



Unión Bíblica

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Ligue pour la Lecture de la Bible

Catalyst

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Word and Spirit

From the Ministry Coordinators

Welcome to Catalyst for 2008!

'I am seeing increasing signs of the coming together of currents in the body of Christ that are often separated. Those committed to meeting God through thoughtful study of Scripture are cross-pollinating with contemplatives and Holy Spirit-focused charismatic Christians in a powerful confluence that is gradually reversing Jesus' reproach to the Sadducees: "...you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matt 22:29). This reversal is desperately needed today.' So writes Bob Ekblad, reflecting on his experience as keynote speaker at our Forum for Bible Engagement in France last November.

The story of the Forum is our main theme in this *Catalyst* – what we learned from one another, the encouragement of being together from twenty SU movements, and the questions and commitments we went home with. We hope it might encourage you to

be the catalyst for a similar Forum in your part of the world – spurred on by this positive feedback from Europe, Britain and Ireland and the Former Soviet Republics, along with a welcome delegate from South Africa!

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'Thanks for this Forum. I find it difficult to explain why it was so inspiring but it was...'

'I thoroughly enjoyed the Forum, was challenged on both a personal and a "professional" level and wished I had had another person from my country with whom I could discuss and begin to contextualise all that we were exposed to.'

'Bob's inputs were – and still are – very challenging. Especially his statement that spirituality is not a question of knowledge is coming into my mind again and again. I recognise that I have to work on this topic further.'

'The Forum gave me a new desire to read my Bible; I do it with greater eagerness now.'

'I can't tell you what a privilege I considered it to come to the Forum...a joy to be able to spend a few days with people who have such a passion for the Bible and for sharing it...'

Clayton Fergie, Pauline Hoggarth,
Wendy Strachan





Discovering Good News!

Following the footprints

A good number of us can look back to the SU International Ministry Consultations in late summer 2001 just before the International Conference. Those who were there may remember the whiteboard in a lecture theatre at Nottingham University in England, and three parallel lines of paper footprints – green, blue and red – running across the board (inset picture above). On them, delegates from the Children’s, Youth and Bible consultations wrote down key ideas and convictions that had emerged from the discussions, prayer and learning together of the previous four days. As we read these out it became clear that in all three groups the same key themes had emerged, and we were filled with a sense that God had spoken to us all, asking us to be open to change in the context of a changing world.

We heard a challenge, for example, to be willing to ‘lose control’ over how people respond to Scripture, willing to trust the

‘Are we willing to trust the interaction between Word and Spirit in people’s lives?’

interaction between Word and Spirit in people’s lives, to be less prescriptive in our Bible guides, study outlines, children’s and youth programs, and more invitational and open. We heard God asking us how concerned we are for people on society’s margins, or whether our vision is limited to the educated and privileged. Are we equipped to read our world as well as we read the Word? Do we really research the ‘life space’ of children and young people so as to prepare resources that address their concerns? And how open are we to working in authentic partnership with others so as to be more effective?

As we look back over these past seven years we are encouraged to see how, little by little, different SU movements have taken seriously God’s call to follow in those consultation footprints. Last November’s delegates met in France to reflect on these issues, with a particular emphasis on Bible engagement. (Electronic versions of the reports of the children’s and Bible ministry consultations are still available: please write to catalyst@su-international.org)

Shaping the Forum

This Forum was planned to support and encourage SU people working in a rapidly changing social and church scene. Brainstorming and planning during 2006 and 2007 by a small team from Europe, Britain and Ireland and International (Peter Hoppler,



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David Bruce, Michel Siegrist, Christian Brenner and Pauline Hoggarth) identified three key areas that we wanted to address:

1. Culture and context: our need to be aware of the specific issues, challenges and opportunities relating to Scripture engagement in our part of the world.
2. Exploring the question, through testimony, research and Bible reflection, of what factors seem to be important for transformational Bible engagement. How do we ourselves interact with the Bible and help others to do so in ways that open us to God's transforming Word?
3. New models of Bible engagement: the opportunity to see new resources and ways of working with the Bible from SU and others.

