

Introduction

For about forty years the Catholic Biblical Federation has been active in promoting and supporting biblical pastoral ministry. Last year it conducted a survey in several countries of the world to assess the relationship of the adult population (both attending and not attending church services) with Sacred Scripture. The research focused on some countries in the North of the world (European Russia, the United States, France and England, in addition to three major Italian cities) and others in the South of the World (Argentina, Hong Kong, the Philippines, while the data concerning South Africa and Kenya are still being processed), reaching a total 13,000 respondents. The occasion for this research was the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of the Bishops, titled *The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church*. With this publication, we would like to offer a first interpretation of the data, as a means to support pastoral reflection on this crucial field of the presence of the Bible in the life of Christians.

The celebration of the XII Synod represents an extraordinary opportunity to assess and increasingly promote the encounter between believers and the Word of God. The proximity of this Synodal Assembly to the previous one on the Eucharist stresses the close bond between these two themes, which is not fortuitous. Last October we remembered the 50th anniversary of the election to the papacy of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli. And the words he wrote as Patriarch of Venice in his Lenten Pastoral Letter dedicated to the Word of God come to mind. To express the link between the Bible and the Eucharist, the Patriarch used the evocative image of the altar on which one can see “The Book and the chalice”.

“Teaching Sacred Scripture, the Gospel especially, to the people – the holy Patriarch wrote – making these children entrusted to our care familiar with the holy book, is like the alpha of the activity of a bishop and his priests. The omega – allow me to use this image from the Book of the Revelation – is represented by the blessed chalice of our daily altar. In the book is the voice of Christ that always echoes in our hearts; in the chalice is the blood of Christ that brings grace, propitiation and salvation to us, to the holy Church and to the world. The two things come together: the Word of Jesus and the Blood of Jesus. Between the two are all the letters of the

alphabet: all one's actions, family and social affairs; these are important, but secondary compared to the eternal destiny of children of God, and worthless, if they are not supported by the two letters at both ends: the Word of Jesus, incessantly echoing in all tones within the Holy Church and coming from the holy book; and the blood of Jesus given in divine sacrifice, the source everlasting of grace and blessings".

With these words from the uninterrupted tradition of the Church, that show the ongoing veneration of the Church for Scripture and the Eucharist, we present the outcome of this research – the largest ever conducted in this field. May a new enthusiasm be aroused for the Scripture at the beginning of this new millennium, to lead Christians on a renewed spiritual path, and the nations of the earth to a new spiritual humanism and brotherhood. The title "Thirsting for the Word" is a synthesis of the core of the survey: believers and non-believers are in search of a spring to drink from, and the Bible is recognised as the source of a word that can quench their thirst.