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Cover illustration by Sarah Prentice.

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Rachel and David Quinney Mee working with the Church in the poor communities of El Salvador.

Playing With Words!

"Playful celebration is the very essence of the Spirit," says David Quinney Mee.

David Martin, BMS Overseas Secretary responsible for Central America, aged and physically shrank before our eyes. A dirty white cloth pulled from the dust and cockroaches was bound around his head and face, leaving only his mouth uncovered. And, in spite of everything, he was smiling.

BMS determination in the face of interrogation and torture? Not really: El Cordero de Dios (The Lamb of God) Baptist Church playing the Bible. David was an old, blind and physically withered Isaac, conned by his crooked son and scheming wife into adjusting his will.

It was hard to get through the impromptu script for laughter. There are worse ways of becoming familiar with the web of relationships in the Bible. This method made it easy to dance lightly between the ages and weave something from the past and the present closer together. Is it the past updated or the present in old clothes?

Nine years ago I visited a refuge of six or seven families in El Salvador, people driven from their homes by war and by the violent harassment of government troops. Separated from our translator, I became bogged down in frustration with an elderly man as we struggled to cross the language barrier and meet each other. Suddenly his eyes flashed and he snatched up his Bible. Racing through well-thumbed pages, he reached the Psalms. The number I understood. His fingers and eyes spoke excitedly.

"Read these," they pleaded, "Psalm 70 and then Psalm 91. That's me! That's my story!"

Back in El Cordero de Dios the liturgy team were looking for a way of presenting Sunday's lectionary passage in a more creative way than a simple reading. One was from the letters of

"We come from a Bible loving church," announced two visitors to the preacher at the close of service. He suspected they disapproved of his exposition. They were from another country and evidently, looking at the Bible from within their own cultural experience, there was only one possible interpretation.

However, the Bible is a living book and through it God relates his good news to people, where they are, within their own life circumstances. So a Bible study or an exposition of a Bible passage which comes alive for people in, say, Latin America may not have the same

HERALD

relevance to people in the UK.

Nevertheless, we can still learn from them. In Central America, people bring to Bible study their life experiences. And "they are somewhat easier to unlock than in a middle-class, British, Baptist congregation." There is much more honesty and immediacy in and understanding of the group identity and context in a "poor group" than in those of other backgrounds. It has to do with the difference between having to defend Life and wanting to defend lifestyle. What was it Jesus had to say about rich people and camels and the "eye of the needle"?

There is also more informality and readiness to play. The study material may suggest a drama or something to start things going, but the leaders, or the group, or anyone in the group, may take that off in a way that is completely unexpected. A British group is more likely to be fixed to what the "notes" suggest. In fact, the study material is often dealt with as is the Bible: the text, to be read and used as the "letter" and not let loose as the "spirit."

So we are taking a look this month at the way people in different areas of the world approach the Bible in the hope that, once again, the Bible may come alive for us.

PLAYING WITH Words!

They wrote out the passage on some writing paper, sealed it in an airmail envelope, stuck some used stamps on it and addressed it to the church.

Peter. They wrote out the passage on some writing paper, sealed it in an airmail envelope, stuck some used stamps on it and addressed it to the church.

It was read in the service as a piece of correspondence. That's how most of the New Testament started, after all. The reaction was unexpected.

Who wrote that?

Instead of comments on the content, someone said, "Who wrote that to us? It's someone who knows us very well! But what are they getting at? And why didn't they sign it?"

"Why is there no address on the letter? Who is sending us anonymous letters?"

The content was quickly recognised as pertinent. Even encouraging. But why anonymous? Hard to separate the text from the context of El Salvador and anonymous threats and fears, and a small community of faith which has often lived on the far side of danger. Text, context and community danced wildly together for some 20 minutes before the cat came out of the bag - to a welcome of relived laughter! By then we had learned a lively tune and the dance continued

in the liturgy.

A man, we were told, once threw a party and invited loads of guests. His staff were sent out to invite them personally. They didn't come.

"Can't - just bought a field."

"Just bought five pairs of oxen."

"Just got married..."

So they went to fetch the uninvited.

And someone asked, "Why did this man invite the rich first?"

"Yes," said another, "'cos you can't buy a field with fresh air! Or ten oxen or get married."

"No - we didn't get married 'cos we couldn't afford the church fees - and that's a good job 'cos we couldn't have afforded the party afterwards!"

Someone answered, "Well, the man was rich - he threw a *big* party - so he invited people like himself. You always invite your own kind to things like that."

"Yeah, then he complained, sulked, when his friends didn't come. And he only invited the poor to teach his friends a lesson. If his friends *had* come he wouldn't have even thought about the poor. And when all the poor didn't come he sent his men out to *make* them come. What does that mean?"

"That's what they do with the poor. They use us, to show their rich friends, to make themselves look good, clever. And they bully us into their projects when *they* want us there, even against our own will. Maybe we have other priorities - you can't just leave your work and go to a party. You get a good meal maybe and you might have a laugh,

but what about tomorrow, and your family? Or your job? You could lose them, all for the whim of the man who wanted to look smarter than his friends."

Jesus eats tortillas and beans with us.

"Jesus doesn't do that, like that rich man. He doesn't take us away from what's necessary. He comes to eat with us, tortillas and beans. Rice sometimes. And when he's with us whatever we eat is a banquet. We don't want invitations to eat at a party in the rich man's house. Let him come and eat with us."

Playing fast and loose with the text? Telling the story didn't lead to questions about when the text was written, or whether it was an original saying of Jesus, or the early church. Instead it immediately triggered images of real life situations. The relationships between the man, his guests, his hired men, the poor, were vivid, evocative.

But is it 'allowed': to hear the story and use it in such a different way? Many would say not. The original context is the most important and we must dig to get to the 'original' meaning, find out what Jesus, or the writers, meant when *they* told the story. And then we have The Message, which is best locked in a golden box for its protection.

But how do we get it from the first century to the community of faith in 1993, wherever we may be? Sometimes the church tradition, guarded by the historians,

"...much more plentiful are the illiterate and semi-literate poor who come, tired, hungry and thirsty to the meeting.."



theologians and ministers helps carry the golden box to us, taking the utmost care not to let it get into the wrong hands on the way. They kindly unlock the box and let us see what Jesus meant 2000 years ago. We can gaze at it in wonder - just don't touch... But what does it mean now? What prevents this gazing from being a 'mere' history lesson? In the Base Ecclesial (grass-roots religious) Communities of Latin America and beyond, where the guardians of (modern scholastic) tradition are in short supply, much more plentiful are the illiterate and semi-literate poor who come, tired, hungry and thirsty to the meeting in a small candle-lit home on the physical, social and economic edges of the city. For them there is no golden box. Only the story which, when told again or acted out with those who have not been taught to read, is wrapped in laughter and precious energy and freed to awaken images of the day, the week, moving in spirited dialogue until the tasks are agreed, prayer is engaged or, quite simply, people have to make their way home before it is too late.

People who sell their sweets, biscuits, vegetables and fruit on the street, sew buttonholes by the hundred for foreign firms, leave their homes at five in the morning to walk the hour or two to sow beans or corn on stony sun-baked slopes, or begin even earlier

collecting wood and water and making the family's tortillas, don't usually come together just to hear or memorise what was said and done in the distant past.

Nor is it just about trying to 'understand' the present in the light of the past, although that is part of the task. It has more to do with how the Bible and its stories may help to live life, to change it, make it different, on a personal and social level. (There are other thousands of poor people who are encouraged to look at the Bible so as to avoid looking at certain basic aspects of their lives - but that is a different story, and a different article).

What does it say about how we live?

We want to know what the stories say about how we live and how we can live."

Hardly time or energy to use on anything less fruitful.

Since all kinds of people from different backgrounds can read the same text and some be set free while others remain disinterested, clearly it is not the *holy text* that makes the difference but rather some external factors. The difference between a liberating and a boring text may have much to do with who is reading the Bible, where, and what for.

Aha! So this poor community,

EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

Those involved in the Protestant Reformation in Europe realised that Jesus had used the language of the common person, Aramaic, rather than the then obscure Hebrew of Jewish Scriptures. They saw that if that same Jesus were to communicate to ordinary people then it could not be in ecclesiastical Latin or Greek, but in the language spoken every day in the market places of Europe.

However, this assumes that people can read. It is no good having the scriptures available in your own language and dialect if you are illiterate. That is why the churches were at the forefront of providing basic education to the masses.