As a planning team we agreed on and prayed for these outcomes:

1. That we would all grow in confidence in God's Word and in his call to SU to help people of all ages to meet him in his Word. This would involve a re-appropriation of a strong theology of Scripture and a renewed love of the struggle with God's Word!
2. That we would evaluate our current models of Bible engagement in the light of what we heard from different speakers about culture and context, and how they are opening up Scripture with people. Are we informed enough about context, relevance, scholarship and appropriate models of interaction with the Bible? And what is our vision for helping those outside any church culture to become intrigued by God's Word?
3. That we would be equipped and encouraged to develop new, contextually relevant, models of Bible engagement across our ministries.
4. That we would develop an integrated understanding of 'Bible Ministries' that brings fieldwork experience and SU's commitment to relationship into our Bible resources and affirms the centrality of God's Word in all our field ministry.
5. That we would be more committed to partnerships / strategic relationships to enhance and strengthen SU's Bible engagement work.

The three-day program combined plenary sessions from a range of speakers (Bob Ekblad, Markus Giger, David Bruce, Helen Warnock, David Pritchard and Julie Wilson) with small group discussions and shorter presentations from many people in different SU movements who have been experimenting with new ways (and sometimes very ancient ways, like *lectio divina*) to encourage people of all ages to discover and explore God's Word. We had also asked people to do some preparatory reading of Bob Ekblad's book, *Reading the Bible with the Damned* and a paper specially written by Henri Bacher of Logoscom on 'Scripture Union in tune with electronic oral culture'. (This paper is also available from us.)



Delegates from Portugal, Slovakia, Northern Ireland and Hungary

A worthwhile Forum?

Many delegates spoke of returning home with a renewed sense of the power of God's Word to address our lives and a determination to try out some of the new ways of exploring Scripture that were demonstrated. Relationships were – as always – one of the most encouraging outcomes, as people from SU movements that tend to work in rather isolated ways had their eyes opened to developments on their doorstep that they knew nothing about! 'We're going to stay in touch!' 'We're going to get together again!' were frequent comments. Most encouraging of all were the many requests to repeat the Forum in the future!

Bob Ekblad went far beyond his responsibilities as speaker, moving among us as a true pastor, listening to and praying with people, drawing many together for refreshing 'soaking prayer' and incarnating what he has written about – the coming together of those 'currents in the body of Christ' mentioned in the editorial. In his experiential exploration with us of familiar Bible texts he demonstrated his longing to leave it to the Holy Spirit to help us to discover good news here for ourselves. His colleague from Tierra Nueva, Troy Terpstra, was also a welcome addition to the group. He made good use of his visit to Europe, going on to Spain after the Forum to learn more about the 'Godly Play' model of children's work with SU Spain's David Pritchard! (Tierra Nueva – 'New Earth' – is the community near Seattle founded by Ekblad to serve poor and marginalised people.)

There were certainly things that we would do differently if we planned another Forum. The small group discussions needed more structure and more specific questions; we needed more workshop-type sessions, less speaking from the front and more time for prayer. We raised many questions and didn't provide enough time to explore ways forward. Nevertheless, it was a rich time of learning and celebrating the creativity and research that have produced the range of resources and strategies demonstrated at the Forum:





- Andrey Cherniak (Russia) spoke about *lectio divina*, a model of engaging with the Bible that is especially important in Russia and is becoming widely practised around the world both by individuals and in groups. Andrey later led a wonderful time of *lectio* at the request of the delegates.
- Laurence Belling (France) told us about her new work with the team of 'Animation Biblique', training in interactive Bible reflection with adults, in partnership with the French Protestant Federation.
- Phil Andrews (England and Wales) showed us the new *Wise Traveller* series, designed as a first step into Scripture for unchurched people.
- Jackie Ringan (Scotland) spoke of the 95% of children in school but not in church and the huge opportunities for SU Scotland just now. She also told us that one of the biggest issues is precisely one of confidence in God's Word – that many youth workers and volunteers have lost confidence.
- Christian Brenner (Germany) took us on a tour of the superb new Bible Shuttle (pictured above) and its related 'Cross Factor' program together with other experiential Bible discovery strategies.
- Rick Hill (Northern Ireland) shared some thoughtful insights into specific cultural factors affecting young people and how SU is seeking to respond to this context in their face-to-face schools work.
- Lin Ball (England and Wales) is also addressing specific contextual needs in her work as a commissioning editor. Resources for men produced in partnership with Christian Vision for Men, and with Causeway Prospects for people with learning disabilities, were just two of the exciting projects she told us of.
- Mari Vahermägi (Estonia) described the work of the Fellowship of the White Rose, a strategy to help young people in the HIV/AIDS situation. Here there is no overt Bible engagement but the communication of biblical values and Christ-like relationships. Mari also told us about the radio Bible work that is proving effective in Estonia.
- Steve Hall (Scotland) had everyone asking that *Ignite*, a new interactive youth website, should be translated into other languages!
- In partnership with Radio Réveil, Michel Siegrist's movement (French-speaking Switzerland) has developed the Audio Bible Guide, a daily podcast.
- Jorunn Sjaastad (Norway) told us about the relational focus of *Siesta*, a Bible reading resource for young people (more details on page 11).
- Jürg Hochuli (German-speaking Switzerland) described exciting plans for the 'Sinnorama – living the Bible' project that will enable people of all ages to 'be there', for example, as Moses leads his people out of Egypt or David faces Goliath.
- David Pritchard (Spain) gave us hands-on experience of Godly Play, a way of encouraging children to interact with Bible narratives that took us by surprise in its power and its simplicity (see page 10).



