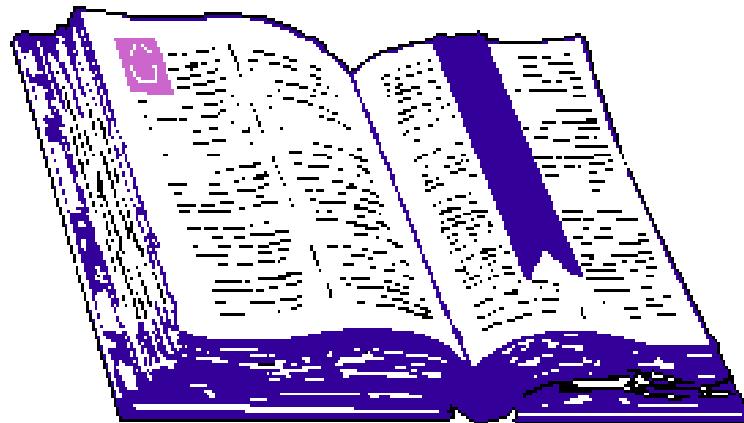
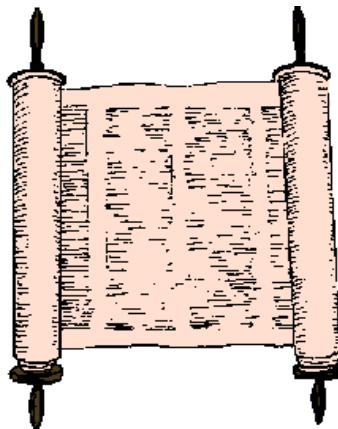


The **Catholic Biblical Federation** (CBF or FEBIC-LAC) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to the ministry of the Word of God. The CBF provides a forum for those organizations in regional and world-wide sharing of experiences in the field of Biblical Apostolate. It promotes the reading of the Bible within the context of concrete life situations (*Lectio Divina*) and trains ministers of the Word in this direction.

Fr. Bernard Latus, SVD is a Coordinator of the CBF in the Caribbean Region.

# Welcome to the Bible



*How to read, understand and pray the Holy Bible*

Basic guide for Catholics in the Caribbean

Compiled by  
Bernard Latus, svd.

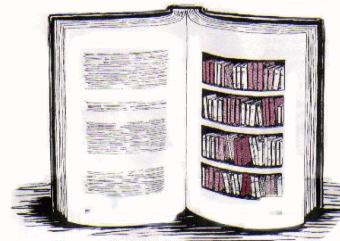
# What is the Bible ?

The Bible is **a record of people's experience of God's self-revelation**. It is based on experience. The book did not fall from heaven nor was written by one man who, in spiritual ecstasy, was writing word by word what God was telling him.

The Bible is, in fact, a **a library of books** written and compiled for over 2000 years (from 2000 BC to 100 AD) by various communities and people. Each book was written in a certain place in the world, by distinct people living in a particular culture and in a specific human language. Very often it was a gathering of various stories transmitted by a spoken word from generation to generation (like Anansi stories in the Caribbean) and then written down on parched skin or paper. In its original form it was not in English nor in King James Version which many Christians in the English-speaking Caribbean consider the true translation of the Bible, but in Hebrew or Aramaic the languages of the Jews - especially the Old Testament, and the New Testament was written in Greek. Over the centuries it was translated to various languages

The Bible is **a story of faith's journey, a story of salvation history**. It teaches us about God who is constantly reaching to us and calling for response. We believe that the writers of Scripture were truly listening to the Lord, and so we call the Bible "inspired by God". We believe that the Lord was truly speaking to them, and that this inspired dialogue between God and humankind still continues in those who know how to trust and to listen. In other words, the experience of ancient Israel is our norm for today. It gives us the proper attitude for interpreting our salvation history. Our faith is not in the words of the Bible. Our faith is in the person - the Lord who is revealing himself to us. He is the word who is calling us into personal dialogue.