In India, Carey was obsessed with translating, printing and publishing the Bible in the various languages of India. But he was also concerned that teaching in the college he founded at Serampore should be in Bengali and not in English.

liberation theology style Bible reading is just about reading an innocent text and twisting it to suit your situation? Hopefully not, but does anybody not do that, to some extent or other?

If we drove to church in a well-polished Porsche whose alarm blips to us as we cross the car-park

THE
Bible
IN SALVADOR

PLAYING WITH Words

towards the welcoming smell of the newly-furnished, centrally heated building to sing *Our God Reigns* alongside other semi-professionals from the dormitory town, who's to say we are likely to be more objective in our working with the text than the barefoot farmer? Are we likely to be more objective than the one who walked over an hour through the dust and stones to meet with her neighbours in a corrugated zinc hut, struggling to stay awake in the heat and hunger between a breakfast of tortillas and salt and a shared lunch of beans and fruit juice, the soldiers playing with their rifles a hundred yards down the path?

We all have our hidden agendas to protect or throw off. The thing is to let them out into the light of day, to let the text meet them in honesty. If you are a *campesino* whose life is constantly balancing too close to the edge of the lifeline you are likely to find the Bible considerably more helpful in defence of Life rather than in defence of lifestyle in a dormitory town in Europe or the USA. However, it does seem to have been used (misused?) more frequently in the long and often bloodthirsty defence of the rich North/West world's lifestyle than as God's communal scream in defence of the poor. It is Archbishop Romero and thousands like him who are shot in the 'Third World', and not General Secretaries of the BMS or the Baptist Union in Didcot, or Professor Whatsit in Manchester University.

Something more creative is demanded

There are certain advantages of illiterate or semi-literate groups. You can't just ask the group to read their Bibles, much less their commentaries or dictionaries! Something more creative is demanded. Other methods which will awaken the creativity of the participants.

That makes it more difficult to 'pass on' the material of Bible study

done in the Base Communities and small grass roots reflection/action groups. Most of it is unwritten, oral, spontaneous and undocumented. The groups themselves are their own material. As the groups vary so does the material. And that's pretty close to how it all started, isn't it?

The text has to find its way in, the context, life-setting of the participants and their community and personal characters, faith, doubts, fears and confidences of the group. It can't help but lead to results different from a simple reading group where all eyes are on the printed page.

There is free use of drama, games, symbols, drawing, song, music, pictures - all as much traditional channels of freedom for the Spirit as the printed word. Usually much more so. Art, creativity, worship, and the implicit subversion of the status quo, are ancient partners. Let us pray - good - but also let us play. Playful celebration is of the very essence of the Spirit.

Playful Celebration

So it all becomes a kind of dance for three. The text, the old stories that ring bells in the lives, the context, of the group - and the nature of the group itself: text, context and community. But if it is a kind of dance it's not always very well choreographed! We are always learners. The historical expert brings part of the work to the group but risks seeing only the letters rather than hearing the music of the Spirit. To watch it happen or, better still to take part, is to

discover there are few rules so it's not hard to become involved.

It will never be a neat and tidy affair - the Spirit may order chaos but doesn't tidy it up and file it away. Wind and fire don't live well in boxes. For those more familiar with a well-ordered life it may not always appear so readily attractive. Sometimes the encounter is slow and heavy, clumsy, and it's hard to hear over the noise of the buses, or the helicopters. You have to learn to hear the 'music' *in* the noise and not beyond it... Other times it's fast and furious, heady like the wild ecstatic worshipping dance of the Dervishes, spinning about the room and out of the door headlong into commitments of courage.

Sometimes it's difficult to coax all the dancers onto the floor for their fears of making fools of themselves, or coming into the open. For hundreds of years too many have been told they can't dance, have no business tangling with the texts, have nothing to say or bring that would be of value.

Sometimes the encounter, the dance, is started by the text, other times by one of the other partners, an incident or experience from the wider context, or the call for some decision within the group. But wherever it starts, none of the three, text, context or community can be left out, and none allowed to hog the floor all the time. Another kind of 'trinity' partnership.

It's easier with the poor

And is it easier here, in El Salvador, or with the poor whatever their nationality? Yes. And no. Yes because the context seems to shout

So it all becomes a kind of dance for three. The text, the old stories that ring bells in the lives, the context, of the group - and the nature of the group itself: text, context and community. But if it is a kind of dance it's not always very well choreographed!

louder, more clearly. You don't get to forget it so easily. It's much more immediate and demands an answer to the 'so what?' of much of our disinterested study for study's sake. No because it's not usually as romantic as it can be made to sound. It can be clumsy, confused, not well-ordered. And it can be frightening. There is a cost. But on the whole, I suspect, the answer is yes, it could well be easier to read and use the Bible with the Spirited poor.

Carlos Mesters, a Dutch priest who has worked for many years with grassroots communities in Brazil, wrote an exciting and most readable book about the communities' way of reading the Bible - *Defenceless Flower*. He speaks of the life and risk of such a reading:



"The theology of liberation is the product of the use the poor make of the Bible in their communities. That use of the Bible is the source of their freedom in the face of the abuses of power." The last line of the epigraph continues to be true: "The world is growing afraid of you, defenceless flower!"

(Quotes from 'Defenceless Flower - a new reading of the Bible' by Carlo Mesters. Orbis/CIIR)

**"Flower, you turn blood into fertiliser!
You are stronger than the hand which cuts you,
More enduring than the idea which defines you,
Brighter than the paint which portrays your face,
The world is growing afraid of you,
Defenceless flower!"**

IN THE BEGINNING

An American film, "The Bible in the Beginning" was shown on Japanese television in 1991 and was watched by 13 million people (12 per cent of the population). The two and a half hour film (originally three hours long before being edited by the Japan Bishops Conference) was well received by viewers, many of whom called the station, NTV, to express their appreciation of the film.

Interest in the Bible in Japan has also led to a new campaign "The Bible in 100 weeks" which takes the reader through the Old Testament in 60 weeks and 40 weeks for the New Testament.



"It is easier with the poor because the context shouts louder and clearer ..."

Ladies' reading class, Upoto, Zaire.



OUR ONLY HOPE

by **Nlandu Mukoko Mpanzu**

When we first read the stories of the Old Testament we quickly identified with that culture. It is not far away from the way we live in Zaire. We have the extended family, not limiting ourselves just to wife and children. We go far beyond that and care for a very large family - nephew, niece and so on.

All this transfers through to the view we have of the Church. The Church is just like a family. All the people together wanting to share what they have with the rest of the people in the church.

Looking at one of the parables, at the story of the Good Samaritan for instance, a Zairian finds it very difficult to understand why a Christian or a devoted Christian pastor would not care for someone in trouble. In our culture you make yourself ready to help the one who is in need even though you yourself may not have enough. The little we have we want to share with the rest.

So we can easily identify ourselves with the one who cares for the person left for dead. Even though he did not have enough, he said, "Go ahead, take care of him and if it's going to cost more than I've been able to give you now I will pay you next time I see you."

That parable also speaks about



tribalism. Through the Bible and because we are Christians, we don't look at our tribal divisions. Those who are not Christian say, "I am from this tribe so I give preference to the group to which I belong." However Christians do not make that distinction.

As far as studying the Bible is concerned, in a church we pick a passage and somebody reads it. The leader then raises certain questions and tries to show what we can learn from it. Then we share together in the group and try to see what the passage means to our lives.

In this time of trouble in Zaire, we are distributing more Bibles than ever. It is amazing to see people, who have very little, doing everything to get a Bible because for them the only hope is in Scripture. They have looked to the politicians, they have looked at material wealth and they have failed them. Their only hope is in God. So there are lots of prayer and Bible study groups coming together where the Bible is central. People read it every day, they meditate on it and pray for the whole situation in Zaire.

The Church in Zaire is still alive in spite of all the problems. Churches are packed every Sunday morning. People are putting themselves into the hands of God. And this is true for the whole of

Zaire, not just Kinshasa.


The Bible Society in Zaire is busily distributing Bibles but it is also organising translations. Our main job begins when we get a request from a church about a group which does not have the Bible in its local language. People trained in linguistics will look at the possibilities of starting a translation. We have to check whether it is right to make a new translation or whether there is another language that group can use.

When we have decided to go ahead we will try to find a local person who speaks the language to do the translation. This is to make sure that the translation is in the way local people use their mother tongue. Then it takes several years before the translation is finished and ready for production.

As far as Zaire is concerned, we now have the whole Bible available in 15 languages. The New Testament alone is translated into about 30 languages and portions of the Bible are available in more than 60 languages. However, there are more than 200 languages spoken throughout Zaire.

