

World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate

N° 13

4 / 1989

Bulletin

*Dei
verbum*

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English Edition

The World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA) is an international fellowship of Catholic organizations involved in biblical pastoral work. The members foster mutual service among all local churches.

Translation and distribution of Catholic and inter-confessional editions of the Bible in simple language, in cooperation with Bible Societies throughout the world, is part of this service.

Furthermore, it is the intention of the WCFBA to promote biblical studies, support the production of pedagogical aids for a better understanding of biblical texts, and assist in the formation of ministers of the Word, such as biblical animators, lecturers and catechists, suggesting ways to form bible groups and recommending the use of both mass and group media to facilitate their encounter with the Word.

The Federation also wishes to promote a dialogue with people who believe only in human values, as well as to encourage an encounter with the sacred writings of other religions. Through such encounters, the revealed Word of God can offer a more profound understanding of God and of human life.

The Federation appeals to everyone to add their personal and community support to those great tasks.

*+ Alberto Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno
President of the WCFBA*

"Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful"
(Dei Verbum, 22)

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Spiritual Preparation
for the
Plenary Assembly
in
Bogotá
(26 June- 7 July 1990)

see pages 19-20

EDITORIAL

"In Mendes, I met people gifted with extraordinary courage and dynamism. Men and women of faith, of prayer, of celebration, of struggle and of community action." With these words, a guest from North America expresses her feelings about the Second Latin American Meeting for the Biblical-Pastoral Ministry in Mendes, Brazil. She continues, "I learned from this congress that the strength of these people resides in the practice which puts the Bible in relation to life and life to the Bible. The one assists in the interpretation of the other in the view of hope and liberation. Certainly a step towards personal, but above all, communal and social conversion."

It is a known fact that biblical-pastoral ministry efforts in Latin America are currently a source of tension, even inside the Church. Thus the importance of this congress. We shall return to this in the next Bulletin. In this issue, however, you find the entire text of "A Faithful Reading of the Bible" (pages 7-14) given by Fr. Carlos Mesters during the congress. Fr. Mesters, well-known for his activities in the field of biblical science and biblical-pastoral ministry, relies on the traditional facts of the Church to present and highlight the lively practice of Bible reading by Christian communities of the poor in Latin America. The reality and profundity of this text encourage study and discussion. Since we are in the last stages of preparing for the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá, the examination of this text may constitute an excellent reflection on our theme: "The Role of the Bible in the New Evangelization".

Likewise, the meeting at Mendes demonstrated the positive effect of regionalization efforts in the Federation - efforts which have spanned several years. Numerous regional or sub-regional reunions of Federation members over these past years are signs of vitality. Our united endeavors to implement the pastoral orientations of the Council document *Dei Verbum* cannot help but benefit from it (pages 4-6).

This accentuates the importance of our next Plenary Assembly in Bogotá where delegates from all our regions shall discuss better means by which to give the Bible the role it deserves in the work of evangelization of the Church. Your spiritual preparations towards this Assembly in Bogotá are also a significant part of our preparations as the letter from our President, Bishop Ablondi, indicates (pages 19-20).

Marc Sevin

The Sub-Regions of the Federation

AFRICA

Since organization according to sub-regions is still in the making in Africa, for the time being the Executive Committee Members from Africa carry out responsibilities as concerns Federation members which in other regions are shouldered by Sub-Regional Coordinators.

English and Portugese speaking East and Southern Africa

Angola / Botswana / Kenya / Lesotho / Malawi / South Africa / Sudan / Tanzania / Uganda / Zambia / Zimbabwe
Coordinator: Fr. Ignatius CHIDAVAENZI, St. John's High School, P.O. Box 1171, Harare, Zimbabwe

English speaking West Africa

Gambia-Liberia-Sierra Leone / Ghana / Nigeria
Coordinator: Bishop John ONAIYEKAN, Bishop's House, P.O. Box 686, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

French speaking Africa

Burkina Faso and Niger / Cameroon / Côte d'Ivoire / Central African Republic / Rwanda / Togo / Zaïre
Coordinator: Fr. Gerard LESCH, SVD, Verbum Bible, P.O. Box 7463, Kinshasa 1, Zaïre

AMERICAS

Latin America (South and Central)

Argentina / Bolivia / Brazil / Chile / Colombia / Costa Rica / Ecuador / El Salvador / Granada / Haiti / Honduras / Mexico / Panama / Peru / Trinidad / Uruguay / Venezuela

Coordinator: Fr. César HERRERA, CSSR, Director, FEBICAM, Calle N° 22-53, Bogotá DE, Colombia

North America

Canada

Coordinator: Sr. Suzanne BOLDUC, SOCABI, 7400 boul. St. Laurent 519, Montréal, Québec H2R 2Y1, Canada

USA

Coordinator: Fr. Michael WALSH, NCCB, Secretariat for Pastoral Research & Practices, 3211 Fourth St., NE, Washington, DC 20017-1194, USA

ASIA and OCEANIA

South Asia

Bangladesh / India / Pakistan / Sri Lanka

Coordinator: Fr. Paul PUTHANANGADY, SDB, Director, NBCLC, Postbag 8426, Hutchins Road 2nd Cross, Bangalore 560 084, India

Southeast Asia

Indonesia / Laos-Kampuchea / Malaysia-Singapore / Philippines / Thailand

Coordinator: Fr. Wim WIJTEN, SVD, Immaculate Conception School of Theology, John Paul I Biblical Center, 2700 Vigan, Ilocos Sur, Philippines

Northeast Asia

Hong Kong / Japan / Korea / Taiwan

Coordinator: Sr. Annuntia IM, SOLPH, Boromae Youth Center, 393, Sin Dae Bang Dong, Dong Jak Ku, 156-010, Seoul, Korea

Oceania

Australia / Fiji / New Zealand / Papua New Guinea - Solomon Islands / Samoa / Tonga

Coordinator: Fr. Wim HOEKSTRA, St. Patrick's College, 151 Darley Rd, Manley, New South Wales 2095, Australia

EUROPE and MIDDLE EAST

Middle and Eastern Europe (AMB)

Austria / Belgium (VBS) / Federal Republic of Germany - German Democratic Republic / Hungary / Italy (Southern Tyrol) / Lithuania / Luxembourg / Netherlands / Poland / Rumania / Scandanavia / Switzerland (German speaking) (SKB) / Yugoslavia

Coordinator: Dr. Norbert HÖSLINGER, Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, Stiftsplatz 8, 3400 Klosterneuburg, Austria

Latin Europe

Belgium (AIBI) / France / Italy / Malta / Portugal / Spain / Switzerland (French speaking)

Coordinator: Abbé Marc SEVIN, FEBICAM, Mittelstr. 12, Postfach 10 52 22, 7000 Stuttgart 10, Federal Republic of Germany

Rome

The international organizations (religious orders etc.) with headquarters in Rome.

