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The biblical animation of our pastoral ministry

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Introduction

The title of the booklet might at first sight scare off potential readers. It would be a great shame for such a thing to take place as though the booklet was just for experts. Nothing could be further from reality. The first paragraph which is precise as is the rest of the work being offered, makes the intention and the envisaged readership very clear: *“This present work attempts to show the reasons why and the manner in which we Brothers of the Christian Schools and our co-workers make use of the Bible in our pastoral ministry”*. Certainly in so brief a declaration of intent there are necessarily omitted aspects which will interest the reader no matter how much he declares himself a non-expert in the subject.

The present study is a model of precision, exactitude, documentation, synthesis and zeal. Only someone who loves the Lasallian mission and with a passion for Scripture can lead us adroitly in such a simple manner without the least resistance.

With topics such as the place of the Bible in the tradition of the Church and of the Institute, Lasallian spirituality, contributions with respect to Vatican Council II, etc. it has been necessary on numerous occasions to have recourse to the past in order to illuminate our present. He smoothes the way for us to arrive at an explanation of the present outlook while leaving aside contrivance, heavy rhetoric, a hidden agenda of confusing, any pretension of showing off, or dubious rigour. He offers an explanation which while not necessarily brief avoids laborious documentation.

To declare that Lasallian spirituality was from its origins strongly rooted in the Bible comes as no surprise to us since it seems that it could not be any other way. An attentive reading will surely make us think that it does not cease being something very important or at least admirable, since we had to wait until the last decades of the 20th century to give back to the Bible its central position in the Church, a position that had been replaced by catechism and the sacraments for centuries. In this sense our inheritance does not cease being exceptional. From the hand of the author we learn the keys of this ingeniousness in historically combining Bible, Liturgy, Tradition and Magisterium.

Prayer also merits a chapter by itself as was to be expected. In addition to presenting the basic assumptions and exploring the various ways of discovering the Presence of God, he offers us an easily understood and practical presentation of John Baptist de La Salle's Method of Mental Prayer.

The Lasallian involved in the work of teaching in whatever domain (technical, scientific, philosophical, artistic, historical, sporting and so on) will feel incited and urged to seek to explore possibilities *"to create learning experiences in which science and faith, art and faith, technology and faith come together, not in an apparent, artificial or forced way, but rather in depth"*, because a life which does not integrate these elements will always remain truncated and liable to schizophrenic unbalance. The Lasallian school should not confuse culture with knowledge.

Bro. Alfonso Novillo

The biblical animation of pastoral ministry

The pastoral ministry, or apostolate of the Church, is an action that we Brothers of the Christian Schools share with many other organizations within the Church. The use of the Bible as the bedrock of all ecclesial activity, a key renewal principle established by Vatican Council II, was already a foundational charism of our Institute. This present work attempts to show the reasons why and the manner in which we Brothers of the Christian Schools and our co-workers make use of the Bible in our pastoral ministry.

1. What is new in the use of the Bible in pastoral ministry.

The Provincial Council of Tarragona of 1233, in response to the Albigensian heresy, forbade the possession of Sacred Scripture in the vernacular, in the supposition that its use by ordinary folk would lead to heresy. Following this criterion, the Franciscan, Alfonso Castro, theologian of Cardinal Pacheco at the Council of Trent (1545-1563), managed to get strong restrictions for the use of the Bible in modern languages. These restrictions were softened by Benedict XIV in 1757 but were maintained in the liturgy. That ecumenical council fixed the general tenor of the Church and its style of acting for more than four centuries while it countered the extreme Protestant doctrine of centering all of Christian life "in Scripture alone." Trent inhibited the use of biblical texts by the ordinary people, all the while emphasizing sacramental life, whose doctrine had come into its full development at the Council of Lyons in 1274 through the influence of St. Thomas Aquinas who had died en route to the council.

Some two centuries prior to Trent the compendium of Christian doctrine was taking stable form through the efforts of diocesan and inter-diocesan synods in Europe. At times this took the shape of short lessons and, with greater frequency, the form of questions and answers to be memorized in parishes and schools. Catechism, in effect, replaced the Scriptures that had nourished

the Israelites and the early Christians. The precepts of the Church to which St Antoninus of Florence had ascribed the number ten, were listed as five in Germany, France and Spain in that same 15th century. These were added to the summaries of basic doctrine as complement to the Decalogue with the sacramental ethos derived from the New Testament. Catholic life was seen as identical to the observance of Sunday Mass, Communion at Easter time, the penitential attitude expressed by fasting, abstinence and frequent sacramental confession as well as the material support of public worship. All this contributed to the passive dependency of the laity on the clergy.

Vatican Council II, having learned the lessons of two bloody World Wars, upon identifying an even greater challenge in the lack of faith and the injustices working against the salvation of humanity, called upon all the available spiritual forces to overcome the pervading materialism and consequent violence against the poor and the weak. Its intention to renew and to evangelize is clear, among other significant places, in the first paragraph that it approved, i.e., the Constitution on the Liturgy:

“The sacred Council has set out to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call all mankind into the Church’s fold.” (SC 1).

In its practical documents it put forward the path to unity with the other Christian churches (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), interreligious dialogue (*Nostra Aetate*) and the respect for religious liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*). In its principal documents it proclaimed, in the most basic of them, the central place of the Word of God in the Church (*Dei Verbum*), then, the role of the liturgy as source and summit of Christian life (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), the entire Church as the prolongation of Jesus Christ, Light of the World (*Lumen Gentium*), an evangelizing vision of it complemented in the documents on the Oriental Catholic communities (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*), on the bishops (*Christus Dominus*), on priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*) and on their formation (*Optatam Totius*), on the life of special consecration (*Prefectae Caritatis*), all with an essential missionary impetus (*Ad Gentes*) and social con-

cern (*Gaudium et Spes*), affirming that both activities must characterize all Christians, above all the laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*), and highlighting the present day importance of two secular professions: social communications (*Inter Mirifica*) and education (*Gravissimum Educationis*).

This theological and pastoral overview of the conciliar documents altogether permits us to glimpse the Copernican revolution involved in permitting easy access to the Sacred Scriptures to the faithful (DV 22). Rather than having the Catholic define himself by “having all the sacraments”, while the Evangelicals and the other reformed churches define themselves by having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and are pleased to call themselves Christians, “the sacred Synod forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful, especially those who live the religious life, to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (Phil 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures, for ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ” (DV 25). It is important that “as many as possible of those who are ministers of the divine Word may be able to distribute fruitfully the nourishment of the Scriptures of the People of God. This nourishment enlightens the mind, strengthens the will and fires the hearts of men with the love of God” (DV 23).

Jesus himself urges us to know the Sacred Scripture well (Mt 22:29); he put the so-called Scripture scholars of his day in a bind (Jn 3:10; Mt 22:15-22, 34-40); demonstrated the coherence of the body of the sacred books of Israel (Lk 24:24); called attention to rarely cited biblical texts (Mt 22:34-40); used simple common sense to interpret a certain text (Mt 12:9-13). He had recourse to Sacred Scripture to confound his critics (Mt 12:1-8; 15:1-9; 22:23-33). He challenged to find the meaning of some difficult text (Jn 10:34f). He refused to limit himself to proclaiming the mere letter (Jn 8:3-9). He committed others to act as believers (Jn 8:39), to fulfill the word of God and teach it (Mt 5:19f).

2. The Bible in the spirit of the Brothers and the use they make of it.

We felt honored when St. Pius X in a Brief of July 11, 1907, called us “apostles of the catechism”. Two centuries earlier St. John

Baptist de La Salle in his inspiring meditations, where he sternly cautioned us to be exact in teaching catechism for the entire prescribed time, teaching our students what they should know in accord with their ability and age (M 206.1), asked us rather to deliver the Word of God in what was then called the catechism class (M 207.3). He considered that it is our place to proclaim this word to the children (M 193.1), as persons chosen by God to announce to them the truths of the Gospel (M 198.3). More than catechists, as educators in the spirit of Christianity (M 194.2), he declared us to be ministers called by God to instruct children, to announce the Gospel to them, and to educate them in the spirit of religion (M 201.1). He called us cooperators with God (M 205.1), ministers of the New Testament (M 196.2), ministers of God and dispensers of His mysteries (M 205.1), ministers of God, of Jesus Christ and of the Church (M 201.2), cooperators with Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls (M 196.2), ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ (M 195.2), ministers to build up the body of Jesus Christ by means of the children (M 198.3), ministers committed in Jesus Christ for the edification and support of the Church (M 205.3), teachers for those entrusted to our care to lead them to the freedom of the children of God that Jesus Christ had won for us by dying for us (M 203.2).