Nlandu Mukoko Mpanzu is Bible Society Secretary in Zaire. He is also the Chairman of the African Executive Committee of all the Bibles Societies in Africa.

JESUS THE BRIDGE



The Revd Eleazar Ziherambere, Regional Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance for Africa, visited Baptist House in September. We asked him how Africans view the Bible.



There are many ways to teach the Bible in Africa, “but the ‘traditional’ ways have not always been the best, especially since many Africans cannot read,” he said.

“So the story method is common. A teacher will prepare a passage from the Bible and will “tell the story.” It is then applied to everyday life. In this way, Africans have found the message of the Bible very relevant to everyday life. That is why many Africans have come to the Lord,” he said.

The Bible is a very practical book, full of stories and parables, God speaking through history and through the person of Jesus, the “Word made flesh.” This is why the Bible speaks to the African.

“For the African, the whole concept of God, of redemption, of the love of God to people must be seen through our neighbours rather than pious people. The love of God needs to be expressed more in deeds and acts and less in words.”

Mr Ziherambere explained that the message of the Bible was quickly understood in Africa.

“Africans have always believed in a supreme being but he was so remote and inaccessible that he did not visit people. However we always believed that there was a connection between God and us.

“In Rwanda, the term for a living person *musimu* and for a dead person *musima* are almost the same because in our thinking a human being exists for eternity. So we believed our ancestors, once dead, served as a bridge between us and the ‘great spirit’.

“When the Bible came to us we had this picture of Jesus Christ as the true bridge between us and God the Father. The African quickly understood that Jesus is the mediator. That is why Christianity has grown so quickly in Africa. And that is why it is better for Africans to do the evangelising because they understand the culture and the African world-view.”





So far this year there have been 16 Staff Team events. Over 1500 people attended the Saturday programme and 213 churches have been visited on the Sunday.

By October 1 there were 485 Link-Up groups involving nearly 2,000 churches and already this year 108 Link-Up groups have had a visit from their missionary.

These two aspects of WML make demands on the churches and to succeed local people need to get together and plan.

For Staff Team events plans can start up to twelve months ahead - the best premises; which workshops and seminars to hold; who will run the children's programme; the day and time; getting churches to book the date in their diaries; and much more. There are guidelines to help the local group and the practical help of the BMS Representative.

There are usually six months to organise a Link-Up visit. The most difficult thing is persuading the group churches to choose two dates when a visit is possible. Once this is agreed detailed planning can begin: joint meetings, individual church meetings, Sunday services, mid-week groups, visits to local schools, colleges, professional groups, invites to non-church groups interested in the area where the missionary works. Sometimes the Link-Up contact person does all the planning but increasingly groups are finding a small team even better.

Is it worth it? "We had a wonderful three days." "Thoroughly enjoyed and benefited from the visit." "It was difficult to get the churches together but in the end it was worth it."

The way we look at things

The following is an extract from the sabbatical study project of the late Roy Turvey, formerly BMS Area Representative for the North of England. Roy examined the Joint Liturgical Group's Four Year Lectionary in order to identify world mission themes

I have tried to keep a third world perspective in looking at the scriptures, realising the severe limitations to this for one not immediately immersed in the struggles of the Third World.

We in the west come to the scriptures with an inherited tradition and an outlook formed by our values and culture which we have not recognised as sometimes alien to the values and culture of the writers of the scriptures and fellow Christians in others parts of the world.

"... the tradition of the evangelical elders seems to owe more to culture than to scripture," wrote John Stott.

I take seriously the words of Rowlands and Corner in *Liberating Exegesis* (SPCK 1991): "What is necessary is a renewed quest for guidelines in our biblical reading, assuming a fixed Archimedean point is no longer possible."

The meaning of a parable, for example, may well be very different for a Bangladesh peasant struggling to feed his family in a time of

drought or a Brazilian farm worker turned off his own land and now exploited by his new multinational company employers.

Rowland and Corner's book is an attempt to help us to see this and set out some of the issues we have to face if we are to discover the word of God for today. Bible study is above all understanding what God is saying today.

There has been a tendency, one writer from the third world points out, for British exegesis to study any environment save that of contemporary Britain. The work of scholars and exegetists is accepted so long as it "establishes more fully the original context of the most famous Galilean without allowing his shadow to fall on their own times."

A useful distinction has been made between the meaning of a text, what it meant for the writer then, and its significance, what it means for us now.

A quotation from Rowlands and Corner helps to put this whole question clearly. First, a writer from São Paulo, Brazil is quoted:

"The Bible must be read with the head, and with the heart and with the feet. The feet are very important. The Bible was written as the product of a journey. It is only by following with our own feet the same journey that we get to know the meaning of the Bible for us."

Their comment is: "Within the reality of the Brazilian poor that journey may mean hanging on to our comforts and spiritualising the journey, but that different reading at the very least puts a question mark against the legitimacy of our assumption that we have grasped the meaning of the Biblical story of God's people."

IN AFRICA
THE Bible

Discussion Starter



.....

1 The Dr. Who mentality
 Since God's Word is written for all people at all times and in all places, do certain people living in certain places at certain times have an advantage over others?

Have linguistic studies in the text of the Bible, and archaeological discoveries enhanced your faith?

2 The three r's
 How important is being able to read in your understanding of the Bible? (See articles "Jesus the Bridge" p 9)

It is easy to assume that everyone we come across can read. How well do your church services cope with the illiterate? (For example, how do you use hymn or song books, notice sheets, and how do you handle Bible readings?) Are there changes that could be made?

Imagine yourself in the situation of sharing the gospel with someone who couldn't read. How would you handle it?

3 The important things of life
 If you had nothing, or virtually nothing, how high a priority would possessing a Bible be? (See article "Our only hope" p 8). What other things would you give importance to? And what things could you do away with?

4 Walking under ladders
 Is it possible, even living in a fairly sophisticated society, to treat the Bible as having magical powers? Can you think of examples similar to those related by Christine Preston? (See article "Injil", p 22).

What does relegating Scripture to a magic formula say about faith?

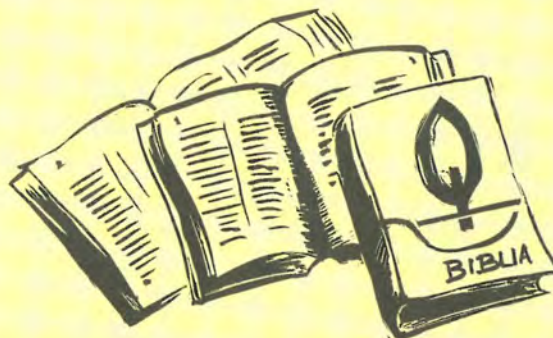
5 Not quite the Trinity
 Evangelical Christians are sometimes accused of believing in a doctrine of "Father, Son, and Holy Bible." Do you think the place of the Bible has in any way ousted the place of the Holy Spirit in the lives and beliefs of Christians today?



6 True Expression
 "The love of God needs to be expressed more in deeds and acts and less in words." (See article "Jesus the Bridge" p 9) Is this true for your church community? Are there improvements or amendments to your church's programme that could be made in the light of this statement?

7 Labelling regulations
 How important is it to you to have your beliefs confirmed and endorsed by others? (See article "We are Baptists!" p 21.) In what ways can we give encouragement to groups such as those meeting in

Double Take



D OUBLE TAKE? Double Take is a way of using the Herald to consider, more deeply, the theme which is highlighted each month. Whether used privately, within a missionary or house group, or as part of Sunday worship, the hope is that a better understanding of the issues will lead to a change in attitudes, to a commitment to prayer, to involvement in mission and to action.

Bible Study



On a Sunday in November 1984 Margaret and the late Ernie Moore attended the Peace Memorial Baptist Church in Avalon, New South Wales, a fellowship which has for some years been a haven for the refugees from Central America fleeing persecution. This service, they described, as "the most unforgettable service of their lives."

They heard how, after the morning service in San Salvador the previous Sunday, the minister Miguel Tomas Garcia, had been arrested by armed men in civilian clothes. Amnesty International had immediately put out a call for appeals to be sent to President Duarte and 900 telexes had descended on Duarte's desk. On Wednesday of that week Duarte had reluctantly released Miguel Tomas, but it was a release into exile with his young family. He was the sixth pastor of the Emmanuel Baptist Church to be exiled since 1979.

