

## Letting Scripture read you

By Katharine Bird  
NC News Service

Coming to the Bible cold can be like "picking up Shakespeare and falling asleep over it," Father John Castelot commented. With some background in Elizabethan history, language and poetry, people "fall in love with Shakespeare." It's the same with the Bible.

When people discover how to read the Bible, said Father Castelot, it's "literally like a closed book has been opened up: All of a sudden it is understandable and beautiful."

Father Castelot was talking about the growing interest today in the Bible. "I could be out every night in the week" teaching about the Bible, Father Castelot said. The priest teaches at St. John's Seminary in Plymouth, Mich., and conducts numerous adult seminars on Scripture.

Other religious educators agree that Christians are hungry for the Bible. Theologian Lawrence Cunningham says that courses on the Bible are the most popular of all religious education offerings at Florida State University at Tallahassee, where he teaches.

Asked why this is so, Cunningham commented: "The Bible is central to our religious vision — we feed off it. No matter how often you go back, you always find something new." He pointed out that biblical stories have been told "Sunday after Sunday, by millions of people, for thousands of years" and still the depth of the Bible is not exhausted. No definitive commentary has ever been written.

Theologian Anthony Tambasco speculated that the Bible intrigues people because it is "the foundation of Christian faith. Everything builds on it." The biblical scholar teaches at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and conducts religious education seminars for adults.

People may find the Bible confusing at first because the biblical writers "didn't write like us," he said. They came from a different time and culture and their manner of expression is unfamiliar.

In helping people discover the Bible's riches, Tambasco said his main concern is to demonstrate that the "faith experience of the first Christians is the same kind of experience we have today."

Tambasco sometimes illustrates what he means by turning to the accounts of the birth of Jesus — the infancy narratives. Events are very compressed in these ac-

counts, he observed.

The biblical account gives us sort of the "end product" of Mary's faith, Tambasco said. And people might not realize what Mary must have gone through. Like Christians today, he asserted, Mary wrestled with her faith. Confronted with the mystery of her pregnancy, she struggled with her trust in God; she had to make decisions about how to respond. She might have asked: "Is this from God? What is God asking of me?"

Next, Tambasco asks students to consider how God might be speaking to them. If they draw a blank, he urges them to look for situations in their own lives where they may have sensed that God is caring for them or offering himself to them.

Cunningham had a similar thought. He feels there is a sense in which we don't just read the Bible. It reads us. "It speaks to our situation."

Franciscan Father Stephen Hartdegen, director of the U.S. Center for the Catholic Biblical Apostolate, speaks of the Bible as a mirror of our lives. He sometimes encourages people to reflect on a particular passage to see if it has any relation to their current life.

People discover that "what was said and done long ago can become relevant to them in 20th century American life," he said.

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)

# THE BIBLE

is our story too



## It's more than a cold recital of ancient history

By Father John Castelot  
NC News Service

The Bible is not just a cold recital of facts from the past. It is about how God deals with humanity, with his people.

It is about you — and me. It is our story.

Perhaps that is why the Bible has for centuries been the basic source of prayer for Christian people. Even prayers that are not formally biblical are inspired by the Bible.

Think how every Mass is studded with explicit and implicit citations from the Old and New Testaments. Anyone who really prays the Mass will imbibe a spirituality that is scriptural.

If the object of prayer is to know God, to experience him, then one of the best means of

praying is to reflect in a very personal way on what he revealed about himself in the history of his people.

— Their faithfulness is my faithfulness; their infidelity mine also.

— Their cries for forgiveness are mine; their response to his kindness is mine also.

By reflecting on their story, which is also God's story, I learn more about him and about myself. It is not just that I come up with additional information from this reading. I grow as a person.

I read and reflect. I react and respond. It all sets up a dialogue between me and God: That is what prayer is all about.

Of course, God revealed himself most clearly in Jesus. This was the purpose of the incarnation: to enable us to "see"

God: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

While we cannot see God directly, we can see a man of flesh and blood like ourselves. If this man also is God, then in seeing him we see God in a way we can understand.

This is why reading the Gospels is such a marvelous means of maintaining contact with God. For in the Gospels we can:

—listen to Jesus as he speaks to us;

—watch Jesus as, in his actions, he mirrors the compassionate and healing ways of his Father.

Gradually we realize that we are getting to know Jesus as a brother and a friend. We can relate to him.

And here is another point to consider: in reading the Gospels, we read what already are prayers,