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THE BIBLE IN CATECHESIS
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Introduction

When speaking of the Bible I have three verses in mind.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
(John 1:1)

“No prophecy ever came by human will but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”(2 Peter 1:21)

On this basis we may look at the Bible today in catechesis.

In this paper I will discuss the role of the Bible in my own church setting especially from a catechetical point of view. In our global world and in our secular societies I assume that many issues are fairly common to all us. In addition I would like to make some suggestions for a meaningful and theologically sound use of the Bible for a modern man or woman.

This paper is based on written official documents but also on personal reflections. I consulted three different church workers and asked about their experiences and understanding of the use of the Bible.

One small remark still. I am an ordained Lutheran pastor but since 1996 also an Anglican priest in the Church of England on the basis of the Porvoo Common Statement. Though not a licensed priest, I have received from the Archbishop of Canterbury the “Permission to Officiate” in the Church of England. Therefore, I take and assist in services in the Anglican chaplaincy of St Nicholas in Helsinki, Finland.

1. The Finnish Lutheran Church

First, here are some statistics to give the context which I will be talking about. I hope that some figures may be helpful in viewing the catechetical approach.

Today 78.2% of Finns are baptized members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church that is 4.3 Million people. It is not a State Church or an established Church like the Church of England but in many ways a

national church. Yet the Lutheran Church regards itself as an integral part of the Universal Church of Christ in the Western Christian tradition. The Finnish Lutheran Church is a Protestant Church. It wishes to witness (in Latin *pro-testare*) the Biblical truth in the tradition of the Early Church and of the Reformation. Literally the Protestants are not against something but for something!

Now some basic figures. Of all the babies born in Finland 79.3% were baptized in and to the Lutheran Church, that is 48,300 baptisms. In our tradition a baby whose parents are baptized members of the Lutheran Church will be baptized into the Lutheran Church. He or she will become a member of this Church, not of any other Church, although the baptism in our teaching cannot be repeated. It is a gift from God and therefore, the Finnish Lutheran Church does not rebaptise those who join the Church from another Church or Christian community – those who are so called converts.

For many the church rituals are extremely important and significant. Baptisms, weddings and funerals are still respected and their role in the religious memory of people is there.

In 2009 there were 47,800 church funerals, in 2010 there were 16,600 church weddings and in 2009 there were 1,600 blessings of homes. The last mentioned rite has become more and more popular during the past two decades. It has also created a wide spread discussion on the notion of blessing. At the moment, for instance, the Lutheran Church accepts the blessing of the same-sex unions but does not offer church weddings for homosexuals. As you know the Church of Sweden has taken another line here. Yet we are in the same Lutheran family, in the fellowship of the Lutheran World Federation and presumably adhere to the same Lutheran confessional documents. With a number of European Anglican and Episcopal Churches we also belong to the Porvoo Communion of Churches which is a genuine effort to express visible unity despite our different church traditions. Theologically and ecclesiastically this development is naturally very challenging. As you know, fairly similar challenges we also have in the Anglican Communion. I wonder how much the new Anglican Covenant will ease the situation.

There are 488 parishes and unions of parishes in the Finnish Lutheran Church with a bit more than 21,000 full-time church workers. They are all employed by the church and have in practice very few official roles in the society. This is important because the church is seen independent and trusted among the people. Here we come close to the need of private confessions. What is confidentially told to church employees will never be passed on to civil authorities.

Each parish is an independent working unit. The Church is responsible for its own finances. The parishes receive some 75% of their total income from church taxes. It is in practice a membership fee

paid by all adult members of the church. In the church there are 2,250 parish pastors of whom 38.4% are female. The Finnish Lutheran Church is liturgically a high Lutheran Church with nine Dioceses and ten Bishops. The Bishop of Helsinki, the Rt Rev Irja Askola, is the only female Bishop in the Finnish Lutheran Church.

On its own website the Finnish Lutheran Church claims that "the church is a well respected institution in Finland. The core roots of Finnish society lie in the work of the Church." This view would naturally require some proof or strong arguments. In my view here are some of those.

