of the glorious mystery that comes only after the sorrowful mystery, they could maintain peace even at the most sorrowful moments. Prayer

strengthens faith and faith ushers in patience, and fortitude.

C. To practice the Word of God

“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, my sister, and my mother” (Mt 12:50).

The most valuable Bible reading tradition of the early Korean Church was that they did not read the Bible with their natural intellect only. Whatever they read, they knew they had to practice or it was not worth learning. When they learned that God created every human being, and saw that it was very good, they knew that they have to practice ‘equality’ to everyone. And many disposed of their personal property, and lived a communal life. They knew by heart that whoever does not do what the Father wants is no son of the father.

D. To proclaim the Word of God

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt 5:14-16).

The Lord teaches us where to cast the net. For example, at the beginning of the Korean Church, people had an ardent desire for ‘equal’ treatment. Lower class people, women, and the politically oppressed *Yangban* class, all suffered greatly from the group dictatorship by the fortunate few. Thus, when the early Korean Catholics began to practice ‘social equality’ they could haul in lots of fish.

At the beginning of the CBLM, Korean Catholics were athirst for God’s Word. Young students saw the need for social justice in the middle of the military dictatorship. The Church stood by them. The Bible taught them that true freedom in the Lord brought new joy, and hope they could never experience before. Now times have changed. Equality or justice no longer draws the attention of people. Egoism, materialism, and a false sense of peace and security prevails. Young college students seem to be losing their spirit. Everyone wants to outdo the others, the competition becomes harder and harder.

Some college students, who have an inner desire to be spiritually emancipated for ‘God’, do not come to the Church since it does not seem to offer them

any spiritual freedom. They think that the Church has gone back to moral conservatism. Instead, they ‘buy’ spiritual ecstasy through Transcendental Meditation, Zen meditation or any other meditation techniques that are sold commercially. It truly is the time for the Church to read the signs of the time, and come out to meet such people’s true needs.

The Word of God can be proclaimed with success only when the Church approaches the multitude by trying to understand them, heal them, and satisfy their spiritual need.

III. CBLM PROGRAMMES

1. BIBLE STUDY AND SHARING PROGRAMME — SMALL GROUP ENVIRONMENT

Goal: This was the first programme the CBLM launched. The first of its series was, “And God saw that it was very good!” taken from Genesis. At present there are programmes for the Exodus, the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel by John, and the Acts of the Apostles, besides the Genesis programme. The key to the success of these programmes is the communal experience of the joy from meditating on the Bible. The programme is not to teach intellectual knowledge. Nor is it to cater to natural feelings. Spiritual joy from meeting the Lord in the heart is the fruit that is sought after. Recovery of sight to the spiritually blind can produce utter joy, and a spontaneous sense of gratitude.

Each series has its own Bible reading guide booklet, and reference book. Both the reading guide booklet and the reference book is designed for the average reader. The guide is composed of study questions, topics for meditation on the given Scripture passages, short remarks on the relationship of the scripture passages with the Liturgy, and a suggested prayer intention for the community. The reference book provides a more detailed exposition of the Scriptures. Some scholarly work is introduced for reference purposes.

The Small Group Sharing Method: This programme is designed for a small group of five or six people, ten at most. They meet weekly for two hours with a trained facilitator whom we call a “Servant of the Word”. The facilitator has an important role in the group and supports the group with his/her example and insight into the questions and meditation topics in the booklet. The group members should commit themselves to attend each weekly meeting. They also are advised in advance that at least four

hours of preparation will be needed before the weekly meeting. More than three absences means they get eliminated. Each is supposed to bring his or her notebook with written answers to the study and meditation questions. This rule is strictly observed.

The written homework commitment is a very difficult challenge. There is reason for insisting on written 'homework'. Writing helps people to organise their meditation more thoroughly rather than speaking spontaneously at the sharing session. These notes later become an invaluable tool when they, in turn, serve as the Servant of the Word.

The key purpose of this programme is to obtain committed Servants of the Word. Each participant is strongly encouraged to accept the challenge to become a facilitator. One learns more as a facilitator. A sense of responsibility, and a readiness to help others creates an environment in which one cares for others more than oneself. In the story of the miracle at Cana, the water turned into wine only after the servants actually drew water and took it to the steward (cf. Jn 2:9).