A few days before his arrest Eduardo, a University student had received a letter from Miguel Tomas. It told of a deacon murdered on his way home from a meeting; of the President of the Youth Association, Tomas' own brother, shot dead; of three youth workers arrested while they were distributing food and medical supplies to refugees. These three were then imprisoned and tortured physically and psychologically from four to six months.

Then Eduardo began to speak to the assembled church about a student arrested on his way to the University. There was a pause. The words were slow in coming.

The Australian minister asked gently, "What did they tell you, brother, they were going to do to you? I know it's hard for you, but tell us, we need to hear this."

There was still a pause. "Those days were the longest in my life. They told me, 'If you do not confess that you are a rebel, we will kill you, we will kill your family.' But Jesus' power helped me. I did not say anything because I have never belonged to a Communist group."

There was a silence such as Ernie and Margaret had never experienced before.

Time spent in fellowship with the people of Peace Memorial Baptist Church brought other recollections of the plight of people in El Salvador to the forefront of their minds. Archbishop Romero murdered in March 1980. Four Catholic women missionaries, Maura, Ita, Dorothy and Jean raped and murdered in December 1980 whilst returning to their work in an orphanage and a school. Maria Gomez, a Baptist and active worker in "Mothers of the Disappeared" - which sought out news of disappeared sons and husbands murdered in April 1989. Six Jesuits murdered in November 1989.

The poor remain poor in El Salvador. The families who have made their fortunes are happy that it should remain so. About half a million of the people of San Salvador live in shanty towns, slums, or 'mesones' - tenements with five to 50 rooms round a courtyard, each room occupied by one family, with all the families sharing water and toilets. Meanwhile the landlords, high military officers, Christian Democrats or Arena party officials 'maintain their families in second homes at some of Miami's most prestigious addresses.'

Amos 2:6-8, 3:12-4:1, 5:10-15

Amos was a prophet, who, around the middle of the 8th century B.C. preached to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. He appears to have had quite a humble background (7:14), but none the less his words were very forthright and hard-hitting.

In each of these sections try to think what the meaning of the passage is for yourself, as you are, now; and then transpose yourself to El Salvador, and think these passages through with the 'head', 'heart' and 'feet' of an El Salvadoran person. (See Roy Turvey's article p 10).

1 Amos 2 : 6 - 8

This passage describes people being treated like things; the poor and oppressed, who in the minds of the rich and powerful, are less than worthless.

a. What message does Amos bring to the poor people?

b. What status do all people have in God's eyes?

c. What is our response to the poor and oppressed?

2 Amos 3 : 12 - 4 : 1

The luxurious lives of the rich are compared to the drudgery of the poor.

a. How are the rich women of Samaria addressed here? Is this a term you could comfortably use about any rich women you know?

b. Is it right for anyone in this world to hold onto their riches?

3 Amos 5 : 10 - 15

A plea for justice.

Do you think the way the courts are run in i) your country or ii) El Salvador are showing the justice and mercy of God?

This Bible study was devised from a longer article written by the late Revd Ernie Moore.

Action Points

1 Sharing the faith
 In a group of people you know well, each select a favourite or special verse or passage from the Bible. Analyse why this verse/passage is special.
 Now do the same with difficult verses. Be open with each other. Some verses that are real problems for some may hold no mysteries for others. Ask: is it your life history and experience that can cause differences of interpretation?



2 Don't read it. Live it!
 (See article "Playing with words" p 3).
 As a group choose a well-known Bible story - but don't read it. Quickly, fall into the different parts that this story demands and act it out. Feel yourself in the setting. Use your senses to respond to one another and to the way the story is leading. You are part of that Bible story - how do you feel? What are your reactions? What is your relationship with the other characters in the story?

- choose some good, relevant Bible study notes, and book a time with a friend (or your spouse!). Get a concordance, and follow themes through the Bible.
 A change in the place of study can throw new light on what you're learning.
 If there is a midweek Bible study group at your church, (or affiliated housegroups) and you've never taken part, think about joining in.

3 No. 2 again, but different.
 You can use this idea for personal meditation. Use your God-given gift of imagination to enter into and live in what perhaps are stale Bible passages. Be expectant. Look for a fresh encounter with God.

6 A means of outreach
 (See article "Training the interested or curious" (p 19) Bible study should never be an end in itself. It should always go on and reach out. Ask God to bring to mind people to reach out to. Maybe you could even start a study group for seekers.

4 January 4th, it must be Haggai 1
 How well do you know your Bible? Make a resolution to get to know it better. Perhaps you could enrol yourself in a Bible Study course. Or follow a Bible reading plan which takes you through the whole Bible in one year or three years.

7 Halewid be thi name.
 Read this and see what you think.
 Fadir, halewid be thi name.
 Thi kyngdom come to.
 3yue to vs to day oure dayes breed.
 And for3yue to vs oure synnes, as
 and we for3yuen to ech owynge to vs.
 And leed not vs in to temptacioun.
 Did it make a lot of sense?
 Not surprising really because it comes from a 1384 translation of the Bible. Relevant up-to-date Bible translation work is an on-going worldwide need. Take time to find out more about it. (See article "Our only hope" p 9)

5 "Much study is a weariness of the flesh" Eccles. 12:12
 Could it be time to try a different way of Bible study? Ask around what your friends do. Maybe you find the daily discipline of personal study hard

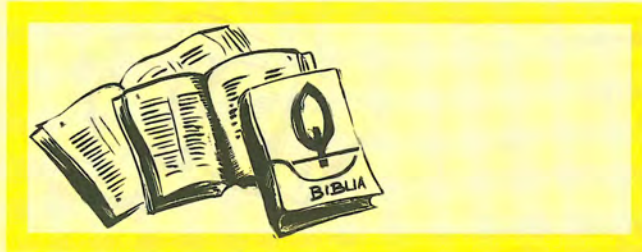
8 Use the Bible creatively
 Write a drama based on a Bible story, or use a psalm or a favourite Bible passage as the basis for a song.

Double Take



Worship

IN EL SALVADOR THE Bible



Idea for living out the Bible, based on Luke 1:5-25, a passage for Advent

You are Zechariah, the priest. You are old, and now the lot has fallen on you to enter the Temple of the Lord, to burn incense. How do you feel? What thoughts are going through your mind? Are you happy and excited, or resigned? Is this the culmination to your priestly work? Will you die soon, with no sons to carry on the family name?

You are Elizabeth. You, too, are old, and worse, you have not been able to bear children. You have lived a God-fearing life, but, be honest, do you have your questions and doubts? Do you sometimes say, "Why me, Lord?"

You are part of the crowd waiting outside the Temple, waiting and praying. For what are you waiting? For what are you praying? Are there many people there? Are you jostled around? Or can you pray in peace?

Zechariah in the Temple. Use your senses. What do you see? (No electricity then) hear? smell? (remember the incense) touch? taste?

You are Gabriel, the messenger of God. How do you react to this man's plight?

Zechariah face to face with Gabriel. What are you thinking? What's it like seeing an angel?

Gabriel, dispelling fear, offering assurance, giving hope, telling of answered prayer, and how it all fits in to God's scheme of things.

Zechariah. Can you believe it? Is it all a dream? Being made mute because of unbelief. Does that make it better or worse?

The crowd. Why the delay? Are you getting restless? Has something happened to Zechariah - he is an old

man after all.

Zechariah. Coming out and meeting the crowd. Do you feel frustrated, not being able to speak? How can you tell them all this that has happened? How do you convey your message?

The crowd. Realising something has happened, waiting and wondering.

Elizabeth, hearing rumours of what has happened to her husband. Can it be true? Can he really not speak? Has God met with him? And knowing later, that yes, yes indeed, God had touched their lives. How do you feel now? Can you express what you feel?

You are the unborn John. Five months gestation, a foetus, but very much alive and able to feel pain and joy. Though cocooned inside your elderly mother, you are none-the-less filled with the Holy Spirit. Describe your situation.

This meditation has kept closely to the Bible text. You may wish to deviate at any point, as the story and your reactions and emotions take over. But the important thing is to live out the passage, to meet with God and have him touch your life in a way that is important and relevant to you.



THE Interested OR CURIOUS

In Natal, north-east Brazil, Margaret Swires runs home Bible studies as part of the evangelistic outreach of the local church.

The Bible study material is provided by the National Mission Board of the Brazilian Baptist Convention.

"I train those interested, or just curious and then put them to work within their capabilities," she said.

"We have not had to look too hard for people to do these studies because, in response to unlikely leaders being willing to have a go, God provided people with a desire to study and not only a desire to study, but also a desire to give their lives to Jesus."