Statistically it is evident that most Finns come into contact with the Church, not only the Lutheran one, every year at church-related family occasions. These rites of passage include baptisms, confirmations classes followed by the confirmation, church weddings, and funerals. Most Finns attend church only a few times a year, especially at Christmas time and around Easter. The average attendance in Sunday services is very low and varies between 3 and 5% but the attendance on weekday activities is much higher. On the other hand, there are hundreds of thousands of listeners to the Sunday worship on the radio. We have actually in this month celebrated the 85th anniversary of worship services on the radio. And this is on every Sunday throughout the year. So almost a half of all the children in the land under the age of seven regularly attend local church day clubs, often on a daily basis, which bring their parents into closer contact with their local church.

It has been said and also verified by several studies that prayer is the heartbeat of religion in Finland. Many parents, grandparents or godparents still teach children to pray with words that may have been passed in the family for generations.

The Church wants to characterize the nature of Finnish religiosity by saying that the Finns are not eager to talk about their personal faith or their relationship with the church. This is well exemplified, to put it very simply, on a Sunday morning in church where a Finn prefers to sit alone in his or her thoughts. After all, it is a service; the people of God are served by God, not a theatrical play with actors and audience. This meditative element is typical of Finnish spirituality. This is also reflected in the understanding of the holy and sacred. God's creation is near to us, especially in nature. Finland is geographically larger than UK and Ireland put together but the population is only 5.4 million. Therefore, tens of thousands of lakes and forests are part of the human experience of practically every Finn.

One of the most important characteristics of Finnish religiosity which is important for our theme is the role of the revivalist movements. They originate from German Pietism and gained foothold at the

beginning of the 18th century. Their emphasis was, and still is, on individual conversion and personal spirituality. Originally they opposed the secularization and rigidity of the Church.

Today there are five different forms of revivalist movements which are all operating within the Lutheran Church: the Laestadians, the "Awakened", the Evangelicals, the Supplicationists, and the Neo-Pietists and the Charismatics. We can say that they are still the backbones of the Church. A recent survey reveals that every tenth Finn belongs firmly or loosely to some revivalist movement.

It is interesting that the revivalist movements, mostly lay movements, were strongly opposed by the State and the clergy during the first half of the 19th century. The State was suspicious of political unrest and the clergy suspected them of opposing the established Church and spreading heresy. Today the majority of the Bishops and the parish workers belong to at least one movement or are directly or indirectly, at least theologically, part of some movement.

The Finnish Freedom of Religion Act came into effect in 2003. Freedom of religion is a constitutional right. It entails the right to profess and practice religion, the right to express a conviction and the right to belong or not to belong to a religious community.

Last week I was with John Arnold at a major research conference in Slovakia where the churches' role during the Cold War was discussed. It was again pointed out what the concept of freedom of religion really meant in many societies which claimed that they guaranteed freedom of religion. In many cases it was very far from the truth. In the Nordic context I would say that the freedom of religion is taken very seriously and also respected in legislation and in practice. No one is persecuted or discriminated because of his or her religious convictions. This has been the principle but naturally the new religious setting has created new challenges which is seen e.g. in the Muslims' religious traditions and their significance in work situations. In the Nordic countries this is a fairly new phenomenon.

Behind the Finnish Freedom of Religion Act rationale is the notion of positive freedom of religion. Religion is considered not only as an individual's own choice but also as part of community tradition. The function of the State is to ensure freedom of religion and create the preconditions for its implementation.

A child aged 12 to 17 may join or remain a member of the Church or a religious community even though the parents are not members. A child under the age of 12 may be received as a member of the Church if at least one of the parents or guardians is a member. A child under the age of 12 may remain a member of the Church even if his or her parents or guardians relinquish it. Those over 18 may decide

independently about their religious affiliations.

2. The Bible in the church context

The Bible has had and still has an undeniable significance to people and to the whole humankind. The historical and cultural impact of the Bible is immeasurable. The Holy Scriptures opens doors to a continuous process in searching for God and in increasing understanding of our existence.

God is revealed in the Bible. A personal contact is possible as God works in the world in three different ways. He created the world and all that is in it. In Jesus he came to save the people who had fallen into sin. And he calls people to his kingdom through the Holy Spirit. All this is the work of the Triune God. This faith was formulated by the Early Church in the Creeds. We have a Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, three in one. Jesus Christ is at the centre of the Christian faith. He is the Truth and he is God's special revelation, God incarnate. The salvation is for the people, for us, through Jesus Christ.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

(John 3:16)

This is what we read in the Bible and what we believe to be the Christian faith. The Bible is the basis of the Christian faith. The Bible is the holy book of Christianity. According to the Catechism, God himself speaks to us in human language in the Bible. According to Lutheran confession, the Bible is the sole rule and standard according to which all doctrines and teachers should be judged. The Bible is a collection of books which detail God's works in our world. The Bible is the word of God written by man. The Bible is thoroughly a human book but, at the same time, it is a completely divine book.

