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This is part of "An Anticipation" in the preface to Willis E. Elliott's five lectures on CONVERSION, TODAY, TO GOD AND HIS KINGDOM, given at the National Council of Churches Ecumenical Evangelism Conference 29 July- 4 August, 1967, Green Lake, Wisconsin.

The flow of these lectures is from our conference subject (conversion) to two contexts (first the Kingdom of God, second the new age) to a sketch of what I consider a style of life appropriate to the Christian in this new age. Before we begin this flow, I must anticipate one characteristic of this new Christian style of life, namely freedom in, from, and through the Bible.... What you are about to see me wrestling with are the problematics the Church of today and tomorrow must wrestle with as it uses its Scripture in worship, study, service, and witness.

I cannot agree with the graffito, "Due to circumstances beyond our control, tomorrow has been canceled." God has not canceled tomorrow, but we are in danger of being ourselves canceled out of tomorrow. It isn't just the Roman Church that needs aggiornamento: all churches, all believers need continuous updating. So let's launch now into an exposition of how the new Christian--that is, the responsive Christian in the new age now being born--can achieve a new freedom to respond to the Word of God, that is, to what God in each situation asks of him.

This existential Word of God cannot be known simply by reference to any ancient book be it ever so venerable. How then is the Bible to be used today in discerning and doing the will of God? Here are ten clues.

1....The Bible is worthy of, and should get, the convert's daily attention, so as to be a continuous instrument of the Spirit in the spiritual, psychic, and intellectual formation of his inner life, and therefore is a continuous instrument in the shaping of his outer life. For the Christian, this should be not just normal, but mandatory. In my own family, daily family worship includes reading from the Gospels, for Jesus is my family's Lord, and whatever gets your attention gets you and is your Lord, and if my family does not daily give this attention to Jesus in the Gospel Jesus cannot be said to be my family's Lord. To

say it another way: the lordship of Christ can be a fact for my family only within the sphere of its being an assignment which daily we accept and fulfill: we do not determine whether Christ is Lord of heaven and earth and history, but daily we determine whether he is our Lord. In our increasingly pluralistic culture, choosing a god is becoming a more conscious and more daily responsibility, and only the committed can hope for depth of life.

2....The Bible more than any other book, is worthy of and should get minimal and maximal interpretation. By minimal interpretation I mean the most painstaking critical attention, striving for a minimum of objective input, a maximum of objectivity--as though one were uncommitted to the god of this Book. Among conservatives this approach is still called "the higher criticism." It is a secular approach in the open domain, and is--within varying degrees of enthusiasm!--accepted by virtually all the Bible scholars in the world without regard to their religious positions. In this approach, these Bible scholars are specialists, experts who have a responsibility to master the text of Scripture with all God has given them personally and within history. But I am discussing the principles of minimal-maximal interpretation: what about that "maximal"? In the summer of 1939 in New York City, Bonhoeffer came to realize sharply that whereas in good German-objective fashion he had come to master the biblical text, he had never let the Bible master him. That is what I mean by maximum interpretation--daily and without ceasing soaking oneself in Scripture so that the Spirit can use the biblical images and ideas beyond the minimal meaning of texts. As daily I kneel in private devotions and read my Bible in Hebrew and Greek, Latin and English, I as a biblical scholar bring to the text my critical understand--but I as a worshipper bring to God through the text whatever transcritical insights come to me. Critically I am bound to the text, but transcritically I am set free through the text and even from the text--freer than I could be had I not this double boundness to the text: 1st, the fact that

daily I bind myself to Christ through it; and 2nd, that Scripture has been much of my job, my life-work. The 1st of these freedoms is available to all believers; and, through their access to Scripture scholars and their writings. The second freedom is somewhat available to nonscholars of the Bible. We should carefully distinguish these two freedoms (a) so that the laity to biblical scholarship will make better use of biblical scholars and (b) so that biblical scholars will feel greater responsibility for communicating their findings and insights with down-to-earth clarity. Also, it may be that when to you a scholar seems to be taking liberties with the text, he is actually using his special freedom, that particular freedom God has given him through his special attention to the text.

