

CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITY
BIBLE


CATHOLIC PASTORAL EDITION

CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITY
BIBLE

CATHOLIC
PASTORAL
EDITION

Christian Community Bible

Episcopal Introduction

The Church is born from the Word of God proclaimed and believed in. Personal and communitarian faith should be rooted in the reading and interiorization of the Word of God. On this premise the Christian community becomes missionary, the sacraments become efficient and personal devotions and charitable works become really meaningful.

Something essential is lacking to Christian maturity when a person or a community ceases to read the Bible.

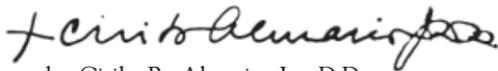
The Bible and God's people were born at the same time and have grown together. God's people needs the Bible, but the Bible has to be interpreted by the people of God. Our vision of God, of man and of the world stems from the Bible, but it is this vision that helps us understand the sacred book.

So the Bible is not a book just to be disseminated and left to the personal whims of anyone.

No one can make himself the owner of the Bible and its message. The believing community who listens to the Word of God is part of the Catholic, that is, Universal Church which has been instructed by the Spirit and enlightened by the great witnesses of the faith during the last twenty centuries. This is why introductions and commentaries accompany the biblical text. They help us get a more global vision of the Good News of God and its impact in a world which God continues to re-create and save among and with us.

The Second Vatican Council asks that the Word of God be available for all times, providing the faithful with necessary and adequate explanations so that they will safely and profitably grow familiar with the Sacred Scriptures and be penetrated by the Spirit (DV 25, PO 4). It is in the spirit of the Council that we recommend this pastoral Bible, hoping and praying that this new version will gain acceptance among our faithful.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines



by Cirilo R. Almario, Jr., D.D.
Chairman, Episcopal Commission for the
Biblical Apostolate

Jesus is Risen!

You have opened the Bible; now look for Christ as you read.

The Bible is not only a book of prayer or for our instruction. The Bible is the Word of God which communicates life to us.

The Cross of Jesus and his Resurrection are at the very center of the Bible. You for whom the road is difficult and who do not see the light at the end of the tunnel learn from the Bible that you are walking toward the Resurrection, and understand who the risen Jesus is for you.

The Bible...

The Bible did not fall from heaven. The books it contains were not proclaimed from the clouds by some heavenly speaker, but rather they were patiently gathered throughout the centuries within the heart of Israel, the **people of God**, thanks to the faith of its most conscious minorities.

For some eighteen centuries, from Abraham to Jesus, the people of Israel discovered ever more clearly that the One God had committed himself to them. The experiences of the national community, the warnings of those men called prophets, who spoke on behalf of God, the concerns which developed among believers: all of this somehow went into these books. The religious leaders of Israel received books, selected and accredited them, then integrated them into the Sacred Book.

That was how the *Old Testament* of the Bible was formed. It is called *testament* because these books were like the most precious inheritance given by God to his chosen people.

After so many experiences there came a time of crisis for the people of Israel when God wanted to bring them at last to mature faith. And Jesus came for that purpose. The most transcendental experience in all of history was fulfilled in him. Jesus – his efforts to save the Jewish people from imminent destruction, his rejection, his death, and then his resurrection – this was the final word of God.

The person of Jesus gave rise to the preaching of the apostles and to the first communities of Christ's Church. The written testimonies of these beginnings, approved by responsible members of the Church, form the *New Testament*: books of the New Covenant, where the book cannot but help the work of the Holy Spirit within us instilling the total, unique truth which becomes certainty within us.

...and Tradition

The books of the Bible only get their message through to those who come to share the experience of the community where these books themselves originated. There is a way of understanding the Bible which is peculiar to the people of God: this is what we call the Tradition of the People of God. Jesus received this tradition from his own family and from his people. Later, he taught his apostles a new way of understanding this sacred history. This is why we speak of the Tradition of the apostles or the Tradition of the Church.

To understand the Bible well, we cannot rely on just any preacher's interpretation. We must accept it as understood by the Catholic Church – founded by the apostles and always faithful to their norms.

The Book in Your Hands

The order of the books: an explanation

In the Pastoral Bible published for the use of Christian Communities, the usual order of the books in the New Testament is maintained: after the four Gospels, there is the Acts of the Apostles, then the letters of Paul, the letter to the Hebrews, the letters of James, Peter, Jude and John, and finally the Revelation.

In the Old Testament we made a choice. While the order in the New Testament is never questioned, the ancient manuscripts offer different orders of the books in the Old Testament. It is interesting to note that the lists of the books that the manuscripts count among the inspired scriptures are not always the same.

In effect, to decide which books are or are not the word of God touches the very bases of revelation. Only those who were chosen to lead the People of God could take such a momentous decision. The Jewish authorities at the time of Jesus and of the apostles had not yet taken this step. There was a Hebrew Bible used in Palestine and a Greek one translated from the first, used by numerous Jewish communities scattered throughout the Greek world. At times this was also used in Palestine. The Greek Bible included the most recent books originally written in Greek. (See the note about *Deuterocanonicals* p. 887.)

The Greek Bible sent back *Ezra* and the *Chronicles* among the historical books after which it placed the books of *Maccabees*. It also inserted *Daniel* among the prophets. We have maintained the Greek way of classifying these books, for, although it could still be questionable, it is universally accepted. To the five deuterocanonical books of Sapiential character (*Tobit, Judith Baruch, Wisdom and Sirach*) we have given appropriate place, that is after the most ancient wisdom Writings.

How to use this book

To facilitate the reading and research of a text through the books of the Bible, an English bishop at the beginning of the 13th century suggested dividing them into chapters. And in 1551 a French printer completed the work by numbering the phrases of the New Testament – the verses. A short time later the same was done for the Old Testament.

Each book of the Bible is divided into *chapters* and each chapter into *verses*. Usually a book is quoted in an abbreviated form as for example, *Mt* means the Gospel according to Matthew. You will find these abbreviations in the index. Chapters are indicated by large numbers at the beginning of a paragraph and verses by small numbers within the text.

Reference to a passage in the Bible is given by the chapter number followed by the verse number. For example *Jn 20:13* refers to John's Gospel, chapter 20, verse 13; *Lk 2:6-10* refers to Luke's Gospel, chapter 2, from verse 6 to 10.