Having this belief the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland emphasizes in many of its documents that it is part of the worldwide Church of Christ. Accordingly the Church confesses the Christian faith, which is based solely on the Bible.

The first Finnish Bible translation is from 1548 when Mikael Agricola published the translation of the New Testament. Agricola had studied in Wittenberg (1536-1539) under Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon and later became the Bishop of Turku, the head of the Lutheran Church in Finland. Protestantism had become the religion of the land in Sweden in 1527. The first complete Bible in Finnish was published in 1642. The present Finnish translation which is used in the Church is from 1992. What is characteristic in the Finnish setting is that there is only one official and Church General Synod

approved translation of the Bible.

The same applies to the Church Hymnal. There is only one Hymnal for church use and it has also officially been approved by the Church General Synod. This is important because in both books the doctrine of the Church must clearly be depicted and found. The Hymnal consists of prayers and texts which are in accordance with the Church's doctrine. Before the present Hymnal from 1986 was approved it was sent to all parishes for comments and feedback. The editorial committee then presented the final version to the Church General Synod which made further amendments and changes in the Hymnal.

The Hymnal is a very important book in many churches. For instance in Finland the 1701 hymnbook was for more than a century the most important popular book which had a deep impact in the minds and religious thinking of the people. It was biblical education! It has been said that spiritual songs and hymns nurture the faith of people who sing or hear them, and these songs provide expression for people's needs and thankfulness before God.

The Church gives this description of the present Hymnal:

The Hymnal includes five sections. The first section (comprising about one fourth of the hymnal in both Finnish and Swedish) contains hymns for various seasons of the church year. The second section includes hymns for worship and other occasions (e.g. baptism, weddings) that bring Christians together.

The third section contains hymns about the experiences and tasks that a Christian has in life; hymns of thanksgiving and praise are included in this section. The fourth section includes hymns for the home and school as well as different age groups, times of the day, and seasons of the year in God's creation.

The fifth and final section is made up of hymns that have to do with death and everlasting life. Appendices include orders of service and songs for sacred rites.

But what we face today is a growing ignorance of the Bible. How much does the new generation really know e.g. about the Old Testament? We have closely monitored the situation in Sweden and noticed growing religious illiteracy. It is naturally very challenging to justify the use and the role of the Bible in a multicultural setting where many different sacred books, scriptures and texts are offered.

On the other hand many biblical sayings are in constant use in our languages. Biblical images are used in commercial advertising, in literature, in music and in films. Even in sports the commentators use biblical expressions like the sign from heaven (Matthew 16:1). The origin is perhaps not recognised but there it is: the Bible.

3. The use of the Bible

The use of the Bible almost compels us to be disciplined. The content of the Bible is best understood when we read it in prayer looking for the living God. In most Lutheran churches there are no daily lectionaries and in the Lutheran churches there are no daily morning and evening prayers which tradition is well preserved in the Anglican churches. It is a pity.

A former student of mine who is now an Anglican priest in St Nicholas Chaplaincy, Helsinki, ordained last year, told me two weeks ago that worshipping regularly, on a daily basis, has in many ways been very important for him. "I have never before in my life read so much the Bible as I have now done in our Morning and Evening Prayers."

Reading the Bible regularly is perhaps the key to its catechetical role. We do not simply try to remember and recollect certain verses or sayings but our aim is to try to understand the message of whole chapters or books and also the life stories of biblical figures.

In the Christian Church our faith is in Jesus Christ. What do we mean when we say that we want to follow Jesus? What does it mean that we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven without him? How do we perceive in our biblical teaching Jesus, the healer? The questions must be raised and confronted with the Bible, with the Church tradition and with the community of believers.

The latest Finnish Catechism, a booklet of 112 pages, was written just over ten years ago. It is a spiritual handbook for every home, a concise explanation of the Christian faith. The Catechism summarizes central teachings of the Bible: The Ten Commandments, the Creed (confession of faith), the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments. The Catechism in Finnish and Swedish was sent to every Finnish home in 2000.

In introducing the Catechism the Bishops wrote that there is presented the central teaching of Christian faith and life. The Catechism leads us to live our lives in faith in God and in love with each other. The Catechism helps to orientate our life also when we confront difficulties.

