

Third Plenary Meeting of the Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM) The Word of God – a blessing for all nations

The Third BICAM Plenary Meeting was held at Karen, Nairobi, Kenya from August 11–17, 2001. The 23 participants came from 11 African countries: Malawi, Benin, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Gambia, Sudan, and Madagascar. They were all agents of the biblical pastoral ministry and delegates from episcopal conferences, member organisations of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) or coordinators of SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) regions. Furthermore there were two representatives of the CBF from Germany.

The meeting had two main objectives: First to serve as space for the preparation of the CBF delegates for the VI Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation, to be held in Beirut, Lebanon from September 3-12, 2002. In line with the theme of the 6th Plenary Assembly the participants reflected on the "Word of God as a blessing for all nations" in their African context. The Acts of the Apostles were used as biblical reference text. The second purpose of this meeting was to evaluate the biblical pastoral activities in Africa and Madagascar and especially the functioning of BICAM.

The resolutions and recommendations expressed in the Final Statement show how much has already been achieved and is being done in the field of biblical pastoral ministry in Africa and Madagascar and, at the same time, they reflect the need of an even better coordination of these activities. The participants of the Nairobi meeting returned to their countries convinced of the necessity to intensify all efforts to promote biblical pastoral ministry on all levels. The pressing question at present is: what can the people and institutions involved in this enormous task do in order to maintain this spirit, expressed in the Final Statement, and to help bring to fruition the resolutions passed there in this crucial time for the biblical pastoral ministry in Africa?

THE THIRD PLENARY MEETING OF BICAM NAIROBI – KENYA 11th – 17th AUGUST, 2001

THEME: THE WORD OF GOD – BLESSING FOR ALL NATIONS

FINAL STATEMENT

1.0 Preamble

- 1.1 We, 25 agents of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry (BPM) from 10 countries in Africa and Madagascar, have met together at Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, from 11th – 17th August, 2001, to evaluate our pastoral activities and to deliberate on the extent to which the Word of God has been a blessing for all nations, in line with the theme of the 6th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) to be held in Beirut, Lebanon, from 3rd – 12th September, 2002.
- 1.2 We note the pluralism of today's world and recognise the opportunities and threats posed by globalisation. We are also aware of the growing challenge of Islamic and Christian Fundamentalism. However, we are certain that the unchanging Word of God

has power to create the right changes in individuals and communities of all times (cf. 2 Tim. 3: 1-17).

- 1.3 We view with great concern, the numerous cases of conflict and injustice that riddle our vast continent but we note that they could challenge us in our prophetic role, with Jesus Christ as our model. Our Lord was a great observer of real life situations of his people; he analysed these situations and did not remain passive. He condemned injustice and negative ways of thinking, proclaiming the values of the Kingdom of God and acting in conformity with his own teaching.

2.0 Word of God – A blessing for all nations

- 2.1 We have reflected on the Acts of the Apostles from the perspective of the Word of God as a blessing for all nations. The great Pentecost event, empowering the Apostles to witness to the Risen Lord and, the series of episodes that followed, are indicative of the abundant blessing that the Lord bestowed on people through his ministers. The words of Peter to the lame man: « I have neither silver nor gold... » (Acts 3: 6), are a challenge to some of our approaches to the BPM. Though, far from being a self-supporting Church, we have become convinced that inadequate funds should not be a major obstacle to effective BPM.
- 2.2 We recount the major in-roads that the BPM has made since the promulgation of *Dei Verbum* in 1965. Today, the Word of God is being made accessible to the faithful. « There is a great interest in the Bible; an eagerness to know it, an openness to hear about it, and to draw from it solutions to felt needs » (Bishop C. F. Esua, 25th Anniversary of CBF, 1994). This is a great blessing for the Church.
- 2.3 We continue to note that through Bible translations, the Bible has become a pioneer in literacy for many communities. The people's ability to interact with the Word of God has been a blessing to very many nations. Moral codes as well as legal and judicial systems of many nations have their roots in the Word of God. The Word of God has been of real help in the time of need for victims of crisis and conflicts in various parts of the world. Indeed, it has been a catalyst in bringing peace and reconciliation to many communities. We appreciate the partnership and co-operation of the United Bible Society in our mutual effort to help our people interact with the Word of God.