Early in the programme Margaret spoke of "eight people to nurture in their new found faith. God's Spirit calls, convinces and saves. It's a joy to see these new "leaders" discovering this."

A year ago Margaret described how the faith of one woman, ZéZé, had attracted neighbours to the group. Earlier last year, ZéZé's husband, Carlos, was killed in a dispute over land. Her stepson, Elder, was accused by a corrupt policeman of complicity in the death of one of those trying to take over the property. Although he has since been cleared of any involvement it was an anxious period. At the same time, ZéZé's mother was taken seriously ill. Nevertheless, her faith never wavered.

"I thank God that my husband was a believer, that my mother is a believer and so is Elder," she said at the height of her problems. She also found time to attend the opening of a new congregation started by the local Baptist Church.

"Jande and Aelia, two young mums, were keen to discover this great faith of ZéZé," said Margaret Swires.

"Yes, neighbours of hers on that street that is closed to anything evangelical. It's fantastic to see their hunger and interest."

Margaret spoke of Vanubia who is just 17 years old: "She walked out on her boyfriend of the last three and a half years, because he had turned violent. Her mother is a prostitute, so she had nowhere to go. However, a family linked to the church took her in.

"She did the first Bible study and has been transformed by Jesus. Now, a child of God, she is reconstructing her life and values. There are many girls like her in Brazil. According to the latest survey, one in four prostitutes is an adolescent."

Earlier this year, many of the homes in the *Cité Satelité* estate area of Natal were visited.

"Half refused to answer the questionnaire, one quarter answered, but did not want to do the Bible study. The other quarter did home Bible study of four lessons, but not all finished - although 60 did and I've still more to do," Margaret wrote in April.

The 60 were to be invited one Sunday to receive a certificate. Margaret said that she was, wherever possible, using members of the church for the home Bible studies.

"God has given one 17 year old girl many talents and she has been a real blessing. Many of the studies are done in Spiritist homes and it was a privilege to see the Holy Spirit shake their security and make them question again the value of Christian beliefs."

*Below:
Margaret Swires (left) leading a Bible study in a large satellite area of Natal and Right: visiting in the district.*



THE Bible

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS ASIA

by Helen Matthews

Introduction

This play is set on Christmas Day, and caricatures the self absorption of many people. The family continually ignore one another, frequently interrupting. The Ghost of Christmas Asia is seeking to point the family to other parts of the world, and other people they are ignoring. By taking Megan on an edited tour of Asia, the Ghost makes her consider the plight of others. She is visibly shaken by what she sees. Once home, her task is to move her family on from their refusal to notice others to a willingness to embrace their needs.

As 'mission' - especially world mission - is often ignored at Christmas, this play may be a timely reminder of a wider world!

Cast

RON (father) An armchair socialist, fairly belligerent

HOPE (mother) Anxious, harassed

MEGAN (teenage daughter) Also belligerent

SAM (son, about 10) Quietly living in world of his own

PENELOPE (daughter about 5) Over excited

GRANDMA Complaining, dissatisfied

GRANDPA Grumpy

GHOST Tall and very dignified, wearing long, flowing pale garments. Speaks sternly, like a head teacher!

STAGE DIRECTIONS

The lunch table should be set downstage, so that the action with Megan and the Ghost can take place upstage.

SCENE

Family sitting around Christmas lunch table.

RON

I think, on this occasion, it would be appropriate to begin by saying a grace.

SAM

Do you know any, Dad?

RON

Enough of your lip, lad. Of course I do. Pay attention. 'For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful'. And a merry Christmas to us all!

General murmurs

RON

sits down

If there's anything to be merry about in this Godforsaken country these days...

HOPE

Now, who'd like a leg? It looks a bit overdone - oh dear, I hope the party at the weekend will be a success. If we over cook the bird it would be awful...

MEGAN

Mum, I've got a friend coming around later, is that OK?

PENELOPE

I'm going to call her Fluffy, because she's got such soft fur. I think her hutch is a bit small for her.

HOPE

The Berkeleys are important clients, we can't afford anything to go wrong.. Does this stuffing taste right?

GRANDMA

I wouldn't have minded a blue dressing gown but red's never been my colour.

GRANDPA

Are we going to be finished in time for 'The Queen'?

MEGAN

His name's James, actually.

RON

Reading paper

Look at this! What kind of outfit are running the country, anyway! What do we pay our taxes for?

MEGAN

He's just a friend. Don't look at me like that, Mum.

Mum is not looking at her

PENELOPE

'Cos if he keeps growing he won't have room to move around and rabbits can die you know, they suffocate until they can't breathe any more...

Starts to cry.

Nobody notices.

GRANDPA

She'll be coming on at three, just like she always does. I'm not missing her this year.

What are you doing, boy? *(to Sam)*

SAM

Playing with my new Game Boy, Grandpa. Look! This one's Dragon Ninja 16, but it looks the same as 15, do you think it is?

GRANDPA

I can't keep up with all this dratted technology. Didn't even have televisions not so long ago. Had to listen to the King then. Seems like only yesterday...

RON

And another thing - this government's got a lot to answer for with its small business record. Going to the wall all over the place!

HOPE

Why did we ever think we could run a catering business? It was just an impossible dream...

GRANDMA

Why do I always get Newberry Fruits? Why can't someone give me a nice box of liqueur chocolates?

MEGAN

Oh, so I can't have my friends around now? You never like any of my boyfriends - you're always criticising me. Well, I'm not standing for it. I'm going - and I don't care if it is Christmas day! *Megan jumps up and flounces off upstage, ignored by rest of cast, who each begin a sentence, all speaking at once.*

RON

And another thing -

SAM

All dead on Level III, now for -

PENELOPE

Fluffy wants a new -

GRANDMA

Nobody ever gives -

GRANDPA

We'll miss the Queen -

HOPE

My VAT forms -

Enter Ghost upstage, confronting Megan. As Ghost raises an arm, whole cast freeze, including Megan

GHOST

I am the Ghost of Christmas Asia. You have been so busy ignoring each other, and you will certainly continue to ignore me. Just for once, I am going to take drastic action.

Megan!

MEGAN

Shakes herself.

Who are you?

GHOST

I am going to take you on a short journey. Come with me. *Makes arc in the air with arm. Each time this happens, a bell tinkles offstage.*

MEGAN

Looks all around her (to front). Gasps.

Oh! How wonderful! The colour - the movement - the lights! Where are we?

GHOST

Delhi, India.

MEGAN

What a brilliant place - the people, the rickshaws - the smell.

GHOST

What do you expect with open sewers and five million people?

Come over here.

Makes arc. Bell. Points Megan to floor.

MEGAN

Oh! A beggar. What's wrong with that baby? It shouldn't be allowed, letting children sit about on the streets like this.

GHOST

What choice do they have? Are you going to give her something?

MEGAN

I've only got my Christmas money! I was going to buy a pair of boots - they're brilliant, black suede, platform.... *looks down again, is visibly moved.*

Oh, all right. Here you are.

Hands money to beggar.

(To beggar) I'm sorry.

(To Ghost) Can we go home now?

GHOST

Not yet.

Come with me.

Another arc, bell. They look stage right.

MEGAN

Help! That car nearly got me. Look out! *(Ducks)* Oh, the traffic! Wherever's this?

GHOST

Bangkok, Thailand.

MEGAN

(With hands over mouth)
I can hardly breathe!

GHOST

Pollution is a real problem here. But there are plenty of others.

MEGAN

There's a girl of about my age. She doesn't look very happy. What's she doing?

GHOST

She's a prostitute. Sorry to shock you, but it's common here. She was lured from one of the hill tribes in the north, with promises of a good job as a waitress. She is being 'kept' by a brothel and is not allowed back home.

MEGAN

Close to tears
Isn't there anything we can do?

GHOST

Think about it when you get home. One more call.

MEGAN

No, I don't want to see any more.

GHOST

Come on. *Makes arc towards stage left. Bell.*

MEGAN

Hey! What a powerful wind, I can hardly stand up. Look at the sky - it's going to pour in a minute. And I'm cold. Hey! My feet are getting wet - the water's rising - I'm going to drown!

GHOST

These are the plains of Bangladesh - flood country. Recently, many harvests have been washed away by storms. Those people over there *(points)* are struggling to stay alive.

MEGAN

They look frozen.

GHOST

They have lost their home as well.

MEGAN

They're holding on to those trees - they'll get swept away in the floods...

GHOST

And after the storm, how are they going to survive until the next harvest? And who will help them to start planting all over again?