Coordinator: Fr. Pietro SESSOLO, SVD, Collegio Verbo Divino, C.P. 5080, 00154 Rome, Italy

Middle East

Egypt / Holy Land / Iraq / Jordan / Lebanon / Syria

Coordinator: Bishop Antonios NAGUIB, Evêche Copte Catholique, P.O. Box 32, El Minia 61511, Egypt

The Regionalization of the Federation

The 1984 Plenary Assembly in Bangalore recommended the development of regional structures for the Federation. Since then, concerted efforts have been made in this regard. The Members of the Federation find themselves now in regions and sub-regions, animated by Regional Coordinators. In view of the next Plenary Assembly in Bogotá (1990) the Executive Committee requested that the Regional Coordinators express their view on this regionalization with the help of a questionnaire. Linda Bryan from the Stuttgart secretariat proposes here a synthesis of their testimonies.

1. Was the emphasis of the Bangalore Plenary Assembly on "regionalization" in your eyes an important element for the promotion of the biblical apostolate?

Sr. Annutia Im, the Regional Coordinator of Northeast Asia termed regionalization "an important element for the promotion of biblical apostolate" due to the "inputs for those who are involved in biblical apostolate". Although people in well institutionalized situations may not see the need for regional structures, she said that because of regionalization "we were able to hold the I and II Asian Workshops which greatly influenced the field of biblical apostolate".

South Asia's representative, Fr. Paul Puthanangady noted regionalization was "certainly important for the following reasons:

- a) It brought the Federation to a grass roots level operation;
- b) It enabled the biblical apostolate to be contextualized;
- c) It opened up the many ways in which the Word of God could and should be reacted upon resulting in the unfolding of the riches contained therein;
- d) It has enabled many countries to become active members who might otherwise have thought of the Federation only during the Plenary Assembly;
- e) It has enabled the annual EC meetings to go beyond its mere administrative character and become an opportunity for more realistic coordination at the world-level as well as to make positive contributions to the animation of the universal biblical apostolate;
- f) Although it has put more work on the Secretary General and the Stuttgart office, it has made their service more meaningful, effective and fruitful".

Regionalization, according to Fr. César Herrera who represents Latin America "is fundamental for the promotion of the biblical apostolate with its objective of reading the Bible in community".

"The biblical-pastoral ministry has developed significantly in Southeast Asia and in the whole of Asia since the Bangalore

Plenary Assembly of 1984" notes their Coordinator, Fr. Wim Wijtten. He continues adding: "The decisions of the Bangalore Plenary Assembly to initiate regionalization following the pattern of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has proven to be beneficial and fruitful. For the first time in history, an Asian Workshop for the biblical apostolate was held in 1985 in Hong Kong. I observed its effects in Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The Hong Kong Asian meeting triggered the idea of holding a Chinese Catholic International Biblical Apostolate Workshop; the first was held in 1987 in Taipei and a second is scheduled for Hong Kong in 1990. Meanwhile, the Second Asian Workshop for the Biblical Apostolate was held in Singapore in Dec. 1988; the Singapore Workshop was clearly the fruit of the Bangalore Plenary Assembly; and the Hong Kong and Taipei Workshops anticipate the Bogotá Plenary Assembly in 1990."

Middle East Regional Coordinator, Bishop Antonios Naguib, calls the decision of Bangalore "decisive for the origin itself of a 'biblical-pastoral ministry' in the region". In 1985, following a visit from the General Secretary of the Federation and the National Coordinator for Egypt to the regions of the country, Naguib said that "biblical commissions" were established in several of the countries. "For the first time, the arabophone 'scholars' had their regional meeting for a common project: The Bible in the Religious and Social Context of the Middle East."

2. What do you see as the major advantages or contributions of regionalization?

"The sharing of common elements (difficulties, problems, other cultural concerns) in evangelization", are listed as major advantages by Sr. Im, as well as, "knowing the people which allows for an exchange of programs for the biblical apostolate plus sharing of resources, etc."

"Regionalization does not only have advantages", states Fr. Herrera, "but it is the proper means of accomplishing the objectives of the Federation. If the Federation were an organization of scholars, then it would be better located in an area primarily suited for academic pursuit. The Federation on the other hand can only accomplish its objectives if active in the local churches and in the Christian communities. This animation of the local churches will develop in a manner to the degree that regionalization develops."

For Fr. Wim Hoekstra, Regional Coordinator in Oceania, the "advantages of regionalization include fruitful sharing, discussion and dialogue with other countries and/or religions; attempts to determine common goals and policy in the promotion of the apostolate; an awareness of the needs of other cultures and a need for sharing of resources."

Fr. Puthanangady added the following regarding his region: "We were able to have two regional workshops which enabled us to:

- 1) Reflect on the concrete implications of the Plenary Assembly decisions in our region;

2) Reflect on the specific orientations of biblical apostolate in our region with its multi-religious character, post-colonial revolution towards industrialization and technological advances, and the need for the creation of a new Asia;

3) Certain parts of our region such as Oceania, have become more aware of the needs as well as the possibilities of biblical apostolate.

Some countries such as Nepal and Burma began to appear before us as countries in need of the Word of God and therefore beckoning us to a more intense involvement in these countries through biblical apostolate.

Many countries have taken initiatives to conduct National Workshops on biblical apostolate thus creating a deeper awareness in their churches with regard to the need and urgency of the biblical apostolate.

The greater contact we have had among the countries of the region has enabled us to have better sharing leading to mutual enrichments in our apostolic methods."

As advantages, Fr. Wijtten notes: "Regionalization provides the structure for an exchange of programs, ideas and personnel. Through frequent contacts - visits and workshops/meetings - solidarity develops and mutual inspiration and support become encouraging realities. As a coordinator I find much joy in experiencing the commitment of youth, bishops, sisters, brothers, priests to the service of God. Regionalization contributes to the contextualization and inculturation of the Gospel. I often marvel how men and women in different countries live the Word and make the Bible their book of life, and their basic prayer book. As coordinator, I am privileged to support and confirm sisters and brothers who are hesitant or discouraged in their service of God's Word."

Bishop Naguib lists several points as advantages of regionalization to include:

- "conscientization" which he describes as a "growing awareness concerning the place of the Bible in the life of the Church";
- on-going animation;
- coordination of activities;
- avoidance of parallel efforts;
- mutual enrichment among countries and regions.

Fr. Ignatius Chidavaenzi agrees that regionalization would be an important element in his region of English and Portuguese speaking East and Southern Africa. "Through a regional coordinator a whole area can be united in cooperating and helping each other in the biblical apostolate thus allowing for a sharing of experiences and methods. In addition, the region can organize seminars, workshops or congresses on biblical apostolate."

3. How would you judge the development of "regionalization" in your area?

Although it is "difficult to comment on the development of regionalization" in her area, Sr. Im said it was "growing step by step".

According to Fr. Herrera, "regionalization has made excellent progress in Latin America". The contributing factors include:

1. The naming of a person to represent the region in the Federation;
2. The establishment of an office;
3. The total support of the Episcopal Council of Latin America (CELAM);
4. The publication "La Palabra Hoy" as an instrument of exchange;
5. Meetings on the regional and continental level."