What does the Catechism say about the Bible? The Bishops write about the Bible under the heading "God speaking to us":

The Bible is the Holy Book for Christians. In the Old and New Testament we read about God's deeds and about his love toward all people. Just as in Christ, the Bible has the human and the divine intermingled. In the Bible God himself speaks to us in human language.

As God's word, the Bible examines and tries us, revealing our selfishness and unbelief. Like a mirror, it shows what we are really like. At the same time it turns our eyes to the Saviour, who did for us what we ourselves are incapable of doing. Christ and his love toward us are the key to understanding the Bible.

Since we cannot build our lives on our own merits, time and time again we have to rely on the promise found in God's word. When we read or hear God's word, the Holy Spirit kindles in us a renewed trust and courage.

In addition to the Catechism the Church Centre for Diaconal work and Society has published a "Catechism of civil responsibility" for adults - to use and meditate upon in modern everyday life.

Catechism is only one example of the church's work with and through the Bible. There are Bible study groups and alpha courses, arranged by parishes and Christian organizations. In some parishes it is also possible to get private Bible teaching.

A special feature in the catechetical work is what the Church does with young people at the age of 15. The Church reconnects the young people in confirmation classes which means Christian instruction before the Confirmation.

During the confirmation instruction, students study the Bible according to a general curriculum for the classes. Very often the students will be given a Bible of their own. The Confirmation instruction is also called baptismal teaching which emphasizes its role in the Christian education. The classes can be attended by young people or adults. In the Finnish Church a young person will attend the training before the Confirmation at the age of 15 or in the year when he or she turns 15, not earlier. The Confirmation can also take place before the young person turns to 15.

Of all the 15 year old boys and girls in Finland 84% attend confirmation classes in the Lutheran Church. The instruction before the Confirmation lasts for 80 hours and it normally takes half a year, including attending various Christian events, visits and excursions. When the Confirmation classes are organized in the summer time in summer camps, it normally lasts about one week preceded by instruction, visits and attending church services in spring.

How is the Bible used in the Confirmation classes? One very experienced parish pastor (after leading

tens of classes) described how the teacher will look for answers together with the students in life situations and tries to interpret the parables of Jesus and other stories. Students will make modern adaptations of the events described in the Bible. Often the classes have included Bible reading without any teaching: one whole Gospel while walking in the woods. Passages are read when the group stops and rests. The teacher told me how motivated the students were in these "pilgrimages" in the woods. The idea here was that it is the word of God which speaks, not the teacher or Martin Luther or a confessional document. For doctrinal issues there are different lectures.

I could tell you of hundreds of other successful methods used in the Bible reading and teaching in the Confirmation classes.

After the instruction or the summer camp the young people will be confirmed, always by the local pastor, practically never by a Bishop as in the Anglican tradition. At the Confirmation those to be confirmed confess their Christian faith into which they had been baptized. The confession of faith had once been said on behalf of the child in baptism, now the young person will do it himself or herself. This will then entitle the young person to become a godparent who in turn may confess the faith at a baby's baptism.

At Confirmation it is believed that God strengthens those who have completed their Confirmation Classes. Confirmation means that the young person confesses his or her belief as a Christian while God reinforces his or her faith. A young person may attend confirmation instruction without becoming a member of the church.

The congregation prays for those confirmed and they are blessed. In the Church's understanding during the Confirmation ceremony the person being confirmed commits to being a disciple of Jesus by joining in the creed.

After Confirmation he or she may independently partake in the Holy Communion. After reaching the voting age of 18 he or she may be a candidate for the Parochial Church Council – and vote at Parish election already at the age of 16.

There are always young people attending confirmation training who have not been baptized. The baptism will take place before the Confirmation. Likewise if the young person's parents are not members of the Church, in this case of the Lutheran Church, the young person may join the Church with the permission of the parents.

In the Finnish Lutheran Church legislation you may have a church wedding only if you have been attended confirmation training but you do not need to be confirmed.

There are also Confirmation Classes for adults. If a person is over the age of 15 it is compulsory to attend the Confirmation Classes in order to join the Church. If the adult person has no prior knowledge of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, it is also an opportunity to deepen the knowledge about Christianity. Questions of life and faith are discussed with others but not necessarily with the Bible. When a person has completed the confirmation classes he or she can decide whether to be baptized and become a member of the congregation. Some people attend confirmation classes to deepen their knowledge of the Christian faith.