The Bible is **a medium for entering into personal relationship with God**. It is the way God communicates with us and we with Him. God does not give us "head" answers to our problems but rather communicates meaning and life. The end and purpose of the Scriptures is to share this good news, to give our lives meaning



## What the Bible is not...

**The Bible is not a history book.** It does not set out to teach science, physics, biology, geography or geology.

*Example:*

*(To believe the biblical description of the earth; it is definitely not a globe but rather a platform with mountains, valleys and rivers and is set upon seven pillars, surrounded by water. The rain water is stored behind the stars and the sun. - a picture which cannot be reconciled with our view of the earth and universe today)*

**The Bible is not an answer book to all the practical problems of life.** We cannot just open the Bible, place a finger with closed eyes and think that the sentence, to which our finger is pointing, is the answer to our problems.

**The Bible is not a book for speculation and fancy prophecy** about the beast, or about the end of the world . There is no secret esoteric knowledge in the Bible. There are many fundamentalist sects who use the symbolic images in the Bible to name who is the beast or Anti-Christ or when the end of the world is coming. These beliefs usually come to nothing as the history goes on. They only create animosity, suspicion and confusion among many credulous persons.

**The Bible should not be used to create disputes with other Christians** setting them apart and judging who is right and who is wrong. In fact with the same Bible, though different texts, you can prove or contradict the same thing.

*Example;*

*Killing other person is acceptable: Lv.20:10, Jdg14:19, 1Sm.17:50-51....*

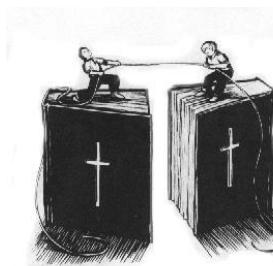
*Killing other person is abominable sin: Ex 25:13, Matt. 5:21ff...*

Finally, **not all texts in the Bible have the same importance to the practice of our Christian faith.** - “you shall not wear clothing made of two different materials” (Lv.19:19) or “anything living in the sea or river that does not have both fins and scales must not be eaten” (Lv.11:10) cannot be regarded as important as the other commandment from Leviticus, which is quoted by Jesus - “Love your neighbour as yourself”

Unfortunately, many Christians are scrupulous about literal practice of some small commandments from Old Testament rather than living the spirit of the gospel of Jesus.

## How the Bible was written

**The Bible was written over two thousand years ago by various writers.** Many texts were transmitted for ages through **oral tradition**. Oral stories were passed from mouth to mouth for many years before they were written down. Some stories from the Old Testament were



borrowed from Mesopotamian writings and from Near Eastern oral tradition.

The individual books in the Bible are significantly different from books produced today. Most modern books were written by a single author within a period of few weeks, months, or possibly years. Few of the biblical books especially those of the Old Testament, came to us straight from the pen of an individual writer. Many of them were **edited and reedited** over the course of several generations.

**For example;** in Old Testament, The Pentateuch (the first five books of the bible) one can distinguish four traditions; The Yahwist, the Elohist, Priestly tradition and Deuteronomic Tradition. These traditions though very often mixed and adjoined together signify many writers and schools that contributed to the final form of the Pentateuch.

**(J) Yahwist Tradition,**

- § 1000-900BC Judean document, (Israel's national epic)
- § Use of the name of "Yah-weh" as God,
- § All the best known stories belong to this tradition, Narrative is vivid and moves rapidly, characters depicted with earthly realism, characteristic vocabulary and style. God is portrayed "humanly" (anthropomorphism), Yahweh is the Lord of history.
- § Interest in Judahite (Kingdom of Judea) history and places.
- § Deep theological insights.