In the pages that follow you'll find three highlights of the Forum sessions: Bob Ekblad's passionate plea to model our interaction with the Bible on Jesus our Rabbi/Teacher, Helen Warnock's paper on the crucial place of relationship in all our work with the Bible and David Pritchard's presentation of Godly Play. Our prayer is that the value of the Forum will be extended through *Catalyst*. There were many points raised by speakers that we wrestled with, and no doubt these articles will prompt questions and more discussion. We always welcome feedback sent to catalyst@su-international.org

Hearing and Communicating Good News from Scripture

by Bob Ekblad



Thoughtful reading and meditation of Scripture is vital for a fruitful life of faith. Psalm 1 celebrates those people whose 'delight is in the law of the Lord...on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.'

But meditating on Scripture is not, in itself, enough. Jesus says, 'You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. But it is these that bear witness of me' (John 5:39). The Scriptures point to Jesus, inviting us into contemplation of God. It's crucial that we understand this. We mustn't fall into Bible idolatry, something I've been guilty of for years of my life. The Scriptures point to the living, resurrected One. I believe that the best way to read the Bible and develop a theology for transformational Bible engagement is through reading alongside Jesus our Rabbi. The Gospels show us how he read Scripture and drew on it to minister to people. Let's look at this in more detail.

Jesus interpreted Scripture, preached and taught with a heart of compassion and love for sinners and for the masses.

'Go and learn what this means,' Jesus urged the Pharisees: 'I desire compassion and not sacrifice. For I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners' (Matt 9:13). He himself went 'through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (Matt 9:35,36). Jesus sends out the twelve into the harvest with authority to cast out unclean spirits and to 'cure every disease and every sickness' (Matt 10:1), telling them to proclaim the good news 'to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt 10:6). 'Lost sheep' were always Jesus' priority.

Jesus modelled and taught humility, poverty of spirit and meekness before

God and others, as essential for proclaiming and entering into the kingdom of God.

Jesus begins his first beatitude, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth' (Matt 5:3,5). Jesus elevated children as exemplary, teaching that unless we have turned and become like children, we can never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3 is a very powerful text; Jesus says that unless we're turned, unless we go back towards being child-like, we can't enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus worshipped his Father, 'because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will' (Luke 10:21).

Jesus interpreted the Old Testament as witnessing to himself as Israel's and the world's Messiah Saviour.

The Scriptures that Jesus read were what people today would commonly call the Old Testament. Jesus read and interpreted the Torah, the first five books of the Bible and he read the Prophets and was probably acquainted with the Writings. But the confession that Jesus is Israel's awaited Messiah, the Christ, demands a particular way of reading the Old Testament to which today's disciples must be especially alert. Some of the real prophets of this way of reading come from this area (Alsace, France). For example, Wilhelm Vischer, the first professor of Old Testament to be silenced by the Nazis, wrote a book called *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ*.

The transfiguration narrative is a really critical text. Moses who represents the Torah and Elijah who represents the prophets appear with Jesus. But Jesus alone is transfigured. God the Father elevates his Son Jesus over the Scriptures: 'This my beloved Son. Listen to him.' Jesus is our Rabbi/Teacher who shows us how Scripture refers to his special way of saving and liberating. On the road to Emmaus the resurrected Christ comes alongside his bewildered disciples, teaching



them how to read the Scriptures (Luke 24:27). Later, with the wider group of disciples, 'he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations' (Luke 24:45,46). Reading the Hebrew Bible as witnessing to Christ is problematic for some Christians today, but I think we need to get beyond that. We follow the Jesus who reads the Scriptures in this way.

Throughout the New Testament Jesus is presented as Israel's God (YHWH) come in the flesh. Jesus reveals the Father.