Even before dealing with what the Brothers did, the holy Founder dedicated himself to the interior life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, defined specifically in the *Rule* as the spirit of faith, which causes them to see all with the eyes of faith, to do all with a view to God and to attribute all to God, as they discover him in the Sacred Scripture. In order to acquire this spirit and be guided by it, de La Salle proposed the most profound respect for Sacred Scripture, shown by always carrying the New Testament on their person, reading passages from it every day, just considering it as their first and principal Rule. The Brothers of the Christian Schools were to be men of the Bible as the means to be men of God, of his Son Jesus Christ and of his Holy Spirit.

Centuries before 1936 when kerygmatic theology in Austria and Germany would rediscover the centrality of the paschal mystery and would disseminate a kerygmatic catechesis in the Congress of Eichstatt (1960), the Brothers, in their proverbial fidelity to the Church, explained the diocesan catechisms, in fact very similar to each other in language and content, always enriching their cate-

chetical expositions with abundant references and commentaries of the New Testament. They carried it in their pocket and they meditated upon it in their “recollections” or moments of reflection before each exercise of devotion several times each day.

The Brothers who did not teach religion because they were engaged in other employments, were always present for the Sunday conferences of Brother Director, based on the liturgical readings of the day and, by means of the *Collection of Short Treatises*, could call to mind a whole raft of Bible passages to inspire all sorts of daily activities. Even though the expression was not in vogue at the time, the spirituality of the Brothers formed in the school of St. John Baptist de La Salle was always Christocentric, biblical and liturgical. It was also lay in character, this last, thanks to the so frequently repeated expression of the holy Founder.

“Do not make any distinction between the matters proper to your state and the concern for your salvation and perfection. You may hold for certain that you will never better work toward your salvation, nor advance both in perfection and in fulfilling the duties of your state, unless you do so with the purpose of obeying God” (*Collection of Short Treatises*, XLVII, 4).

In any conversation with the simplest of pious Brothers, biblical texts were always at the tip of their tongue, and always applied to daily life.

Neither did the Brothers fall into a closed and fundamentalist use of the Bible, for they situated the Bible quotations in the context of Tradition in order to interpret the doctrine according to the universal and enduring meaning of the Fathers of the Church and the universal Magisterium, in contrast to the episcopal magisterium of the bishops of France of the day, influenced by Gallicanism and Jansenism. They adhered to the norms given for times of polemics by the holy Founder, a solid doctor of theology who followed the lead of the holiest men of his day such as Barré, Poullart des Places, Tronson, Bäüyn, Bourdoise and others.

3. The Para-biblical Apostolate.

Father Ludger Felkaemper, SVD, Secretary General during two periods of the Catholic Biblical Federation, calls para-biblical the

apostolate of translating, producing and distributing the Sacred Scriptures. There are Brothers engaged in all these services.

There are Biblicists who are skilled in collaborating with the translation of the books of the Bible. Successive versions attempt to adapt to the evolution of spoken language in the different living tongues. Translation today uses the technique of dynamic equivalency: instead of a slavish, word for word translation, they now strive to bring out the original meaning couched in present day language.

At times, when in the liturgy or in the catechism, a biblical version is used which is a bit antiquated, an expert in the language of the target audience, if he or she is well familiar with the biblical quotation, can make use of the dynamic equivalent. In certain cases, he is obliged to do so, in order not to cause damage or scandalize the audience. The harshness of some Hebraic expressions demands this. Instead of saying: *"If someone comes to me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers and sisters, and even himself, he cannot be my disciple"* (Lk 14:26), it is more correct to say: *"If someone comes to me and does not love me more than his father, his mother..."* The sense of the passage is this second version and not the first, even though that one is more faithful to the verbal canons of the original text. In modern biblical translations these disturbing Hebraic phrases have been disappearing. Every good catechist must be attentive to this delicate question. And even more so should be the teacher of catechists, even though he or she need not be a specialist of the Bible nor of languages. It is sufficient to have a good working knowledge of the language of one's audience and to know a good commentary of the text, sometimes to be found as a footnote in the Bibles approved by the Catholic Church.

Without being biblical scholars, many are cooperating in the spread of an understanding of Scripture, not from the original languages, but from present day languages. They are reconciling the text with the language of today's readers and listeners, especially of newly literate adults or of children and youngsters with limited vocabulary, for whom anthologies of passages suited for their age or social and cultural situations have been elaborated. These include printed material for spiritual reading and catechesis as well as taped versions and offerings on the Internet.

Others are placing their editorial expertise at the service of biblical publications with attractive presentation and accessible price.

These examples of the elaboration of the text, of the publication of the sacred books and of their direct diffusion as well as the production of diverse resources with biblical content are indispensable, but still are not enough.

4. The Biblical Apostolate in the Strict Sense.

The biblical apostolate *sensu stricto* consists in giving the faithful translations of the sacred texts which are equipped with necessary and really adequate explanations so that they “can familiarize themselves safely and profitably with the Sacred Scriptures, and become steeped in their spirit” (DV 25).

From the time of the holy Founder we Brothers of the Christian Schools have proclaimed and sought to explain the New Testament above all in our religious instruction because we have always had it close at hand as an essential part of our spirituality. It is a Lasallian tradition that our students would memorize inspiring and compelling maxims from the Bible and that these be understood correctly, thanks to the clarification of the Brothers in the classroom.

Since Vatican Council II, the students themselves make use of the Bible in the school and many also have it at home. They have grown up in regular contact with Sacred Scripture. Their parents are today surprised by the flexibility with which they interpret biblical texts because, for their part, they did not have the same biblical education. Some of the parents have received it during the two years of the family catechesis of Eucharistic initiation¹.

In Lasallian schools today most of teachers are lay persons. Even though in the terms of their contract they have agreed to support the Catholic program of education, many lack a systematic Christian formation both in school and in the university. They are discovering the Christian school as a place of evangelization and salvation, and they show openness to receive from the Brothers in

¹ See: GARCÍA AHUMADA, ENRIQUE FSC. *Catechesis of the family for initiation into the Eucharist* in MEL Bulletin #19, 29-53.

particular, but not exclusively, an education in the faith, provided it is presented for adults. We have here an important call to the Lasallian biblical apostolate to which the Brothers and their theologically well prepared lay colleagues can respond.

5. The Catholic Interpretation of the Bible.

To make proper use of the Bible, we Brothers and our lay partners need to keep in mind certain basic questions which it is well to review here, even though we do so rather quickly.

There is no evangelization without the Gospel and without the Bible. In order to evangelize it is necessary to know how the Catholic Church interprets the Bible. Vatican Council II, in the Doctrinal Constitution *Dei Verbum* on divine revelation established the bases for the correct reading of the Bible. Above all, it does not limit the Word of God to the Bible. "This economy of Revelation is realized by deeds and words, which are intrinsically bound up with each other" (DV 2). God has revealed himself principally in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of His Son, who is the Word of God *par excellence* (see John 1:1). In a beautiful passage with biblical references the Council says:

"Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself." (DV 2).

The works of God were commented on from generation to generation giving origin to Jewish-Christian Tradition, a part of which has been written down.

"Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other... Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the Holy Scriptures alone" (DV 9).

The inspired authors wrote down the manifestations of God according to the understanding that had been reached in their epoch. "Then... Israel daily gained a deeper and clearer understanding of His ways" (DV 14). Divine Revelation, properly speaking, is progressive. Especially in the Old Testament there are imperfect expressions that have been corrected throughout the ages.

“Before the era of salvation established by Christ, the books of the Old Testament provide an understanding of God and man and make clear to all men how a just and merciful God deals with mankind. These books, even though they contain matters imperfect and provisional, nevertheless show us authentic divine teaching” (DV 15).

The forms of communication which brought about the biblical books are diverse and cannot be reduced to dogmatic affirmations. The Council reiterated the importance of distinguishing the literary genres of the different biblical texts (DV 12). The sacred texts ought not to be read as if they all had the same weight of revealed truth. Some of the accounts have an historical character and others are more like novelized narrations whose teachings are indirect, or are broadly epic amplifications of memorable events. There are also poems and hymns, refrains and transitory laws, which it is important to recognize as such.

The Old Testament must be read in the light of the New Testament and be corrected by the same. Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount applied one of these corrections to the existing biblical teachings of his time in order to bring out their full meaning (Mt 5:17. 21f. 27f. 31-48).

“But since sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with its divine authorship in mind, no less attention must be devoted to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith if we are to derive their true meaning from the sacred texts” (DV 12).

Just as the Bible was formed in the People of God who meditated on those great happenings and remembrances, so too we must regard it as a whole and not pull isolated texts from their context and era. That is the meaning of the technical expression “analogy of the faith”. The most Blessed Virgin Mary herself only gradually understood the revelation that culminated in her son Jesus the Messiah or the Christ (see Lk 2:8-19. 41-51).