Before one is designated as the facilitator, he should participate in the weekend Bible seminar that takes place at the end of each series. The seminar is for a larger group of 40 to 50 that came from five or six different groups. In these intensive Bible seminars, besides lectures, each small group jointly meditates on the Scriptures, and they express their meditation in an art form, by plays, songs, etc. before all the participants. The celebration of Mass is the key to the programme. At the end of Mass, the new candidates for the Servants of the Word are called, and blessed by the priest.

Fruits: At present in Seoul Archdiocese alone, there are about 500 youth Servants of the Word consisting mostly of college students. They serve about 550 groups in twenty universities. Among the adults, there are about 900 active Servants of the Word from 95 Parishes in Seoul. The ideal number of members for each group is over four and less than eight. However, due to the small number of Servants of the Word, most groups have more than 10 members. About 12,000 faithful participate in this small group Bible study programme each year in Seoul alone. In Los Angeles, there have been about 300 lay Servants of the Word over the years since the CBLM was established in 1988, and through them a total of about 2,500 have participated in this small group Bible sharing programme.

2. BIBLE IN 40 WEEKS

Goals: Even though the small Bible group approach was very successful, it could not serve the needs of the multitude of the faithful who were thirsty for the Word of God. In 1980, Fr Arnold Jurgens who was the General Secretary of CBF visited the CBLM. He introduced us to the "Bible in 100 weeks", which was written by a French missionary for use in Japan. Using that reading guide as the main reference book, the "Bible in 40 weeks" was written. It is composed of five volumes: Three for the Old Testament and two for the New Testament. It is designed to cater to a large group in a class-room environment. It provides reading guidelines and schedules in order to enable the participants to read both the Old and the New Testament within 40 weeks.

The Large Group Method: The text book provides the daily reading schedule, gives a simple commentary and highlights the important passages. The size of the group can be very large. In Seoul Archdiocese, some groups have as many as 1,200 participants. Each week's meeting starts with a well-organised lecture presented by the priest or a religious, who has gone through five series of seminars for a two-year period, specifically designed for the clergy and the religious. The lecture is followed by well-organised small group sharing with the Servants of the Word serving as facilitators. Even though the 40-weeks commitment is such a difficult one, about 80 to 90 per cent of the initial participants finish the year-long programme.

Fruits: Throughout Korea, the total number of priests who went through the two-year seminar during 1981 to 1987 was 200 clergy. The total number of the Religious that went through the leadership seminars was 1,000. Tens of thousands of the faithful have gone through this programme at the parish level led by these priests and religious. Lately the numbers have been decreasing for two reasons: first, a lot of Catholics have already participated in this programme during the last ten years; secondly, these days there are many alternative Bible reading guide programmes, that certainly is a good thing for the entire Church. Fr Lee Sok Jee from Incheon has been using this programme at the parish level during the last ten years. His parishioners also meet weekly in order to read in advance and share the meditation of the two Readings and the Gospel for the following Sunday Mass.

3. EMMAUS DIALOGUE

Goals: This programme was developed in 1993.

The Emmaus programme was developed for a wider spectrum of people with diverse backgrounds. It utilises sharing and prayer between two Emmaus partners. Each partner meditates upon the Scripture of the day, and shares it with his partner. The way the two communicate with each other in a truly understanding and caring way is the key to the fruitful result of the programme. There are certain rules of communication within the programme that are designed to prevent the usual forming of opinion by one regarding his partner's sharing. Each partner is asked to open his heart, and ears simply to listen, and to appreciate the way the Word touches the other partner. Meditative breathing, meditative pictures, excerpts from the writings, and homilies within the Apostolic Tradition and ecclesial traditions are used to help the participant to widen the horizon of his spiritual experience. Then the session ends in the larger group setting ushered in by praise and thanksgiving.

Method: The model for the programme was derived from the Pilgrimage programme that was widely used during the early period of the CBLM. At the time, our Servants of the Word, consisting mostly of college youths, had bi-annual day pilgrimages to the nearby Holy Places of Martyrs. To prepare for the pilgrimage, some selected Scripture passages were handed out one or two weeks before the pilgrimage. Each participant was supposed to read and meditate upon these.