The *biblical text* is found at the top of the page with the commentaries below in a different print. The sign • indicates what paragraph of the text the commentary refers to.

We use italics:

- in the New Testament for quotations from the Old Testament, for example in Mt 26:3 the evangelist quotes from the prophet Zechariah 13:7;
- in the Old Testament for various reasons which are indicated in the introduction to each book.

Where do we begin our reading of the Bible?

The simplest way is to start with the Gospels where we meet Christ, who is the Light, the Truth and **the** Word of God.

Obviously the Old Testament has many important lessons. Yet the person who reads them after having heard Christ understands them differently and discovers a deeper meaning in them.

Some are accustomed to opening the Bible at random, thinking that the first paragraph they find will give them the precise 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.

In any case it is advantageous to have read each book of the New Testament in sequence at least once. It is good to begin with the Gospels. In this regard, read the Introduction to the Four Gospels at the beginning of the New Testament.

How to avoid misunderstanding the Bible

1. 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 become a founder of another strange sect.

2. 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 this message shed on the present time and circumstances?

3. God taught his people for more than fifteen centuries from Abraham to the apostles, but he did not teach everything from the beginning. Do not wonder, then, that Moses and even the Prophets ignored important matters as manifested by the witnesses of Jesus who is *the Word of God*.

4. From the very first message which God gave his people, he had in mind the coming of his Son and the mystery of his cross and resurrection. All is to be understood in this light.

5. In the Bible, what is most important is clearly taught. However, some pages that actually have little to teach us were written in a sophisticated way according to an old literary style. Do not cling to some strange sentences to the point of forsaking what is clear and fundamental.

6. Read your Bible continually, not to learn what you do not yet know, but as a proof of your love and faithfulness to God. If you persevere, he will give you all the understanding you need.

Inclusive language

It is relatively easy to translate the Bible into classic English. The marriage between the Anglo-Saxon and Latin languages resulted in a rich language full of nuances expressive of abstract ideas – the paradise of the Greeks – and of concrete facts of the Hebrew language as well.

As in many other languages, English used the masculine form referring to both genders at the same time. Perhaps this is not fair and logical. However, there are many other things equally not logical in all the languages and everyone understands them. This would not be a problem in a biblical translation, considering that the Bible transmits to us the experiences and the discovery of the faith of a male dominant society. Texts have been written by men; they were addressed first of all to men, and they were dealing with businesses in which men played the most important role. One thing is to try to overcome the injustice of the exclusive (sexist) language and another to try to create a new language.

It will take time to create new personal pronouns and for people to get used to them... (he/she and his/her) while being faithful to the quality and to the poetic texts. Present solutions have not been borne out of life but from "political" decisions that perhaps will not last long. We could think as a solution to put all texts in plural, but can we do so without being naive?

A biblical message is not only found in an intellectual content but also in the way it is said. For instance, we realize that the word "Israel" is applied at the same time to a person and to a people, and that when Moses speaks to Israel, he speaks in singular as referring to only one listener. In this case, even the English of the first part of the century betrayed the meaning when the pronoun "you" was used for both singular and plural, stealing somehow the flavor of the Deuteronomy discourses.

The same happens with the ambiguity of the word "people" that refers to a people as a cultural and human group and to an individual, so common in the Bible. We constantly read in the Bible, "your fathers" so as to express continuity and solidarity in sinning from one generation to another. If instead we use "your ancestors," we would distance ourselves from a past which is no longer ours.

Let us go further. It is not foreign to Christian personalism, that is so central to the Revelation and to western culture as well, that the word "man" means at the same time the human race in general and the concrete reality of this humanity reunited in Christ. To exchange "man" and "woman" would be to divide and destroy the biblical idea. To use the term "human being" would destroy both its meaning and its poetry. In Psalm 8, for instance, "man" is at the same time the human species and the one man, Christ. To translate this psalm in plural would betray its content. We could present many similar cases. It would be irrelevant to say that these expressions are only an external frame to the message; the "Word" is also a human word and it is impossible to totally separate both realities. At the core of the biblical hope, we find prophetic messages referring at the same time to the faithful people and to their Savior, being true to both aspects. "Man" will always mean Christ, and women are included in this expression.

Though we try to use inclusive language as much as possible in our translation, we have not tried to hide the fact that Sacred History has been made out of masculine experiences; to do otherwise would have been to side with the fundamentalists who deny the historical aspect of Revelation. We have not systematically attributed to Moses, in an anachronistic manner, an inclusive language, nor have we written "brothers and sisters" when Paul addresses himself to the Elders and the Jewish priests. We have not considered the "man" and the male pronoun as "impure" or something to be eliminated systematically, even in cases referring to Christ, or the King of Israel or one of his ministers, or to any of his enemies and adversaries.

Certainly, the biggest difficulty is found in the Psalms, the Books of Wisdom and in certain passages of the New Testament that we read as something addressed to ourselves. However, we thought it was more honest to maintain a "classic" translation in order to be true and faithful to the passages where the text would have otherwise lost its strength and meaning if translated in plural form.

This kind of difficulty is not only characteristic of modern English: we find similar problems when translating the Bible into less developed languages, or languages foreign to the biblical culture. In that case one has to choose between "saying everything that the Bible says" or "saying it in a way to be understood." We have not systematically renounced the usage of classical language. Not all our readers will be pleased with our decision, but we consider, however, a gift from God that in the Church will co-exist different cultures and that our languages will have to compromise a little. This mutual acceptance is part of the Christian message (Rom 14:14).

What existed before the Bible?

For many centuries the Bible was **the** book, first for the Jewish people and then the Church. Faith was not only an individual matter, and the entire Bible was centered on a covenant of God with humankind. There had been a starting point, stages and, at the end, would take place the recapitulation of our race into Christ and the integration of the created world into God's mystery. And so the Bible was a story which sought to be the story of humankind. Not only was it the book of God's words, but it was also one of the bases of culture.