"Regionalization", pointed out Fr. Hoekstra, "has been slow to take off in Oceania/Pacific, on account of the large distances between the Federation's member countries, their relative poverty and political instability" He believes that "the region will continue to rely on the assistance of the General Secretariat and other members in promoting the biblical apostolate".

Through the development of regionalization in South Asia, Fr. Puthanangady said "we have become better co-workers in the ministry of the Word; we have realized that we have common problems and therefore we can face these problems more effectively if we work together; by trying to solve our local problems effectively, we can add to the world-wide experience of the Federation; many National Directors of biblical apostolate have become more aware of their mission in the service of the Word of God and have taken up new initiatives encouraged by the experience of the others in the same region which is certainly due to regionalization; through regionalization we have reached a wider audience and as a result many new areas of biblical apostolate have opened up.

He concludes with the "hope that this process of regionalization will enable us to become more and more effective in our mission to proclaim the Word to our people".

Though regional structures are not yet developed in his area, Fr. Chidavaenzi considers "personal contacts as necessary ... in order to start or maintain an existing" regionalization concept.

"I appreciate that regionalization slowly takes on a more pronounced profile in Southeast Asia", comments Fr. Wijtten, "and I am grateful to the Bishops and all the biblical apostolate coordinators for accepting and inviting me. I realize that I must develop frequent and more regular contact through letters, especially in preparation for the Bangalore Plenary Assembly."

He expresses regret that "Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam cannot yet profit from this cohesive Asian Biblical Apostolate development - I am sure that all of us would profit much from the lived Gospel experiences of our sisters and brothers in those three countries."

Looking to the future in assessing the development of regionalization, Bishop Naguib envisions the following measures: "...regular communication between the coordinator and national promoters; contacts with the pastoral animators; encourage ecumenical collaboration at the biblical level; develop an exchange medium for existing programs both within and between the countries of a region; orientate the biblical-pastoral ministry towards a real contextualization and new evangelization."

Faithful Reading of the Bible

Introduction: Interpretation and fidelity

1. To interpret is to facilitate communication between two persons who wish to dialogue. It means that the word spoken by one be translated into the language of the other. Consequently, the interpreter must remain faithful to both persons in dialogue: to the biblical word through which God speaks to us, and to the people who today listen to the Word of God by way of the Bible. "Between these two loyalties, faithfulness to the Incarnate Word and faithfulness to contemporary people, there cannot and must not exist any contradiction (Pope Paul VI) [1].

2. Faithfulness to the Church, to Tradition and to the Magisterium remains as important to biblical interpretation as the roots to a tree. Without roots the tree dies. These roots remain below the surface; they neither appear nor need to appear. It is not by way of the interpreter's quoting Tradition or Magisterium that his interpretation acquires authenticity or unfaithfulness. It remains of crucial importance to not just quote but to obey (cf. Mt 21,28-32).

3. What we wish to expound here are some very fundamental matters. They are hermeneutical norms of the most elementary kind for the Christian reading of the Bible which come to us from Tradition and Church teaching (Magisterium), and which converge in the Vatican II document DEI VERBUM. The fact of there being ten principles remains a mere didactical aid that helps the memory and assists their assimilation.

1. Believe that the Bible is the Word of God

4. This belief is the point of departure for everything. It characterizes most our reading of the Bible. It is the point of entry. Without it people would not have any interest in the Bible. The Scripture is Word of God, because it was inspired by God (2 Tim 3,16). God is its author (DV 11)[2].

5. Because it is Word of God, the Bible has authority. Together with Tradition, it constitutes the supreme norm of faith (DV 21). The Word of God is constituent of the Church. The Church, as community, depends upon it as water to a spring. "The teaching office is not above the Word of God, but serves it"; it must listen to it and guard it so as to explain it faithfully (DV 10).

6. As Word of God, the Bible transmits to us "faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation" (DV 11)[2].

Therefore, the Church community seeks in it that light which guides its path as People of God on the way towards salvation and liberation. For the Word resides not only in the Bible. God also speaks in and through life, through nature and in history. [3]

7. Being the Word of God, the Bible has power to bring about what it teaches. "The force and power in the Word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her children, the food of the soul, and perennial source of spiritual life" (DV 21). And this occurs today, particularly among the Christian communities of the poor.

8. As Word of God, inspired by God, the Bible, when "read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written" (DV 12), communicates this Spirit to those who read it with faith. The lectio divina transforms us, so that our way of thinking can acquire the divine way of thinking. That is to say, it assists us in breaking with the false ideologies which curtail the Word of God, for it "reveals the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men" (DV 15). The lectio divina brings to realization what St. Paul speaks of in his letters: "the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3,15), "is useful for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be upright" (2 Tim 3,16); the Scriptures give "perseverance and encouragement" (Rm 15,4); and serve "as examples and a lesson for us, to whom it has fallen to live in the last days of the ages" (1 Cor 10,6.11).

2. Word of God in human language

9. Through the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word of God has assumed the form and characteristics of human language. Jesus has become like us in all things except sin. Thus the language used by God to communicate himself with us in the Bible is similar to our language in all except error and untruth [4]. The Word of God is not a distant, alien message, abstracted from the course of history. "God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion" (DV 12).

10. The Bible as Word of God must be interpreted with the help of those criteria proper to faith (DV 12). While being Word of God in human language, it must also be interpreted with the aid of those criteria by which human language is interpreted (DV 12). The encyclicals "Providentissimus

Deus" (Leo XIII, 1893) and "Divino afflante Spiritu" (Pius XII, 1943) for the most part have inspired Catholic exegetes in that direction.

11. From the beginning of the century, interpreters have used to advantage the methods of literary criticism, historical analysis, advances of ethnology, archaeology, paleontology and other sciences (Pius XII, 20). More recently, under pressure of those problems that affect the faith of people, particularly here in Latin America, interpreters have also applied those methods peculiar to social analysis. Some of these contain philosophical presuppositions contrary to Christian faith. Nonetheless, their use, in the understanding of John Paul II, does not imply the acceptance of these same presuppositions. On the contrary, such methods may come to be very helpful in discovering the meaning of the Bible (John Paul II) [5].

12. "The great variety of methods may, at times, give the impression of a certain confusion. But this may also be advantageous in showing the immense richness of God's Word" (John Paul II, *ibid*). "All method contains its own limits". Recognizing those limits constitutes part of the scientific spirit. The believing exegete must be aware of the relativity of his own scientific investigations. Such modesty guarantees the authenticity of his interpretation and maintains his exegesis in the service of evangelization (John Paul II, *ibid*).

3. God reveals himself in his Word

13. "Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate himself and the eternal decisions of his will regarding the salvation of men. That is to say, he chose to share those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind" (DV 6). Thus, before becoming a list of truths, the Bible is a manifestation of the grace, love and mercy of God on our behalf (DV 2). He has first loved us! (1 Jn 4, 19). The principal object of the Bible and its interpretation is to assist people in discovering the merciful and gracious presence of this God and experience his liberating love.