**(E) Elohist Tradition,**

- § 922-730BC document from the Northern Kingdom,
- § Use of the name "El-ohim" for God, and pre-Sinai material, stress on places (sanctuaries) in the northern kingdom. Worship of God on the mountains. The tradition is restricted - begins with Abraham. Elijah zeal for transcendence - lack of anthropomorphisms God speaks in dreams, from cloud or fire or through angels. Stricter morality and more didactic style. Climax of history is the covenant of God with Israel.

Preference for the idealized desert experience,

The conflation of **J & E** after the collapse of northern kingdom (721BC) with the reign of Hezekiah with the preference of the use of **J**,

**(D) Deuteronomic Tradition**

- § 721-621BC work of a Judean author. (Book found by Josiah)
- § Restricted (with small exceptions) to the Book of Deuteronomy,
- § Hortatory style, distinctive vocabulary - religious crisis
- § Salvation is possible only through loyal response to Yahweh's Covenant and return to pure worship of God in Jerusalem.
- § Enhanced concept of Covenant as loving election of Israel and of law as Israel's loyal response to the election.
- § The decision must be personal - constant use of words "you", "how" and "today" in reference to this decision.

**(P) Priestly Tradition**

- § 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Post-exilic work of the priests in Jerusalem
- § The style is dry and statistical (narrative is just a sketch or outline)
- § Genealogies: (*Noah was the father of....*) Artificial chronology.
- § Details concerning priesthood, sacrifice, festivals and cult.

- § Legalistic tone and language
  - § Creation Story - (Gn1:1-2:4a) - ritual and liturgical applications and allusions,
  - Preoccupation with calendar (liturgical implications)
  - § History portrayed with ritual-liturgical view.
- Incorporated into **J-E-D** Pentateuch around 400BC ( time of Ezra-Nehemiah)

Similarly, in the New Testament, **the Gospels were written in a process**; first there were stories of eye witnesses to what Jesus did and said. These came later into collections of Jesus' parables, sayings, etc. The Christian community emphasized certain stories and accentuated certain issues, thus the three synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke). Each of the gospels stresses different aspect of Jesus. **Matthew** highlights the Christ of majesty (who heals by word of mouth alone, never touches people, never hungry, never angry, etc), **Mark** highlights the Christ of might (who proves he is the Messiah by his acts of power and authority over natural and demonic forces), **Luke** highlights the Christ of mercy (who reaches out to the poor, the outcasts, foreigners and women) and **more original Gospel of John** highlights the Christ of mystery, who was with the father from eternity and who has come into the world to reveal this hidden mystery, the truth that leads to life).

With few exceptions, the authors of the Old and New Testament books did not think of themselves as professional writers. They were members of a community which felt especially chosen as the bearers of God's promise. **Their writing was an expression of the community in action**: it was the result of the process of listening to God's word in history and in the religious experience of the nation, of reflecting on that word, of telling the story, and handing the message to larger generations of the community. Thus, the Bible comes from the midst of the community of faith in order to serve the community of faith.

## How the Bible was established

The books that make up the present biblical **canon** (a term meaning "rule" or "norm") were chosen through a process that took place over a period of about 1000 years. There is considerable agreement that the books known as the Law or Torah (the first five books of the Bible) were the first books to be regarded as Scripture and authoritative. That probably happened about 400 B.C. The other two groups of books in the Old Testament, the Prophets and the Writings, came to be regarded as Scripture later, between 400 B.C. and A.D. 100. Between the third and first centuries B.C., the Jewish Scriptures were translated into Greek for the benefit of Jewish colonists who lived in Greek-speaking areas. This translation was known as the **Septuagint**. The Christian Old Testament canon was formed from it.

The Protestant churches have adopted this as a canon while the **Catholic Church shortly after the time when the Reformation began in 1546 at the Council of Trent explicitly and authoritatively announced the canon of 72 books of the bible**. At that Council **six books were added** as inspired to the Hebrew canon. The canonization of the books of the bible was a process of many hundreds of years and it involved a discernment and recognition of all the inspired books. Some of the standards that were used to make this statement were the inner unity and cohesiveness of the books, their apostolic origin, their ability to foster prayer and love and, above all, their acceptance by the local Christian communities. Many biblical scholars even Protestant recognize the value of the Deuterocanonical books or Apocrypha for an understanding of the late Old Testament period.