Faced with the complexity of God’s revelation transmitted through human beings that today we would consider to be primitive and pre-scientific, we can rely on the Pope and the bishops in communion with him to give us an authentic interpretation of the Bible and the Tradition of the Church.

“But the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposed for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith” (DV 10).

St. John Baptist de La Salle left us a legacy of great fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church with his example and his witness:

“...I recommend to you, above all, that you always have absolute submission to the Church, especially in these calamitous times, and that, as testimony of this submission, you do not depart in the slightest way from the Roman Church, remembering always that I sent two Brothers to Rome with the intention of asking God for the grace that this Society would always be entirely submissive”.

It is not unusual among the Brothers to seal this fidelity with their martyrdom when it has become necessary. The same can occur with our co-workers.

6. The Use of the Bible Required by Vatican Council II.

Vatican Council II adopted what was best of the Protestant Reformation: “It follows that all the preaching of the Church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture” (DV 21). So, the four facets of ecclesial action must be animated by the Bible to manifest the Incarnate Word: the service on justice and charity, the missionary and prophetic *proclamation*, the fraternal *communion* and the *prayerful celebration* (diakonia, prophecy, koinonia and liturgy). In this way the Church continues to follow Jesus king-servant, prophet, shepherd and priest.

Without the Bible as motivating force, 1) ecclesial diakonia becomes mere social and philanthropic service, lacking in evan-

gelizing sense; 2) the function of proclamation and education in the faith becomes moralizing and psychologizing verbiage, useless for the journey to eternal life; 3) life in community falls back into human relations motivated by mental hygiene, collective productivity or other superficial stimuli; and 4) the liturgy is reduced to ritual disconnected from the events and words that impart meaning to even the sacramental symbols.

The intent of Vatican Council II cannot be reduced simply to promoting the Bible and a committed listening to it, like one more activity among the several apostolates or pastoral organizations. The Council wishes to give the Word of God in the Bible its central and guiding place in the Church, so that it can truly be the "spouse of the Incarnate Word" (DV 23). This level is the pinnacle of the biblical apostolate.

7. The Bible as the Inspiration of Social Transformation.

Among the four functions of the Church mentioned, the role of the Bible is evident in the ministry of the Word, in the liturgy and in the promotion of the ecclesial community described in *Lumen Gentium*. Christian diakonia ought not be reduced to activities of assistance that in the early Church motivated the Apostles to create the ministry of deacon (Acts 6:1-6).

With the purpose of going beyond mere charity through almsgiving, from the time of Leo XIII in 1891 the Popes and bishops, sometimes alone, sometimes collectively in the Council, in Episcopal conferences, in general continental conferences, or in synods, have elaborated the social doctrine of the Church. Unfortunately, these teachings are common currency among sociologists, cultural anthropologists, economists and well-informed social and political leaders but have not become part of the common faith patrimony of the faithful. That doctrine has been couched in philosophical and theological terms for the instruction and conviction of statesmen, legislators and experts in social sciences, dealing with issues such as the human person and his rights, the promotion of the family and of human life, the place of the State with regard to the common good, the conditions of justice in commerce, the protection and association of workers and

international relations. Ordinary Christians among the working class do not always see the pertinence of such themes to their faith in Jesus, in Mary and to their sacraments and devotions.

The key to bridge the gap between the Church's social doctrine and action and the ordinary life of the faithful is in the Christ centered employment of the Bible². Here we can offer some initial leads because the topic is extremely broad, for instance, if one would want to illustrate it with the social, cultural, economic and political teachings of the Old Testament.

For example, we might want to show Jesus as prophet, whose word is hard to accept for those interested in worldly prestige (see Jn 7:1-5). They hate him because he strips the mask from their evil intention (Jn 7:7; 15:18f). Those who cling to power hide the truth behind the majority opinion and that of the powerful (see Jn 7:45-48); they look for specious arguments to trap him (see Jn 8:3-6); they hide behind legal minutiae rather than accept the truth (Jn 9:13-16; 19:7); they pretend to be the sole bearers of the truth, insulting and abusing with their authority instead of surrendering to evidence (see John 9:24-34); they defend their power disguising it as the common good (see Jn 11:47-50). The rejection of the truth leads to its imprisonment (see Jn 7:32; 18:12) and to murderous violence (see Jn 8:37-40, 44). Greedy self interest is masked by the appearance of goodness (see Jn 12:3-6). The excessive enslavement to social prestige and the fear of the powerful prevent them from publicly recognizing the truth (see Jn 12:42f). The fear of what others will say causes one disciple to deny the truth (see Jn 13:36-38; 18:25-27). Attachment to personal power can cause the rejection of legitimate authority (see Jn 9), turning one's back on the truth (see Jn 18:37f), blaming others for one's own acts of injustice (see Jn 19:1-8) and knowingly condemning an innocent person (see Jn 19:5-16). Finally, the rejection of the message of love leads to homicide (see 1 Jn 3:11-15).

Those who are faithful to the word of Jesus attain their freedom (see Jn 8:31f) and eternal life (Jn 5:24). Worldly powers lose importance for those who accept the truth (see Jn 7:45f). The person who lets Jesus touch his spirit is freed of anxiety and can announce

² See GARCÍA AHUMADA, F.S.C., E. *Situación y propuestas para una catequesis social liberadora*. "Catecheticum" 5 (Santiago de Chile, 2002) 109-124.

him to others as did Magdalene (see Jn 20:11-18), or step out onto the water as did Peter (see Jn 21:7). The person who accepts Jesus as the Word and the Son of God conquers the world (see 1 Jn 5:4f). Jesus Christ, the *"Faithful and True One"* whose name is *"the Word of God"* (Rv 19:11-13) defeats the powers of this world who act as false prophets (see Rv 19:19-21). As we can see, truth is the first challenging topic of the social doctrine of the Gospel.

The transformation that Jesus Christ brought about applies to cultures as well. In the first instance, Jesus incarnated his teachings in the culture of his listeners. He called on them to observe nature: the water from the well (Jn 4:10-14), the re-birth at springtime (Mt 24:32), the healthy trees and the sterile ones (Mt 12:33), the sowings and the harvests (Mt 13:3-8), the nests of the birds (Mt 13:32), the light of the sun (Mt 13:43), the red glow on the clouds (Mt 16:2f), the changes of the weather (Lk 12:54-56), the feelings of dogs (Lk 16:20f), the behavior of preying animals (Jn 10:12), the functioning of the human body (Mt 15:10-20; 6:22), hunger and thirst (Jn 6:35; 4:13), disabled, one-eyed or lame good persons (Mt 18:8f), sleep and death (Jn 11:11-14), the pangs of birth and the joy of childbirth (Jn 16:21); children's' games in the public square (Mt 11:16-19), communication at home of joyful events (Mk 5:18f), the customs at weddings (Mt 25:1-13), the festive occasions (Lk 15:22), the preparations for a feast (Lk 15:23-25), washing the vessels both on the outside and the inside (Mt 23:25f), where human waste ought to go (Mt 15:17f), the whitening of sepulchers (Mt 23:27), the preference for the neighbors rather than outsiders (Mk 7:27).

In addition, Jesus followed the prescribed religious customs: the pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Lk 2:41f), the celebration of the Pasch (Jn 2:13; 6:4; a2, 12f) and other feast days (Jn 5:1) such as that of the Tents (Jn 7:2-10) and the dedication of the Temple (Jn 10:22f). He criticized the bad religious practices: the avid quest for miracles (Mt 12:38-40; 16:1-4), the ostentatious giving of alms (Mt 6:2), the showy prayers (Mt 6:5), the fasts on public display (Mt 6:16), the nitpicking in public worship (Mt 12:9-12), the purely exterior religion (Mt 15:1-20). He praised humility over religious pride (Lk 18:10-14), mercy over strict observance (Mt 9:11-13), and he changed a cheerless religion for one of joy in God's presence (Mt 9:15). He contrasted popular beliefs with divine revelation (Mt 16:13-17).

However, in cultural matters Jesus both questioned and taught others to question them. He aroused the critical sense and set down criteria for discernment (Mt 7:15-20; 12:33-35). In dialogue, he led his listeners to consider what is most important (Mt 19:17; 22:41-46; Jn 4:7-26). He helped them to discover the difference between appearances and reality (Jn 7:24), what is lasting and what is ephemeral (Mt 24:1f), the earthly and the eternal (Lk 12:16-21, 31-34), what is important and what is secondary even though it be worthy (Mt 23:23), the value of the person over the material world (Mt 16:26; Lk 12:23), the esteem coming from men or from God (Lk 16:15). He warned before the lack of concern and before human praise (Lk 6:24-26), about twisted teachings (Mt 16:5-12). He did criticize but also indicated the remedy (Mt 8:26; 12:28; 22:1-12, 15-21). He laid his finger exactly on errors (Mt 22:23-32, 34-40; 23:13-36). He compared bad public customs with what is pleasing to God (Mt 6:1-8, 16-21; Lk 14:7-11). For difficult situations he pointed out the suitable procedure, such as excommunication (Mt 18:15-18). He patiently respected religious freedom (Lk 9:51-56) but he left no doubt about the responsibilities of conscience (Lk 10:10-12, 16). He evaluated achievements and failures (Lk 9:18-21; 10:17-24). He prepared his disciples for trials and for sorrow (Jn 15:18-21; 16:2-4, 20-24, 33). He showed them how to accept the sufferings of every day (Lk 9:23). Rather than promise earthly pleasures, he announced to them the sufferings that would come upon those who follow him, but he encouraged them with the hope of eternal life (Mt 5:11f; 16:24-27).