MEGAN

The wind's getting worse - I'm scared - save me, save me!

GHOST

Makes wide arc, turns and exits with great dignity.

MEGAN

Turns to face family.
Hey!

All come back to life, and begin speaking together.

RON

- take away the powers of the Trades Unions -

SAM

- Level IV, here goes Dragon Ninja again, Pow, pow!

PENELOPE

- hutch with a run on the grass, he needs -

GRANDMA

- me what I really want, every Christmas it's the same -

GRANDPA

- if we don't all hurry up and finish dinner

HOPE

- are a nightmare, I don't know how to fill them in -

MEGAN

in hubbub jumps on table and picks up turkey. Over the noise we hear her say:
I AM GOING TO PUT FLUFFY THE RABBIT IN THE OVEN AND FEED THE TURKEY TO THE DOG!

Sudden silence. All eyes on Megan.

DO SHUT UP EVERYONE! Sorry Grandma, I mean, please be quiet. You've got to listen to me - we've all got to listen for once.

There are other people waiting to be heard this Christmas.

The End

Christmas Play



CALL TO PRAYER

My soul tells out the greatness of the Lord. Luke 1:46

*Loving God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
this Christmas story
is not the warm and cosy
tale we thought;
it's hard -
for the proud,
for monarchs
for the high and mighty
for the rich
even while being good news
for the hungry
and the lowly,
and we are not quite sure
which group we belong to,
except that we know
your mercy is sure
to all who fear you.*

WEEK

49

December 5-11
ITALY

It is more than three years since the BMS accepted an invitation to work with the Union Christiana Evangelica Battista d'Italia (UCEBI). Only now are the first BMS missionaries arriving in the country. David and Ann MacFarlane are already there; Chris and Sarah Mattock will be arriving in January. Both couples are doing language study at Perugia. Mark and Claire Ord and Elizabeth Ruth, who will be just over twelve months old, are due to go in September 1994.

WEEK

50

December 12-18
ASIA

Pressures from varying situations in Asia drive men and women here and there across the continent. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) of Myanmar holds the country in a disciplined grip that restricts speech and action. Muslims in the west of Myanmar looking for freedom have flooded into Bangladesh. Burmese Karen also seek refuge in Thailand - the denial of human rights forces people to leave the familiar for the risk of promised security in the unknown. Political tensions in Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan prompt other massive moves of population.

The Christian church too is on the

move! Rapid church growth in China, South Korea, Indonesia and Nepal confirms the movement of God's Spirit among the peoples of Asia.

WEEK

51

December 19-25
THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

This is where mission starts, in the heart and mind and action of God as he reaches out in love, offering himself through his son - God with us - for the salvation of the world. We greet his coming with joy and take the opportunity to recommitt ourselves in love and service.

WEEK

52

December 26-January 1
REPENTANCE AND RESOLVE

A time to look back in thanksgiving, praising God for his goodness and love, but also a time to take note of our failures, to realise that our commitment to mission has mostly been half-hearted. So let's not make empty resolutions for the future. Let us enter the New Year prepared to "go" as Jesus commissions us, knowing he is with us "until the end of time."

WEEK

1

January 2-8
CHILDREN

Even in times of peace, children are exposed to violence. Even in stable and loving homes, children have many fears. They are vulnerable, exposed and they need loving and nurturing. Orphanages in ravaged parts of Europe were big news last year. Well-meaning journalists sought out the worst for exposure on TV and individual response has been generous and swift. Our prayer must be that such children become less newsworthy as their conditions improve and that their God-given dignity as individual people is restored to them.

WEEK

2

January 9-15
ZAIRE

The struggle for power in Zaire continues and the people suffer. The president is determined to hold on to power at all costs. The economy is in tatters and hyper-inflation makes day to day life very difficult. Most families only have one main meal every other day. Those who rely on the state for their salary are paid infrequently and this has provoked elements of the military to riot and loot. In the past year there has been violence in the south and in the east of Zaire.

The Baptist Community of the River Zaire (CBFZ), which covers an area stretching for over one thousand miles, continues its ministry in the face of great logistical problems. Travel is not easy nevertheless the different CBFZ regions are determined to hold together. Local churches maintain a lively witness, services are full and some churches now have to hold two services each Sunday morning to accommodate all the worshippers.

BMS has only a handful of workers in Zaire at the moment but their presence symbolises a continuing partnership with CBFZ.

WEEK

3

January 9-15
BANGLADESH: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Social Institutions Board of the BBS is recognised by the Bangladesh Government and under this umbrella the Social, Health, Economic Development Board exercises a ministry of varied activity. Tensions can arise when the priorities of social care and response seem to carry more attention than the direct preaching ministry of the churches. Pray for BBS and particularly for its Pastors who are often torn in their loyalty to a local church and the needs of the immediate congregation, and those of the wider community scattered around the fellowship.

Sue Headlam based at Chandraghona co-ordinates Community Health Programmes throughout BBS areas of work - she also has a vision for new opportunities opening up in urban areas.

1993 AND 1994 PRAYER GUIDE UPDATE (Week numbers correspond to those in the Prayer Guide)



WEEK

4

January 23-29
BRAZIL: PARANA

Paraná in the south of Brazil continues to be one of the most progressive states. There has been noticeable improvement in communications and in the electrical and water supply to towns in the interior of the state. The capital, Curitiba has a population of nearly two million. BMS partnership with the Paraná Baptist Convention has continued for 40 years and although we have only two missionary families associated with the work, our interest continues. In Curitiba there is a work amongst street children, helped by Fund for the Future. A project to help the deaf and their families, "The Family Movement - The Voice of Silence", has resulted in strong growth in the congregation for the deaf in the First Baptist Church in Curitiba where numbers at meetings reach 120.

Keith and Barbara Hodges: Keith is Dean of the Seminary and Head of the Old Testament Department. Gerry and Johan Myhill are involved in a boat ministry to fishermen based in Antonina.

The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. Deut. 30.14

Parent God
we rejoice in your nearness
no need to travel
the lightyears of space
to find you
no need to plumb
the depths of the ocean
to hear you
you have drawn close to us
in your Son
and through his life and death
and rising again
you have spoken your word
and changed our lives.
May that same word
in our mouths
in our hearts
part of our very being
reach out to touch the lives
of people
in a Brazilian city
or a British street.

ILLITERACY AND ISLAM

It has been speculated that massive illiteracy is a contributing factor in the explosive spread of Islam.

"While adherence to Islam is demonstrated through easily performed rituals and social conventions, Christianity requires a more abstract relationship with a holy God having very high standards for daily life. These standards are set forth reliably only in a written document - the Bible. For those many who cannot read this document, folk Islam is an inviting alternative."

So wrote Dr Stephen Walter, International Literacy Co-ordinator for the Summer Institute of Wycliffe Bible translators.

Recent trends are not encouraging as the number of illiterate adults continues to grow by 30 to 50 million a year. In 1960 there were an estimated 700 million illiterate adults over 15, increasing to over a billion in 1990.

Perhaps it is time for the church once again to face up to the illiteracy problem with more serious determination.



FINANCE MANAGER

The BMS is looking for a Finance Manager based at Didcot to assist the Director for Finance and Administration in administering the financial resources of the Society. The person appointed must have recognised accounting qualifications.

Essential qualities will include a full sympathy with the aims of the Society, a willingness and competence to take initiative, and an ability to relate well to a wide range of people.

The salary paid will be commensurate with the responsibility of the position. Office hours Monday-Friday 9 am-5 pm with a system of preferred working hours in operation; good holiday entitlement; occupational pension scheme and free meals in staff restaurant.

Applications, with CV, or request for further information to the Revd R G S Harvey, General Secretary, Baptist Missionary Society, PO Box 49, Baptist House, 129 Broadway, Didcot, Oxon OX11 8XA marked confidential.

Closing date 16 November 1993

FEDERATION DES EGLISES EVANGELIQUES BAPTISTES DE FRANCE

ÉCOLE DE LANGUE FRANÇAISE

LES CÈDRES



CHRISTIAN FRENCH LANGUAGE SCHOOL

17, voie de Wissous – 91300 MASSY FRANCE

DIRECTOR: DAVID BOYDELL

Tel: + 33 1 69 30 00 67

Fax: + 33 1 64 47 12 26

- Classes at all levels begin in January and September; some places also available from April. Minimum study period: one school term (approx. 3 months).
- **INTENSIVE COURSE 11th to 29th JULY.**
- Brochure on request.