In A.D. 98 a council of Jewish scholars at Jamnia established criteria for determining how a book may be considered sacred. Seven books, known as the Apocrypha, were rejected by this council. **The Protestant Christian churches follow this list of Jewish books as their Old Testament**. They did not accept the Apocryphal books as canonical, or authoritative. The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox churches retain these seven Apocryphal books in their Old Testament for a total of 46 books. The first Christians, as well as Jesus, used the Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament) as their Bible. Later, between about A.D. 50 and 125, they composed their own documents, known as the New Testament. It took nearly three more centuries and many disputes before the present list of 27 New Testament books was adopted as authoritative by the Western church. This list of 27 books was first listed in A.D. 367 in the 39th Festal Letter of Athanasius, a bishop of the church.

## **How the Bible was translated**

The Old Testament's original language, with few minor exceptions was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. Early Christian communities used the Septuagint - the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Later, as Christianity spread to other lands, translations into other languages were needed. Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damasus I to do the authorized Latin version which he completed around AD 410. This translation came to be known as the **Vulgate**, from the Latin word meaning "common" or "everyday". It was the standard version of the Bible for over 1000 years. By the eighth century, only scholars could read and understand Latin. A monk known as Venerable Bede worked on translating Jerome's Latin **Vulgate** into Anglo-Saxon (about A.D. 735), the language then spoken in England, but he died before he completed it. Other Anglo-Saxon versions were attempted but did not become widely used. Beginning in the late 14th century, a number of major English Bible translations were completed. Among other well known old English translations are **The Wycliffe Bible** (A.D. 1384). **Tyndale Bible** (A.D. 1525), **Coverdale Bible** (A.D. 1535). **The Geneva Bible** (A.D. 1560). **The Rheims-Douay Bible** (A.D. 1582-1609). **The King James Version** (A.D. 1611). King James I appointed 54 scholars to make a new version. They based their work on early Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, and gave great attention to style and literary quality. This Bible became the most popular version in the English language.

By the 19th century, many new **Greek and Hebrew manuscripts** had been discovered,, and the English spoken in 1611 had changed greatly. New versions such as the **English Revised (1885)** and the **American Standard (1901)** were created. Later in the 20th century, many more versions were completed **New English Bible, Good News Bible, Jerusalem Bible, Christian Community Bible, Living Bible, etc..**

These most recent translations of the bible use modern English and are much more easy to read and are used widely in the Catholic Church. In liturgy the most common are the Jerusalem Bible and the New American Bible translations. All the bibles that were mentioned above are trying to give a faithful rendition of the Hebrew and Greek scriptures. To say that only the King James Version is the only correct English translation is not true; this translation is the most popular in the Caribbean because it was used during the colonization and at that time it was the only available one, used in all churches and schools. The King James Version does not reflect the English language of today. Attempts are being made to translate the Bible to English and French creole and patois. The list of new English and other-language translations continues to grow today.

## **How the Bible is arranged**

The Bible is divided to two parts; Old Testament & New Testament.  
Old Testament are the books which were written in Hebrew and Aramaic (the Apocrypha accepted in the Catholic Bible in Greek)

### **Overview of the Old Testament**

The Old Testament, as accepted by the Catholic Church has 45 books (in Protestant churches, has a collection of 39 books; the other books are called apocrypha). In the Hebrew Bible these books are usually divided into three groups: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The list of books in these three categories is as follows:

#### 1.The Law

##### ***Pentateuch- Torah***

Genesis,  
Exodus,  
Leviticus,  
Numbers,      Deuteronomy

## 2. The Prophets

### **4 Major Prophets:**

Isaiah, Jeremiah Ezekiel, (*Daniel - see writings*)