Jesus identified himself with the poor and with the victims of injustice in the world (Phil 2:5-8). He was born poor in a stable (Lk 2:7), suffered persecution and exile (Mt 2:13), lived family joys (Lk 2:10-20; Mt 2:10f) and conflicts (Lk 2:46-50). He grew up in a very undistinguished place (Jn 1:45f). His hometown neighbors were surprised at his wisdom when he began to teach (Jn 7:15), since they had known his family and his work as a carpenter (Mk 6:2f). With only the studies (Jn 7:14f) and the journeys that were normal in his town, he had learned with great interest (Lk 2:45-47). He spoke with unique authority because he knew where he came from and where he was being sent to (Jn 8:14). He considered authority to be a service (Mt 20:27f; Lk 20:20-28). He is not jealous of his own authority but he respects that of others, like the

priests whose task was to certify the cure of lepers (Mt 8:4), the teachers of the law (Mt 23:1-3), John the Baptist (Mt 11:11), other disciples who did good deeds without belonging to his own entourage (Lk 9:49f). He refused to intervene in what was not his concern (Lk 12:13f). He forbade others to keep children away from him (Lk 18:15f) as well as the needy (Lk 18:35-43). He rejected improper influences, appealing to principles (Mt 20:20-23; 22:16) and to the primacy of his mission (Lk 8:19-21; 19:36-40). But he accepted reasonable and just influences (Lk 7:1-6), the intercession of his mother (Jn 2:1-11) and of his friends (Jn 12:20-30) and even pressure put to bear when the motives were right (Lk 5:17-20).

He leads society to perfection through interpersonal relationships based on the golden rule (Mt 7:12). He attracted people to him through love (Jn 14:15-22). He overcame anger through reconciliation (Mt 4:22-24), mutual understanding (Mt 5:25f) and fraternal correction (Mt 18:15-17). He lightened the weight of duty by the means of his company and example (Mt 11:28-30). He declared the poor, patient and suffering to be blessed, promising them heaven and earth, that is, everything (Mt 5:3-5). He promised happiness to those who seek justice, have compassion, maintain purity of intention and work for peace (Mt 5:6-10). He encouraged with promises (Mt 7:7-11; 18:19f; 19:27-30; 21:22). He congratulated both in public (Mt 8:10-12; 15:28) and in private (Lk 10:17-24; 19:9).

He promotes the family by the means of fidelity (Mt 5:27f), mutual forbearance (Mt 5:31f), unity (Mt 19:4-9) and union (Mt 12:25). He urged respect and assistance for parents (Mt 15:4-6). When dying he provided that his mother would not remain alone (Jn 19:25-27). He gave importance to caresses (Lk 18:15; Mk 10:16), to respect, to harbor, to give good example to children (Mt 18:5f.10) and to lead them to God (Mt 19:13-15). He paid attention to children but he returned them to their parents (Lk 9:38-42). He commissioned the family to be the primary bearer of God's blessings (Mark 5:18-20). He submitted family relationships to union with God (Mt 10:37; 12:47-50) and the observance of God's word (Lk 11:27f).

Jesus took his examples from the ordinary ways of society: the distinct relations with sons and with slaves in the family (Jn 8:35), the

freeing of slaves (Jn 8:36), domestic customs (Mt 13:33. 51f), the itching to spread news of joy (Lk 15:4-8. 8f), proper courtesy in banquets (Mt 22:1-14), hospitality for visitors (Lk 7:44-46), the prudence of guests (Lk 14:8-11), the preparedness of ladies-in-waiting (Mt 25:1-13), the lack of social sensitivity of the wealthy (Lk 16:19-21), the capriciousness of sons (Mt 21:28-31), the rebellious and pleasure seeking youth (Lk 15:11-32), the search for darkness by evildoers (Jn 3:20), the cunning of thieves (Lk 12:39f) and of brigands (Mt 12:29; Lk 10:29-37), the married couples who wish to divorce (Mt 19:3), the repentant prostitutes (Mt 21:32), the loneliness of the sick and the prisoners (Mt 25:36.43).

Jesus formed leaders. He stirred up interest in the increase of workers dedicated to the salvation of others (Mt 9:36f). He declares his listeners to be the light of the world if they do good works (Mt 5:13-16). He chose collaborators (Jn 15:16f). He called them personally (Mt 4:18-22; 19:21). He freely chose some to be his Apostles (Mk 3:13). He accepted some who came of their own initiative (Mt 20:34) but he sent others elsewhere according to their gifts (Mk 5:18-20). He named persons of every condition and mentality as leaders: fishermen (Mt 4:18-22), young John, Matthew the tax collector (Mt 9:9), and Simon the Zealot (Mt 10:4). He devoted special times to give them formation (Mt 11:1; 16:20; 20:17-19). He instilled in them detachment (Lk 9:57-60), readiness and perseverance (Lk 9:61f), a spirit of service for gratitude (Mt 10:8) and trust in the Holy Spirit (Mt 10:19f). He taught the virtues that they should develop as leaders: self-control (Mt 5:11f.22-28.44; 6:21; 7:12; 8:23-26; 10:22.28.37f), self esteem (Mt 6:26; 10:29-31; 12:11f), the habit of welcoming others (Mt 5:47), the spirit of service (Mt 8:19f), foresight (Mt 6:33.34; 10:11; 16:1-3), the courage for making decisions (Mt 10:25-27), prudence (Mt 7:24-27; 10:16f; 16:6.11f), flexibility (Mt 5:25), the skill for organizing (Mt 13:44f; 15:32-38), concern for the growth of others (Mt 14:24-32; 16:24f). He made them critically analyze the opinions of other people (Mt 16:13-20). He gradually entrusted them with responsibilities: first of all to tell in their families the blessings of God (Mk 5:18-20); then he had them baptizing the people (Jn 3:22; 4:1f), afterwards he chose twelve to preach and to cure (Lk 9:1-6), and then he sent another seventy in pairs for an experience of preaching (Lk 10:1). He encouraged Peter in a naïve initiative, and he helped him to fulfill it (Mt 14:25-32). He accept-

ed suggestions of others before taking action (Mt 14:15-20. 36; 15:34-36). When he passed on responsibilities, he gave clear instructions: he explained where to go and where not to go (Mt 10:5f), what to say (Mt 10:7.27), what approach they should have (Mt 10:8.16), what to do (Mt 10:8), what attachments and what distractions to avoid (Lk 10:4), how to react in accord with the reception (Mt 10:11-14; 23; Lk 10:5-12). He prepared them for hardships (Mt 10:18.21f), explained how to deal with their fears (Mt 10:22.26.28.31) and pledged his personal support (Mt 10:19f.32.40). Finally, he departs having left full responsibility to others, even though he would remain with them spiritually (Mt 16:18f; 28:18-20).

Jesus raised awareness to economic realities, particularly the needs of the poor (Mt 25:31-46; Lk 16:19-31). He spoke of sweeping the house to look for just one coin (Lk 15:8), of baking bread (Mt 13:33), of sewing patches on clothes (Mt 9:16), of ageing wine (Lk 5:37-39), of fertilizing fruit trees (Lk 13:6-8), of pruning to increase the yield (Jn 15:2), of the difference between harvesting and gleaning (Mt 12:1-3), of storing crops (Lk 12:16-21), of the renting of fields (Mt 21:33-41), of the foul tricks that farmers might play on one another (Mt 13:24-28); of the care of sheep (Mt 18:12-14; Jn 10:1-16); of comparing the fodder of animals to the food workers are given (Lk 15:15f), of fishing with nets (Mt 13:47), of selecting merchandise (Mt 13:48); of the foundations for building (Lk 6:47-49), of unemployment and hiring workers (Mt 20:1-16), of engaging day-laborers (Jn 4:36), of serving two masters (Lk 16:13), of the difference between working for the family and working for wages (Jn 10:11f), of contracts for leasing (Mt 21:33-45), of the management of the household (Mt 21:28-32; 24:45-51), of old and new things in the storeroom (Mt 13:52); of the good and bad performance of servants (Mt 24:46-51); of financial administration (Mt 21:28-32), of the promotion of faithful servants (Mt 24:46f), of punishment for slackers (Lk 12:47f), of good lenders (Lk 7:41-43) and good employers (Mt 20:13-15), of fraudulent administration (Lk 16:1-11), of calculating accounts (Lk 14:28-30), of the comparative advantages of investments (Mt 13:44-46), of business practices (Mt 25:16-18); of unproductive capital sums (Mt 25:24-26), of bank deposits (Mt 25:27), of debtor's imprisonment (Mt 18:25; 20:27) and of exploitation by the powerful (Mt 20:25).