14. For the poor and the oppressed, this divine revelation has meant, from the beginning, that God inclined himself and came close to hear their cry; he walked with them, accompanied them in their affliction and freed them from slavery (cf. Ex 3, 7-8; Psalm 91, 14ff.). We can, therefore, rightly affirm: "The major certainty that the Bible communicates to us is this: God hears the cry of his oppressed people. He is present in the life and history of this people and he assists them in their liberation". This is the kernel

of all revelation, expressed in the name Yahweh - "God with us".

15. The revelation by God of himself to his suffering people is being progressively realized through history (DV 2 and 14). Of all periods of that history, the exodus was that which marked most the conscience and the memory of God's people, to such an extent that the New Testament uses images and themes of the exodus to express the significance of Jesus for our lives. The exodus is so important that even today the liturgy of Holy Week speaks about it. For that reason, when Liberation Theology emphasizes the exodus, it neither innovates nor distorts but merely imitates the New Testament.

16. Bible reading serves as purifier. It proceeds to open the eyes to acquire once more that contemplative gaze which original sin deprived us of (St. Augustine) [6] and it enables us to distinguish events so as to discover in them the liberating presence of God: "If only you would listen to him today!" (Ps 95, 7). This is what occurs within the Basic Christian Communities: a real experience of the living God arising from within the pilgrimage of the people insofar as they are being inspired by faithful reading of Scripture.

17. This revelation and experience of God are fruit, at once, of the grace of God and of the effort of a people who strive and struggle. On the one hand, the divine revelation provokes collaboration and participation and demands observance of the covenant. On the other hand, this revelation allows us "to share those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind" (DV 6). Commitment and gratuity, struggle and celebration, nature and grace, all constitute the unifying integration within the pilgrimage of God's people.

18. Further public revelation over and above that given to the people of Israel and in Jesus, will not precede Jesus' second coming (DV 4). And yet this revelation realized in the people of Israel and described in the Old and New Testaments, have become primordial experiences, canon or norm. Through them God is present and reveals himself in the histories of all peoples. Thus is revealed the "economy of salvation" (DV 14), the divine project, "the eternal decisions of his will regarding the salvation of men" (DV 6).

19. In the course of Church history, the Magisterium has repeatedly condemned those who affirm that there exists a difference between the God revealed in the Old and New Testaments. (EB 28 & 30) [7]. It remains the same God

who reveals himself in both! Ultimately, the fullness of the revelation of God took place in Jesus Christ (DV 4).

4. Jesus is the key to the understanding of Sacred Scripture

20. This is an ever repeated truth through all Tradition and constantly taught by the Magisterium. Jesus constitutes the center, the fullness and the object of revelation which God was bringing to realization since Abraham and since the creation of the world (DV 2.3.4.15.16.17). This does not mean that the Old Testament has been discarded. On the contrary, the OT reveals to us the intentions of God (DV 14), helps us to know the Father of Jesus Christ (DV 2.3.4.15), and teaches how to prepare for the coming of Jesus. "The books of the Old Testament with all their parts, caught up into the proclamation of the gospel, acquire and show forth their full meaning in the New Testament and, in turn, shed light on it and explain it" (DV 16).

21. Without the Old Testament, it would be impossible to understand fully the meaning of Jesus for our lives. For all the principal titles given him by the New Testament are each originally from the Old: Lord, Christ, Servant, Son of Man, Prophet, High Priest, Son of God. Jesus himself uses expressions, phrases and themes of the Old Testament to reveal the meaning of his mission and teaching. For example: "Of old it was said ... but I say to you" (Mt 5,21-48); "The time is fulfilled, God's reign has come" (Mk 1,16); "The spirit of the Lord is upon me ... to bring salvation to the poor" (Lk 4,18). The early Christians came to affirm that Jesus was hidden in the Old Testament: "The rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10,3-4). They spoke of Jesus as the Yes of the Father to all the promises of the Old Covenant (cf. 1 Cor 1, 20). In a word, it was through the Old Testament that they sought out the identity of Jesus. In that way, more or less, half of the New Testament constitutes a quoting, a recalling or a reinterpretation of the Old. The New Testament is the fruit resulting from the interpretation of the Old, made in the light of the Christians' experience of Jesus alive in the midst of the communities.

22. This hidden presence of Christ in the Old Testament is possible for those who convert to Christ (2 Cor 3,16). The living experience of Jesus in the community is the new light which opens the eyes of Christians enabling them to understand fully the meaning of the Old Testament and of their own history (DV 16). For us this all contains a particularly pregnant truth.

23. First, Jesus, through whom we must read the Old Testament, is not some theory, some idea, or somebody

from the past who no longer exists. He is the living Christ, today, in the Church, in the communities, here in Latin America, inspiring the faith of the people. That means, to read the Old Testament in the light of the New does not mean speaking constantly about Jesus. It means primarily speaking from the Jesus-experience, from the perspective of faith-vision, that he lives today in our midst! Christ is, as it were, on our side, pondering with us the Old Testament, clarifying it with his light and helping us in its understanding.

24. Second, this does not mean only an understanding of how the early Christians arrived at their interpretation of the figures of Jesus in the Old Testament (DV 15). It means principally, however, becoming learners from their example and doing today, like them, of that achievement; namely, discovering how our old testament, that is to say, our history, is being shaped, mysteriously, by the Spirit of Jesus for a fullness of resurrection; discovering how "the meaning of Sacred Scripture can be related with the present time of salvation" (Paul VI, speaking to Bible professors, 1970). For the New is latent in the Old, and the Old is revealed by the New (DV 16). There exists a dynamism within human history, proceeding from the Creator, who created all for Christ (Eph 1,4; Col 1,16).

25. Third, there appears now the importance of the exegesis done by the Church Fathers. They sought to discover the fruit of the Spirit contained within the pages of the writings (St. Jerome). Meaning, they attempted to reveal how the ancient texts of the Bible reveal the living presence of Christ, enlighten the situation of the communities and lives of each Christian. They carried out a symbolic interpretation, that is to say, a uniting of faith and life, Old and New Testaments, past and present biblical history and their own actual history.

5. Acceptance of the complete list of inspired books

26. There exist two lists of inspired books: the Jewish which includes only those books from the Old Testament; and the Christian list which includes the books of the Old and New Testaments. (There remains a lesser divergence among Catholic and Protestant lists). To accept the complete list means accepting the unity of the two Testaments (DV 16). It means, too, to read the Old in the light of the New Testament (DV 16).

27. The complete list (canon) of the Catholic Church was established at the Council of Florence in 1441 (cf. EB 47) and later at the Council of Trent in 1546 (EB 57-59). In its formulation of the definition, the Council states that "all

books both of Old and New Testaments together with all their parts" must be accepted as inspired (EB 60, DV 11). This means that nobody has the right to exclude any text, book or Testament. Only the gospels are given certain primacy (DV 18).