Yet the fact is that the whole biblical history was written in the course of several centuries in a small corner of the world. Even if, as we will say, this area was a very privileged place, from their perspective, the biblical authors could see only a very small corner of space and time. Outside of their own particular history, they could only depend on hearsay and on ancient traditions. There was no doubt in their minds that God created everything "in the beginning," that is to say, approximately 6,000 years earlier if we accept a few rough dates from Genesis. No doubt for them the inhabited world did not go much farther than Europe and the Middle East and the Gospel had been announced to humanity as a whole, even if entire areas, such as the Islamic countries had abandoned the faith. In the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas maintained that if, by chance, there was anyone who did not know the Christian message, for example, someone who had always lived in the middle of a great forest, God would surely send an angel to make his word known to that someone.

Science started to question such convictions only in the eighteenth century. First came the notion of time. And then the discovery of the enormous amount of time needed for the formation of the universe and of the countless animal and plant species that had disappeared from the earth. We went from the traditional 6,000 years to millions then thousands of millions of years.

A second stage affected our vision of the world even more deeply. It was the intuition at first, then an ever increasing proof of a real history of living beings. It was no longer enough to classify the living or extinct species according to their similarities or differences. The picture was becoming more like a family tree. Common trunks, branches began to appear depending on the closeness or remoteness of the relations.

Strangely enough, this discovery, which fit well with the insights of some Church Fathers, was considered by the majority of the Christian world as a dangerous threat to the faith. One of the reasons was a rationalistic or anti-religious philosophy – it would be better to say the rationalistic "faith" – of numerous scientists of the past two centuries. For them it was enough to explain a few mechanisms at work in some minute evolutions to maintain that all the inventions and wonders of nature could be explained in the same way and that all the mechanisms had come by accident from nothing.

Since Christians for their part were accustomed to think in terms of unchanging truths (this was valid for dogmas of faith), it seemed to them that God must have subjected the heavenly and earthly world to unchanging laws: heavenly bodies merely spin in circles (an elliptical orbit was already a great concession) and living beings could only reproduce

themselves in the same way. It was only the second quarter of the twentieth-century that moved beyond the opposition between science, anti-religious in its claims, and faith which chose to ignore the facts.

What is the point? Simply this. The view of a world in evolution fits in perfectly with the Christian concept of the time and “ages” of history. If we study Paul’s letters we will see that for him the whole of human history is God’s educating work from which the authentic Adam emerges. After Paul, Saint Irenaeus of Lyons saw all of history led by God’s teaching toward a fulfillment of the race, or of the human community. All this, of course, is just the reverse of the widespread image of a Tarzan-like Adam who, at the beginning of time, is handsome and strong as we see him in Michelangelo’s fresco, but later falls from his pedestal.

If these perspectives are accepted, it is no longer difficult to think that all of creation took place in time. The “big bang” is an extraordinary approach of a starting-point of created time, a time starting from eternity and returning to eternity! Twenty billion years for the expansion of millions of galaxies, each one with its thousands or millions of suns. And somewhere, planets. How many? Who knows? How many were inhabited? Still a greater mystery. Here too faith has its insights. The whole Bible singles out the freedom and the gratuitousness of God’s gestures. Though God loves all humans and leads them all to himself, whether they know him or not, he also knows how to choose the people he wants and to give to them what he will not give to others. Did he not create millions of galaxies? This does not prevent him from choosing only one of them, in some remote corner, to place on it the race of “homo habilis” which God’s Word chose as his “landing place” in creation.

So, human beings did not happen by chance. They are not monkeys that, after a few totally unpredictable chromosomal mutations, awakened one day with the ability to understand. A lot would have to be explained about materialistic theories and those chance accidents which allegedly, one day, cause a race of male and female monkeys to engender some great musicians and quite a few pretty girls. Many generations as well as many links and many humble ancestors were necessary whom God may have already known and loved as he loves us. The model and the goal, however, were already there before them, and that was Christ.

At this point, we would like to recall briefly the great stages preceding the formation of the people of the Bible.

The first steps of human beings

When and how did human beings appear? We can always argue about the terms: what kind of beings will be called humans? Those who were breaking pebbles, those who conquered fire or those who buried their dead? We are speaking of real human beings, those whose spirit is in the image of God, those whom God knows and who can know God.

No one can answer this question with precision. For many centuries, human beings did not really change the face of the earth. Their lifestyle and the creations of their minds barely distinguished them from the anthropomorphous primates from which they came. Families and human groups were living in caves and hunting in forests.

Slowly, human beings invented language and made weapons and instruments. They were not only interested in what was useful and visible. They were artists. Underground, in the caverns and the grottos where these people celebrated their magic rituals far from daylight, they expressed their vision of the world by the animal figures they painted in the walls.

Human beings were *religious beings*. They buried their dead with rituals destined to assure them of a happy life in another world. Being created in the image of God, their

intelligence instinctively suggested that they would continue to live after death. However, primitive they may have been, these primitive beings had a conscience: they were capable of loving and they were discovering something of God (as said by Paul in Acts 17:27).

The first civilizations

About 10,000 years ago a change began to occur in humankind. People gathered together in greater numbers in the fertile plains. Within a few centuries they discovered how to cultivate land, to raise cattle, to mold and bake clay. There appeared villages which united to defend themselves and to make better use of the resources of the soil. The first civilization had been born.

After that, everything happened very quickly. Five centers of civilization appeared on the earth.

Three thousand five hundred years before Christ, in the geographical area called the Middle East where the biblical people would be born, two empires were being formed. One was Egypt and the other was Chaldea, the land from which Abraham would come centuries later. Chaldea perfected an irrigation system, constructed houses with baked clay walls, invented a writing system, had laws and a centralized administration. Egypt had also progressed. They constructed magnificent temples for their gods and built the pyramids for the tombs of their pharaohs.

Similarly in China and India, approximately twenty centuries before Christ, and in Central America, ten centuries before Christ, other civilizations were born. Those of Central America, China and India developed separately since in those days it was very difficult to travel over the continents. In the Middle East instead, Chaldea and Egypt were in contact with each other and the road leading from one country to the other passed through a small country which would later be called Palestine.

The Bible and world religions

These few reminders are enough to show that history and biblical traditions only cover a small, though one of the most important, area of human history at the crossroads of three continents. Perhaps no other area of the planet has seen so many geological and human upheavals. But most of humanity bypassed this history and experienced life and God in its own way. We should never forget that.

