

Book provides challenging study of Scriptures

The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture, by Sandra M. Schneiders; Harper (San Francisco, 1991); 206 pages; \$20.

By Dr. Christine M. Bochen
Guest contributor

The Bible is not just another book. For believers it is the "word of God." How believers read the Bible matters. How believers understand what it means to say the Bible is the "word of God" matters, too.

In *The Revelatory Text*, Sandra Schneiders, professor at The Jesuit School of Theology and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif., draws on her expertise in both New Testament studies and Christian spirituality to develop an integral theory of interpretation of the New Testament.

Although the book certainly makes an important contribution to the work of biblical scholarship, Schneiders emphasizes that she is not only addressing concerns of Scripture scholars but also believers' concerns as well. She intends the book for "the nonscholarly but healthy critical lay readers whose primary concern is the text's capacity to inform personal and communal spirituality" as well as for scholars, "beginning and experienced."

In the first part of the book, Schneiders focuses our attention on how we read the New Testament. We can read "for information or in view of transformation, that is, to be intellectually enlightened or to be personally converted." But we need not, indeed should not, choose between enlightenment or conversion because the two objectives are related.

Biblical scholarship to date has done much to enhance our reading for information. Using the tools of critical analysis, we learn many things: where, when, by whom a text was written; how it was transmitted; the purpose of a particular text; and its literary form. Schneiders insists, however, that these methods of biblical study do not adequately

address our second objective as believers who read the text in the hope that we will be transformed through our reading. Believers, after all, approach the text, not simply because it is interesting or informative, but because it is a sacred Scripture, a revelatory text. The Scripture is read by believers because it is the word of God.

Schneiders reminds us that the metaphor "word of God" does not refer to God's literal speech but rather to all the ways God reveals self to us — in creation, in sacred history, in the community of believers, and above all in the person of Jesus. Put another way, "sacred scripture is a sacrament of the word of God."

Scripture is the symbol of God's self gift to us. God speaks to us in many ways. But in the Scripture, the word of God is articulated "with a clarity and transparency that focuses our attention on the mystery of divine revelation and this fastens our attentiveness to the word of God however we encounter it."

In the second part of the book, Schneiders discusses various approaches essential to what she calls an integral interpretation of the New Testament, which aims to get at the world "behind" the text; the world "of" the text; and the world "before" the text. This means using the text as a "window" through which we glimpse the ancient world in which the text originated; being attentive to the way in which the text engages us in a world of meaning; and being open to the "significance of the text for the present."

It is not enough to discover what the text meant then. It is necessary to realize what it means now for us as disciples.

Schneiders closes with a case study: a feminist interpretation of John 4:1-42. Her goal is not just "to discover what the text says about the Samaritan woman in relation to Jesus in the context of the first century" but to uncover "the truth claims intrinsic to the text"

and their significance for discipleship today.

As a feminist critic, she is especially attentive to the anti-woman bias in the text and in interpretations of it. As she works, she demonstrates how the integral theory of interpretation addresses the text's historical, literary and theological aspects. The interpretation of this passage in John 4 draws the reader into a world "characterized by an astonishing even shocking inclusiveness."

Jesus goes to Samaria, "the land of the hated 'other'" and there offers an invitation to a woman, "universal representative of the despised and ex-

cluded 'other' not only in ancient Israel but throughout history and all over the world." This text invites the reader to participate "in the struggle for a transformation of this world into the world of discipleship that the text, imperfectly but nevertheless really, projects."

Well written, this book is nevertheless a challenge. It calls for a close and careful reading. But the scholars and "healthy critical lay readers" for whom Schneiders intended the book will be intellectually rewarded and spiritually enriched by the effort.

Dr. Bochen serves as a professor at Nazareth College of Rochester.

Vagueness flaws Columbus film

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Arriving shortly after Warner Bros.' *Christopher Columbus — The Discovery* is another hollow screen version of events that took place 500 years ago, this time in Paramount's 1492: *Conquest of Paradise*.

French actor Gerard Depardieu stars as Columbus, whose bold belief in a westward passage to China moved Spain's Queen Isabel (Sigourney Weaver) to finance his expedition.

The film records the voyage of the three vessels, Columbus' changing relationship with the natives in the New World and his fall from grace when a steady flow of gold back to Spain did not materialize.

His personal life is given a romanticized treatment in scenes with the adoring mistress (Angela Molina) he refuses to marry and their young son, while an elder son's origin is left unexplained.

Actually, much is left vague by director Ridley Scott, who seems more concerned with capturing breathtaking visuals than in capturing the spirit of the man or his times.



David Appleby-Paramount Pictures
Gerard Depardieu stars as Christopher Columbus in 1492: *Conquest of Paradise*.

The actors recite their dialogue in such measured, hushed tones one expects — but never hears — pearls of wisdom. Unfortunately, a plodding pace results, though it does allow ample time to admire the impressive costumes and stunning visual design.

Due to some savage violence, a common-law marriage and tribal nudity, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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