3....A third clue as to how the Bible is to be used today in discerning and doing the will of God grows immediately out of the second. When a scholar seems to be taking liberty with a text (as the phrase goes), he may simply be denying what the text says. He may be disagreeing with the Bible either for factual or for personal reasons. Where he claims to stand against the Bible for factual reasons--i.e., where he claims the Bible is wrong or wrong for our time--we do well to give him a serious hearing; where he's against the Bible for a personal reason, a conviction, we should receive his witness as the witness of a brother-believer, for in the field of convictions every man is his own expert. Of course there are still among us believers who claim not to have this problem because they automatically reject all rejectors of anything in Scripture, and all adders thereto. Thus Jesus was no intellectual problem for the scribes, for Jesus' freedom through Scripture gave them frequent opportunities to display, by contrast, their devout boundness to the very letter of Scripture. This Jesus-killing, freedom-strangling stance I call scribalism; and since in this the scribes of the Sadducees were the worst, I call the whole attitude of taking literature more seriously than life, the Sadducean syndrome. In the past few centuries in Protestantism, it has taken the form of hardline biblical infallibility, the doctrine of the

errorless Book, the inerrant Word. The thing is damnably hard to counter both because it is so comforting and because it is so primitive. It is comforting because it seems to settle many otherwise baffling questions, to quiet dissent, and thus to make for unity among the brethren (through the unity is partly illusional since it is sanctioned partly by the illusion of access to an infallible historical authority). The second reason it is so hard to counter is that it is primitively religious: the all-powerful God has given man an all-perfect Book and sets a taboo-curse on any who would tamper with it through denials or additions. Some of such scribes will of course be highly intellectual, as highly intellectual people are born into all stances and choose all stances in religion; but no matter how well-armed they are, they remind me of Valéry's famous phrase, "marching backwards into the future." The scribalist is not, of course, the only sinner against Scripture: taking the past too seriously, the scribalist uses Scripture to archaize the present--whereas his counters take the past not seriously enough: the modernist rejects it and the academicist merely archaeologizes the past. So many ways to sin! I am not saying that the scribalist uses the Bible with bad will, but I am saying that he uses it with an unnecessarily high proportion of bad results-- time and again hindering rather than helping persons in their struggles toward maturity, time and again fighting against the future in the name of the past. Scribal pride in "defending the Bible" must be humbled or at least wounded, or there can be no true opening toward dialog with the rest of mankind i.e., with those of us who don't believe things just because they are in the Bible.

4....This leads to our fourth clue: we cannot abide scribal constriction to what the Bible teaches and how it teaches it. I call the Amish syndrome the position that the Bible provides us with the full intent, content, and extent of teaching on the will of God for man today. An American frontier version of this was "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent." How, e.g., do we go about to find out what "conversion" means? Well, of course we ask the Bible--and this the Loffler paper does competently. But do we stop

there? ^{conversion} c. means change, so in order to understand c. we need to learn all we can about change: how does the person change? On his individual side, the person changes as described by Tom Bennett in his THE PROCESS OF CHANGE: on the corporate side, society changes, and resists change, as described by Eric Hoffer in THE ORDEAL OF CHANGE. What is c. as human change? As the Bible. Tom, and Eric--and many others! Of course after we Christians have come to some picture of what c. is, we are tempted to ascribe that picture to Scripture for the good rhetorical reason that Scripture can promote our idea of c. with the sanctions of antiquity and divinity. I say this is a temptation. I must go on to say that it is a trick, almost always, unconscious, that many persuaders among the people of the Book--Jews and Christians--are guilty of. Evangelicalists outrageously read their narrow doctrine of c. into the Bible and out again as though it were the indubitable and seamless teaching of holy Writ; and ecumenists do the same thing with their go-go socialist doctrine of c. Now, aside from the issue of truth, we just can't continue getting away with this fraud. For our youth today, integrity is the supreme value and honesty is the supreme virtue and phoniness is the unpardonable sin. It's time to level, brother and sisters! We shall not win and keep our young people, and we shall not use Scripture as God wants it used today, unless we are honest both about what is in Scripture and about what we are convinced should be in our hearts, no matter what the relation between the two. To come to right where we are at this moment in these lectures, within my task as I see it, I am telling you what I mean by "conversion," what c. means to me, a fellow-Christian with you, a steward of the mysteries of God and of the energies of life and of the opportunities of today. If I diverge from Scripture and know it not, I am ignorant; if I wilfully diverge from Scripture when God does not ask me to, I am stupid if I diverge from Scripture and conceal it by making my opinion appear to be those of Scripture, I am vicious; when I humbly and firmly diverge from