Biblical people came late on the “chessboard” of nations and for a long time they did not raise any questions about those who had not received God’s Word of which they were the bearers. And for that reason, God said nothing to them about it because when God speaks to us, he speaks in a human language and within our own culture and, to some degree, God respects our limitations and our ignorance. However, God had already communicated his word and his spirit in a thousand ways. At various times, Israelites or Christians thought that everything coming from abroad was bad, that all wisdom born outside of Jewish or Christian lands was to be rejected. But there were also inquisitive times during which faith became enriched through its contact with other cultures, other prophets and other thinkers.

We should not therefore seek too many answers from the Bible about the way God spoke in other cultures, the way his Spirit was at work in their midst, about the way in which they are touched today by the energy radiating from the risen Christ and how they are saved by the one and only Savior. The Bible only asserts that God’s call to Abraham was the start of a great and unique adventure, one which leads straight to the Son of God, to his Word or Wisdom made flesh.

Summary and Dates of Sacred History

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Time of the Patriarchs

Around **1750**

Abraham

Around **1600**

Jacob

Between the year 2000 and 1750, the two great powers of the Middle East, Egypt and Mesopotamia underwent a period of intense political upheavals. It was then that nomads whose means of living was the rearing of goats and lambs (“Hebrews” in Egyptian), occupied in Palestine the places left behind by the Canaanites who after 1,000 years, had founded in these regions small and numerous kingdoms. The Bible talks to us about some great figures who left their names in the memory of these nomadic clans: **Abraham**, **Isaac** and **Jacob** among others. It is with them that the adventure of the People of God begins. They are the **Patriarchs**.

1750-1550

“Slavery” in Egypt

For almost two centuries, Egypt was governed by foreign princes of Asian origin who favored the arrival of nomads searching for pastures in the Nile delta. Among them were the clans from Palestine who later will be part of the people of Israel: the descent to Egypt of the **children of Jacob** refers to this period.

Around **1250**

Exodus

The Exodus and the Conquest

Under the kingdom of Ramses II, some nomads flee to Egypt under the leadership of **Moses** to escape the slave labor: this is the **Exodus**, the “flight to Egypt.”

While going through the desert, the nomads live in the mountain of **Horeb**, a unique experience which will be decisive for the future of Israel. In Kadesh, a place of pilgrimage of the nomads, the clans of Moses share the new faith with other tribes.

1200-1030

Time of **Joshua** and the **Judges**: settlement in Palestine

The nomads who entered Palestine with Joshua united with those who had been in the country. Towards the end of the second millennium, frequent conflicts occurred between the Canaanites from the interior cities and the Philistine settlers on the hills.

Slowly the nomads were able to impose their law. The tribes learned to live a certain sense of solidarity, with a greater trust in the God who saves.

1030-1010

Establishment of the **Monarchy**
Saul, the First King of Israel

The frequent conflicts and the lack of unity forced the tribes to ask for a king to be their leader. Saul from the Tribe of Benjamin is chosen. His reign without glory will help clarify the respective roles of the **prophet** and of the **king**. Israel will not be a kingdom like the others since it is God’s people.

1010-970

Reign of **David**

Saul dies in the battle of Gilboah. **David** is consecrated king of Israel by **Samuel**. He reshapes the unity of a people that was again torn apart by tribal feuds. He conquers Jerusa-

lem which was outside the territories of the tribes and makes it the capital. Military campaigns consolidate the sovereignty of Israel over the small surrounding kingdoms.

The Time of the Kings

970-931
Solomon

Solomon, son of David, adopts the concept of the Oriental kings by taking foreign wives, with their gods and their cultic practices. He builds the **Temple** on an elevated area dominating the city and builds his palace nearby: on high, God and king, and below the people, a politics of prestige mainly at the expense of the northern tribes.

931
The Schism

The crowning of Rehoboam in Shechem is the occasion for the northern tribes to present their complaints to the new king. His refusal to listen to them provokes rebellion. The northern and central tribes organize themselves as an independent kingdom that will keep the name **kingdom of Israel**. The south, remaining faithful to the descendants of David, will become the **kingdom of Judah**.

The Golden Age of the Prophets

931-721
The time of the two kingdoms

After the schism, the two kingdoms often live in conflict, worsening the difficulties coming from external aggression. In Israel as well as in Judah, the prophets will unceasingly recall the marvels God had done in favor of their “fathers.” They proclaim fidelity to the demands of the covenant and the conversion of the heart.

Through daily contact with the Canaanites, the kingdom of Israel lets itself be attracted by the cult of idols and accepts pagan customs.

The intervention of the prophets: **Elijah, Elisha and Hosea**

The kingdom of the north experiences the instability of human institutions: coup d’etat and the changes of dynasties multiply.

721
Fall of Samaria and exile to Nineveh. The kingdom of Judah remains.

The awakening of Assyria in the eighth century brings to an end the kingdom of the north. The country is invaded and part of the population is deported to Nineveh. Others take their place, and since then, Samaria becomes a province of the Assyrian empire.

In spite of its mistakes, the kingdom of Judah experiences another favor. Faithful to his promise, God maintains on the throne the descendants of David. Then the intervention of the kings to ensure the clerical authority of the Temple of Jerusalem and the intervention of the priests in favor of the legitimate kings.

It is in the kingdom of Judah that God calls the largest number of witnesses to his Word. Some of the great prophets lived during the eighth and seventh centuries: **Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah**. The expectation for the **messiah** and of a new age takes shape. Miraculous **liberation of Jerusalem** in 701. Offensive return of paganism under Assyrian pressure and reform of King **Josiah**. Assyrian and Chaldean invasions.

Double siege of Jerusalem; the city falls captive. The elites are **deported to Babylon**.

The Exile

The destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple is a dreadful test of faith. This time, God did not intervene. Had he forgotten his promises or was he powerless?

587
The destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple

587-538
The Babylonian Captivity

This is a decisive turning point for Israel's faith. The prophet **Ezekiel** affirms to the deported people that God is with them in their exile. If they convert, God will have them back in their native land. But the question at hand is whether or not the kingdom of Israel will be reestablished under the guidance of better shepherds than the previous ones.