The ancient confession 'Jesus is Lord' makes a direct identification with the Lord (*Kurios* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew YHWH, translated in English Bibles as Lord, Yahweh or Jehovah.) Throughout John's Gospel Jesus is identified with the Father (especially John 14:8-14) and the Holy Spirit. The apostles' first preaching highlights Jesus' identity as both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36).

Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to guide future disciples in every aspect of their lives and ministries.

The Paraclete, the Spirit, will be the guide who brings to memory the teachings of Jesus, our Rabbi/Teacher: 'But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you' (John 14:26). Later he promises that

'Right interpretation of Scripture begins with discerning needs that God wants to address.'

'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you' (John 16:13,14). In Jesus' first public sermon in Luke's Gospel, he turns to Isaiah 61:1-3 to inaugurate his ministry. If we can talk of a 'mission statement' for Jesus, it's surely

there in Luke 4:18,19: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor.'

Jesus ministered in the power of the Spirit to bring good news to the poor.

In Luke's gospel Jesus places preaching good news *to the poor* as his first priority. In order to know what will be good news to the poor it is critical that we first become aware of the particular struggles facing the poor – the individuals or community of people we are called to serve. What are the forces that prey on them? Right interpretation of Scripture begins with discerning the needs that God wants to address at *this* moment, in *this* community, *these* people, *this* individual. This is critical. If we come all prepared with an interpretation of Scripture simply worked out in

our study, there's a danger, isn't there, that it's not going to be the appropriate liberating word and action that is needed? We see in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' teaching and preaching that Jesus often launched into Scripture in response to needs he perceived or to confrontations with religious authorities or his disciples. I encourage you to read through the Gospels and to take notes. How does Jesus use Scripture? How does he minister? It's very interesting. Often Jesus acts first before drawing on Scripture. He goes to Scripture afterwards to interpret his actions. And we don't just want to say, 'Well, that's Jesus. I work for Scripture Union or I'm a preacher.' No, we're invited to *follow Jesus*. He opens the way for all of us to minister in the lives of others.

So what is Jesus' method? *There is no method!* Every encounter is unique. This is why the Spirit's anointing is so critical.



Experiencing John 8:2-11

Discerning which message is needed for each person or situation requires revelation and spiritual discernment. My own life has been based on *analysis* of Scripture, using my brain and my eyes, my education, an intellectual approach. That's mostly been the way I've operated. And when I struggled in ministry my tendency was to read more books, go to more seminars. I was trained in a very intellectual approach, focusing on the brain

and not nearly enough on the heart, on spiritual discernment and on cultivating the spirit. I think we're all suffering from this. I know I have suffered and the people to whom I've ministered have suffered too. But God is able to work through us, despite ourselves. God has taken some of my efforts and used them. He is merciful.

Receiving words from God for particular situations is the heart of the prophetic calling and gifting. Isaiah 50:4,5 is a key text describing how a prophet receives contextually appropriate messages: 'The Lord God has given me the tongue of a disciple, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to hear as a disciple. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious. I did not turn backwards.' It's easy to be rebellious. When you move into this area of freedom, you find freedom terrifying. Is God really going to show me what to do? Will I really hear? What if I get it wrong? It can be frightening to launch out and let yourself be led by the Spirit, trusting that what you are hearing is what you should do, rather than what you had planned.

Jesus himself exercised the gifts of the Spirit when the Spirit came upon him and he received God's anointing for ministry.

The authority of Jesus' teaching astounded his contemporaries (Luke 4:32, Mark 1:42). How did Jesus receive his authority? He didn't begin his ministry until he was around thirty years old. There's no talk of his having authority until he is baptised and the Holy Spirit comes on him. So it is with us. In baptism we die and

are raised as sons and daughters of God. The Spirit came upon Jesus and comes upon us. The Father's favour is freely given, by grace, completely apart from our performance. 'You are my beloved son,' God declared (Luke 3:22) before Jesus ever did anything. Jesus was a beloved son before he had done anything in terms of ministry. And so are we. We are beloved children and this has nothing to do with our performance. We need to recover this truth over and over again. Otherwise we'll end up striving, and ministry that comes out of striving is exhausting and unfruitful.

This empowerment by the Spirit happens through immersion, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Baptism means to be immersed, saturated in the Holy Spirit. That saturation doesn't just happen at the moment of our baptism. It's for all the time. We're called the temple of the Holy Spirit. We don't want the temple to be empty of the Spirit. So we receive this anointing over and over again to teach us how to minister (1 John 2:27).