3.0 Resolutions

In the light of the above, we resolve:

- 3.1 To foster collaboration amongst ourselves and be more co-ordinated and committed to the task as we intensify our efforts at ensuring that the Word of God becomes central in all spheres of life.
- 3.2 That the Word of God shall be our daily companion to illumine our path and guide us so that our people will be enabled to actualise their prophetic role in building a new world order based on unity, truth, love, justice and peace.
- 3.3 That the Bible shall be the source, centre, and inspiration of evangelisation, catechesis, spirituality, and pastoral ministry by using all available traditional and modern methods to bring the Word of God into the hands, minds and hearts of our people.
- 3.4 To work hard to provide Bibles widely, at prices people can afford and in languages they can understand, study guides to the Bible, teaching and learning materials;

commentaries, research findings, audio and video cassettes etc., to enable our people know, appreciate, understand and live the Word of God in a liberated manner.

- 3.5 To foster co-ordination and unity among ourselves, other agents of the BPM, our dioceses, conferences and regional bodies, the hierarchy and the clergy, priests and the lay faithful, the religious and secular, rulers and their subjects.
- 3.6 To re-echo the numerous commitments previously made to make BICAM effective as contained in our memorandum to SECAM concerning BICAM at the First Pan-African Seminar in Nairobi – Kenya on 24th January 1990.
- 3.7 To be active members of the CBF who support and implement its programs and activities.
- 3.8 To fervently pray and work tirelessly for the success of the forthcoming Sixth Plenary Assembly in Beirut.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 To SECAM

- 4.1.1 Having observed that for about three years now the Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM) has been without a Director and that the Centre has not lived up to its promotional and inspirational expectations, we humbly appeal to SECAM to appoint a Director for the Centre.
- 4.1.2 In line with the need to make the Word readily available to the people (cf. . DV. 22), and the desire of our people to read the Word of God, SECAM find ways of subsidising the printing of Bibles to make them affordable to the people.
- 4.1.3 Considering the importance of the BPM in the mission of the Church, especially, here in Africa, we appeal to regional bodies of SECAM, Episcopal Conferences and to each individual Ordinary to encourage BPM by appointing Regional, national and, diocesan co-ordinators.
- 4.1.4 We recommend that there be three representatives from the regional bodies of episcopal conferences (from the anglophone, francophone and lusophone groups) to the BICAM Executive Committee.

4.2 To BICAM

That the new Director of BICAM, when appointed by SECAM, finds ways and means of revamping the Centre for it to be an effective instrument for promoting Biblical Pastoral Ministry in the Region.

4.3 To Catholic Institutes of Higher Learning

While appreciating the tremendous efforts and contributions of our Catholic Institutes of Higher Learning in the training of personnel in Biblical Theology, we will appreciate better if these Institutes could use African categories to make the Gospel intelligible to the people. By this, the Africans would see themselves as African and Christian at the same time.

4.4 To the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF)

We appeal to CBF to consider giving the opportunity to the Africa and Madagascar region, to host the 2008 Plenary Assembly on the theme :
'The Word of God – A New Pentecost'.

5.0 Conclusion

We thank God that the Third Plenary Meeting of BICAM has successfully ended. We are grateful to our funding agencies, the current and immediate past Secretaries-General of CBF for the immense contributions they made to enable this meeting take place. We pray that the good Lord will continue to bless and sustain their efforts.

May the Holy Spirit inspire us as we continue our journey of preparation for the Sixth Plenary Assembly in Beirut, Lebanon, in September, 2002.