The "Second Isaiah" opens new perspectives: the humiliations of Israel were allowed by God to prepare it for a worldwide task. Its weakness will be its strength because the final word of God is not his power but his love. This revelation is so new that the majority of the exiles forget the message and they will have no other goal than the restoration of the ancient kingdom of David.

538
The Edict of Cyrus

Cyrus, the Persian, successively conquers the kingdoms of the Middle East and builds up a vast empire. As ruler of Babylon, he authorizes the deported population to go back to their places of origin. Jewish caravans return to Jerusalem; the Jews rebuild the Holy City and the Temple.

The Jewish Community after the Exile

520-515
Construction of the second Temple

A considerable task takes place in Judaism under the leadership of **Ezra**. It is at that time that the majority of the Old Testament books are somewhat definitely fixed, especially the **Law** or **Torah**.

445-398
Mission of **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**

The clergy takes a dominant role in Israel. The country, a province of the Persian Empire had lost its independence; the priests, servants of the only Temple, ensure the unity of the people of God.

336-323
Alexander the Great conquers the Persian Empire

From Macedonia, **Alexander** puts an end to the armies of Darius and advances as far as India. At his death twelve years later, he leaves behind an empire which his successors divide among themselves. Thus Palestine is taken by the Seleucides who ruled in Antioch of Syria, and the Lagides (or Ptolomees) who ruled in Egypt.

Hellenism (the Greek culture) conquers the Middle East. Strong tension in the Jewish community between those open to the Greek culture which conquered the Middle East and those attached to the ancient traditions. Beginning of the Hassidic movement (the "religious") from which will come the **Pharisees** and the **Essenes**.

167-154
The Great Persecution

Antiochus IV, king of Syria, plunders the treasures of the Jerusalem Temple to reorganize an army. This sacrilege and the following repression lead to the rebellion of the priest Mattathias, followed by his sons **Judas Maccabeus**, Jonathan and Simon. After fierce fights and cruel persecutions, the Jews

63

Pompey conquers
Jerusalem

recover their independence. **Simon Maccabeus**, high priest and king, begins a dynasty where political and religious powers are united under one person. The dream of a great kingdom of David was enkindled once more: reconquest of faraway territories, taking advantage of the decadence of the Syrian kingdom.

The **Hasmonean** (Maccabean) **dynasty** falls into decadence: the last Hasmonean fight for power. Pompey, in the name of Rome, profits from this and takes over the country.

37-4 B.C.

Herod the Great

Under Rome's control

After years of intrigues, **Herod the Great**, a foreigner, marries an Hasmonean. He makes his rivals disappear and convinces Rome to name him king.

Although the high priests are appointed by the existing power, their appointment is not for life. They are at the head of the party of the **Sadducees**. The **Zealots** become a terrorist movement against the Roman occupation with the exorbitant taxes from Rome, collected by the publicans, famine, unemployment yet much work absorb the manpower.

19

Reconstruction of the
Temple

Herod begins the reconstruction of the Temple.

4 B.C.-6 A.D.

Archelaus and Herod
Antipas

About two years before Herod's death, **Jesus is born**.

Great turmoils at the death of Herod. Emperor Augustus gives Judea to Archelaus, and Galilee to his brother, Antipas. Rome, displeased with the bad reign of Archelaus, removes him from power and sends him to Gallia in Vienna. Judea is then placed under the direct administration of the Roman governor of Syria. Zealot terrorism in Galilee and repression.

6-39 A.D.

The period of the
Roman procurators

Roman procurators rule over Caesarea across the sea, which Rome has made the new capital of Palestine. The most well-known Roman procurators is **Pontius Pilate**, who will condemn Jesus to death. Galilee, "an allied kingdom," is given to Herod Antipas. Herod's intrigues will eventually lead to his exile.

27-30

The years of the
Gospel

In the autumn of the year 27, the preaching of **John the Baptist** and the beginning of the **public life of Jesus**.

Passover of the year 28, first ascent of Jesus to Jerusalem (Jn 2:13).

Year 29: John the Baptist is executed in the fortress of Machaerus.

Year 30: **Jesus is crucified**, most probably, on the eve of the Passover, April 7, year 30. He rises on the day following the sabbath.

THE GOSPELS

APOSTOLIC TIMES

Historical Data	Data from the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles	Letters of the Apostles
	Year 30: At Pentecost, the birth of a Hebrew-speaking Christian community in Jerusalem.	Oral tradition, then written in Hebrew (liturgy) or in Aramaic (catechesis).
	From the year 30 to 36: Christian communities in Judea, Galilee and Damascus. The beginning of a Greek-speaking community in Jerusalem.	First writings in Greek by the Hellenists.
Autumn 36: Pilate is called back to Rome	This departure could explain why the Sanhedrin dares to have Stephen stoned to death. (Acts 7:57): Year 36.	
	End of Year 36: Conversion of Paul on his way to Damascus (Acts 9).	
Nabatean King Aretas IV dies in 39 or 40.	Years 38–39: Paul escapes Damascus and goes to Jerusalem and Tarsus (2 Cor 11:32; Gal 1:18).	
	Years 39–40: The beginning of the Church of Antioch. At the same time, Peter goes to Caesarea to baptize Cornelius (Acts 10–11).	
Year 41: Emperor Claudius in Rome. He appoints Herod Agrippa I as king of Judea and Samaria.	Year 43: Herod Agrippa had James , the brother of John executed. Peter is freed from prison and escapes most probably to Antioch (Acts 12). James, “brother of the Lord,” heads the Church of Jerusalem.	
	Years 43-44: Most probably the incident between Peter and Paul happens in Antioch (Gal 2:11).	
Year 44: Death of Herod Agrippa Judea becomes a Roman province again.	Commentary about his death in Acts 12:20. Between 44 and 48 , the first mission of Paul (Acts 13:1): Cyprus and Pisidia. The return to Antioch in 48 (Acts 14:27).	
Year 48: Famine in the East and in the West	Prophecy of Agabus (Acts 11:27).	
	49: 14 years after his conversion, Paul brings alms to Jerusalem (Gal 2:1; 2:10; Acts 11:29). The Council of Jerusalem:	