### **12 Minor Prophets:**

Obadiah,, Jonah, Micah, Amos, Nahum , Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Hosea, Zechariah,  
Joel, Malachi

(*Joshua, Judges 1, 2 Samuel, 1, 2 Kings - see the writings; historical*)

### 3. The Writings

#### ***Historical:***

Joshua, Judges  
1, 2 Samuel, 1, 2 Kings, 1, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther,

#### ***Wisdom:***

Job, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel

### **4. Additional Books in Catholic Bibles:**

There are seven deuterocanonical (second listed) Old Testament books included in the Catholic Bible that are not included in Protestant Bibles and are considered by them as *Apocrypha* are:

Tobit, Judith, Sirah (called also The Wisdom of Solomon), Baruch, Esther, and also Story of Suzanna & Bel and the Dragon included as 13 & 14 chapters of the Book of Daniel.  
Also some additions to the Book of Esther.

These books were already included in some unofficial canons in the past but the Council of Trent (1546) made the final decision to include them in the canon.

The term Law, as applied to the first five books of the Bible, is a translation of the Hebrew word Torah. Torah has a much broader meaning, though, and may be related to the Hebrew word *yarah*, meaning "instruction."

There are many laws and regulations mentioned in the first five books of the Bible, including the Ten Commandments, but there is other important information also. The accounts of creation, the stories about Abraham, Sarah, and their early descendants, the exodus from Egypt, the wilderness wanderings, and the Sinai covenant are some of the significant stories and events described in the Law.

The second major group of books, known as the Prophets, contains the three major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and 12 minor prophets. (In addition, in Hebrew scriptures, it includes six books (Joshua—2 Kings) that we would not generally consider prophetic books. We are more likely to call these books history.

The third major group of books, known as the Writings, contains a wide variety of books. Here can be found poetry, songs, hymns, wisdom instruction, and stories. More history books are also included in this group, such as Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. This final grouping includes many of what may be considered the "latest works" written in the Old Testament.

## **Overview of the New Testament**

The Books of the New testament could be divided as follows:

**1. The Gospels:**

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John,  
**Acts of the Apostles,**

**2. Paul's Letters:**

Romans, 1& 2 Corinthinas, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians,  
Colossians, Philemon, 1& 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus.

**Letter to the Hebrews.**

**3. Catholic Epistles:**

James, 1&2 Peter, Jude, 1,2 &3 John,

**4. Book of Revelation.**

The New Testament is a collection of 27 books that focus on the continuing love and mercy of God as revealed in the incarnation—the coming of Jesus, the Christ, in the flesh. The word covenant may be an even more appropriate term than testament to describe the content of this collection of books.

A covenant is an agreement that establishes a relationship between two parties. The Old Testament tells of the covenant God established with all the world through the chosen people of Israel. The New Testament tells of a new covenant established through Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, prophesied in the Old Testament. Because Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the Christian church—Jesus' followers—is a continuation of Israel's history. The books of the New Testament fall into four literary forms: gospel, history, letter, apocalypse. The first four books of the New Testament are called "Gospels." The word gospel comes from an Anglo-Saxon word, god-spell, which means "good news" or "good tidings." The Gospels tell the good news of Jesus through relating the events of his life, ministry and teaching, and death and resurrection.

Mark is thought to be the first of the gospels written and appears to have been one of the sources available to the writers of Matthew and Luke. Both follow Mark's sequence of events rather closely but add material from other sources (such as a document of Jesus' sayings called Q) to create their own versions of Jesus' life. Because these three Gospels have much in common, they are called the Synoptic Gospels (from the word synopsis, meaning "see together"). The Gospel of John does not follow the same sequence of events as the other three Gospels and contains much material not found in the others.

Portions of the history of the early church and the spread of the Christian faith are contained in the Acts of the Apostles. The period covered by the events in the book of Acts is from Jesus' resurrection to Paul's journey to Rome, approximately 30 years.