The pairs then walked side by side to the Holy Place, while sharing the meditation and life experiences of each other. This activity usually took more than four hours. Then at the site of the Holy Place, the whole group met again, and celebrated Mass together. There, each person shared the meditation and life experiences of his partner with the whole group.

The Emmaus Dialogue does not require serious commitment by the participants. But the programme produces no less effect than the previous two. Scriptural dialogue between the two with one heart provided the uplifting of the spirit. The programme has been used for various kinds of groups: Sunday school teachers, the Marriage Encounter couples, Priests, and Religious. It was most welcomed to the Christian prisoners, where prisoners were not allowed to write anything under regulations. It is used for busy labourers, or people in impoverished areas, who do not have enough time to join in other Bible programmes.

Group

This Seminar generated many questions for us:

How can we grow towards realising the biblical dream of service in the complex realities of today? As "Servants of the Word" what is the GOOD NEWS we share in the midst of violence, oppression and apathy?

We experience the paradox of preaching the Good News. Some of us are pained and frustrated in our relations with the official Church. As we journey with those who are poor, sick, suffering and excluded in society, faith and hope is given to us from the people themselves. God is creating something new among us — life comes from pain, struggle, suffering and death. "It is Christ crucified" that we preach — a sign of hope and contradiction.

We experience God at work in all cultures and situations. We touch the face of God in the goodness and richness of life values that express the experience of God in other faith traditions and scriptures. Why is it that to become a Christian, especially a Catholic, people are uprooted from their own culture? Is it possible to become a Christian, or a religious, without becoming Western? We need to rediscover our identity as Indians and Africans and then discover what it means to be a Christian or a religious.

Realising that inculturation is a slow and gradual process, we need to return continually to reading the Word, to be touched and fired by it, to sharing it in the context of community — and to exploring what the Good News means for our lives as religious and for our ministries.

Fruits: Immediately after this study guide was published, it was introduced to about 800 Sisters and 30 Priests in Korea. It was also introduced to about 1,000 Servants of the Word over the last two years. In 1995, I was invited by the Chancellor of the Jun-Joo Diocese to launch the Emmaus programme in the Diocese. To prepare for the programme, I travelled to Jun-Joo every week for three months to train seven priests to become the core Servants of the Word. The seven then helped to train twenty priests in the following one month who were to serve as the

Emmaus Dialogue facilitators. Eventually a full-scale Emmaus Dialogue programme was held for 80 priests at a four-day residential seminar at the pilgrimage site in memory of St Kim Dae Kun Andrew. From November 1995 to February 1996, I trained about 700 young people (most of them are University students and Sunday-school teachers) as facilitators of this new programme.

4. LIVING WITH THE SCRIPTURES (LWS) — MAGAZINE MINISTRY

LWS is a Bible periodical, aimed at the Evangelisation of our nation, which proclaims the Good News through the medium of a monthly magazine. The LWS covers various topics on the Word of God. At the beginning of the CBLM, LWS was a news bulletin for the Servants of the Lord for the purpose of circulating Bible meditations and news about the participants. The editorial work was being done by volunteer students together with our Sisters. By coincidence, the old LWS was reborn as a full magazine at its 103rd issue, in the year 1984, when the 103 Korean martyrs were canonised. At present it has a circulation of 8,000 copies monthly.

The Chief Editors, Lee Young Kyul Luke and Lee Uoo Sik Peter, and the illustrator, Shin Myung Woo Joseph, have been our core youth Servants of the Word for 10 - 20 years. Their love for the Word of God has turned these *élite* into low-salaried full-time workers who labour diligently for the cause of evangelisation. One of the main purposes of this magazine has been to acquaint the Servants of the Word with the written tradition that has been inherited from our ancestors in the faith. One of the other key purposes of LWS is to provide assistance in the Ecumenical work. The magazine is read by many Protestants, as well as Buddhists.

5. CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink" (cf. Jn 4:7).

Despite all the blessings that have been poured on our Bible ministry through the CBLM, we often seem to hear our Lord crying "Give me a drink". The signs of the times make us gloomy. Materialism seems to have eaten away the souls of many. A competitive spirit of survival prevails everywhere. Economic power is being concentrated more and more into the hands of a few. We can no longer identify the faces of these few rich. Wealth and income are owned by nameless big corporations. Job opportunities are scarce for young college graduates,

let alone high school or elementary school leavers. Mass communication and computer technology have made the whole world into one. Everyone shares the pop culture made in the advanced countries like the U.S.