Jesus called attention to the responsibilities of government (Jn 19:11), opposition to the ruler (Lk 19:15-27), abusive taxation (Mt 17:24-26), tyranny (Mt 20:25), punishment for evildoers (Mt 22:7), abuses of judges (Lk 18:2-8), the correct procedure for a judicial investigation (Jn 18:19-21), the delaying of procedures (Lk 18:2-5), civil wars (Mt 12:25), diplomacy (Lk 14:31f). He knew how to withhold respect toward an unworthy authority (Lk 13:31f; 23:8-11) and to uphold his rights (Jn 18:22f). He exacted responsibility from the unjust ruler (Jn 18:33-36; 19:1-11). He disqualified the group solidarity which is not according to the will of God (Mt 15:12f). He blamed functionaries who did not do their work (Lk 10:30-32; 18:2-8). He openly criticized the false teachings of those who presumed to be teachers and models (Mt 16:5-12). He warned the rich to mend their ways (Mt 19:23-26). He fulfilled the laws of Israel but he perfected them, carrying them to their ultimate consequences (Mt 5:17-19).

A careful examination of the social awareness of the most Blessed Virgin in the New Testament helps to correct an image of a passive and silent woman, outside of public affairs, where she has been relegated by the mental bias of those who hold to an unfair masculine dominance in the world. Mary is a slave only to God but she proclaims Him to be liberator of the oppressed (Lk 1:51-54). She dared to remain standing at the foot of the Cross when almost all the disciples had fled (Jn 19:25). A legitimate interpretation of chapter 12 of Revelation envisions in the woman radiant with grace, crowned with twelve stars who gives birth to the Messiah, not only the twelve tribes of Israel, nor even the Church of the twelve Apostles, but also Mary shielded by God with the wings of the eagle, whose descendants, *“those who keep God’s commandments and bear witness to Jesus”* (Rv 12:17) jointly with her, are an image of the militant and vigorous Church, making war against the evil dragon for the salvation of humankind.

It is well now to explain the ways that the biblical animation of ministry is related to the work of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

08. The Evangelization of Academic Culture.

In our educational communities it is already normal practice to begin every sort of daily and formal meeting with a prayer and a

biblical celebration; units of formation are culminated with some celebration of the Word, if not with the Eucharist; and, similar to the manner in which the raising of the flag of the country with the national anthem forms part of scholastic ritual, so too in the post-conciliar age the proclamation of the biblical word, followed by a moment of prayer, has become the ritual sign of the identity of the Catholic school in cultural, social and sports events. In order not to lose the opportunity to touch hearts, it is important in the choice of the texts to be "*as shrewd as serpents and as simple as doves*" (Mt 10:16). What is important is that the word of God guides the life of each community and, as much as possible, each individual. This extends as well to the school as an ecclesial place.

If the total program of Lasallian education is meant to form Christian persons, joining faith with culture and with the life of youngsters in school, it is important to create learning experiences in which science and faith, art and faith, technology and faith come together, not in an apparent, artificial or forced way, but rather in depth. To accomplish this, it is indispensable to offer the teachers sufficient biblical and theological formation besides their apostolic formation. This biblical formation will not just be for illustrative purposes but also contemplative (Ps 147:4f). This is a duty that the congregation of Brothers has today and for which we are accountable to God.

The basis of evangelization of academic culture is not only biblical but it is also tributary of an ever growing tradition of Lasallian education, conceived as a Christian apostolate and not as a servile transmission of the scientific and technical culture.

The first requirement for the evangelization of the scientific culture is to avoid false confrontations of faith and science by means of an adequate understanding of the salvific revelation contained in the Bible. This is the religious revelation *that* the world depends on God Creator, and does not pretend to explain *how* the matter came about, was organized and has evolved, which are issues available for free research of the scientific community. There cannot be a contradiction between revealed truth which refers to salvation and what is discovered by reason in reference to other topics, because both proceed from God. One speaks of the *why* and the other of *how* the world came to be as it is now. For this, a suf-

ficient knowledge of the Catholic interpretation of the Bible, spoken about above, is indispensable.

The science teacher has four tasks to accomplish if he wishes to form Christians. The first one is the example of his own behavior as a Christian educator: his efforts to raise the self esteem of the students who think they are less capable than they actually are (see Mt 6:26; 25:14f); his creative methods to succeed in teaching even the slowest of students (see Sir 6:32; 14:20-22); his practice of the virtues of the good teacher, added in his Meditations to the original "twelve" by the holy Founder, starting with charity and justice.

The second indispensable task for the Christian educator in teaching sciences with the spirit of faith is to transmit certain philosophical and theological convictions having to do with the work of science: to go beyond the materialism which leads to an excessive appreciation for scientific experimentation (see Sir 1:1), to point out the limits of all sciences, which focus on some specific object rather than on a global insight; to cause the students to recognize that the explanations of scientific models are approximations, as well as the limits of validity of scientific laws, the provisional character of theories, the inadequacy of experimentation to resolve philosophical questions such as the validity of the scientific method itself, the existence of God, the spirituality of the human soul and others; to recognize the existence of order in the cosmos rather than chaos (Jer 51:15; Wis 11:17.20b) which is why it can be studied methodically; the correlative capacity of human intelligence to progressively know the natural world from the most immediate data to the most indirect (see Sir 38:6); to distinguish the degrees and types of human knowledge: sensory information, experiential knowledge which combines deductions, inductions and assessments in a non-systematical way so that even unschooled persons can reach great wisdom in life; experimental scientific knowledge; mathematical knowledge; logical knowledge; empathetic or psychological intuition; esthetic intuition, ethical intuition, natural religious intuition; ontological and philosophical knowledge; religious faith; theology; infused mystical contemplation; and the beatific vision of the saints in eternal life³.

³ See GARCÍA AHUMADA, F.S.C., E. *Teología de la Educación*. Santiago, Tiberiades, 2003, 168-298. A translation into English is being prepared. Contact at www.tiberiades.cl

The third task of the teacher of science imbued with a passion for evangelical justice and charity is the communication of the scientific ethic: love of honest quest for truth (see Prv 2:3f; 25:27; Sir 3:25; Jn 7:24), social responsibility of the researcher (Sir 37:22f), the use of science for the good of humankind, respect for human life from conception, the humanistic and not idolatrous service to ecology, the awareness of the danger of using science with an individualistic (see Is 47:10), economic, aggressive, predatory, hedonistic or inhumane mentality.

The fourth and crowning task of the science teacher animated by the spirit of Christian faith is to cause God's presence and action be discovered in all things: to show the compatibility between divine creation, the expansion of the universe and the evolution of the living species; to awaken wonder at divine providence in the design of living beings and their adaptation to the conditions of their surroundings, and many other reflections that will arise through their experience of faith upon studying and investigating.

It is also an objective of the Christian school to evangelize artistic culture. The basis of the literary arts is learning to express oneself with decency (see Eph 4:29.31; Col 3:8) and with good taste (Col 4:6). Saint Brother Miguel lost no opportunity to use as grammatical examples religious and educational thoughts. The beautiful *Letter to Artists* of John Paul II in 1999 is helpful for educators of the various arts. The educator of the literary, plastic and musical arts ought to make use not only of esthetic criteria but also of ethical and religious criteria to educate the whole person (see Phil 4:8). With seductive language destructive messages can just as easily be transmitted. In the history of arts there is an enormous wealth of plastic, literary, musical and cinematographic works of art inspired in the Bible which deserves a relevant and meaningful place in Christian education.

The teacher of history, if he or she is a Christian, sees and causes others to see human history in harmonious or conflictive relationship with the history of salvation which began in the events told in the Bible, continues in those of today for which we are responsible and will continue until the Parousia in the Plan of God. The Bible gives us numerous examples for judging human history with God's criteria (2 Chr 35:26; 36:8.9.11f; Mt 20:25-28; Lk 1:50-55; Prv 6:1-17; 8:1, etc.). Anti-Catholic teachers cleverly manipulate

history to attack the Church; but it has not always been taught in the Catholic school in such a way that you *“always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope”* (1 Pt 3:15) well informed of both the merits and the sins of the Church throughout history.