The next 21 books of the New Testament are referred to as letters, or epistles, though some are actually sermons. These letters are divided into two categories: those written by the Apostle Paul, and those written by others. These letters address personal issues, questions and controversies, and develop arguments which explain and expand our understanding of the Christian faith.

The last book of the New Testament, the Revelation to John, is a unique literary form called an apocalypse, which means "revelation." Using symbolic language, this book is concerned with the future of God's kingdom on earth and in heaven. This is the most used and abused books by many fundamentalist sects which try to predict the end of the world.

## **How to read the Bible**

The Bible should not be read like any ordinary book from page one to the end. Rather a person who tries to be a Christian, should start reading the Gospel of Mark or Luke, to learn about Jesus' life, his teaching and his work of salvation.

Many have started reading the bible from the first book and rather than being inspired by the Gospel message they were taken up by the Old Testament laws and commandments of the first books of the Bible; eg. Adventists who uphold the Sabbath, and Jewish dietary laws. Others still got inspired by the message about the end of the world from Daniel and the Book of Revelation and treat those books of the bible as the most important. Such reading of the Bible give way to creating sects - groups that give enormous value only to some sections of the Bible.

While reading the Scriptures, do not think that you are the first to understand God's message and that there were no true Christians before you. This would be the way to have one more founder of those strange sects. A true Christian starts reading the Bible form the New Testament, especially the Gospels and also gets directions of how to live Christian life from the Letters of Paul and the Catholic epistles.

To foster his prayer life he uses the book of Psalms and gets very practical advise for life from the Book of Proverbs. This is the reason why many New Testament books which are in circulations are appended with the Books of Psalms and Proverbs.

Some people are accustomed to opening the Bible at random, thinking that the first paragraph they find will give them precisely the word they need at that moment. Certainly God can answer their concerns in this way but he never committed himself to communicate with us in such a manner.

The word of God is life-giving but that does not mean that every word is an instant problem solver today. Each word was given by God to people living under concrete circumstances. Let us ponder what their problem was and what God wanted them to understand. Then we may ask; What light does the message shed on the present time and circumstances?

It might not be advisable to read a whole book at one time but rather to choose small portions of the Gospel or other book of the Bible and study it, meditate and pray about it.

For a Catholic Christian a good way to read the Bible is to read passage by passage each day, using the assigned readings of the day in Liturgical Calendar of the year. It will help you to live the Liturgical seasons to the fullest; Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter season, etc.

## How to study the Bible

The Bible was written by believers for believers. As a believer you read it in order to live it. It is your book so you desire to study it. Yet you will often find the Bible strange and difficult, for it comes from a distant and ancient cultures. With its numerous editors and authors covering many centuries, the Bible is really raw material of your faith, not its finished product. How you go about studying the Bible is crucial.

There are **many Christian denominations and sects who study and interpret the bible literally**, the words mean exactly what they say regardless of their context, destination or literary form. Those who do that kind of Bible study are called Fundamentalists. You have to be aware that joining such a Bible Study group may only confuse you and pose a threat to your faith. In the Catholic Church we do not study the Bible exactly the same way as some other churches do. Do not join the Bible Study groups of other denominations unless you are well instructed , trained and grounded in the Catholic interpretation of the Scriptures.

**A sound introduction to the Bible requires the expert services of knowledgeable tour-guide** and the lively company of fellow tourists. To visit the land and times of the Bible is to visit a foreign land and an ancient time. We need to be shown those special, sometimes out-of-the-way places that give us a feel for this vast and alien territory. We need a group to help spark excitement, to share ideas, and to provide an incentive to stick to the tour. In short we ought to be a part of a Bible study group. The best is to form a group within your own church community. A group needs a knowledgeable and believing Bible study leader who animates the group.