In the midst of it all, the spirit of the youth is being hurt. In Korea, the participation of youth in our CBLM is growing weaker and weaker. This does not mean that they are hopeless. They still are the best hope we have. They can still change any time, if they come to know the truth. But it is more challenging to us. We have to reach out more often, and support them with a compassionate heart.

In the meantime, those who have an instinctive thirst for the Lord do not seem to be satisfied with the wine provided by the Church. They go out and buy cheap wine from the *gurus*, Yogis, Zen masters, New Age masters, Pentecostal healers, drugs, sex, etc., and get drunk. St Augustine meditated on the story of the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:7-14) in the following manner:

Our Lord said to her: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you: 'Give me a drink', you rather would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water." [He said this] to show her that he had not asked for the kind of water that she herself had understood, but that he himself was thirsty for her trust and was desirous of giving the Holy Spirit to her for her own thirst, for we correctly understand this living water to be the gift of God, as the Lord himself says: "If you knew the gift of God".

Every time people look for cheap wine, it is the sign that they need genuine *wine*. Signs of the times, like the "New Age Movement", tell us that people need more and more the Holy Spirit that our Lord is so "thirsty" to give. Our challenge is to go out like our Lord, and to "create" an urge for the Holy Spirit in them. But first we need to go to their well. This means with a 'compassionate heart'. Our Lord did not say that it is 'their problem' that they do not seek his gift. He instead went to their well, and said, "I have a problem, children. I am so thirsty. Can you give me water?"

6. THE CBLM's FUTURE PLANS

A. Emmaus Dialogue as a tool for reaching out

One of the programmes that we developed, in answer to the Lord's cry, was the "Emmaus Dialogue".

The programme does not even ask people to bring a Bible, and read it. Everyone seems to be so busy earning a living, or studying for examinations or interviews. Thus it is time for us to go where people live, and to proclaim the Good News while making casual conversation. Thus our Servants of the Word go to prisons, factories, fish markets, and share the Word with those who are thirsty but cannot come to the Church gathering. The Emmaus Dialogue hinges upon 'understanding' the heart of the two who 'agree' like two musical instruments (cf. Mt 18:19). To 'agree' is *'sumphoneo'* in Greek, sharing the same root as 'symphony'. This programme is still in its early stages. We need to fine-tune our programme further, and to learn by experience.

B. Ways for deep contemplation of the living Word of the Lord

Catholics have a great number of Saints who look down from above, and have been blessed with a vision of God, and His Kingdom. The Spiritual Exercise of Ignatius of Loyola is one such treasure. But his exercises do not suit everyone. Some people are gifted with the faculty of imagination, others with the faculty of dreaming. But there are many who do not know how to 'imagine'.

We seek in various ways to develop a 'spiritual exercise' that is simple enough, and suits our culture, our talent. We try to learn from our past experiences, and to discern what was the most effective group prayer that helps us to meet the Lord during Scripture meditation. Let me take one example that seemed to have good results.

First we read the short Scripture verses, and sit before the Blessed Sacrament in a traditional Oriental prayer position. We gaze at the Holy Sacrament which helps us to calm down our thoughts, and heart. Scripture meditation in deep silence seems to have given us awakening experiences of the living Word. We are still at the stage of developing simple but effective means of contemplating the Word of God in utter silence as in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Asians live in the Oriental tradition. The manner Asians contemplate the mystery of the Bible is done in the traditional Asian way. But, once this Document has been published, any 'spiritual exercise' that looks 'Oriental' begins to be perceived as potentially dangerous. There is a rich Oriental tradition, not just technique, that one can tap into, in order to meet our Lord in the middle of utter silence.

7. A SILENT MOVEMENT AMONG THE LAITY IN KOREA

"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened" (Mt 13:33).