Physical culture is evangelized when we look upon our own body and those of others as temples of God (1 Cor 3:16f; 6:12-20), tabernacles called to the resurrection (Jn 6:53-58) without the idolatry of physical beauty (Prv 31:30), nor one’s own human shape (Prv 11:22), nor making a god of the stomach (Phil 3:19). Faith educates sexuality as a function of fidelity in love (Prv 5:15-20; 6:26), toward the one spouse in the first instance, or toward God when one is consecrated to Him (see 1 Cor 7:32-34). Faith can motivate to train the body for the strength it will need to sustain times of scarcity (Prv 18:14), to defend oneself without unnecessary violence (Prv 3:30; 17:19), to have it at the service of the mind (Prv 4:20-23) and of others (Prv 14:30). We are to take good care of the body through recreation (Prv 15:13; 17:22), rest (Prv 19:15), cleanliness (Prv 30:12), proper nutrition (Prv 20:1; 21:17; 23:20f; 25:16), without drinking in excess (Sir 18:33; 19:2), nor use of harmful drugs, in the pursuit of the harmonious personal development (Prv 23:29-33).

In technical education, where the students are not so accustomed to humanistic reflection, a special creativity and effort are necessary to instill Christian attitudes toward technical skills, toward their instruments and toward the industrial culture. The students ought to be especially aware of fulfilling the command of the Creator: *“Fill the earth and subdue it”* (Gn 1:28). They can better understand the present day meaning of the parabolic expression: *“The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it”* (Gn 2:15) and each day offer up their work for the glory of God (Ps 104). They can also discover the importance of the social doctrine of the Church flowing from the sanctity of work exemplified by Jesus the carpenter (Mk 6:3; Jn 5:16-21), appreciate his affirmation that *“the laborer deserves his payment”* (Lk 10:7) which should neither be delayed (Lv 19:13) nor lowered (Dt 24:14-18), because one’s wages have to sustain a family (Mt 20:1-16). The students can see the value of union organization and of ability for representative action in Scripture texts which are more narrative than theoretical (Ex 5:10-

16). They will discover God as their protector in simple and clear biblical texts (Mal 3:5; Jas 5:1-6). It is suitable that students in the religious instruction in technical establishments learn what is explained above about the use of Scripture for the transformation of society.

09. Biblical Animation in Prayer.

The Catholic Biblical Federation favors a form of biblical prayer known as “lectio divina”, borrowed from the tradition of medieval monks who found spiritual nourishment in Sacred Scripture. One of the most widespread versions consists in answering four questions after personal reading or a community proclamation of a biblical passage.

First: *What does the text say?* This step of the method requires that we pay attention to the literal sense of the passage, giving importance to what it says and avoiding hasty or capricious interpretations. There are persons who bring some preconceived idea when they read a text and say that they have found the answer when they have not properly read the text. They draw subjective conclusions, running the risk of attributing to the Word of God what God has not said, or the contrary of what He says. The Catholic versions of the Bible carry footnotes which aid in understanding the text itself and its literary context. The Protestant versions, even though they may be very good professional translations, do not have historical or literary explanations for they presuppose that the Holy Spirit will illuminate each reader. They do not succeed in preventing the continuous subdividing of their churches due largely to the variety of interpretations. This does not deny the existence of excellent Protestant exegetes. Here we are dealing with the good use of the Bible in praying with it.

The second question is: *What is God telling me in the text?* Once the meaning of the particular words and their context are made clear, and not before, the religious moment begins. A message for one’s personal life is sought in the passage that has been read.

The third question is: *How I respond to what the Lord tells me?* The Word of God initiates a dialogue. It is not simply a discourse to acquire culture. It is a call to sincerity, to friendship and to intimacy. It is a moment to express the sentiments that it awakens.

The Bible is the great book of prayer of the People of God. In it God makes Himself known, revealing His plan for the world and for each person and asks for a reply. In it we come to know what God has done throughout history and we find what we are responsible for in that history. The proper response to God's love shown in so many ways, is love. Thus the reading gives rise to prayer.

The final question is: *What will I do now?* The answer we make to the Lord ought not to remain in words and feelings. Something must change in me. Today I must show love with deeds.

In fact, Lasallian prayer is essentially biblical. It consists in living in the presence of God, with the help of texts from Sacred Scripture which reveal the many modes of that presence. Jesus Christ lived in the presence of God the Father, animated by the Holy Spirit. St. De La Salle did not pretend to exhaust the number of ways in which God is present nor make an exhaustive list of the biblical texts that refer to them. If we also have recourse to texts from the Church, we can broaden the manner in which we find God present in order to live in a spirit of faith.

1. God is present in the place where we are because He is everywhere. *"Can a man hide in secret without my seeing him? says the Lord. Do I not fill both heaven and earth? says the Lord"* (Jer 23:24). *"Where can I hide from your spirit? From your presence, where can I flee? If I ascend to the heaven, you are there; if I lie down in Sheol, you are there too."* (Ps 137:7f).
2. God is present in nature giving it both existence and life. *"The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack. In green pastures you let me graze; to safe waters you lead me"* (Ps 23:1). *"Even when I walk through a dark valley, I fear no harm for you are at my side"* (Ps 23:4). *"Praise the Lord from the heavens...Praise him, highest heavens! Praise him, sun and moon, give praise all shining stars!"* (Ps 148:1-3). *"Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deep waters... You animals wild and tame, you creatures that crawl and fly!...Young men and women too, old and young alike!"* (Ps 148:7, 10, 12). *"Praise the Lord from the earth... you lightning and hail, snow and clouds, storm winds that fulfill his command! You mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!"* (Ps 148:7-9). *"Let everything that has breath give praise to the Lord!"* (Ps 150:6).

3. God is in us giving us our natural life. *“Rather it is he who gives to everyone life and breath and everything”* (Acts 17:25). *“In him we live and move and have our being”* (Acts 17:28). *“Therefore we are the offspring of God”* (Acts 17:28). *“Do not drive me from your presence, nor take from me your holy spirit”* (Ps 51:13). *“Your eyes foresaw my actions; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped before one came to be”* (Ps 139:16).
4. God is present in the temple because it is a house of prayer. *“How awesome is this shrine! This is nothing else but an abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven!”* (Gn 28:17). *“Only goodness and love will pursue me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come”* (Ps 23:6). *“For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples”* (Is 58:7).
5. God is present in our body as in His temple. *“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwells in you?”* (1 Cor 3:16). *“The temple of God, which you are, is holy”* (1 Cor 3:17). *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?”* (1 Cor 6:19). *“For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.”* (1 Cor 6:20). *“For we are the temple of the living God”* (2 Cor 6:16)
6. God, the Blessed Trinity, is in us through His grace. *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always”* (Jn 14:15-16). *“Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him”* (Jn 14:21). *“In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live”* (Jn 14:19). *“Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me”* (Jn 15:4). *“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him”* (Jn 14:23). *“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you”* (Jn 14:20).

7. Jesus Christ is present in the poor and in those in need. *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation on the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me"* (Mt 25:34-36). *"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me"* (Mt 25:40). *"And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me"* (Mt 18:5).
8. Jesus Christ is present wherever two or three are gathered in his name. *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Mt 18:20). *"I will set my Dwelling among you, and will not disdain you. Ever present in your midst, I will be your God, and you will be my people"* (Lv 26:11-12). *"Sing to the Lord a new song, a hymn in the assembly of the faithful... Let them praise his name in festive dance, make music with tambourine and lyre"* (Ps 149:1.3). *"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you"* (Jn 14:18).
9. Jesus Christ acts with his grace in the celebration of the sacraments, as Vatican Council II teaches us: *"Christ is present in liturgical action. He is present with his virtue in the sacraments"* (SC 7).
10. The Risen Jesus is present in a special way in the Eucharist. *"My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world"* (Jn 6:32-33). *"You set a table before me as my enemies watch; you anoint my head with oil and my cup overflows"* (Ps 23:5). *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst"* (Jn 6:35). *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world"* (Jn 6:51). *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds of me will have life because of me"* (Jn 6:56-57).

11. Jesus is present in the ones that he sends and in his representatives. *“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me”* (Mt 10:40).
12. God is acting through Sacred Scripture. *“In his Word, it is He who speaks”* (SC 7).
13. The Holy Spirit is in the world, spreading the kingdom of God. *“For behold, the Kingdom of God is among you”* (Lk 17:21). This affirmation permits us to look upon today’s history with the eyes of faith in order to detect the signs of the presence of God or of the rejection of God.

It is possible to find even other ways in which God is present so that our constant attention to Him may have many new avenues.