Secondly **the group needs a sound catholic study guidebooks**, be aware of many publications that are not Catholic and are available. A Catholic group would do best to select a Catholic publication. Some Catholic Bibles; like the Christian Community Bible distributed in the Caribbean, give excellent footnotes and commentaries on various topics which could be used by the group. There are three basic Bible Study approaches;

1. **"Word-to-live-by" approach**; is a problematic approach used by many churches and sects which searches the Bible for a text to prove moral point that one has already decided upon. It tends to take the words of the scripture literally.
2. **Contextual approach**: Studying systematically one book of the Bible, looking for the contexts, who wrote the text, for whom, why , etc.
3. **Thematic approach**; using and exploring biblical themes; love, sin, salvation, etc.

## How to pray the Bible

In the Church's history the Bible was used to foster prayer life. It is not just the book of Psalms which offers a set of ready made prayers.

One of the ancient methods of praying the Bible is *Lectio Divina*:

*Lectio Divina* means "sacred reading" , it is not just the reading of the Bible but reading the life-experiences in the light of the scriptures; we discover the Bible in our life-experiences and we

find our life-experiences in the Bible. There are four elements in the method of *Lectio Divina*:

**1. Reading the Text,**

The text is read in a prayerful reverential way, not to just inform you but to inspire you. You may read the text yourself or the text could be read by someone when it is done in a group. You can read the text more than once. Let the text speak to you. Be attentive to the words which give life. Situate the text; What is it saying?, who is speaking?, to whom?, What is the situation of the people it speaks about? What the author tries to convey?

**2. Meditation:**

Here we employ our imagination and memories. Go beyond the text to your own life situation, to your own experiences. Ask what is the text saying to me today, in my present situation. We make the text our own, a message to our own life. We ask ourselves why these words touch me? What feelings do those words evoke in me?

**3. Prayer**

Meditation leads to prayer, it could be of thanksgiving, petition, submission etc. We start praying with our own words and move to praying with the words of the passage. If our meditation has been done well then our prayer will reflect the words of the scripture.

**4. Contemplation.**

At this point we deepen our meditation. We need to give time for the passage of the scripture to take roots in our lives. Contemplation is an action of seeking and looking and of being sought and looked at by God. We are giving here a special space to the Holy Spirit to guide us and inspire us.

When we have done a very good *Lectio Divina*, we shall get the feeling that the passage was written especially for us and that our lives are included in it.

## How to share the Bible in groups?

### Outline A.

*The Word of God leads us to reflect upon our life.*

1. We invite the Lord                      Choruses & Prayer

2. We read the text

Could be the gospel of the day or the coming Sunday,

3. We look at the text again

No preaching or discussing !

What important words or phrases do we find ?

We read the text again

4. We let God speak to us                 Silence 2-5 minutes

5. We share what we have heard in our hearts

No preaching or discussing

6. We search together.

- What does the Lord want us to do?  
- How have we been living our WORD OF LIFE?

- What new WORD will we take home ?

7. We pray together.

- We pray using the text of the Bible and our shared experiences  
- We end prayer with Our Father or Psalm 23

### Outline B.

*Our life's experiences are enlightened*

## *by the Word of God*

1. We invite the Lord Choruses & Prayer

2. We share experiences

Share experiences of everyday life, choose one which makes the greatest impact on the community,

3. We look for the Word of God to enlighten us

We ask ourselves a question; Which passage of the Bible could enlighten us in our life - based on the experiences shared?

What God says about that aspect of our life?