What happens after the confirmation? Full-time church youth workers in the parishes try to reach out to those confirmed and naturally to all the young people. The reality today is that only 8% of those aged 15 to 18 attend regularly church youth activities.

However, this is not the whole truth. In each Confirmation Class we have group leaders who are young people between 16 and 18 years of age. They attend for two years training in the Bible which they then use in children's camps and Confirmation Classes. A friend of mine told me that in her parish 30% of all 15 year olds continue at these group leaders' programmes. The drop-out takes place in the age group 17 to 18. We do not really know what happens to their understanding of the Bible and the biblical message in their lives. What we do know is that the young adults do not read regularly the Bible. Despite hundreds of different forms of activities in parishes the Church seems to lose the majority of the young adults.

But – does the Church lose them? We are not only talking about statistics but also about Christian values, moral behaviour, loving one's neighbour, voluntary services, caring for others etc. How do we see God's work, revealed in the Bible, in our daily lives?

The Bible and church activities

How to reach to the people with the word of God? I would like to mention a few activities.

The Finnish parishes offer Bible tuition in many forms. Bible study groups are arranged for immigrants, children, women, men etc. There are groups of different levels from beginners to advanced learners. Some parishes have even arranged Bible reading marathon competitions!

The Christian organizations have arranged together with schools national Bible competitions (also hymn singing competitions). It is interesting as religious education at school in non-confessional.

Bibliodrama and various creative methods support the process of human growth. They also help people to realize their own perception of God in relation to the biblical revelation. "Pearls of life" (Prayer pearls for meditation; initiated by the Swedish Bishop Martin Lönnebo) are used and especially pilgrimages have become very popular. The Church is aware of how thin is the knowledge of the Bible and its message in the present society. Therefore, practical methods are needed to strengthen the commitment in the Christian faith.

With the children "Godly Play" has been an important method also used in Finland. Children play with toys while the biblical stories are told.

Catechumenate is a newly found form of baptismal teaching for adults. It is now one of the fast growing forms to deepen and strengthen the spiritual lives of adults. Catechumenate, an adult faith as it is called, is based on an old church tradition where a group will study the key questions of faith. The group will actively take part in worship life and also create new forms of worship.

Jointly with Christian organizations the Church has in recent years heavily invested, both in personnel and especially financially, in electronic services. Interactive websites have been opened and the discussions always include biblical questions.

Church pedagogics has gained more and more interest in the churches. The idea is simple: I will enter the church building with all my senses, I will hear, see and experience the Holy through the Scriptures and church symbolism. God is present and there begins an active interaction between the biblical message and the seeker. To grow with the Bible is well symbolized in a church building. Previously the baptismal font was at the back of the church by the main entrance. From there people walk to the altar where the burial always takes place. Although the baptismal font is today by the altar in front there is a possibility to experience the road of life.

Religious instruction at school

Religious instruction is compulsory at all levels at all schools in general education. 98% of the schools are run by local municipalities and communities and there are very few Christian schools and no Church schools.

In the Basic Education and Upper Secondary School Acts the term previously used was "religious instruction according to the pupil's denomination". It was replaced a few years ago by the term "the instruction of their own religion". Accordingly, practically all the Christian denominations and religions have their own syllabus.

In the new legislation a teacher of Lutheran or Orthodox religious instruction is no longer required to be a member of the church in question, only to be qualified to teach.

One of the major challenges today is that there is less and less religious instruction at school and the churches have not fully understood their responsibility in the changed situation. Activities in junior work and youth work in parishes are often full of nice social activities with practically no Bible teaching. The time is past when the Sunday schools were the main line of church youth work. Today some 14% of children aged 5 to 11 attend Sunday schools. Therefore, there is an urgent demand for Bible teaching at the confirmation classes. But the confirmation classes are not enough. There seems to be a strange vacuum in religious instruction in parishes after the confirmation classes.

On the other hand there is a very close cooperation between local churches and practically all the schools. For instance in my neighbouring city just outside Helsinki all 12 and 13 year olds received from the local church a very popular cartoon Bible, called Manga Messiah. It has been published by the Finnish Bible Society.