Knowing who we are as daughters or sons of God and receiving the Holy Spirit are the basis of empowerment by the Spirit and for being anointed like Jesus for preaching good news with the signs that follow. As I get older and struggle with my own lack of fruitfulness, I know I want to go further and deeper with God. I want to be fruitful. I've been hearing this as I listen to you too. People are thinking, where's the Bible's impact? How do we move to a place where we see more breakthrough? I'm learning how to wait on the Spirit like Jesus told his disciples. This is something I love about *lectio divina*, the waiting and watching and listening. Jesus tells his disciples, 'Behold I am sending forth the promise of my Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high' (Luke 24:49). If you try to go out and proclaim the Good News without it, it's going to be very difficult.

This is also about the priesthood of all believers. The Holy Spirit empowers ordinary people – young and old and even male and female slaves – to become spokespersons for God (Acts 2:16-18). Anyone engaged in a careful study of the Scriptures in preparation for teaching, preaching, writing or personal devotion needs to remember that the Holy Spirit speaks to the most ordinary and illiterate people in supernatural ways. *Reading the Bible with the Damned* bears witness to this truth. People ask me if it's not depressing to go into the jail and hang out with all those criminals. I say no, I sometimes go in a little depressed but I usually come back totally excited because of how these men are hearing God speak and how God is moving among them. I leave the jail more empowered than when I went in!



The gifts of the Spirit facilitate the confirmation of the Word with the signs that follow.

This is something new to me in the last few years. I see the spiritual gifts as essential if we are effectively to interpret Scripture and communicate good news. These are supernatural gifts. They are not gifts cultivated through getting our MTh or PhD. It's always valuable to get more training but spiritual *gifts* are actual supernatural gifts. Through our baptism, our immersion in the Holy

Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit are released in us. Words of knowledge and faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, all are important for interpreting Scripture and announcing the Good News.

As I said, this is something new to me but it has become pivotal. About three and a half years ago I came to a crisis point in my life. 9/11 was very hard for me because I had always been an educator of American church people, trying to help them to see the whole world as the kingdom of God without borders. I've spent twelve years of my life outside the USA and that has transformed my understanding. When 9/11 happened it felt as if everything that I'd been doing was for nothing. It was painful. Flags everywhere, the power of pride. And after 9/11 came methamphetamines. We already had crack cocaine, but meth is a poison that people can make themselves. And I watched a lot of the people I cared for coming to Bible studies with their minds dulled and with sores all over their bodies.

'Ministry that comes out of striving is exhausting and unfruitful...'

I had lots of books, lots of training, I had my doctorate, I was an expert on reading the Bible with the poor and yet I felt I was being humiliated, humbled to the extreme. My younger brother was a crack addict and he ended up being converted and healed of a depressive disorder through a charismatic renewal group. He suggested that I should go along. I believed that charismatics weren't to be trusted – they were among the most patriotic of Americans! But I couldn't deny the transformation in my brother. So after a couple of years of his coaxing I ended up going to this pastors' conference. It was the last place I would ever have thought of going. I've been a person of the Word and I thought I had the Spirit. But there's this big gap in the world between Word and Spirit and it's a tragic gap because both groups desperately need each other. The charismatic renewal movement needs the people of the Word. The people of the Word need more of the Spirit. I ended up going and being turned inside out through a wholly unexpected and deeply powerful encounter with God's Holy Spirit. Afterwards I began to minister differently.



I felt almost as if I became like a baby because of the experience of the Spirit. Perhaps God needed to do something radical with me because I was such a 'head' person. I began to experience the presence of God in a way that I never had before. Reluctantly I began to pray for people's healing and they began to get healed. This was shocking and I resisted it; I didn't want to be a person with power. I'd spent my whole life trying not to be the person with power. But no power is fruitless. When there is no power you don't see transformation. God has been showing me that he wants to confirm what we are seeing happen as he did with his disciples, 'by the signs that followed' (Mark 16:20). The Word also interprets the action of the signs of the Spirit. In the last three years I've seen hundreds of people healed in our Bible studies. Every time it happens I stand in awe.



by **Helen Warnock**



Relational and Community Dimensions in Bible Engagement

‘Jesus interpreted Scripture, preached and taught with a heart of compassion for the masses’: this relational dimension opens Bob Ekblad’s exposition of Jesus’ approach to Scripture. SUI’s Statement of Hermeneutical Principles asks us to engage with Scripture and interpret it relationally: ‘God is a relational God, his character is to build and sustain relationships. So all our interpretation of Scripture is to be rooted in the two dimensions of our relatedness to God as his children, and of the web of human relationships around us.’