28. According to circumstances and problems, therefore, one or the other text, book or Testament is afforded priority. For example, in the 16 documents of Vatican II, the Bible is cited 1333 times, with the Old Testament mentioned 88 times and the New 1245 times. [8] Evidently the Council gave priority to the New Testament and, within that selectivity, chose especially the letters of Paul. One of the accusations brought forth against the popular reading of the Bible is that it affords pre-eminence to the Old Testament, and within it, to the Exodus account. Apart from being untrue, this accusation contains within it nothing extraordinary. Acting thus would merely be imitating the Magisterium! Statistics, as such, can show that people of Basic Christian Communities, in the face of circumstances and problems, read all the books of the Bible, excluding none.

29. This fifth norm contains something more than just a mere theoretical question of the past. To accept the complete list of inspired books means acceptance of the fact that one and the same divine economy unites both Testaments within a single, salvific plan of liberation; a plan only fully revealed insofar as the Old is assumed in the New. The transition from Old to New was initiated at the moment of Christ's resurrection and has not yet concluded. Every instant new people and distinct persons enter into the "Way" (Acts 9,2). This passage (pasch) from the Old to the New embraces all: everything and everyone created by God for Christ. Thus each person, group, community, people or nation lives its particular old testament and must realize its passage toward the new; that is to say, it must enter into its inner life to discover, at its depth, the loving and gratuitous presence of God, directing all toward Christ and resurrection in him. The Bible, with its two Testaments, is norm or canon, God-given, so that through it we can be helped to discern and bring about our passage (pasch) to salvation and liberation.

6. The Bible as the book of the Church

30. The Church lives the Word of God and is the Body of Christ (DV 21). When the people assemble around the Word of God, it forms as it were a small sanctuary. It constitutes the living temple of which St. Paul spoke (Eph 2,21; cf. 1 Pet 2,5). The innumerable sanctuaries that spread out today all over Latin America, especially among

the poor, are the delicate and fragile branches of that trunk which reinforces and invigorates the tree that is the Church. Within these tiny sanctuaries the people read and interpret the Bible as book of the community that is the Church.

31. Our use here of the term community instead of Church does not wish to mean any reduction of the universal Church to the size of the small, particular and local community. On the contrary, "it is the faith of the universal Church which is lived and expressed concretely in the particular communities. A specific community gives concrete form to the faith of the universal Church and thus transcends any sense of private and isolated groupings; it overcomes its own peculiarity in the faith of the total Church" (Puebla 373) [9].

32. The interpretation of the Word of God is not the activity of any one individual who may have studied more than others, but it is a community activity in which all participate, each in their own manner. Together they discover the will of God through their own means. Together they discover the will of God through reading and meditating on the Word of God. The exegete, like any other, participates with his or her contribution (of real importance undoubtedly) and thus contributes as a service to the community (DV 12)[10]. In this way, gradually there arises and grows a communal sense that is accepted and shared by all. It constitutes the "sensus ecclesiae" or the "sensus fidelium", or "the faith-sense of the Church" by which the community commits itself, as it were, to God himself.

33. The "faith-sense of the Church" is not primarily the teaching shared by pastors with their people, but more a graced discovery of God lovingly present, for "out of the abundance of his love (God) speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself" (DV 2). The meaning of faith which the Church discovers in the Scriptures is like an immense river. It rises amid those small and humble "sanctuaries", dispersed on the periphery of the world. The tributaries join, forming even greater streams. The communities, coordinated by their pastors, meet and share among themselves their faith, their way of reading and understanding the Word of God. The communities of Latin America, represented by their pastors, assembled in Medellin and Puebla and gave expression to what is for us, today, on this continent, the will of God. The communities all over the world did the same. Assembled by John XXIII and represented by their legitimate pastors, they united in Rome at the II Vatican Council. In the 16 Council docu-

ments they expressed what was discovered to be the will of God, in the light of the Word of God, for the Christians of the entire world. Thus the "faith-sense of the Church" grows.

34. This "sensus ecclesiae", faithfully guarded and transmitted under the careful attention of the Magisterium, is the context within which the Bible must be read and interpreted. It is the term of reference, born of the very community's meditation of the Word of God, that allows us to understand the meaning of the Bible for us today.

35. The interpretation of the Bible in accordance with Tradition and Magisterium demands of us not only a theoretical identification with the doctrine of the Church but also, and above all, a practical identification with the life of the Church. It demands that the interpreter be part of a community in a concrete manner. For normally it is through the life of the community that one enters into contact with the Holy Spirit's action, alive and present in the Church. Without this Spirit the interpretation of Sacred Scripture is impossible (DV 12).

36. "Tradition, Scripture and the Magisterium are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls" (DV 10). This union of the three aspects of revelation is by no means something automatic or magical. Like the union of Jesus with the Father, it is achieved, at times painfully, through obedience (cf. Heb 5,8; Phil 2,8; Jn 4,34; 8,28-29). Prior to soliciting obedience from its faithful, the Magisterium must itself obey and be firmly united to Tradition and to Scripture. At the same time then, it may and must solicit this same obedience from its faithful, thus exercising its authority "in the name of Jesus Christ" (DV 10). And yet, it cannot organize the aspect of doctrine in such a way that prophecy, which raises new questions, becomes synonymous with heresy or with rebellion! True obedience does not impede there being a place for the questioning of a Peter by a Paul (cf. Gal 2,14).

37. "The task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church" (DV 10). This task has been exercised some few given times. Few are the texts whose meaning was authentically explained by the Magisterium. This does not mean that in the interpretation of other texts the interpreter ought not take into consideration the faith of the Church. The role of the

Church and the Magisterium in the interpretation of the Bible does not consist only in declaring authentically the meaning of one or the other controversial text of Scripture. Its role remains much broader: to encourage and animate the reading of Sacred Scripture, defend it from possible deviations, maintain it within the scope of Tradition and of the proper objective of God's Word, spread it among God's people so that it becomes the daily food of all the faithful (cf. DV 21-25) [11].

38. Such being the task, the teaching office of the Church (Magisterium) can view with joy and gratitude the outstanding characteristics in the history of the churches in Latin America: the poor are taking upon themselves the reading of Sacred Scripture in community from the perspective of their faith and from their concrete situation; they are discovering in it inspiration and strength for their struggle and task; and from that same Scripture they denounce and rectify those aspects of social, church and family life that demand conversion.

7. Take account of the faith criteria

39. Reason alone does not suffice to discover the entire meaning of Scripture. "Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written" (DV 12). To attain this objective it is necessary to take into account the three criteria proper to Christian faith: serious attention to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture; the living tradition of the whole Church; and the analogy of the faith (DV 12).

All three aspects aspire to the same objective: discover the fullest sense of the Bible, impede the manipulation of its meaning, and avoid that any text become isolated from the context and the tradition from which it derives and which it transmits. Let us look again at those three elements:

40. "Attention to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture". This criterion reveals the importance in maintaining a global vision of all of Scripture. This ample vision broadens the meaning of a text, helps to situate it within its context (literary, historical and theological), brings light to bear upon the various aspects and details, and assures that certain texts do not become absolute to the detriment of some others. This actualizes an elementary criterion of ancient times applied by Rabbis and Fathers of the Church, whereby the Bible is to be understood by way of the same Bible!