For St. John Baptist de La Salle the Bible is above all a book to pray in dialog with God who speaks in it. To learn to pray is to learn to answer God with words and actions. As De La Salle tells us:

“What an admirable thing it is, and of what great help to those who wish to live in piety and in the practice of virtue, to meditate often on the holy and exalted maxims contained in Holy Scripture! They are far above all that the human mind can conceive by itself. Holy Scripture enlightens the mind with that divine light (Jn 1, 9) which Saint John says enlightens everyone who comes into this world. Because, according to Saint Paul, the precepts of the Lord are in Scripture (2 Tm 3, 16), meditation on them animates us to practice them.” (M 192.2).

When in the Institute, we begin to share our spirituality with our Lay Partners, they learn the method of mental prayer of St. John Baptist de La Salle, which he developed for very active apostolic persons. As we realize, this method is not a law to be fulfilled to the last detail but is rather a help, much like a method to learn a musical instrument, which is put aside once we know how to play. In his posthumous publication entitled *Explanation for the Method of Mental Prayer*⁴ the holy Founder begins by saying:

“Interior prayer is an inner activity in which the soul applies itself to God... But the principal activity of the soul in prayer that is truly interior is to fill itself and to unite itself interiorly

⁴ From this work we have taken the texts of the following expositions.

with God, which, through a lively faith is for the soul a sort of apprenticeship and foretaste of what the soul should do in reality for all eternity”.

There are three parts to interior prayer. The first part is *the disposition of the soul and this is properly called recollection*.

“The first thing to be done in interior prayer is to become filled interiorly with the thought of God’s presence, which must always be done through a sentiment of faith, based on a passage taken from Holy Scripture”.

At this point one enters into a reflection without much reasoning, preferring affect, since here we deal with the love of God. The ideal is to reach the point of being with God through simple attention. In love, words have importance but there may be intense communication in which a loving mutual presence is sufficient, a desirable goal in itself. At times, “God gives them this grace (freedom from affection for created things), which they rarely or even ever lose, and for them this is anticipation and a foretaste of the joy of heaven”. Now in the presence of God the following acts or sentiments are quietly entered into:

For example,

A. Those referring to God:

FAITH, firmly believing that God is present to us.

ADORATION, recognizing, in profound respect, that God is our creator and our sovereign Lord.

THANKSGIVING, showing gratitude to God for his loving presence with us.

B. Those referring to ourselves:

HUMILITY, recognizing the gift of that attention that God freely gives to us.

REMORSE, recognizing ourselves unworthy to appear before God because of our sins and offenses.

CONTRITION, asking God to pardon us, with a firm purpose of not sinning again, trusting in His grace.

C. Those referring to Jesus Christ our Lord:

APPLICATION of the merits of our Lord and his intercession before God the Father in order to obtain our purification.

UNION of ourselves to the interior dispositions of Jesus in his own prayer to the Father.

INVOCATION of the Spirit of our Lord that He may be pleased to inspire us in our prayer.

So as to leave time for what follows, these acts may be done “in a shortened way and with few words”, or even, “integrating in a single act the interior sentiments of all the rest”, or perhaps “making only the act of the presence of God and that of adoration...omitting the remaining acts”.

The second part is the *application to the theme of prayer*. Here we may take one of the mysteries of our faith and especially of our Lord as the subject of our meditation, such as the Incarnation in the womb of Mary, the Nativity, his Baptism, the Transfiguration, the Last Supper, the Passion, Death, Resurrection, Ascension or the Sending of the Holy Spirit. Or we may meditate on some mystery of God’s action on the Most Blessed Virgin, such as her Immaculate Conception, her Visitation to Elizabeth, some scene of her presence in the public life of Jesus, her Assumption. We may meditate on some of the virtues of Jesus Christ, of Mary or of some saint; or we can apply ourselves to the meditation on some teaching or simple maxim of the Lord in the Gospel, or center ourselves on some biblical, liturgical, or ecclesiastical text, or on some saint.

It may also be advantageous to use shorter reflections, continued for a long time and with great reverence, on a passage of the Holy Scripture or on what the Church has to say about the matter we consider. “This serves to maintain our attention fixed on the passage and on the mystery in an interior manner based on faith”. Likewise the words may be omitted when we make new acts or express new sentiments such as the following:

A. Those that refer to Our Lord:

FAITH, firmly believing that God acted for our welfare through this mystery, virtue or maxim on which we meditate, or “converse with the Most Blessed Virgin” on that matter.

ADORATION, by rendering homage to God with great respect because of the saving work that he does.

THANKSGIVING, expressing gratitude to God for His goodness in this mystery, virtue or maxim.

B. Those that refer to ourselves:

REMORSE, recalling the times and the ways in which we have been far from the spirit of the mystery, virtue or maxim on which we meditate.

CONTRITION, asking pardon for those faults or sins, promising amendment with the help of God.

APPLICATION, striving to acquire the good that this mystery, virtue or maxim offers, searching for the proper conduct inspired by that spirit, forming resolutions which must be at the same time, present, particular and efficacious.

C. Those that refer to God and to the saints:

UNION with the attitudes and dispositions of Jesus in this mystery, virtue or maxim in order to acquire his spirit and put it into practice.

PETITION to God the Father with filial trust in the grace of His Spirit to participate in that mystery, virtue or maxim.

INVOCATION to the saints of our devotion that they may intercede and make up for the defects of our prayer.

It is not necessary “to make the effort to do all the acts of the second part in the same prayer, but only two or three, or possibly only one....taking care, nonetheless, to formulate the resolutions or renew those previously made”.

The third part is the *conclusion of the prayer*. Briefly, three acts are made:

THE ACT OF REVIEW, of what we have done in prayer and “of the sentiments God gave us during this time that seem to be the most practical and useful, and the benefits we can draw from them”.

THE ACT OF THANKSGIVING, for the favors we have received from God in the prayer.

THE ACT OF OFFERING, of our being and our resolutions for the day to God, invoking Mary and the saints.

“When one feels gently and interiorly attracted by something that had not been proposed, such as to love God; to manifest

to Him one's trust or submission; to ask insistently and confidently for something, for oneself or for another; or to reflect on some Word of God, that attraction must be followed in the measure that may please God to maintain us in it. One becomes aware of this when finishing the prayer with a renewed desire to fulfill one's duty through love of God or to please Him".

As we see, the method of interior prayer of St. John Baptist de La Salle is very detailed, which is a great help to know how to proceed in mental prayer. At the same time, it is very flexible. Even when it gives much importance to Sacred Scripture, it is not strictly bound by it and permits us to call upon other resources of the universal and Christian spiritual tradition.

10. Formation for Biblical Animation.

Since the mid-twentieth century, the Catholic universities and the diocesan institutes of religious studies have been offering professional courses in order to prepare the teachers of religious education in the schools. With ever greater frequency the Brothers and lay professors of Catholic religion have been taking part. With this formation, the Lasallian biblical apostolate described here is perfectly feasible.

A survey undertaken by the present author in 2004 of the Brothers Visitors of the Lasallian Latin American Region shows that in general the Brothers of Latin America and the Caribbean have been professionally trained in religious studies or in theology in their initial formation.. They have the biblical formation that additionally qualifies them to form Ministers of the Word. With all the more reason, then, can they initiate the parents and the teaching, administrative and auxiliary personnel of each educational establishment in the vital reading and interpretation of the Bible if they have the purpose to multiply the communities of faith at all levels of the school and maximize its evangelizing character.

It is increasingly frequent that in the dioceses, in connection with the catechetical institute, courses be given to form grass roots agents for biblical animation. At the same time, on every continent there are institutes to form biblical scholars, that is, persons capable of translating, interpreting and explaining biblical texts.

However, their specialization does not make them able to give biblical animation nor to organize it.

The Superior Institute for Catechetical Pastoral Ministry of Chile, "Catecheticum"⁵, co-founded in 1992 by the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Marist Brothers, the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the "Hogar Catequístico" Foundation, the Episcopal Conference of Chile, aggregated in 2001 to the Pontifical Salesian University of Rome, has established the first licentiate in Educational Sciences with Mention of Biblical Pastoral Ministry. The students are required to have a Bachelor's degree in Theology or the degree of Professor of Catholic Religion. In two years, with a pastoral-theological program, a formation on exegesis, social sciences and methodological courses, with three semester-long practicums of increasing responsibility and a post-graduate thesis, they are enabled to form animators for the biblical pastoral ministry, to organize and to direct biblical pastoral ministry at the level of religious provinces, dioceses and Episcopal conferences.