Biblical training of the clergy

It is quite clear that due to a strong Christian youth work in each parish, mostly run by full-time church youth workers, there is no shortage of theological students in the Finnish Universities. Every pastor of the Finnish Lutheran Church must have a Master's Degree in Theology from the University. At the Theological Faculty in Helsinki University we have today 2,100 students out of which some 1,600 are undergraduates.

It is perhaps no wonder that there is constant discussion of the methods in biblical studies at the University and of what is taught in the parishes. The University education emphasizes the study of the Scriptures and the cultures of the time from where the writings originate. The religious and Christian and "semi-Christian" texts outside the Bible belong to the subjects in the biblical studies. The question of methodology seems to be crucial. There are naturally linguistic and historical methods but also methods of archeology, social sciences, literature and psychology. The biblical history of ideas is one of the modern popular approaches.

It may be that we will always face the questions concerning interpretations and hermeneutics. In many Anglican and Protestant churches we struggle with different and even conflicting interpretations of the Bible for today. When American Anglican Bishop John Spong paid a visit (actually already twice) to Finland his controversial thoughts were received with both great interest and sharp criticism. What is the future of the Church when and if its existence is based on the biblical revelation as expressed e.g. in the Early Church creeds?

4. Growing with the Bible

What I have tried to indicate here is that in the Finnish Church we truly work hard on the Bible teaching. There is a great variety of inspirational work which takes seriously and holistically people and different age groups.

A human person is a pilgrim of his or her own life. During this pilgrimage the person confronts God in many different ways, in prayer, in human encounters, in the nature, in the sacred places, churches, cathedrals – and in the Bible.

I would like to suggest that the growth could be a key term in our efforts to let the Bible speak to us.

First, the Bible which is understood and which can be approached

In the Middle Ages people were offered the Bible of the poor and destitutes (*Piplia pauperum*) which included pictures, as there were no Bibles in vernacular which was not only caused by illiteracy. The 15th and 16th centuries brought translations into several languages.

The United Bible Societies still continues on this same vision:

- For children there are Bibles with pictures which is a meaningful and constructive method to help children to approach the Bible.
- For illiterates there are leaflets with short sentences and passages. When literacy increases there are books and leaflets with more biblical texts.

The Bibles are printed in a paperback form and there are parts of the Bible in leaflets. They are all here and available. I remember attending one of the late John Stott's University Missions in Cambridge late

1970s. At the end of one evening he invited to the front all those who would like to know more of God. As a doctoral student of theology I also went to see him. He gave me St John's Gospel which I still have and quite firmly told me to read it carefully with prayer. It was a very straightforward but wise advice.

The Bible is a holy and sacred book. The Bible reads me. I cry and become rejoice with the Bible. The Bible cannot be read objectively. I am with the Bible and the words and the Word of God, that is Jesus Christ, touch me.

Reading and listening to the reading of the Bible liberates us from our prejudices and interpretations. The Bible is always full of surprises although our own past, experiences and attitudes may easily obscure the powerful message. In short, we do not interpret the Bible but the Bible interprets itself.

King James Bible is not celebrated this year without a good reason. The language is beautiful English and the linguists unanimously admire it. In Germany we have the Lutherbibel (from 1534) which is very precious and some of us in Finland revere the 18th century Bible translation. This is interesting because the world changes rapidly, academic research and biblical studies have revealed new insights and in modern media we see and hear many things differently. But still the biblical message prevails.

We come back to the question of motivation. How will a modern person become interested in the Bible? It is easy to say that life questions have always been the same. Is it really true? There have always been sorrow, suffering and love but the question of the salvation or the sin or the guilt are not necessarily the same what we read in the Bible. How can we reach to the people and start searching together the right answers?

Secondly, the understanding of the Bible grows and deepens in different age groups and life situations

The Bible teaching is important for us if we want to grow as Christians and responsible human beings. I have not mentioned the moral teaching but it is part of the process in which we live throughout our lives.

At different ages and age groups we learn to read and understand the Bible. For many the Sunday school or a junior church club has been a vitally important period. Today we have also church day clubs, religious education at school, Christian youth work and different prayer services, confirmation classes, young adults' activities, many activities for grown-ups and a great variety of work among the elderly.

The Bible speaks differently at different age. Educationally and catechetically there is an important continuation, from childhood to adulthood.

Young people want to challenge what is taught and told. Adults will think of the values of their lives and older people when looking back may think that small is beautiful and enough, the love of God is the only that matters.

We will study questions related to the Christian faith from our own perspective, with our own questions. There we face the Bible and its teaching.

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