41. "Attend to the living tradition of the whole Church". Tradition embraces the Bible, before, during and after.

Before coming to a written form, the Bible was narrated. Later it became literature, took on written form bit by bit within a process of transmitting histories and doctrines, customs and traditions of a people. Finally, once written, it continued to be handed on, from generation to generation, up to today, within a living tradition. Here various aspects are to be considered:

42. First: It is important to show how no text simply fell from the heavens! Each grew within a living tradition of the faith of God's people, assuming its place in the midst of their conflict-laden pilgrimage. Read and re-read by following generations, the text was carried on by tradition as a boat by the river's flow. Such a process of reading and reinterpretation resides in the origin of the Bible. [12]

43. Second: The Bible within the living tradition of the Church, is a continuation of this same process; it is the same river, flowing toward the sea, carrying along with it the same boat. It is impossible to leave aside the tradition of the Church and remain solely with the text. The interpretation of the Bible, throughout the centuries, discovered and brought out the meaning. The fruit was being born whose seed contained the Bible. Besides, the very living-out of faith in differing situations created different traditions that already appear in the Bible and touch the entire history of the Church. The study of such traditions help us understand how the same faith can be incarnated and lived in a variety of ways such as our communities experience today.

44. Third: All this goes to show the importance of the study of exegesis of Church Fathers (DV 23) [13]. This exegesis is especially important given the always actual vision with which it looks upon, reads and interprets the Bible.

45. "Attention to the analogy of faith". Each text must be read not only within the context of the same Bible but also within the context of Tradition, and particularly within the contemporary Church's context. Not only must it obey the faith demands of yesteryear, but also the contemporary demands of faith. This is what we may call the analogy of faith. "Fidelity to the Incarnate Word demands also, given the dynamics of the incarnation, that the message become actual in its integrity, not only for man in general, but for man to whom the message is preached today. Christ became the contemporary of certain people, speaking to them in the language of their time. Fidelity to him demands that this contemporaneity continue. In this consists the entire task of the Church with its Tradition, its Magisterium,

its preaching" (Paul VI) [14]. Thus the Bible achieves its rightful place within the divine plan, and all exaggerated and inappropriate reductions are avoided.

8. Bear in mind the criteria of actual reality

46. Two levels of criteria make up the reality in this context; the reality of the people of the time when the Bible was written, and the reality of those who today read the Bible. Both levels have their challenges that must be taken into consideration in interpretation. It is a matter of finding that common human condition which unites the people of the Bible with the people of Latin America similarly situated before God, and of gaining an attitude of openness so as to discover the meaning of the text for our present reality.

47. Considering the people's situation in history out of which came the text. Regarding this aspect, the Magisterium leaves no room for doubt. "The exegete is called upon to enter into the thought patterns of those ancient times of the East" (Pius XII, 20). The exegete must investigate the situation and the culture current in the author's lifetime and discover thereby the circumstances that led to such an expression, thus arriving at a truer understanding of the text itself (DV 12). To achieve this, the investigator must make use of various scientific methods [15]. The methods of scientific analysis of social sciences help in the understanding of the social, economic, political and ideological situation of the people of that time. From the help, therefore, of those sciences, the interpreter can establish the meaning of the text *per se*, and prepares the way for our subsequent understanding of the text for our situation today. That is to say, there is established "a certain co-naturality between the interests of today and the matter treated in the text, thus disposing us to hear its message" (Paul VI) [16]. Taking into consideration the situation lived by those who elaborated the text is but the natural consequence of our faith in the incarnation of God's Word in human history. It also becomes a manner of being faithful to the tradition of the Church Fathers. Prior to their harvesting the fruits of the Spirit, they demanded that the letter and history be fully investigated. Besides, through a historical investigation of the concrete situation in which the text originated, the reader is assisted in overcoming that type of fundamentalism which carries with it such confusion for our people in their faith-understanding of Scripture.

48. Consideration given to the situation in which people today read the text. The text of the Bible grew out of the desire to find, within the struggle of each age, the call of the

same God. Jesus himself offered an explanation of Scripture to the two disciples of Emmaus taking as his point of departure their particular situation (Lk 24,13-25). Paul VI goes on to say that it does not suffice to explain a text historically. It must also be expounded in its meaning for contemporary people [17]. He adds "Faithfulness toward mankind today, while remaining an arduous and difficult task, remains a necessity if we are to remain faithful to the message" (Pope Paul VI speaking to Scripture scholars, 25 September 70). Here, in Latin America, this means fidelity to the poor. The preferential option for the poor, defined by Puebla, must therefore become a point of departure from which we come to read and interpret the Bible for all, rich and poor, without exclusion.

49. To read the Bible from the option of the poor demands that the causes generating poverty be discovered and analyzed; those are economic, social, political and ideological causes. This does not imply a reductionist reading of the Bible. Nothing is reduced. On the contrary! The scope of vision becomes even wider, coming to take into account things not previously considered. Interpretation ceases to be spiritualistic and alienated, and begins to inspire the life of the people in their most concrete aspects. It becomes good news once again for the poor! Again the principal objective of the Bible is focused: a source of "Today, if you should listen to his voice!" (Ps 95,7).

9. Prayerful reading of Scripture

50. The Bible must be read and interpreted in the same spirit with which it has come to be written (DV 12). As we have seen, this demands that the interpreter make use of the criteria of faith and be attentive to reality. But more is demanded. Coming to a full understanding demands more than mere study. It also has to do with a living commitment of sharing both faith and life with people. It calls for that attitude by which the Spirit may act, move freely and reveal to us the meaning which the text contains for us today in Latin America. It is known as the "spiritual meaning".

51. Concretely this implies: 1. an attitude of silence and listening; 2. an ongoing application, in depth, to the lives of people and the meaning of life's challenges; 3. allowing joys and sorrows in a prayerful attitude; 4. dedicating time, not only to the study, but also to a celebration of the Word; 5. culminating the study in sharing, prayer and concrete commitment; 6. giving sufficient importance to liturgy, sacramental life, Divine Office and those expres-

sions of people's religious piety with which life is nurtured; 7. coming to know in the celebrating of God's Word its value as sacrament of Christ alive in the midst of the community. Now all this is precisely what the members of the Basic Christian Communities have taught us through their testimony. For them it has come to be impossible to unite around the Word without, at once, joining in prayer and praising God in their song and music.

52. Words mean not only what they say but they also transmit power. The Word both speaks and acts. It not only raises consciousness, but also transmits the warmth and strength of friendship and love. Light and power! These two aspects of God's Word must be activated through biblical reading. The Hebrew word "dabar" expresses, at once, "word" and "object signified", it says and does, announces and brings about, teaches and animates, enlightens and strengthens, is light and power, Word and Spirit. In the history of the Church this type of reflection received the title of "lectio divino", encouraged by the II Vatican Council (DV 25).