*We invited **Helen Warnock** who leads the SU team in Northern Ireland to help us explore the place of relationship in our own interaction with the Bible and as we encourage others. This is a shortened version of her talk at the Forum.*

Is it possible that we in SU have learned to talk about ‘relational Bible engagement’ without being convinced of the crucial importance of community?

After all, we each carry our own individual copy of God’s Word. With my personal commentaries and SU Bible-reading guide, why would I need anyone else to help me read, understand and live Scripture? To need others is surely to imply that God is not enough.

As long as we treat the Bible as a mere source of information, as long as we rate understanding it more highly than living it, as long as we value knowledge over relationship, we are being deaf to two cries:

- The cry of the Bible as an invitation to know God
- The cry of this generation for connection

The cry of the Bible

It’s popular to think of the Bible as a manual, an instruction book for life. But is this adequate? If so, is its use primarily – like most manuals – for the novice or as a quick solution for a crisis? Surely the Bible is much more. Surely it is where we hear God’s call: *Come and get to know me. I have poured myself all over the pages of this book – come into relationship with me.* How can we hear that invitation in our own lives? How can we help our children, young



‘The forgotten art of sharing our lives...’

people, adults, staff and volunteers to hear that relational call of the Bible?

We are passionate about the Bible not because it has wise things to say about life (though it does), but because it is the revelation of God himself, the God who invites us to a lifetime-and-beyond relationship with him. So how can we, as a movement determined to keep the Bible at the heart of all we do...

- help those we serve to experience a meeting with God rather than a rush to identify an ‘application’?
- encourage people to see reading the Bible as more than a tick on a spiritual ‘to do’ list?

The cry of this generation

What might transformational Bible engagement look like for a child whose





family has been made homeless? What does it mean for a teenager living in fear of violence? What might transformational Bible engagement look like for young people whose despair drives them to attempt suicide? Or for those who are secure in loving relationships?

Transformational Bible engagement is about answering the cry of this generation – the cry for connection. People are starved of long-term committed relationships. Without relationship, our words carry no power.

Rediscovering the forgotten art of sharing our lives

SU's Aims are that people should be encouraged to 'meet God', 'become committed church members...and servants of a world in need'. These aims are all relational in nature. Our Statement of Belief says we are 'united to himself and with each other in love'. Our Working Principles mention 'building caring relationships'....'faith that lead to action'.... a 'social dimension'....and that 'we guard against calling for superficial responses'.

Where do we start to incorporate this relational dimension into our Bible engagement? Surely by re-discovering the forgotten art of 'sharing our lives'. In the Bible, 'sharing life' is written on almost every page:

There's no Adam without Eve.
No David without Jonathan.
No Naomi without Ruth.
No disciples without Jesus.
Do you remember how Mordecai spurred Esther on?

Do you remember the significance of Eli helping Samuel to hear God?
Do you remember how Paul needed Timothy?

Sharing is not new – we just need to rediscover it. We are so used to the teacher-student model that we have created two groups: the speaker and the silent listener. The purpose of Bible study has wrongly become a search for right answers rather than deep engagement with the text and a true meeting with God. Rediscovering what it means to learn together will involve

- Creating space for children, young people or adults to explore and respond;
- Finding ways to talk about the Bible in non-formal contexts (over a meal for example) so that just as we chat with friends about the weather, politics, TV, our children, so we talk about a passage we read in the Bible.



And is this not what the call of the Bible is about – to share honestly all our life with God? So 'relationship' is not an optional extra in Bible engagement; it is core to our message and to our methodology.

In the previous edition of *Catalyst*, Wendy Strachan wrote: 'Encountering God in his Word brings transformation of mind, attitudes and behaviour.' And this is where we begin encountering God: by truly hearing the cry of the Bible to this generation – and responding together.

Issues to consider:

1. How can print or web-based resources include a relational element?
2. How can we take interaction with/study of the Bible out of formal church setting and into everyday life?
3. When this generation marginalises the Bible because it perceives it as irrelevant to its own interests and concerns, what can we do?

Consider the rich exchanges that can take place when this happens. When we allow this relational aspect into our Bible engagement, we bring all of who we are to it: there is no hiding. Our character, our prejudices, our background and our strengths all come through. Who and how I am will be as important as what I teach. And this is what keeps us sharp. It forces us to live out the Bible and allows the Word of God to permeate our lives.



Adam shuddered at the senior Pastor's technological advancement...



Godly Play:

...what's it all about?