Scripture when I believe God is asking me to, and I know it and admit it, may be wrong but I am honest.

5....This leads to our fifth clue: the authority of the Bible should be for us para' rather than huper', 'alongside' rather than 'over'. Little can be proved from Scripture, and everything should be proved (I.e., tested) by Scripture. To put it another way, the Bible is epexegetic--less than authoritative and more than analogic. If we use the Bible for analogies, as the current so-called secular theologians tend to, we are not using it seriously enough; if we use it to settle all disputes and to validate our claims with the sanction of ultimacy, we are using it too seriously. In the first case, the Bible is too far from us; in the second, too near. The right distance, it seems to me, is that distance which provides optimum opportunity for the Spirit to use Scripture in and through us to illumine the claims and cries within and around us. When I say that the Christian should have one eye on the Bible and the other on the tempests, torments, and treasures of his time, I am giving enormous importance to the Bible--but not too much. The great rabbi Abraham Heschel distinguishes between the Book as written (what we call the Old Testament) and the Book as lived (the oral tradition), and parallels these respectively with "theology" as expressed and "depth theology" as lived. What I am talking about on this clue is, then, "depth Bible"--living the Bible daily in our world, in each situation. Such use of the Bible as I am proposing requires what historian Herder called Einfuehlung, the capacity to feel oneself into past and present--here into the Bible and into the moment.

6....This leads to a sixth clue: For Christians, the Bible is the one book which should and must be used both for self-examination and for brotherly criticism. Human beings are not individuals or collectives but are persons who need community both to create and to sustain them, and every Christian should be in a Christian community small enough to bring his life under the eye of the Spirit through Scripture. I am saying that a Bible-study group is not optional for healthy Christian living. Where there is not this mutual submission to God and to each other in the presence of Scripture, Christian witness

will be weak and Christian service will lack adequate Christian reflection.

7....Because the Bible is a thoroughly future-orientated (eschatological) Book, we enter its heart only through our own eschatology, our own hopes and fears for ourselves and others and the world. Faithfulness to the Bible requires faithfulness to truth, and faithfulness to truth requires honorable handling of whatever comes to us from past and present under the call of Jesus Christ as Lord of the future. There must be then a reciprocal activity between the Bible and both the needs of the moment and the vision of the future. As Loffler puts it, nobody comes to the Bible empty-handed, but rather with a task, or as I would say a divine assignment both general and particular. The present general divine assignment is the new age we are entering, an age so radically new that it staggers us with fear and thrills us with hope. To enter it, we need to be free from and through Scripture. Our life-style must include a new way of relating to Scripture, and it is to this that I am pointing through these clues.

8....Propositionalism is a snare and a Greeky perversion of truth and perverter of Scripture. Squeezing the Bible to force it to yield abstract propositions was inevitable in the Hellenistic civilization, and it has been in ours, which is to an enormous extent the daughter of that civilization; but it is of decreasing value and of increasing danger the farther we get chronologically and culturally from biblical times. Illustration: work and leisure. Work is what is done during the time needed for the exigencies of existence; leisure is discretionary time beyond that time, plus the ability and inclination to employ such "free time" for truly human ends. Now if we squeeze the Bible for ideas about work and leisure, we come up with some notions which, if applied, would ludicrously and cruelly distort the realities we are beginning to face today. None of the cultures mentioned in the Bible provided leisure for the common man. In those cultures, the leisure of the classes was taken at the expense of the sweaty subjugation of