THE NEW 28:19ERS

Six 28:19 Youth Action Teams have just set out on their first assignments. The 27 young men and women are going to France (Lille and Carcassonne), Brazil, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka and Thailand/Nepal. This year, 25 young people from UK churches are joined by two young Baptists from Germany.

Before leaving they spent four weeks in preparation - at Didcot, at St Andrew's Hall, Selly Oak and in local Baptist churches. They will be overseas for a period of six months and "hope to encourage others and themselves whilst witnessing to the word of Jesus." When they return they will spend a further two months visiting Baptist Churches in the UK sharing something of their experiences.

NICARAGUA

Radio Bautista in Nicaragua, (see *The Voice of Hope*, October '93) was quick off the mark with news of a severe tropical storm which hit the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua in September.

Sheila Brewer, who was visiting the area with the Executive Committee of the Youth Work of the Baptist Convention, was caught up in "hurricane Gert". She reported that over 40,000 people had been affected and

many houses, crops and animals swept away or destroyed in the subsequent floods.

Jeurgens, a member of the Executive Youth Committee is a reporter for Radio Bautista. He phoned from the local Red Cross Office and gave news to Managua of the situation.

The BMS made an emergency donation of £5,000 to help in the work of relief and rehabilitation.

FMLN LEGALISED

In El Salvador, the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) guerilla army has been legalised and now presents itself as a political party after declaring itself de-militarised. The FMLN, after years of guerilla opposition, has signed a peace agreement with the government. It can now stand in the elections in February.

However, both sides are suspicious of the motives of the other. President Cristiani has little faith in the FMLN gesture and believes that it still has a considerable arsenal of weapons. The FMLN condemns the government for not punishing those shown by the United Nations to be responsible for the work of the death squads, including the assassinations of Archbishop Romero and the Jesuit Priests.

SLAVE LABOUR

Almost 1,400 Brazilian Indians were found recently working as virtual slaves on a sugar plantation in Mato Grosso do Sul.

A delegation that included officials from the Ministry of Labour found members of the Terena, Katova and Guarani peoples, including almost 500 children, working twelve hours a day.

"Indians are the cheapest labour available to businesses. They are not used to working for a salary and do not even understand the normal conditions in the job market," said Maucir Pauletti, a member of the Permanent Commission for Inspection of Work Conditions.

The Indians, who were offered a third of the minimum wage, which is equal to \$23.75 a month, received nothing because the company subtracted money for food and housing and even charged them for a cup to get water from the river.

BiCentenary of the Society and in doing so doubled their giving to the Fund for the Future.

During the afternoon, representatives of many churches met in seminar groups led by David Martin, David and Joyce Stockley and Jim Clarke where they received updates on aspects of BMS work and opportunities.

The under-13s were catered for by a special youth programmed arranged by Histon Baptists and the BMS 28:19 Lille Team.

At the buffet meal, many international dishes were featured.

The high point of the evening was the celebration and thanksgiving service attended by 120 people from 20 surrounding churches. The guest speaker, David Martin, said "by our giving, caring, praying and going we are all involved with Christ in making the gospel a reality in the world."

Amidst a procession of national flags and church banners, delegates brought their churches' offerings of money and symbols of how Fund for the Future monies were raised. There was further rejoicing when the grand total of £6,400 was announced - the Cambridgeshire amount had been doubled.

200 PLUS ONE

Cambridgeshire Baptist churches were called together on the 201st birthday of the BMS - October 2 - for their final act of celebrating the

Children demonstrating communication methods during the Celebration Service on October 2 in Cambridgeshire.



WE ARE BAPTISTS!

A new church began last year when a group in Ondara, Spain, began studying the Bible on their own. Their study led them to different church groups to see whether any corresponded to what they had discovered in the Bible.

Eventually they decided Baptist teaching most closely matched that of the Bible. So on Easter Sunday the group's pastor, Joiquim Lahuerta, his wife and their two daughters were baptised at Holy Trinity Baptist Church in Denia. Joiquim then prepared to baptise about 80 others who make up the group.

Members of the group come from a variety of backgrounds. Some were brought up in a church, others have no church background at all, and some are drop-outs from the hippie movement.

Jorge Pastor, the minister of Holy Trinity, first heard about them when the father of a student began asking questions about Baptist beliefs.

"He began to show he was interested in speaking to me on a deeper level," he explained.

Puzzled by the depth of the questions, Jorge met Joiquim Lahuerta and learned how the group had organised itself into a church after Bible study. Discussions went on for several months.

"With Bible in hand we went looking, passage by passage, at what the Bible said," explained Jorge Pastor. "One session lasted more than five hours."

After studying Baptist doctrine Joiquim Lahuerta turned to Jorge and said, "We are exactly like you!"

They were stunned to hear how many Baptists there were around the world.

"You mean there are 70 million as strange as us? Now we can feel more normal in our faith," one man said.

His next comment was, "How can we share the gospel with others?"

"When they learned of the Baptist World Alliance and the European Baptist Federation and other Baptist work they were just overwhelmed," said Jorge Pastor.

"We feel this is an action of the Holy Spirit. The Lord has brought them this far and we don't want to get in the way."

"For years we have prayed for the town of Ondara and asked God how to begin work there. When we see things like this we can tell that the Lord is in it."

NEPAL FLOODS

When the BMS heard of the heavy monsoon rains and disastrous floods in Nepal £10,000 was sent from the BMS Relief Fund to the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) and the International Nepal Fellowship (INF). In all, the UMN received more than \$80,000.

"Your gifts gave us the ability to respond to this emergency in a variety of ways," said UMN.

"We were able to make \$3,000 worth of approved medicines available to government relief effort when the need was greatest. We put two medical teams at the disposal of the relief effort and they were deployed.

"Your financial support helped us to transport and distribute, in the Rautahout District, 2,000 relief sets, each containing a set of men's and women's clothing, a wool blanket and a nine piece set of cooking utensils, all contained in a plastic bag. In addition 500 tarpaulins were distributed to 700 of the most severely affected families.

"The distribution was planned and organised by the Community Development Officer with assistance from other groups.

"Your support enabled us to respond to a request from the government to send a trained Relief Distribution



Observer to facilitate, encourage, observe and report. We were also able to make about \$2,650 available to more than 400 families in Lalitpur where UMN has long been at work.

"Generally we have spent about \$50,000 on relief efforts and have commitments of approximately \$40,000 for rehabilitation in Okhaldhunga and Dhading where we have ongoing projects. It is possible that the government will invite us to assist in rehabilitation projects in other areas.

"Please know of our gratitude and thanksgiving to God for your prompt and generous response. We seek your continued interest and prayer."

FAVELA BALLETT DANCERS

Seventy children from a favela in Forteleza, north-east Brazil, have gone on a trip to Italy to perform a ballet. The children are aged between ten and 15 and belong to the school of Dance and Integration which is run by ballerina Dora Andrade.

BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY GENERAL COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS

Nominations for the General Committee of the Society for the year 1994/95 can now be made by members of the Society, contributing churches, auxiliaries of the Society, Baptist Unions and Baptist Associations, and must be received not later than 31 December 1993.

Please act now and remember that the General Committee needs to be as representative as possible of the Baptist constituency.

Nominations in writing should be sent to Michael J Quantick, Administration Secretary, Baptist Missionary Society, PO Box 49, Baptist House, 129 Broadway, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 8XA.

CHECK OUT

ARRIVAL

Margaret and Roy Deller
from Brazil
Margot Bafende
from Zaire
Chris and Marion Collicot
from Brazil
James and Susan Grote
from El Salvador
Laurence Kelly
from Nepal (Volunteer)
Ruth Berry
from Nepal
Chris Burnett
from Albania

DEPARTURES

Derek and Joanna PUNCHARD
to Brazil via Jamaica
Mark and Andrea HOTCHKIN
to Guinea-Conakry
John and Lynne THOMPSON
to Albania (Volunteers)
Jennifer Smith
to IBLA, Hungary (Volunteer)
Sue Headlam
to Bangladesh
Christine Preston
to Bangladesh
Margot Bafende
to Zaire
Steve and Pam Seymour
to Zimbabwe

VISITS

Reg Harvey
to Moldova, France and India
John Passmore
to Moldova and France
Derek Rumbol
to Niger, Cameroon and Sierra Leone
Angus MacNeill
to Bangladesh
Derek PUNCHARD
to Chile

CONGRATULATIONS!

To **Mark and Claire Ord** (candidates for Italy) on the birth of their daughter, Elizabeth Ruth, on 19 August 1993. Correction: please note that Mark and Claire do not go to Italy until September 1994 (see October Herald)

To **Debbie and Graham Atkinson** (Nepal) on the birth of their son, Peter, on 9 September 1993.