	on the question of circumcision of the pagans (Gal 2:2; Acts 15).	
	Paul in Antioch until the Council of Jerusalem during the feast of the Dedication in 49 (Acts 15).	
Year 49: Edict of Claudius expelling the Jews from Rome (Acts 18:1)	Second Mission of Paul in the year 50 (Acts 15:35): foundation of the Church in Galatia, Macedonia and Greece (Acts 16-17).	
Gallion, proconsul in Corinth in the years 51 and 52 . Paul is brought to him.	Paul remains in Corinth for a year and a half. Arrival and departure in mid-season: from September 50 (Acts 18:1) to March 53 (Acts 18:18).	<i>1 Thessalonians</i> <i>2 Thessalonians</i>
	April 53 , Paul goes to Ephesus. By boat to Caesarea, Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 18:22).	
Year 54: Death of Claudius. Nero succeeds him.	Paul sets off again (beginning of 54?) and visits Galatia (Acts 18:23). In autumn, Paul is in Ephesus where he remains for two years and three months (Acts 19:1). Year 56: Most probably a trip to Corinth (2 Cor 13:2). Then Paul is imprisoned in Ephesus.	Pentecost 56: <i>1 Corinthians</i> <i>Philippians</i>
	End of 56: Paul is liberated and struggles against the Judaic propaganda. Paul goes to Macedonia and then evangelizes Illyricum (Rom 15:19). In Greece for the winter 57-58 .	<i>Gal;</i> <i>2 Cor</i> 10-13 Pentecost 57: <i>2 Cor</i> 1:9 <i>Letter of James</i> (?) Winter 57-58: <i>Rom</i>
	February 58: goes to Philippi At the end of the Passover week, Paul goes to Troas (Acts 26). Encounter at Miletus (Acts 20:7). Arrives in Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16).	<i>Letter to Titus</i> <i>1 Timothy</i>
	At the end of Pentecost week, Paul is taken prisoner at the Temple: June 58	<i>Letter of Peter</i>
Felix, governor from year 52 to 60 . He is replaced by Festus who dies in 62.	Paul prisoner for two years in Caesarea, close to Felix (Acts 24:27). In the year 60 , soon after Festus' arrival Paul appeals (Acts 25), leaves for Rome in September.	September 58 (?): <i>2 Timothy</i> <i>Ephesians</i> <i>Colossians</i> and <i>Philemon</i>
60: Colossae is destroyed by an earthquake		
62: The high priest has James, the brother of the Lord, stoned to death.	February 61: Paul arrives in Rome (Acts 28:11).	<i>Letter to the Hebrews</i>

	63: End of the captivity of Paul (Acts 28:30). Paul might have gone to Tarragona (Spain) as he had wished (Rom 15:28).	<i>Gospel of Matthew</i> (?)
64: Burning of Rome and persecution of the Christians.	64 or 65: Peter and Paul martyred.	63 or 64: Most probably in Greece, Luke publishes the <i>Gospel</i> and the <i>Acts</i> .
66: Jewish War; Christians in Jerusalem try to flee to Pella.		In Rome, <i>Gospel of Mark</i> .
70: Conquest of Jerusalem and burning of the Temple.		
81: Persecution of Domitian.	Around 90, the preaching of gnostic Nicolaitans in the province of Asia. Towards 95-98 John, already in Asia is exiled at Patmos	<i>Revelation of John</i>
98: Emperor Trajan in Rome.	In Ephesus John confronts the preaching of Cerinthe.	<i>Letters and Gospel of John</i>

From the Apostles to Us

Seventy generations separate us from the time of the apostles. This span covers twenty centuries of Church history. To speak about the Church is to speak about these sisters and brothers of ours: it is easy to criticize them or to think that they should have been better, but it is more difficult to know the world in which they lived, a world very different from ours, and to understand what they tried to accomplish under the inspiration of their faith.

Free people, virgins and martyrs

Christians of the first centuries had the exciting experience of their newly found freedom. They felt free of pagan superstition, of fatalism in facing destiny, and of death without hope, free also from their own selfishness. But they paid a high price for this freedom. In their days there was no law superior to the emperor's will or to the customs of the people. Yet Christians placed Christ above human authorities and, being conscientious objectors, were treated as evildoers. Christian love and virginity were insults to the vices of the pagan world.

Christians were therefore persecuted. During three centuries there were repressions and martyrs, sometimes in one province of the empire, at other times in another. In some periods all the forces of power were unleashed against Christians with the intention of wiping out the name of Christ. The crowds who, for entertainment, would go to watch the tortures inflicted upon Christians came back ashamed of their own wickedness and convinced of the authentic humanity in the persecuted.

Constantine's conversion

Meanwhile the Roman world was becoming decadent. Before they were vanquished by their enemies, the Romans' spiritual forces which had so exalted their empire were weakening: the old beliefs were lifeless. In the year 315, Constantine, the emperor himself, asked to be baptized. After him, all rulers were Christians. This was a decisive event for the Church which became protected instead of being persecuted.

This triumph, which in a certain way benefited the masses, brought along some disadvantages as well which would be seen with time. From then on the Church had to be the spiritual force needed by the people of the Roman Empire. It replaced the false religions and opened up its doors for the crowds seeking baptism. The Church was no longer restricted to believers baptized after being converted and tested. Rather the Church had to be the educator of a "Christian people" who did not differ significantly from the previous "pagan people." What was gained in terms of numbers was lost in terms of quality. The "Christian" emperors were not much different from their predecessors. As they had been the supreme authority in the pagan religion, now the emperors wanted to rule the Church, to appoint and control its bishops. They protected the faith: they also protected a state religion against the "virus" of the Gospel.

On the other hand, when Christians were no longer underground and oppressed, they became more involved in worldly problems. How could they reconcile the culture of their time with faith? This was the period when the bishops, called the "holy fathers," gave an

extensive presentation of the faith as they responded to the questions of their contemporaries. St. Augustine stood out among the best.

Some people prefer not to see the difficult aspects of faith. Those who dare to probe them (as should be done), do not always bother about errors. A heresy which spread rapidly and almost destroyed the early Church was "Arianism." Due to their fear of dividing the one God, Arians denied that Christ was the Son, equal to the Father; they considered him to be only the first among other beings in the whole of creation. Arian emperors would appoint Arian bishops. However, as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit preserved the faith of Christians and the heresy faded.