^{more} the masses. Hebrews, Israelites, Jews were often among the oppressed than among the oppressors, so their religion sanctioned hard labor and condemned luxury. As for the old Protestant work-ethic, which is increasingly irrelevant, it is a propositional extension of this biblical attitude. To follow the biblical life-style at this point is to convert what God meant to be an aid into an idol and to misuse the Bible to misfit people and misshape human life for the here and now and for the world of tomorrow. On this one matter--and this is my point in this clue--the Bible is not just useless: it is worse than useless--but its counsel to live all of life--work and leisure--for the glory of God and the service of man is not useless; on the contrary, it is a clue to a new life-style that can incorporate into itself the open and celebrative elements of the new age now being born, with its affluence of expendable dollars and disposable hours.

9....This new age is not as impressed with print, with books, and therefore with the Bible, as the old age of "the Gutenberg galaxy" (as McLuhan calls it). This fact automatically demotes the Bible as written and promotes our participation in that oral tradition which runs from Abraham to Eschaton, from our spiritual forefather to the end of history. So, says Catholic scholar Walter J. Ong, in biblical studies "the oral substratum has been discovered." Since "the oral mind is a mnemonic mind," and we are now entering a new oral age, the Bible that counts will be the Bible spoken--not just quoted!--into situations! (This fits in with the situational principle we shall be considering later.) The scribe is becoming even more irrelevant, and the loremaster is once again emerging--which helps account for the fantastic fad of Tolkien's fantasies on our campuses. Not only has the ear made a comeback from its suppression by the reading eye, but all the senses (the total sensorium) are beginning once again to work in patternful unity.

Children growing up in the world of TV are thereby better able to grasp the purport and import of Scripture.

10....This upheaval in the way man grasps his world has heated up our interest in language itself: nearly all of history's great thinkers on the nature of language are still alive! This new look

at language is greatly improving our understanding and use of Scripture.... In the age we are entering, prose will not dominate but will have to share the seat with poetry. On its June 2 cover, TIME announces its cover article: "Poetry in an Age of Prose"--an article in which (p. 67) poetry is said to "describe and change the climate of mind." Yet, ironically, George Steiner (LANGUAGE AND SILENCE: ESSAYS ON LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND THE INHUMAN, Atheneum/67) is right in saying that we live in a time of political, technological and esthetic devaluation of language. It is vital, however, to see that much of this devaluing was merited by the former overinflation. Alfred North Whitehead said it a third of a century ago (ADVENTURES OF IDEAS, Mentor/33, 286): "The success of language in conveying information is vastly overrated especially in learned circles. Not only is language highly elliptical, but also nothing can supply the defect of first hand experience." ...Let's look at another limitation of language, namely its distance from reality. The Second Vatican Council would hardly have been conceivable without good Pope John's distinction between the reality to which a doctrine witnesses and the verbal formulation of the doctrine. That distinction is of the very essence of the Catholic "modernism" which a former pope anathematized in the 1st decade of this century, but subsequent sophistication about language has made the distinction inescapable even for popes! Not incidentally, it has sharp pertinence for theology too: as Bishop Pike cutely says, "'Thou shalt have no other gods before me,' not even thy best definition of me." More broadly, the distinction is endemic to man's consciousness and so applies even to theoretical science. As Werner Heisenberg puts it, "Mathematical formulae (are no longer seen to) portray nature, but rather (only) our knowledge of nature," which is ever at a distance from reality....This leads me to a further step: prose thinking must now not only share the seat with poetry, but also admit that poetry sat there first! Anthropologists and philosophers (e.g., Heidegger) agree that man's primal thinking is poetic.