Group Transforming Word

***echoing down the endless ages
stammering in Babel-ed tongues
A VOICE in loving stillness nestling
murmurs in the turning pages
whispers from between the lines
reading hearts of seekers gathered.***

***calming clamour of power and hurry
breaking bindings of ego and tribe
A MESSAGE birthed from humble text
prophet seer, mystic subversive
welcomes us within the circle
embraces, pardons, serves, loves.***

***ears so eager for easy answers
harbouring hopes for quick escape
the WORD impassioned utters only ques-
tions
wondering, leading, pushing, prodding
sending out and sending again***

setting hearts on fire.

LISTEN.

The Catholic Bible Life Movement (CBLM) is not a well-structured 'organisation'. It is called a 'movement', because it is a silent movement that works invisibly within the Hierarchical Church. This appendix shows the interaction between the political and social circumstances that greatly affected the manner Bible ministry took its specific form in the course of history. The Bible Apostolate put on different clothes in the course of history, depending upon these circumstances. The uniqueness of the CBLM is its emphasis on the lay Apostolate. What differentiated the movement from the ordinary Protestant Bible Study activities with a much longer history than Catholics was the following:

1. The CBLM relies on the service of the Servants of the Word, who take on the role of facilitators, not lecturers.
2. The CBLM works under the umbrella of each parish, and diocese. Every participant goes back

to his/her local parish, work place, and family, and serves the Word in an inconspicuous manner.

3. The CBLM honours and experiences the Tradition, the Liturgy, as well as the Bible. The three are never separable from one another.
4. The spiritual goal of the CBLM is to believe, pray, practice, and to proclaim in the Word, rather than to study academically and to interpret the Bible.

There are many invisible fruits from this movement. First, CBLM has become part of the parish and diocesan Bible ministry according to its original goal and nature. For example, any of the youths who participated in the early CBLM are now active middle-aged members of the local parishes. Second, the CBLM has awakened a number of youths to their Vocation, and now it is estimated that more than 50 work as clergy, or religious. Third, the CBLM has increased sensitivity to the need for Bible ministry by Dioceses, local parishes, and other Religious Orders.

8. THE BIBLE MINISTRY IN THE MODERN KOREAN CHURCH

A. Establishment of Church and Persecution (1784-1883)

The role of the lay Apostolate founded upon the Word of God was discussed in detail in the first paper submitted to the SEDOS, entitled: "Reading the Bible in an Asian Context".

B. Freedom of Religion in Korea (1884-1965: before Vatican II):

In 1884, Christianity was finally permitted in Korea. The Protestant missionaries started to arrive with the Korean Bible as their tool. In 1884, Lee Su Chong, a Cho-Sun Government official, completed a translation of the New Testament. When the first Protestant missionaries came, they brought with them the New Testament in Korean. Pastor Ross completed the Korean New Testament and published it in 1887 in Manchuria, a neighbouring country, north of Korea. Catholics, on the other hand, has lost touch with their great tradition of the Bible ministry by the laity. Descendants of earlier Catholics who survived the repeated persecutions were so impoverished that most of them had become illiterate. There was no fully translated Korean Bible available.

C. The Re-establishment of the Bible Ministry (1966 - 1983)

The Second Vatican Council opened a new era for all Catholics, including Korean Catholics. God started to speak Korean again in the Bible, as well as in the Liturgy. A Complete Korean New Testament was published in 1969, and a combined New Testament and Old Testament was published in 1977. The CBLM came into being at the right time and initiated a silent, and invisible revolution by resurrecting our faith ancestors' tradition of the lay Apostolate founded upon the rock of the Bible ministry. The history of the CBLM is too short to attach any serious historical meaning to it at this moment. Its historical significance will also depend upon how the CBLM meets the challenges lying ahead, and whether it keeps on growing not in quantity alone, but in spirituality. There have been many powerful 'movements' throughout Church history. But not many have survived for a long time.

This does not mean that the Bible ministry did not exist at all. The faithful heard the Bible through the Liturgy of the Word, homilies, and catechism classes. The Catholic emphasis on Liturgy differentiated it from Protestantism. The Protestant Korean Bible was treated as a kind of 'cursed object' by traditional Catholics. On the other hand, some of the younger generation with zeal for the Word of God that cannot be easily quenched within the established Church attended Bible Study programmes offered by the Protestant ministers. Many young Catholics were lost in the process.