53. The interpreter must himself place his life under the scrutiny of God's Word and permit it a place in his life. "Those who study the Sacred Scripture are primarily examined by it and consequently must approach it with a spirit of humble availability, indispensable to its fuller understanding" (Paul VI) [18]. In another discourse, quoting St. Augustine, the Holy Father states: "Those who dedicate themselves to the Scriptures must be encouraged not only to remain and become versed in the intricacies of languages, but besides that, what is fundamental and at the same time necessary, they must themselves pray to comprehend it (orient ut intelligant)" (Paul VI) [19].

10. All exegesis is a service to evangelization

54. The exegete has no self-sufficient purpose, but remains at the service of the life and the mission of the Church. The central mission is evangelization in view of the transformation of people and society. Speaking of the methods of evangelization, Pope John Paul II addressed the Pontifical Biblical Commission: "In the Church, all methods must remain, directly or indirectly, at the service of evangelization" [20]. In fact, owing to the nature of his work the exegete is forever running the risk of becoming closed within his scientific activities and thus losing sight of the primary objective of God's Word. Therefore, "fidelity to his task of interpretation demands of the exegete that he not satisfy himself with secondary aspects of

biblical texts, but rather that he reveal more fully its central message which is a religious message, an invitation to conversion and the Good News of salvation, capable of transforming each hearer and all human society, introducing them into divine communion" (John Paul II, *ibid.*).

55. This presupposes two things: 1. All through his task of exegetical study, the scripture scholar must keep in mind the situation of the people who await the message of evangelization; 2. The Church and each community

become an instrument of evangelization not only by word but above all by witness; they themselves must allow the Word to transform them into a sign and grace-filled measure of what they preach to others. For this reason, they must have their entire existence permeated and nourished by the Word of God "enlightening their minds, strengthening their wills, and setting men's hearts on fire with the love of God" (DV 23).

Carlos Mesters, O. Carm.

Footnotes

1. Paul VI to scripture professors, 25 Sept. 1970, in: *Reading the Bible today*, official texts of the Church, Petropolis 1982, pp. 9-12.

2. Dogm. Constitution DEI VERBUM (DV), no. 11: "Both the Old and New Testament in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 20,31; 2 Tim 3,16; 2 Pet 1,19-21; 3,15-16), they have God as their author".

3. "God, who through the Word creates all things (cf. Jn 1,3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to himself in created realities (cf. Rom 1,19-20). Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, he went further and from the start manifested himself to our first parents. Then after their fall his promise of redemption arouse in them the hope of being saved (cf. Rom 2,6-7)" (DV 3).

4. "As the Word consubstantial with God became like to us men in all things except sin (cf. Heb 4,15), thus also the Word of God is expressed in human language, perfect in expression in every way except error" (Pius XII, encyclical "Divino Afflante Spiritu", no. 20).

5. "The exegete who is enlightened by faith cannot, obviously, adopt such premises, but he can at least profit from the method. Since Old Testament times, the People of God have been encouraged to "enrich themselves on the spoils of the Egyptians". John Paul II to the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission 7th April 1989.

6. In his book on the exegesis of the Church Fathers, quoting St. Augustine, and others, H. de Lubac defines thus the objective of the Bible: "The Holy Spirit, finger of the divinity, having already shaped the letters of creation, continued the task of composing this new book: He extended over to us the blanket of Scripture; unfolded this second firmament which, like to the first, narrates the power of God and, perfecting the first, sings the mercy of the Creator. Thanks to it we receive again "the contemplative gaze", and thus each creature becomes for us a theophany." (de Lubac, *Esegesi Medievale, I quattro sensi della Scrittura*, Roma, 1962, pp. 220-221)

7. *Enchiridion Biblicum* (EB), *Documenta Ecclesiastica Sacram Scripturam spectantia*, ed. tertia aucta et recognita, Rom 1954.

8. In this elaboration we base ourselves on "Index Locorum S. Scripturae in Documentis Oecumenici Vatican II".

9. III Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana, Puebla, Mexico, 1979. No. 373.

10. "It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature" (DV 12).

11. DEI VERBUM, Ch. VI: Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church (nos. 21-25) describes the objective of all the Church's activity with relation to the Bible. Thus the flower exudes its perfume and beauty abundantly.

12. Some examples of this process of reading and re-interpretation of facts and texts within the very Bible: the book of Genesis contains two creation stories; twice the vocation of Abraham is told; various Psalms interpret history, but in their particular fashion; the book of Chronicles reinterprets the life of David in a manner quite distinct from its historical happenings; the book of Wisdom offers anew the vision of the plagues of Egypt already given in Exodus, but in a style that not always respects its source; the Pentateuch contains traces of four distinct traditions, each one offering its peculiar historical viewpoint.

13. "The Church rightly encourages the study of the Holy Fathers of both East and West and of sacred liturgies" (DV 23). This brief mention within the Council document actualizes various papal exhortations of the past, Leo XIII in: *Providentissimus Deus*, nos. 47 and 55; Benedict XV in: *Spiritus Paraclitus*, nos. 1-29 (published on the occasion of the 15th centenary of St. Jerome's death); Pius XII, *Div. Affl. Sp.* (cf. note 6).

14. See note 1.

15. Concerning the adequate scientific methods, see John Paul II to the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (note 5); Leo XIII in "Providentissimus Deus" nos. 68-80; Pius XII, "Div. Affl. Sp.", no. 20. 16. See note 1.

17. Paul VI, discourse to members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, 14th March 1974.

18. See note 1. 19. See note 17. 20. See note 5.

Biblical-Pastoral Center

DEI VERBUM

Course for

Ministers of the Word of God in Sacred Scripture
and for formators in the biblical apostolate and
biblical-pastoral ministry

Nemi (Rome),

23 Aug.- 20 Dec. 1990

The main thrust of the course:

The **point of departure and the basis of the course** are the directives of Vatican II concerning Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church, especially the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation DEI VERBUM (DV), Chapter VI in particular.

There are **three major areas of concentration:**

The **Interiorization** of the Word of God.
This is a basic prerequisite for ministers of the Word "lest any of them become an 'empty preacher of the Word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly'" (DV 25).

The **communication** of the Word of God.
This is the ultimate goal of the course, "that as many ministers of the Divine Word as possible will be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the People of God" (DV 23).

The **study** of Scripture for better understanding.
Though the course is not an exegetical one strictly speaking, the importance of biblical scholarship and the concern "to move ahead daily toward a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures" (DV 23) are clearly seen and instilled upon the participants.