E. Hoskyns put it neatly: "The eternal gulf between being and idea can only be bridged by the rainbow of imagination. The word-bound concept is always inadequate to the torrent of life. Hence it is only the image-making or figurative word that can invest things with expression and at the same time bathe them in the luminosity of ideas: idea and thing are united in the image. But whereas the language of ordinary life--in itself a working and workmanlike instrument--is continually wearing down the image content of words and acquiring a superficial existence of its own (logical only in appearance), poetry continues to cultivate the figurative, i.e., image-bearing qualities of language, with deliberative intent." I add that anybody who wants to understand the Bible and doesn't like and read poetry, can't make it; he is certain to misunderstand the Bible. But before I put this discussion into the funnel and shoot it at our term "conversion", let's look at the communicative function of language. Communications people talk about a complex process of encoding and decoding, and we are concerned here primarily with translating: how shall we translate what the Bible has to say about conversion not just into English, but into life? The basic perspective should be that literature is both an expression of life and a servant of life. Our life, then, must make contact with the life of which the Bible is an expression and servant, or we shall fail to use the Bible as a servant of our life, i.e., we shall fail to express in our use of the Bible what God intends to be expressed in and through our lives as we use the Bible. The Bible is the servant word of the living Word. No prosaic, wooden, up-tight use of it can speak with any greater authority than that of the scribes-- and such a use will time and again convert the servant word into a lordly word, tyrannizing over God's people. It may help to sophisticate us on this if we take a look at the American Bible Society's translation technique as spelled out by Eugene A. Nida: (1) analyze the message in the source language by "back-transforming" it to the "kernel" expressions; (2) translate on the kernel level into the receptor language; and (3) transform the result into correct, idiomatic language at the desired level--colloquial, popular, or literary... Note the Bible's abandon on this matter: so great a desire

for the kernel message that details are only servants of it, and not always ruly servants. Look, e.g., at the roughness between the strands of the Eucharistic tradition in the New Testament (which did Jesus serve first, the bread or the wine? or did he serve only the bread?) and between the strands of the Resurrection tradition (where and when did Jesus appear? where does the empty tomb fit in?). The scribe's too-close attention to the details and their reconciliation (called in a former day the "harmonizing" of Scripture) tends to blind him to the kernel--as Jesus said, straining out gnats and swallowing camels! Why is the biblical language, finally, so picturesque? Only partly because of Semitic style. Chiefly because the Bible is concerned to move people toward God and his Kingdom, and it's metaphors that motivate. Owen Barfield says that metaphors are the arousers of the inner man (the imagination and the spirit). Here Paul S. Minear speaks to the biblical language and to our condition: "The early Christian imagination... was... flexible because it was so alive to the mystery of the church's participation in the creative and redemptive work of the Triune God. Perception of this mystery induced an almost endless variety of modes of describing it.... Yet... every congregation was all too prone to blindness. It did not see itself either as it was or as it was meant to become. The images were normally used to cure this blindness. The cure required a rebirth of imagination that would enhance deeper perceptions and more authentic self-recognitions. They needed new eyes for seeing, and this change required a greater degree of 'play' in their thinking." I am pleading for more "play" as we these days are thinking about conversion so that our thinking about conversion while solid, will be as flexible as it needs to be for Christian life and witness in our time. We can make some structural sense out of the Bible's data on conversion, as Loffler shows; but we should be even more aware that the Bible is primarily calling men to conversion, not teaching them a doctrine of conversion! So--in the light of everything we have said about language-- we should expect what we find,

viz. that in the Bible there is a chaos of images on the subject of conversion, a mountain-stream torrent of pictures consistent with the flow but not necessarily with each other. Nor does the Bible, in its concentration on religiotheological vitality, notice the logical confusion. Let's be open to the vitality, and not deny the confusion.

To review, then, here in one sentence for each are the ten clues on the use of the Bible in the new age:

1. The Bible is worthy of, and should get, the convert's daily attention, so as to be a continuous instrument of the Lord in the spiritual, psychic, and intellectual formation of the convert's inner life--and thus a continuous instrument in the shaping of his outer life.

2. More than any other book, the Bible is worthy of, and should get, both minimal and maximal interpretation--i.e., both critical objectivity and devotional subjectivity--so that the convert will be free in, from, and through the Bible.

3. The convert should give a fair hearing to biblical scholars at points where, for factual reasons, they claim the Bible is wrong or wrong for our time--for the convert, absolutely bound to Jesus Christ as his Lord, is only relatively bound to the Bible, i.e. bound to the Bible relative to (a) Jesus Christ, (b) facts as the convert apprehends them, and (c) the existential Word of God--i.e., the convert's decision as to God's will for him in the specific situation.