We look for a specific text in the Bible -

Others may share other texts

4. We read the Word of God (Only 2 or 3 texts should be selected)

5. We let God speak to us  
(Silence 2-5 minutes)

6. We share what we have heard in our hearts  
(No preaching or discussing)

7. We pray together  
- We pray using the text of the Bible and our shared experiences  
- We end prayer with Our Father or Psalm 23

## **How, why, what... and other questions**

**1. Why the Catholic Bible contains more books than the protestant King James Version ?**

The Catholic Bible and its contents have almost 2000 years of history. It evolved from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called Septuagint) which was then translated into Latin (Vulgate) and subsequently to many modern languages. The Greek translation (200BC),

contained some books and additions to the books of Daniel and Ester that were known only in Greek. It was this translation, known as Septuagint, and not the original Hebrew, that was widely quoted by the writers of the New Testament: Paul, Luke, etc. Besides some of the books like the 2 Maccabees and Wisdom have references to the belief in the resurrection from the dead, a belief that existed many years before the birth of Jesus. No wonder that these writings were very important for the early Christians.

After the New Testament was almost written the Jewish leaders opposed to Christianity met in Jamnia (95AD) and in response to the new Christian "heresy" created the first canon of the Bible accepting only the Jewish writings and rejecting all additions that were not written in Hebrew and Aramaic. This canon contains all the books of the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi as they are in KJV though in different order.

During the time Reformation, Martin Luther rejected the widely known Vulgate translation and opted for the old Jewish canon attempting to translate the Bible into vernacular languages from the original Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible that was available was the Bible of the Jews in Europe which contained only the books accepted in the Council of Jamnia. He became suspicious of the Vulgate even more and adopted the Jewish Bible claiming that it is more authentic. The other books like Judith, Tobit, Wisdom, etc became Apocrypha for Luther. The King James Version was made also from the contemporary Hebrew Bible. The KJV New Testament is the same as in the Catholic Bibles.

## **2. Why Catholics were discouraged reading the Bible in the past and are encouraged now ?**

The rise of Protestantism which accepted only the authority of the Bible and rejected ages of Christian tradition, made the leaders of catholic Church very cautious about making the Bible widely available to the people. Protestantism itself did not remain uniform but various preachers and "inspired" persons found in the Bible new revelations and branched off from the main stream Protestantism and the whole reformation movement was fragmenting itself into numerous sects where each of them, after meticulous research of the Bible, came up and adopted various marginal laws and dubious doctrines derived often just from Old Testament.

Following the Reformation and the continual fragmentation of Christianity Catholic Church adopted a defensive attitude and developed devotions and spiritualities not directly dependent on the Scriptures. During the Vatican II Council (1965) *Dei Verbum* - a special constitution was written on Divine Revelation. It recommends the propagation of the knowledge and use of the Holy Scriptures among the faithful. Since then Bible has much prominent place in the liturgy and the life of the Church. People are encouraged to read and study the Bible, and various groups; Charismatic Renewal, Basic Ecclesial Communities, Catholic Bible Study groups.... among others build their spirituality on the Bible.

Many Catholics, however, feel threatened and sometimes fall into the traps of biblical fundamentalism, for this reason there is a need for catholic teaching on the Bible.

### 3. ***What is “biblical fundamentalism” and how we can counteract it?***

Biblical Fundamentalism is a reactionary movement that evolved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the “biblical truths” were threatened by the findings of modern science, particularly by the theory of evolution. To defend the “*biblical faith*” five fundamentals were established. Among them “**the inerrancy of the Scriptures**” proposes that Bible should be read and believed literally; i.e. everything happened as it is written. Fundamentalists believe that everyone else is wrong and needs to be corrected so they adopted proselytizing attitude to other Christians.

It is a waste of time to argue individual texts with fundamentalists, do not attack them either as they are very defensive since their faith in God depends on reading the Bible literally. Fundamentalists apply persistent proselytism so be aware and, rather than engage in disputes, avoid discussions with them as they use some key verses on which they base their doctrine and will try to impress or intimidate you by their knowledge.

Finally, read the Bible and study it but do not hang on to individual sentences, laws and commandments, especially if they come from Old Testament. Try to attain a wider view of the Bible: how the individual books were written, in what context, for whom, etc. Hopefully, this little booklet enabled you to get some hints of how to approach the Bible.