In July, 1972, the first small group Genesis programme was held for a handful of college students. Cardinal Kim Soo Hwan Stephen of Seoul Archdiocese has provided moral support of the programme from the beginning. Without his referral, and recommendation, and support, the CBLM programme would not have grown so rapidly. As early as 1973, the CBLM began to work within the Federation of Korean Catholic Students, that was supported by the Seoul Archdiocese. Fr Choi Chang Moo, the Bishop, began to help the CBLM, under the recommendation of Cardinal Kim. Fr Choi's presence facilitated the connection between the CBLM, and valuable teaching resources that have already existed within the Catholic Church. Professor priests at the Seoul Major Seminary, soon followed by parish priests, began to provide lectures, and assistance.

During the same period, outside the Church, the Korean Government was being run by a military dictatorship. Starting with the October 'Yoo-shin' in 1972, constitutional right was more severely restricted in the name of 'national security'. Freedom of speech, and of assembly was brutally curtailed.

Religious activities were the exception. Catholics, led by a small group of young priests who organised “Priests for Social Justice” (PSJ), were about the only religious organisation that was providing moral support and sanctuary to the oppressed, and to the student activists. Many religious and laity supported the PSJ. Even though the PSJ was not an officially approved organisation within the Catholic Church, the public began to look at Catholicism from a new perspective. After the assassination of President Park, a new military *élite* group controlled the country. The persecution of liberals was unprecedented in the history of Korea. Many were massacred in the provincial city of Kwang-Joo in May, 1980.

In this gloomy political atmosphere, the CBLM was providing a different vent for frustrated college students. The CBLM did not provide political freedom, but students experienced the true freedom that the Lord provides. The Word of the Lord healed their broken hearts, and flooded them with inner joy, and spiritual peace. At the same time, the students’ zeal for social participation was being satisfied by their active involvement as Servants of the Word in proclaiming the Gospel.

In 1974, one of the Youth Servants, named Kim Young Sup Simon, designed the fish logo for the CBLM, that represents “In the Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we believe, pray, practice, and proclaim the Word”. Sister Yoon Alma, SOLPH, made badges with the logo, to be worn by the Servants, as well as the counsellor priests. Many programmes were also developed during the period. The Genesis, and Exodus guide books were published during the 1970’s. The “Bible in 40 Weeks” was published during 1981-1983. The CBLM spread to non-student groups as well. Mothers’ and Fathers’ Group, as we called the more mature adults, was initiated in 1976. Thus, the CBLM, that was initiated by a handful of ‘little children’ spread to mothers, fathers, cab drivers, company workers, and so on. As the number of participants grew, a minimal organisation structure became indispensable. Bible centres were set up, and full-time sisters from the SOLPH were stationed at the Centres to provide motherly services.

D. Since 1984 (200th anniversary of the Korean Church): Challenges Ahead

1984 opened a new epoch to the Korean Church. In this year, the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Korean Church, our Lord brought us the gift of 103 new Saints. This event had symbolic and prophetic

meaning. It is an honour for us Koreans, and for the CBLM. But the Lord did not allow us much time to celebrate and congratulate ourselves, as we are no longer “little children”. The Korean Church as a whole needs to be ready to proclaim the Gospel to the whole Church including the West, as well as to the non-Catholics in the true spirit of ecumenism ushered in by the Second Vatican Council. The Korean martyrs are no longer the Saints of Korea alone.

The CBLM keeps on growing. We started a small centre in the U.S. in 1988, for local Koreans. The New Emmaus programme was initiated in 1993, on the third Sabbatical year of the CBLM. Our numbers, are still growing fast. But as the body grows, the spirit should grow at least at the same pace. Now the Father has given us a difficult mission. He seems to send us trials to strengthen our faith, rather than the frequent sweetness of joy, that could spoil us. Maybe this time we shall have to wait until the servants fill the whole six jars, each jar as big as a million hearts. South and North Korea combined have about six million population. Or each one may represent one continent, the six jars representing the six continents. This means that everyone should think big. The whole Church should think big.