11. Biblical Animation of the Church in Today's World.

The 6th Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) took place in Beirut, Lebanon, from the 3rd to the 12th of September, 2002, opening with a papal address⁶. The Federation was founded in 1969 in the Apostolic See by the Secretariat for the Unity of Christians in order to put into practice Chapter VI of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*. The present author represented the Superior Institute of Catechetical Pastoral Ministry of Chile, "Catecheticum" and the Generalate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, two institutions which are associate members of the CBF. According to the outgoing President of the Executive Committee, Most Rev. Cornelius Esua, bishop of Kumbo in Cameroon, from the time of the 5th Assembly, CBF had increased by 28 new members and now had reached 306 among full members (Episcopal conferences) and associated members (institutions

⁵ www.catecheticum.cl

⁶ The "Osservatore Romano" in Spanish, September 13, 2002

active in the biblical animation of pastoral ministry). The new President of the CBF, named by the Apostolic See, Most Rev. Vincenzo Paglia, Bishop of Terni-Narni-Amelia in Italy, treated each participant to his commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke, written as an aid to *lectio divina*.

The Chilean theologian, Pablo Richard, lectured on: *Pluralist Experiences of the First Christian Communities according to the Acts of the Apostles*; Professor Theodor Khoury, a Lebanese now working in Germany, on: *Abraham, a Blessing for All Nations, according to the Jewish, Christian and Islamic Traditions*; Sister Doctor Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, from Kenya, on: *Scenarios of Pluralism, a Sociological Analysis*; Bishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, from the Secretariat for the Unity of Christians, on *Religious Pluralism, a Theological Reflection*. Contributors from the various continents analyzed the projections for the biblical animation of pastoral ministry according to the post-synodal pontifical apostolic exhortations.

The CBF promotes the reading of the Bible “in context” to avoid as much as possible a literalist interpretation, the so-called fundamentalist reading, as well as one that is purely spiritual without external impact. It encourages the *lectio divina* in its several forms, including the commitment to action for the biblical animation of retreats and days of recollection, even though other forms of biblical based prayer exist such as that of St. John Baptist de La Salle or of St. Ignatius. There was *lectio divina* each day by language groups on the texts of the Acts of the Apostles. The thrust was on going beyond the purely academic aspect of biblical formation to center it more on Christian life and ecclesial action.

Coordinators of the continents or zones described the situation of the biblical apostolate in their regions, which was bolstered by a permanent exhibition of materials from the different countries and by numerous communications to volunteer groups.

Interesting and impressive experiences were culled from the reports given in writing or in plenary sessions: the flagrant violation of religious liberty in Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan, where the communication of the Christian faith is considered a crime and where they seek to destroy the Church. It was observed that in some seminaries and religious houses there is a deficient formation for the spiritual and pastoral use of the Bible, reducing

it to an instrument for theological argument and, as a result, impoverishing homilies and making it difficult for the faithful "to familiarize themselves safely and profitably with the sacred Scriptures, and become steeped in their spirit" (DV 25b). If it is the task of catechesis to initiate "all the faithful" in the "diligent reading of the Scripture so that they acquire the '*surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ*' (Phil 3:8)", it is doubly urgent to give special support to the biblical and spiritual formation of the catechists. In several places, at the time of the Week, Month or Year of the Bible, campaigns have been organized around trivialities rather than emphasizing the big issues dealing with the experience of God in the life of the People and of individuals.

Before the violent resurgence of nationalisms in the Balkans beginning in 1994, the president of the Slovenian Biblical Institute, Rudi Koncilja, propagated a method which promoted "the Word of God as a Force for Positive Thinking". In the sub-region of Central Europe the director of the Czech Catholic Biblical Institute since 1997, Petr Chalupa, has verified the unifying power of the Word of God in the encounters of representatives of political and social factions generally at odds with one another. The same Institute has utilized an approach to Sacred Scripture as a marriage preparation for future spouses that can last for a lifetime. The Austrian Biblical Institute maintains an open telephone line to inform the public on the dangers of the sects where people can seek some refuge in their insecurity. The German speaking countries and regions (of France, Belgium, Switzerland, Poland, etc.) proclaimed 2003 as the Year of the Bible, with the purpose of making the prayerful reading of the Bible an important part of the life of families by means of biblical circles.

In Eastern Europe the present day needs are manuals of introduction in order to learn to read the sacred text. The recent document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Hebrew People and Their Sacred Writings in the Christian Bible* has been gratefully received at a time in which anti-Semitic feelings and attitudes have resurged.

In the sub-region of Rome, in addition to academic institutions, there are congregations which, besides translating and spreading the Bible in their missionary efforts, have stressed the place of the Bible in education, such as the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the Brothers of the Christian Schools who have also formed

Ministers of the Word. The various members have formed task forces on the Bible and Mission, the Bible and Formation, the Bible and the Means of Communication, which schedule their own annual encounters.

In Africa, the activities are concentrated on the translation and diffusion of the biblical text and in the preparation of exegetes. The 6th Assembly approved a preferential option for Africa, where it is indispensable to have Bibles for a biblical pastoral ministry.

In Oceania, Catholic web pages have been multiplying exponentially with reflections, prayers inspired by biblical texts, greeting cards with biblical thoughts and discussion and sharing groups which make use of the Bible to shed light on social, justice and ethical problems that affect every country. In the Diocese of Enga, the Year of the Bible was celebrated in processions from one parish to another with the Bible in a crystal case, similar to the Ark of the Covenant, representing the presence of God, which moved many persons to comment on the Bible in the family with some aids. Monitors have been prepared in biblical retreats with the support of national and diocesan courses for animators of biblical pastoral ministry. In Australia they have created the Family and Bible Camp.

In Northeast Asia, youth camps have been organized for biblical and liturgical formation. The Studium Biblicum Franciscanum offers biblical formation and the spread of the Bible through its magazines as an extension of its academic and translation work. The Commission for the Biblical Apostolate of Taiwan produces videos and audiocassettes for formation and information on the life of the Church in support of a growing network of Bible groups, promotes the spread of the Bible for prisoners and maintains the Bible on the Internet: www.catholic.org.tw In Macao ministers of the Word are being formed to animate communities rarely visited by priests. In Japan, the St. Sulpice Seminary produces very popular software for introduction to the Bible. In Korea the Daughters of St. Paul run a biblical course on distance learning for the faithful in general; the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres, the Sisters of Perpetual Help and the Caritas Sisters offer courses and publications for biblical formation.

The United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association (UCCBA), linked to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

through the Office for the Promotion of the Apostolate for the Chinese People, promotes the memorization and study of the Word of God in order to inculturate it and build communities of love to sanctify the world. It encourages Chinese communities everywhere to be affiliated to the UCCBA. The Association promotes interactive interpretation between the Books of Confucius and the Bible. Keys to understand the biblical text for each day are offered on the Internet. The Bible and a Guide for Reading the Bible are posted in this way. In Hong Kong annual camps for the Bible and Life are offered to new Catholics, one Sunday a month, for sharing the Gospel in retreat houses, a year-long course on the Bible and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well as the Bible and Youth Encounters to learn how to use it to enlighten aspects of their life with the Word of God.

There are contests in the Week or the Month of the Bible with biblical drawings and essays to see the actuality of the Gospel. They share insights on scriptural texts, devise crossword puzzles and other biblical games and extend the Good News to handicapped persons. The Catholic Biblical Institute of Hong Kong has a diploma course in biblical studies linked to the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (SBF) of Jerusalem and an open course with certificates for attendance. The SBF produces "I go to Mass" with commentaries on the Sunday readings for children from 8 to 14 years of age.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, in addition to the "Dei Verbum" revue published in Stuttgart in Spanish, English, French and German, the members of FEBIC-LAC receive "La Palabra Hoy", published in Santafé of Bogotá, that includes reflections, news of encounters, experiences and pullouts to animate activities. There are triennial encounters in each zone (México, Central America, the Caribbean, the "Bolivarian" Countries, Brazil and the Southern Cone), a Latin American-wide meeting every six years and, as far as possible, an annual one for each country.

The final declaration of the 6th Assembly commits the members to overcome unjust discrimination and sectarian divisions, accepting the plurality of world views, of interpretations of the Bible, of theologies and ecclesial structures and it offers cooperation with the Ten-Year Plan to Overcome Violence of the World Council of

Churches and every initiative for the promotion of justice and peace in the world.

* * *

The Lasallian organisms active in biblical animation have the right to request incorporation into the Catholic Biblical Federation by making contact with the biblical pastoral commission of the Episcopal conference of each country, or directly with the General Secretariat of the FEBIC, Postfach 105222, 70045 Stuttgart, Germany. We hope that “La Salle Intercom” and our web pages show the participation of the Brothers and Lay Collaborators of our Institute in the animation of the biblical pastoral and educational ministries.

Final Questions

For reflection and sharing

1. How is biblical formation to be promoted at personal and group levels? What concrete actions or steps are required to provide biblical formation of students and also staff, Brothers' community, Lasallian collaborators and students' families?
2. What will help to significantly foster the integration or synthesis of culture-science-faith in the educational centre? How can this synthesis be fostered in situations where there are students or teachers of other religions?
3. Has your understanding of Lasallian spirituality changed somewhat? Would you add a further element which is not found in the bulletin?

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