Seeing that the Church was no longer the fervent community of the time of the martyrs, Christians looking for perfection in those days began to organize themselves into austere and demanding communities. They felt they had to withdraw from the comfortable life to seek God with their whole soul. First in the deserts of Egypt, then throughout the whole Christian world, there sprang up hermits and monks. In the Church, the monks preserved the ideal of a perfect life, a life totally surrendered to Christ. Their life of mortification allowed them to know the deepest recesses of the human heart. And God, for his part, gave them the experience of transformation or divinization reserved for those who have left everything for him.

The yeast in the dough

When the Roman Empire collapsed with the invasion of the barbarians and was devastated it seemed as though it was the end of the world. (We mention the Roman Empire not because it was the only inhabited place in the world, but because Christian preachers had scarcely gone beyond its frontiers.) It was the beginning of some centuries of ruin and devastation. Some thought the end of the world was near.

But in reality, this destruction announced by John in Revelation marked the beginning of a new time. The Church did not collapse in the turmoil. Instead, it discovered a new role: to evangelize and educate people who, after the barbarian invasions, had come back to a poorer society, quite uncivilized and totally disorganized.

The only moral force or stable institution people knew was the Church. Many times the bishop became the only "defender of the people" against the invaders. There was no one but priests to educate the people; books about ancient culture were kept in monasteries along with the Sacred Scripture. The Church was the soul of these primitive people, who were cruel and excessive. While the Church was struggling to limit wars and revenge, to restore civil authority, to protect women and children, and to teach the values of constructive work, it allowed itself to be invaded by superstition and corruption. Quite often it seemed that even the highest authority, the popes and bishops, sank into corruption and vice... but the Church was far more than they, and what had been sown in tears would bear fruit.

In the course of salvation history, God instructed the people of Israel in the midst of many errors that would to be corrected in time. In their turn the peoples who formed Christianity, learned to live as human beings, responsible and free. In the new civilization that was emerging, culture, art and above all ideas were the products of their faith, even if they were mixed with many things, not completely Christian.

Catholics and Orthodox: the Schism

The Eastern part of the Roman Empire resisted the barbarian invasions. Little by little this part of the Church, called Greek or Orthodox, which later would evangelize Russia, distanced itself from the Western part occupied by the barbarians and led by the Church of Rome. There were two churches, different in culture, language and religious practice although keeping the same faith. Both churches, however, erred in paying more attention

to their own customs than to the common faith. Thus, the Eastern church moved away from the pope, Peter's successor in Rome.

Later the Turks, followers of Islam, conquered the rest of the Roman Empire in the East and there remained only a few Christian communities where the ancient churches of Syria, Palestine, Egypt... had flourished. Today, Greece, Romania and Russia form the most important part of the Orthodox world.

The Church and the Bible

In 1460 Gutenberg's discoveries made the printing of books possible. Before that there were only expensive and rare books, written by hand. The average person could not have a Bible, or even a Gospel. The Bible was read in church and was the source of preaching. To make it more visible to the faithful, no church was built without adorning it throughout with paintings, sculptures or stained-glass windows depicting biblical scenes.

The invention of Gutenberg was to make the Holy Scripture available to everyone, provided of course one could read. This technical discovery would also speed up a new crisis in the Church. For centuries Church institutions, clergy and religious upheld the culture and the unity of the Christian world; as a result of their social status, worldly interests tended to attract greater interest than did the ministry of the Gospel itself. But what was more grievous, the institutional Church had become a very heavy religious system, often stifling intellectual research as well as evangelical renewal. Many outstanding religious and holy people protested and asked for reforms. But no reforms followed. With the printing of the Bible many thought that the only way to reform the Church was to give the Sacred Book to everyone so that by reading it, people would appreciate the original message and correct the errors and evil customs which had become so entrenched.

Martin Luther took upon himself the task of translating the Bible into German, which was the language of his own people. Up till then the Bible had normally been published in Latin, the language of the clergy. Only a few at that time considered individual reading of the Word of God important for all Christians. It was feared that if the Holy Book were given to everyone, many would not interpret it correctly. Such a view was not entirely wrong: shortly after Luther had translated the Bible into the language of the people, his disciples began fighting among themselves and founded rival churches, each one convinced of possessing the truth.

Later, after the rift with the Protestants, the Catholic Church, impoverished in human riches reformed itself. Great things were achieved and saints with exceptional personalities abounded. Still the Catholic Church was unable to stress listening to the Word of God. On the contrary it was more than ever under the control of ecclesiastical authority, restraining to a large degree the expansion of the role of the Christian laity. Preachers and missionaries did indeed preach the Gospel, but were more like knowledgeable experts than servants of the Word of God trying to discover, together with their sisters and brothers, its richness.

The missions of the Western Church

From the time of the apostles, believers have been preoccupied with passing the faith on to others. There were missionaries who ventured among hostile peoples, or people who spoke different languages, in order to preach the Gospel when all Europe was more or less united under Christianity and the cultural and social fields animated by the Church, people felt the missionary task had already been achieved. What existed outside the Christian nations? Most would have answered: "Only the Moors." The Moors, that is the Muslims, were fierce enemies of the Christian nations. No one thought there were other people beyond themselves and the Muslims.

Some prophets like Francis of Assisi or Raymond Lull understood it to be better to preach Christ among the Muslims than to fight with arms. There were also some missionaries, like John of Montecorvino, who traveled to Asia on foot all the way to China. They were the exceptions. In those days which may seem remote to us, the churches of Europe already accumulated centuries of tradition; they had their culture, their own way of thinking about the faith and of living the Gospel. It was very difficult for people of that time to understand people of another culture and to pass the Gospel on to them in such a way that they could organize themselves into a church suited to their own temperament and according to their own way of thinking. It is the main reason why the missions which the Church established in these distant places did not prosper and the Church became identified with European Christianity.