4. When the convert diverges from Scripture at points where he believes God is asking him to--and humbly but firmly admits his divergence--he may be wrong but he is honest. Where he sticks with Scripture, he may be right or wrong and honest or dishonest.

5. On the Christian way, the Bible is not a lord but a God-given companion and pedagogue that leads us, in each situation, both to the Lord and to the world. (This is "depth Bible", the daily living of Scripture.)

6. For purity of Christian willing, profundity of Christian service, and power of Christian witnessing, the Bible is the one book which should and must be used regularly for self-examination and ~~for~~ mutual criticism (including brotherly reproof).

7. Because the Bible is a thoroughly

future-oriented book, we enter its heart only through our own eschatology, our own hopes and fears for ourselves, for others, and for the world, handling past and present truthfully as we hear and answer the call of Jesus Christ the Lord of the future.

8. Since the Bible is primarily a guide for pilgrim feet rather than a mine for the speculations of philosophers and the propositions of theologians, the convert as pilgrim should be wary of the pitfall of using the Bible as an idol rather than only as a pilgrim aid intended not to hamper but to help him on his way.

9. The convert can rejoice that the new age of the wrap-around psyche, the total sensorium, is better able to perceive and apprehend the import of the Bible than was the intermediate lineal age of Gutenberg, when man was too impressed with print!

10. In the new age our new sophistication about language and communication are freeing us to feel the force of the Bible's truth, and the function of the Bible's details as servants, often mutually irconcilable servants, of that force.

Finally, before we get to section 1, in this new age of the corporate, group Bible study in the context of mission--what I like to call "action Bible Study" is crucial for all the old reasons plus some new ones. There are many ways to go about this and much literature to stimulate experimentation. I must take a moment to describe the method I've found most helpful and which I've written up in many connections. (It appears in the just-published pamphlet of United Church of Christ, entitled "The Local Church in God's Mission", and in a commentary on the Pastoral Letters (United Church Press), and will come out next winter as an American Bible Society tract.) I offer it as an example of the use of the Bible in the new age.

First, action Bible study uses, and aims at developing, the skill of shared leadership and shared responsibility. It isn't just because of faddism that this principle of spreading leadership is getting so much play; it's because this new age is demanding a new style of leadership. The more groovy people are about the new age, the less will they tolerate

the old-style leader who is in verticle relationship to the mass. As I shall say in section 19, new-age man is autonomous, his own boss--more than is good for him, according to me, but that is another story. He wants the world to tell it like it is, but he won't take no sass, and he's less and less inclined to show up where he has no say--for example the traditional Sunday morning worship, and where he has very little if any say--for example, the traditional Sunday morning adult Bible class. As Christian leaders we must discover both how to use man's new vision of himself as center of decision and action, and how to outwit his pride. A bonus in this readjustment is that the clergy, who can no longer reach all the people partly because there are too many and partly because even their own people are increasingly scattered in the worlds of work and leisure, will themselves be working through to a new style of clergy leadership which has more spread value or multiplier effect than the old style ever did. The most radical example of this I know of is the restyling of the Navy chaplaincy, which is costing the government over one-half million dollars. And within this example is ministry on the Polaris submarine, whose complement of men is too small for a chaplain and whose runs are never less than two months. Two months ago eight of us were put into a thinktank--literally in a tank, on Polaris!--and came up with a prospectus for retaining chaplains as trainers of lay ministers (who have their regular Navy assignments as missilemen, torpedomen, etc.) not to be substitute chaplains (like the clericalized laity in civilian life) but to be full ministers of Jesus Christ. The mutual transfer values between this experiment and the role of civilian clergy should be considerable, and public interest in such experimentation is high: I was on CBS Saturday evening discussing the project, which incorporates action Bible study first in retraining the chaplains and then in training Navy lay ministers first for Polaris and then, if the review committee is satisfied with the results, for the rest of the Navy. A course I proposed has this title: "On a Polaris, how do you live toward making submarines unnecessary?" (Now, what Bible texts would you use in such a course?) But for a somewhat less glamorous situation for action Bible