Godly Play, developed in the 1970s by Jerome Berryman in the USA, is now used in many different denominations and countries. David Pritchard, SU Spain's children's specialist, has trained as a GP teacher and we invited him to lead a hands-on session that had a profound impact on many delegates at the Forum. His background paper is available from us – just write to catalyst@su-international.org.

Some key factors characterise Godly Play

- It **encourages** in children a **sense of awe and wonder**. In an atmosphere of quiet reverence, children become more aware of the mystery of God's presence around them and in them. The goal is not that children merely learn more *about* God, but that they *experience* something of God for themselves.
- It is **invitational**. As the Bible story is told with the aid of simple models and with minimal embellishment or instruction, the children are invited to 'wonder'.
I wonder what part of this story is the most important?
I wonder what part of the story is about you?
The atmosphere is non-coercive: there are no right or wrong answers.
- It is **open-ended**. Its focus is on process rather than outcome. Why? Because each child has different

life experiences, so Godly Play provides a secure base from which they can seek and find their own answers to questions of life and faith. They can respond to the story in ways that they choose.

- It is **playful**. The ways in which children address the hard issues of life and find a 'language' to explore them, are through story and play.
- It is **structured**. There is a 'ritual' to Godly Play that mirrors a liturgical pattern. The progression begins with welcome and introduction, then moves through story, response time, prayer, communal 'feast', blessing and farewell.



Godly Play and Scripture Union

- You may recognise that some of the principles underlying Godly Play are themes that SU has been exploring in its Bible and children's ministries in recent years. Dr Berryman was invited to be a speaker at the SU International Children's Ministry Consultation in 2001, but personal circumstances forced him to withdraw.
- Godly Play offers a contemplative approach that is well worth exploring. Some people question its suitability for young children or for children who prefer certain learning styles; some suggest it's an inflexible approach. Why not find out more from www.godlyplay.org or explore it on Google in your own language?

Building relationship into our Bible resources: *Siesta* and *twentyfour*



'Siesta has never been better...It's a pleasure for me to recommend this to my friends who find it hard to read the Bible. The new design is so refreshing... I hope a lot more will discover this tool' (Knut H).

Knut is one of the young people who have helped SU Norway to revitalise *Siesta*, a Bible engagement resource for teenagers. Keen to get young people excited by the relevance of the Bible to their world and knowing that many young people no longer relate to a written text, SU Norway invited teenagers in schools and churches into their creative process.



Editor Karin Holt (left) distributes Bible passages to teenagers in 'response groups' and asks them for their spontaneous reactions, questions and comments. These are then sent to the *Siesta* writers. The second step is to ask the response group to comment on the writers' drafts. The young people may point out words that are 'too adult', dialogues that are embarrassing or trivial, or passages that don't make sense to them. Finally, teenage response groups across Norway take turns to record *Siesta* as sound tracks available for download from SU's interactive website where young people can talk to the writers and to each other (www.bibelsiesta.no).

The result? A multi-media approach with a strong relational dimension. Is it worth the effort? Here's Helene's response: *'I've looked up your website and downloaded the mp3 files. Bible reading is much more fun with the new Siesta product. But how can I download files for a whole week? I'm going on holiday and don't want to go without my daily Siesta in my earplugs!'*



twentyfour

Check out www.twentyfour.bty.com.au from South Australia for more strongly relational interaction with the Bible for young people. This joint initiative of the Bible Society, Scripture Union and the Bible to Youth Consortium provides a website where 24 Christian teenagers are interviewed about their experiences with the Bible. Each is then invited to read a passage from Luke's Gospel. Young people can watch the interviews online or download them as an audio file. They then have the opportunity to think about questions related to each chapter, personally or with friends.

The relational dimension is strengthened through four group Bible reflection outlines, also free to download. Each takes a chunk of Luke's Gospel, and offers suggestions for topical media clips, illustrations (in the form of quotes and stories), Bible background and some thought-provoking discussion starters. This is a site where young people discover that 'living the Good News' and 'understanding the Good News' go hand-in-hand.

Taking it further...

These discussion questions could help your staff and volunteers to interact with the articles in this edition of *Catalyst*. Most of the issues are relevant to our movements in all parts of the world.