When Marco Polo, Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus pierced the wall of ignorance surrounding Christianity, the Church realized the true dimension of the world which had not yet received the Gospel: Africa, Asia and America. The first to sail to far countries were merchants and adventurers – unobtrusive people do not usually venture into such exploits. But as soon as they had discovered the new world, they were to be accompanied by adventurers of the faith, people eager to win for Christ those who did not yet know him. Among those who left without weapons, with little preparation other than their faith were saints and martyrs.

In Africa, mission and colonization traveled together. Christian faith reached animist religions. In their preaching, missionaries regarded lightly the cultural background of people so that the numerous baptisms did not mean the depth of the African soul had been converted.

In great parts of Asia, especially in China and India, many missionaries were not prepared to undertake an evangelization starting with the knowledge of local culture and religion. The ignorance of such a long religious experience resulted in the conversion of only minorities except in some parts of India and Vietnam.

It seemed that mission in America would be easy and fruitful. The Spaniards destroyed the indigenous nations and, oftentimes, ruined their culture. The natives did not resist the faith and, in various places, privileges were granted to those who became Christians. But under a thin layer of Catholic practices, the native people preserved their pagan beliefs. Most of them did not encounter Christ, nor did they convert to his message in a meaningful way.

The rebellion of the laity

When we discussed Christianity, we said that the Church often took over many public services out of necessity for there were no civil or military authorities to administer them. The clergy founded and managed schools and universities; the religious were in charge of public health – hospitals, hospices and orphanages. Monks colonized and developed uncultivated lands.

In time, the more responsible among leaders and intellectuals realized that all these tasks should be given back to civil authorities. They agreed with the Gospel which distinguishes between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God. They had to confront an already established power and custom: how difficult it is to cede one's responsibilities to others! In the historical changes that accompanied the birth of modern nations, lay institutions and sciences independent of the faith, often appeared to be a struggle against ecclesiastical power. Everyone has heard of the trial against Galileo and the political conflicts between popes and kings.

The Church and the modern world

In the last four centuries the world has experienced more crises, progress and changes than cumulatively in all previous times. Christian faith gave Europeans the energy, security and awareness of their mission in the universe which enabled them to formulate science, develop technology and dominate other continents. Obviously, conquests and colonization sprang from motives very foreign to faith; even so, they were unknowingly completing the plan of God who, from the beginning, contemplated the reunion of all nations.

The Church participated in this expansion. In the 19th century there were as many as 100,000 missionaries, priests and religious committed to evangelization and education in Asia, Africa and America.

However something very important was occurring in Europe. The Church was facing modern culture which had emerged from the Church but which, having become independent of it, was turning out to be an enemy. Learned minds commonly believed that their wisdom was capable of bringing about progress, happiness and peace to humanity. Conversely they saw nothing in the Church but ignorance and prejudice. In short, they saw the Church as the main obstacle to human liberation. Many dared to predict the death of Christianity before the 20th century.

There was no less blindness in the church. It is only a hundred and fifty years since a pope condemned railways as a diabolical invention. The hierarchy was accustomed to teach and to have the last word on every topic. Even today it often is not able to remain silent on problems concerning the laity, where ideally each person should find his/her own way according to faith and conscience, and make responsible decisions with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The Church gradually found itself marginalized in many areas. It was tempted to absent itself from the world and stay far from the realities of life as a small group of those who know and are saved. Such a temptation has always been present. Great apostles have fortunately shown that the Church can fully carry out its mission in the world provided it always comes back to the humble Christ, servant and poor, instead of seeking support from the great of this world or trusting in its banks.

The Church is no more than a minority in the world: about a billion Catholics among six billion inhabitants of the earth. More than ever this minority feels concerned with all that is human, knowing that God saves not only souls but the human race as a whole. Just when the world is seeking its unity, Christianity remains divided. Catholics and Protestants embody the same division that was seen in the two nations of Judah and Israel: the Catholic Church more attached to the authenticity of the faith and to the tradition of the apostles, the Protestants more enthusiastic for the communication of the Word of God. Although unable to unite up to now, they must face together the call of the world where a planetary civilization appears to be in its early stages.

The return to the Gospel

Return to the Gospel. All through history the Church has experienced renewals and reformers. Reform has always meant a return to the Gospel.

Today however, a return to the Gospel has taken on a special meaning. For centuries (what Paul and Luke have called "the time of the nations"), the Church was the educator of the people where it established itself. With them it went through the same experience as the people of Israel. It both handed over the Gospel, the mystery of God-communion, the love and mystery of the cross to them; and it took its part in the slow climb of nations to maturity, through suffering, struggle and ignorance.

Today we begin to look back on the road that has been traveled. The Gospel was for

all humankind, a declaration of a humanity-with-God. Yet progress now means taking steps toward this encounter with all cultures and all human realities. It is the hour for the Church to fully enter into the New Testament. From now on the Church will no longer be the tutor of the nations, but Christians will rather be yeast in the dough. The huge Church structures, which can only grow bigger will lose their importance. The search for God through his word will take the most important place in the religious life of the believer.

It would be more appropriate for us to speak of a return **of** the Gospel. Today the Gospel emerges as the key to our history. For centuries Christians have seen in faith and religion the means of saving their soul and of serving God, but they lacked the key to understand actual history in its daily barbaric reality. It is only now that the key words of the Gospel begin to make sense in the context of planetary problems. It is not an accident that in the eastern countries millions of people search the Gospel for the secret of a seeming western superiority.

Whatever the sin and ignorance of the West had been, the risen Christ has been working on humanity through them. The Gospel is not merely words (and hardly a religion), but an opening, a state of grace in the human person who finds herself/himself facing God, through the cross of Christ. Few bastions of humanity still resist new forces. Cultural worries, even when gone astray, almost always open doors to the Gospel. Mozart's music has opened a fresh Christian awareness to more people than some great missionaries. Women emancipation has brought nations and millions of men to a true conversion.

Now is the time when every Christian and Christian community find themselves led back to the time of Jesus and the apostles. Free of the religious structures which supported and at the same time imprisoned our forebears, it is time for us to announce the Good News to the world. We have already experienced the disappointment of the hope placed in science, communism, and the reign of reason. Humanity, now in control of many elements of its own destiny, begins to face the great fundamental question: live, but why? We have come to the great century of evangelization: the Lord comes!