Outside the Church, people have become very materialistic, and very egoistic. Money, not social justice, attracts their attention these days. In the introduction, we mentioned the ‘leaven’ of the Word that enabled the CBLM to grow much faster than our expectations. But our Lord also warned against evil ‘leaven’ as well. It uses the means of mass transportation, mass communication, and the world-wide computer network very cleverly. Compared to that speed, the spread of the Kingdom of God looks all too slow. We still have to walk on foot, and communicate person to person. The Church is not immune from this yeast, either. The seeds of self-pride, self-glory, division, unenthusiasm, lack of compassion and understanding, hatred, anger, factions, malicious judgement, condemnation, etc., can spread very quickly even inside the Church.

Paul says: “Do you not know that a little yeast makes the whole mass of dough rise? Clean out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (cf. 1 Cor 5:6-8). The unleavened bread of sincerity and truth is the Word of God that is pure, and genuine (cf. 2 Cor 2:17).

IV. EPILOGUE

“We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him, whom he has called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

Our Mother Church has always reacted in time, having read the signs of the times. All of us face the difficult task of proclaiming the Word of God in a generation in which more and more people are running away from the Lord. At difficult times, the Church had more visibility. But when everything looks ‘peaceful’ by secular standards, spreading the Word seems to become harder and harder. In such moments of despair, we should re-examine ourselves. As I explained at the beginning of this paper, if there was any success in the CBLM’s Bible ministry in Korea, 90 per cent of it was all due to favourable circumstances. The Church was fully supportive of the Bible ministry, and the Catholics were thirsty for the Word of the Lord.

But we feel more and more helpless. The Word is honoured by people when it manifests the full power of the Lord. The Corinthian Church was weak, and suffered from division, when people were talking about the Gospel based upon human wisdom only. The Word of God is meant to be accompanied by God’s power. Because the “Kingdom of God is not a matter of words, but of power” (1 Cor 4:20). Thus we pray the Lord may bless the Word we are proclaiming with power. We rely on his word when we are weak, because he is the strongest.

The first and most urgent thing we pray for is that the Lord will bless our Bible ministry by his power. The second thing we pray for is that our Bible Ministry be filled with love and a spirit of gentleness, not with the stick of criticism (cf. 1 Cor 4:21). What we really need is *agápe* love. While love has become a hackneyed word in the West, Orientals hardly use it, even between young lovers. A word in Asia with the closest meaning to *agápe* love is ‘compassion’. *Jabi* in Korean means ‘compassion out of sorrowfulness’. Compassion brings out the spirit of understanding. A more sympathetic attitude of comprehension is necessary between people.

So we need to be filled with power and compassion in this generation. As a matter of fact, the Church has relied on these two from the beginning.

We do not think that we can do this alone. We need the support of the whole Church which constantly renews herself with power, compassion, and an understanding heart. Only then will the work of weak servants like us be blessed, drawing power and love from the source of both: the Holy Trinity and our Mother Church.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water’ (cf. Jn 7:37-38).

This is 25th year I have worked for the Bible Apostolate. At the beginning of the CBLM, whenever I had to give lectures to our Bible Family, I prayed with Jeremiah 1:6-8 who said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a [child]. I prayed with this same verse of Jeremiah’s when I prepared this conference. But the Lord said to me. “Do not say, ‘I am only a [child]’: for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you” (Jer 1:6-8). Therefore, I am here.

Preparation for the two papers being presented here in Rome has been a very difficult process. Just like my first Paper, many people have assisted me. Lee Young Kyul Luke (Chief editor, LWS) is the co-author of my Korean script of this paper. Lee Dong Ik Augustine (Servant of the Word-Banker in the U.S.) has done the translation and ‘editing’ of the manuscript. Rose Aleman (Banker in the U.S.) has helped with proof-reading within such a short time span. Sin Myoung Woo (Illustrator, LWS) and Sr Bong Ja Regina has supplied me with meditation pictures.

There are so many others who have sacrificed for me, especially all the Sisters and Novices of our Congregation who offered their constant prayer and support. All the Servants of the Word of the CBLM should be the co-authors of this paper. I am just the voice of the community from the beginning to the end. In the midst of this challenging assignment, we know that the Lord blessed all of us abundantly. *Chan Mi Jesu!* Praise the Lord Jesus!

Please note:

We are not able to publish all the Ariccia conferences in this double issue,

because of lack of space.

*The Conference of Sr Nuria Calduch-Benages, MN,
on "The Challenge of Biblical Work in Europe"
will be published in our next issue.*

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