- Q** Which of the seven ways in which Bob Ekblad describes Jesus ministering and engaging with Scripture most challenge you at a personal level and at the level of your SU movement? Why?
- Q** 'We are beloved children and this has nothing to do with our performance. We need to recover this truth over and over again. Otherwise we'll end up striving and ministry that comes out of striving is exhausting and unfruitful': how do you respond to these words of Bob Ekblad's?
- Q** 'So what is Jesus' method? *There is no method!* Every encounter is unique.' How do you respond? Do you find these statements exciting, threatening, overwhelming?
- Q** In the paper he wrote for the Forum, Henri Bacher writes, 'To change things, we need more than ideas or new concepts, we need men and women to carry these things through. The generation of "classic leaders" or Scripture Union veterans will always be composed of "immigrants" into the electronic oral culture. I am one of them. What we need to find are "natives" and they may not come out of the traditional academic institutions. We will no longer look for academic achievers, but for the gifted, charismatic and creative.' How do you respond to this quite provocative statement? Does your SU movement need to think about these issues?
- Q** 'It's popular to think of the Bible as a manual, an instruction book for life,' says Helen Warnock, and challenges this understanding as inadequate. How does your SU movement understand the nature of the Bible?

Resources that will take you deeper...

We try to let you know about resources in any of SU's official languages – Spanish, French and English. Please let us know of books or websites that you have found helpful so that others can benefit too.



Websites

www.eBible.com is a Bible study website that allows you to post comments and share reflections with others using the site.

www.shareyourstorynow.org is an initiative of the American Bible Society to encourage people to share their testimonies of the impact of God's Word in their lives. Why not send in a testimony from your SU movement?

WordLive is a new website for Bible engagement from SU England and Wales. Access it through their website **www.scriptureunion.org.uk**



www.animationbiblique.org is the website that SU France's Laurence Belling works with. It offers many resources and ideas for supporting adult Bible reflection groups.

www.lectionautas.com is an interesting Spanish language website from the United Bible Societies and CEBIPAL, the Catholic Biblical Pastoral Centre for Latin America to encourage *lectio divina* for children and young people.

www.suignite.org.uk is SU Scotland's new interactive website to encourage young people into engaging with the Bible. You'll be able to explore the public section of the site.

www.bobekblad.com gives information about Bob and the Tierra Nueva community. Some of this website is in French.



Books

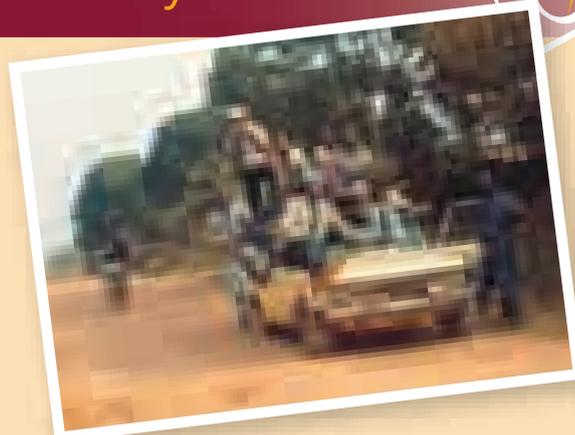
David Smith, ***Moving Towards Emmaus: Hope in a Time of Uncertainty*** (SPCK 2007).

David Smith, who has twice been a keynote speaker at SUI's Leading Staff Development Course, has written a new book that is well worth reading. It is an exposition of Luke 24 interspersed with 'Dispatches from Emmaus' – testimonies from Albert Camus, Jacques Ellul, Tatiana Goricheva and Edith Black.



Catalyst Photos

SMILE!



'The changing world of teenagers' only brought in one entry! Thanks to Joseph Litofe Lokonda of SU in D R Congo for this intriguing photo of 13 youngsters and their leaders travelling to camp at Ngombe Lutete. 'You can see a spirit of adventure, anarchy and initiative in this picture,' comments Joseph!

Keep sending in your favourite current Scripture Union photo...

send to catalyst@su-international.org

Your digital pictures should be in one of these formats: .bmp .jpg or .png. File size must be between 2 MB and 250 KB. Please include a caption for the photo and the full name and address of the photographer and his/her SU movement.

Remember to let us know if you would like your personal copy of Catalyst!

Write to Sue Stott (a1admin@su-international.org) to ask to receive a PDF of *Catalyst* by email. Please say if you would like the French, Spanish or English version. If it is difficult for you to receive email attachments, please also let us know and we will aim to send you a print copy.

Thank you!

Once more, thank you to everyone who has written material for this edition of *Catalyst*. Photos are supplied by and used with the permission of staff and volunteers from SU movements and SUI. Thanks this time especially to Peter Hoppler, David Pritchard, Natália Luptáková, Bob Ekblad and Helen Warnock.

Over to you again

Catalyst is planned as a resource that helps us to exchange ideas across the SU movement. Please feed back your comments, questions and suggestions for future editions to catalyst@su-international.org