To **Marcia and Colin Pavitt** (leave of absence from Angola) on the birth of their son, Daniel, on 24 September 1993.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Legacies	
Miss Flora Forbes	371.88
Edith Morgan	1,678.54
Miss Gladys Pitman	50.00
Miss Jennie Rowlands	50.00
Mrs C M Mills	2,000.00
Miss Hilda Cruchett	6,596.56
Leonard Coulson	5,000.00
Allen George Meale	100.00
M Turnbull	50.59
Thomas G Powell	881.98
Miss Bessie Loosley	1,000.00
E E Watson	2,376.69
Mr E C Marsden	4,460.00
Doris Berry	1,000.00
Miss Grace Carman	1,625.72
Gerald Leonard Gibson	800.00
Dorothy Moore	1,810.50

General Work	
Anon: £500.00; 45 Years Wed: £25.00; Anon: £20.00; Anon: £240.00; CAF Voucher: £15.00; Fund for the Future: £5.00; Fund for the Future, Gatwick: £10.00; Bristol: £100.00; Romford: £40.00; Fund for the Future: £20.00; "Scottish Notes": £7.00; GYE 190: £60.67; Briton Ferry: £6.00; Liverpool: £10.00; Nationwide Cheque: £23.00; Ilford: £25.00; Baptist Union Corporation: £25.00.	

INJIL

THE "GOOD NEWS" IN BANGLADESH

**Thy word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
I have taken an oath and
confirmed it
that I will follow your righteous laws.**

The words of a song sung by the women at the leadership training camp in Bangladesh last June. They were together for 15 days of intensive Bible Study, applying the truth of the living word of God to their lives.

Each woman came at great personal cost, leaving husband, children, elderly parents, bearing the criticism of relatives who considered the programme "a waste of time." They had been encouraged by other relatives, who thought paid employment could be a spin off from such training.

It was a joy as well as a privilege to share in the teaching, looking at the lives of Jacob, Joseph and Moses. The story of Ruth, a village woman whose heart was touched by Yahweh, the God of Israel, and so she became the great-grandmother of King David.

How we revelled in the stories from the less-well read part of the Bible. All those who took part loved their Bibles. They had embroidered covers for them, kept them in a special place and slept with them under their pillows - to keep themselves safe. Sadly, in Bangladesh, there is a disturbing tendency to treat the Bible as almost "magical."

During my years working in Chandraghona I observed various unusual practices amongst the staff and patients who came from the

Christian community. They were practices similar to those followed by Hindus and Muslims.

Ayesha was sick and in hospital for investigations. Her mother felt the medicine was not bringing the improvement she had hoped for. So she asked for a fountain-pen and wrote out the story, from Luke 8: 51-56, of Jesus healing Jairus' daughter. The paper was washed

knowledge of it. So they were told they would have to share the cost of the item. This provoked great indignation. One senior student nurse decided to catch the culprit by "magic" using a Bible. On hearing of the suggestion, the missionary nurse's very distressed response actually enabled one student to admit his "mistake" in taking the patient's property. Everyone knew that this was the best way to catch a thief. It was frequently used in the villages.

This is one of the distressing results of illiteracy and inadequate Bible teaching. Each of the religions in Bangladesh has a holy book so it is easy to understand how those in rural or isolated areas do not fully realise how totally different the Bible is.

Since the introduction, in the late 1970s of the Good News Bible (New Testament) in Bengali, all those who have had five years schooling can now read and understand what they read. These copies of

the *Injil* (Good News) are sold by teams of young men as part of a discipleship programme as well as at special seasonal outreach events.

So more and more men are coming to the churches asking for baptism. Why baptism? "Because it is in 'the book'."

These men, with no formal Christian education, unevangelised apart from having bought a copy of the New Testament *Injil* have found in the written word the living Lord Jesus Christ.



Sharing "Injil" - Good News - with children in Bangladesh

carefully, the water was saved and given to Ayesha to drink in the belief that the "word" which had been written, then washed, was powerful to heal.

Samir's father wrote the words, "I am the Lord who heals you," on a small piece of paper. This was folded into a tiny package, sealed with wax, then tied onto Samir's arm to assist healing.

Once, when a patient's property had been stolen from a locked cupboard, all the staff denied

M A K I N G W A V E S

GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH THE BIBLE EVERY DAY

by Jaziel Martins

In Brazil we believe the Bible is the Word of God. We accept its message, so if it is written in the Bible we believe it must be true. We can, of course, discuss what it says, but the Bible has a power in our churches and in our community.



We meet together to discuss the Bible and to learn from it more frequently and more often than you do in Britain. We not only have Sunday morning worship we have all-age Sunday Schools, divided according to age and need, where we study the Bible. We try to apply the Bible to our own situation, our lives, our families and our jobs. There are meetings for families to study the Bible, often without a leader, but they read it and they worship and they apply the Bible to their own needs. Then there are Bible study meetings in church led by the pastor.

Brazilian people love the Bible more than people in other countries because they have an experience of the Bible. Some don't go to work in the morning without reading it and praying. So the Bible is in our hearts not just our minds. It is real and present in every family and life.

The Bible is central to our belief. If we reject the Bible we reject everything else because the Bible is the Word of God which the Holy Spirit uses to transform our lives and help us. We can apply the Christian message to ourselves and others only when the Bible is real, present and central, not only as a historical book, or for academic purposes - to discuss the divinity of Jesus - but as a message of God. We believe that God talks to us through the Bible every day in our lives.

The Revd Jaziel Martins is a Baptist minister from Curitiba, Brazil. After two years of study, as a BMS Scholarship holder, at Birmingham University he has just returned home where as well as doing pastoral work he hopes to be teaching at the Baptist Seminary in Curitiba.

The Bangladesh Bible Society is currently spearheading research in adult literacy programmes using audio-cassettes with wind-up tape recorders. The stories are the parables of Jesus - timeless tales for rural people who understand about flood, poverty and the uncertainty of life. Late at night, by the light of kerosene lamps after a hard day in the fields, farmers read of wise and foolish builders.

Over the past ten or twelve years, Rashid Alam has been an office assistant for several Christian organisations. He was a practising Muslim, well-learned and devout in his faith, yet experiencing regular periods of ill-health. One day, he met someone who explained that the name of Jesus was powerful to heal. Having nothing to lose, Rashid accepted prayer and was dramatically restored to health.

This happened twice before he accepted a copy of the *Injil*, yet within two weeks he asked for a second copy for a friend. Over the months a change came over his life, a new light in his eyes and a quiet confidence in his work. It was only when his son miraculously escaped injury from a falling beam that Rashid Alam felt able to testify openly to the power of God, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The good news of the *Injil* had gripped Rashid in a way nothing else could do. He had been satisfied by the living water of life.

Christine Preston

BOOKS

from

BMS

BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY



WILLIAM CAREY

A new edition of the biography by Kellsye Finnie
price £3.50

THE BAPTISTS OF WALES AND THE BMS

by Tom Bassett
price £4.95

A GREAT ADVENTURE

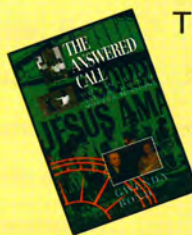
Scotland and the BMS by Marjorie McVicar
price £2.95

FOOL'S GOLD

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THE ANSWERED CALL

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"A thoroughly gripping story...Gwenda Bond is a born story-teller. With this book Gwenda Bond has put the whole denomination in her debt and it should be widely promoted in our churches."

Baptist Times September 1992

THE HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY

by Brian Stanley price £30.00

"...a compelling and fascinating narrative, meticulously researched and fully documented.... It is a standard work of considerable brilliance which will be of lasting value not only to Baptists but to the whole church of God."

World Outlook January 1993



PRAYING WITH GOD'S PEOPLE

by David Pountain price £4.99

A book of prayers on mission and the world Church



"Many of these prayers are intensely personal and reveal fears and joys, hopes and doubts, that missionaries, self-effacing people that they are, would rarely speak of in person.... To pray these prayers, either as a group or as an individual, is to share the privilege of seeing into the heart of a fellow-Christian."

Baptist Ministers' Journal January 1993

THE UNFINISHED STORY

by Basil Amey price £4.95

A study manual of the Christian Training Programme looking at the story of the BMS.

"It is a great story, well told, and it deserves to be very widely read."

Baptist Ministers' Journal January 1993



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