study take the local church where I function as a layman. I'm not there much, too much travel. But I trained one layman in action Bible study, he trained ten others, and there were ten action Bible study groups none of which I ever led--or did I? In our first session of this conference Andy Young said Madison Avenue must be changed if we want to reach youth. Well, in that local church are scores of Madison Avenue cats whom you couldn't get near a traditional Bible study class but who are taste-makers to America. I admit this is an extreme example, but the new man in the new age leaps instantly through the mass media, especially advertising and TV, into the psyches of the smallest rural congregation, especially into the psyches of its youth, who are less apt to have anything to do with the institutional church--and that, I am convinced, because with dimly few exceptions churches care more about their traditions than they do about their young people-- a fatal preference.

The new age demands a new style of leadership, enabling rather than telling, a leadership of aloneness, or whatever jargon you may use to describe it. The next most radical readjustment ABS requires, in contrast to old methods of studying the Bible just for itself, is this: ABS keeps one eye on the text and the other on the mission question, with these components: 1. an ever-present consciousness of the world as it now actually is, of the gospel in what Andy Young Saturday evening called its full spread, and of the congregation's own life as it actually now is; 2. an intention to let the Word of God illumine the church's present mission action; 3. discussion about the original meaning of texts; 4. confession of conscience where the Word moves members to word their sins and the church's failings (to provide forgiveness that cures the infection, heals wounds, and releases energies for positive action); 5. sharing of insights new and old; and 6. openness to guidance planning and acting as a group, as a congregation, and as persons. ABS gets everyone in on the whole process, as it were, designing and building and flying and handling the plane. The

method fosters an atmosphere of search and openness, quiet contemplation alternating with passionate engagement, resulting in rewards and satisfactions. It understands that people act on pictures in their heads and that those pictures are more perceptual than conceptual; so the method seeks to expose the inner depths to the essential biblical imagery, rather than simply squeezing the Bible for ideas. Man acts on what seizes his imagination; what gets the attention of his psyche and spirit gets him, no matter how much trouble his rationality may have in trying to construct logical patterns.

A session should not be less than an hour and one-half. It is a five-act play, each act beginning with silence and closing with sharing--the acts being of about equal length except the first, which should be less than ten minutes. The periods of silence, during which participants may jot down thoughts that come to them, are especially important: they provide the autonomous end of the individual-collective polarity.

In phase 1, the guiding question is WHAT DID THE PASSAGE SAY TO ITS DAY? There are many ways to go about this, but the elements are (1) getting the passage read aloud, (2) having somebody (who has boned up on commentaries on it) tell it like it was, and (3) eliciting questions for clarification... at this point, if the group is larger than 12, divide into groups of not more than six.

In phase 2, the first half is silence and the second half sharing--talking out the meaning of the passage in itself--in the light of phase one and of how the participants grasp the original meaning.

In phase 3 the overriding question is HOW DOES THE PASSAGE PRICK OUR CONSCIENCE about our lives and the life and mission of the church? As phase one addresses the conceptual life (the life of facts and ideas), phase two addresses the moral-ethical life. We stand in judgment with Bible in one hand and newspaper in the other.

In phase four, in the presence of the Spirit and the word and each other we ask ourselves--first individually, then corporately--WHAT NEW LIGHT has come to us during this session? This aims at the perceptual-picture life and moves us in the direction of new action.

Finally, in phase 5 we confront the

cost: What can we do and WHAT SHOULD WE DO in the light of God's dealing with us in this session? What attitudes, habits, courses of action do we see now as needing changing, in our lives and in the life and mission of our church? The aim here, of course, is the life of action.

This whole preamble to these lectures has been on the use of the Bible in the new age. In this new age we have the same Bible but quite different people. The theoretical question as to whether human nature ever changes must not be allowed to obscure our seeing the widening gap between the old methods of teaching Scripture, and the new psyche. We must use the best biblical scholarship and the best the human sciences can provide as we try to make the Bible once again available to the common man, so that as God's people make themselves available to each other and their neighbors, their inner life may be shaped by the Word of the living God--and so, their outer life.