Resource persons of the past courses included:

Bro. Enrique Garcia, FSC, one of the authors of the "Family Catechesis Program" in Chile, director of the Catechetical Department of the Theological-Pastoral Institute in Medellin, Columbia;
Fr. Oswald Himmer, Fr. Anselm Prior, OFM, team members of the LUMKO Missiological Institute in Delmenville, South Africa;
Miss Teresita N. Nitorreda, Academic Dean of the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) of Manila, Philippines;
Fr. Paul Puthanangady, SDB, Liturgist and Director of the National Biblical-Catechetical-Liturgical Center (NBCLC) in Bangalore, India;
Fr. Louis Ska, SJ, Professor of OT at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome;
Dr. Eugene Trester, of Tucson, AR, USA, originator of the Adult Biblical Inter-dependent Learning (ABIL) Program;
Dr. Hans- Ruedi Weber, Dr. Wille Riekkenen of the Department for Biblical Studies at the World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland.

Conditions of acceptance

- * The age limit is 55 years.
- * At least two years involvement in the biblical apostolate or in the biblical-pastoral ministry are required as well as an assignment from the respective bishop, religious superior or person responsible for the formation of ministers of the Word, to continue working in this field as formators.
- * At least a Bachelor's degree.
- * A good command of English.
- * The willingness to contribute constructively to the success of this course.

Please make inquiries about registration and course fees not later than 30 April 1990.

The next course is scheduled to take place from 23 Aug. - 20 Dec. 1990 in Nemi, Italy, about 30 km outside of Rome in the Albano Mountains. Inquiries should be addressed to:

**DEI VERBUM
BIBLICAL-PASTORAL CENTER
The Director
Missionari Verbiti
Via dei Laghi 52
00040 Nemi (Rome) ITALY
Tel.(06)-936.83.66**

YOUR APPLICATION LETTER SHOULD CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

1. Your assignments and activities in the pastoral ministry up to now.
2. The kind of biblical-pastoral formation work you will be involved in after this course.
3. A brief description of yourself: How do you see yourself? What are your personal character traits? What are your talents and interests? How would you describe your physical and psychological health?
4. Your personal reasons for choosing to participate in the biblical-pastoral course at Nemi?
5. A letter of recommendation from your Ordinary or Provincial or from the Director of the institution/organization which will benefit from the formation you receive.
6. A recent passport-size photograph.

DATE: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

Why is this course offered?

Because of the great need of solid formation of ministers of the Word of God immersed in the Scriptures.

This need has become evident even more since the **II Vatican Council** insisted that "all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture" (DV 21) and that "easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (DV 22).

Similarly, Pope Paul VI in the Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World called for "adequate formation of all ministers of the Word". In this context he expressed his joy to "see pastors, religious and lay people fired with their mission to evangelize seeking ever more suitable ways of proclaiming the Gospel effectively" (EN 73).

Likewise, Pope John Paul II in addressing the WCFBA Executive Committee on 7 April 1986, underlined the need of diligent preparation for all ministers of the Word.

For whom is this course intended?

The course is intended for lay people, religious and clerics both male and female who have already been involved in the biblical apostolate and biblical-pastoral ministry on the diocesan, national or regional level, and who will continue working in this field.

Specifically, it aims at forming them into ministers of the Word who:

- * will be involved in out-reach programs
- * are promising effective multipliers
- * will be assets in "networking" - which is so very necessary today in the pastoral ministry and the biblical apostolate in particular.

Involved personnel:

The course is offered under the auspices of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) as an associate member of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA).

Some 12 resource persons are invited to the course who are experts in an area of biblical apostolate and Scripture ministry and come from various geographical, cultural and pastoral backgrounds.

Interaction among the resource persons and the participants as well as between the participants themselves is the main means through which the goals of the course are attained.

These resource persons not only draw from their personal experience and particular expertise, but also help the participants tap their own resources for the benefit of the group.

Instead of the one-way lecture approach, the program operates according to the recent insights and principles of andragogy and group dynamics: it is as much learner-oriented as it is subject-oriented.

The participants do not come just to be enriched by absorbing information. Communication of the Word of God is ultimately geared towards building community (cf. 1 Jn 1,1-3 and DV 1; 2). Therefore, the participants consider the forming of a Christian community with their fellow participants from various countries and cultures as one of the challenges of the course.

Furthermore, drawing on both their own involvement in the biblical apostolate and preparing themselves for their future assignments in the field, they will work on a particular biblical-pastoral project, like adapting existing materials to their own concrete situations, designing new programs, etc.

NAME: _____ (Last) _____ (First) _____ (Middle)

PRESENT ADDRESS: _____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____ (Year) _____ (Month) _____ (Day)

PLACE OF BIRTH: _____ NATIONALITY: _____

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INSTITUTION/ORGANIZATION FOR WHICH YOU WILL UNDERGO FORMATION: _____

FOR PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS: DATE OF ORDINATION: _____
OR PERPETUAL VOWS: _____

Informations

Bangladesh: First National Workshop for the Biblical Apostolate

In Jessore, from 5-10 June this year, 47 ministers of the Bible from five Dioceses of the Church in Bangladesh met for the first National Workshop for the Biblical Apostolate. The participants set three goals:

1. to better understand the who, where and how of the Biblical Apostolate in the country;
2. to become familiar with the final statements of the Bangalore (1984), Hong Kong (1985) and Singapore (1988) Workshops of the Biblical Apostolate; and
3. to formulate recommendations on how the Biblical Apostolate could grow, develop and strengthen within the perspectives shared and in the present situation in Bangladesh.

Following are the participants' recommendations:

1. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB) is requested to appoint two or three Biblical scholars or persons interested in the Biblical Apostolate to be co-workers with the present person in charge of the Biblical Apostolate at the national level. They will form the National Committee. To facilitate communication, the Bishops in each Diocese should appoint one interested person to this committee.
2. This Committee will work jointly with the National Catechetical and Liturgical Commission and with the National Training Center at Jessore. It will also work in conjunction with other Biblical Apostolate groups.
3. The Committee should have contact with the training centers in each diocese or with persons selected by the Bishops for this Apostolate.
4. At the National and Diocesan levels the various formation and training centers should arrange regular courses for Bible Ministers.
5. Those responsible and the Committees for the Biblical Apostolate at National and Diocesan levels should strive so that within the next five years each Christian family will have a Bible in their home.
6. For the next three years, a Bible Sunday should be celebrated annually in Bangladesh so that the Local Church can become familiar with the Bible.
7. The different practical methods of using the Bible should be made known so that the Bible becomes the Book of Life and of Prayer for the Christian.
8. In the Biblical Apostolate, priority should be given to the family, to Basic Christian Communities, to inter-religious communities and to youth.
9. In preparation for "Bogotá 1990" there should be another national Workshop on "New Evangelization".
10. All the publications relating to the Bible should be collected at National and Diocesan Training Centers and shared with others.

Further information: National Seminary, Block A-112, Road 27, Danani, Dhaka-1213, Bangladesh

Canada: Biblical Workshops

The Catholic Biblical Association in Quebec (Société Catholique de la Bible = SOCABI) offers continuing formation courses in biblical education for teachers in primary and secondary schools in an effort to enhance these religious education programs. Since 1988, 50 courses have already taken place with more than 1500 teachers participating.

Over the past three years SOCABI has offered a series of weekend courses in various regions of the French speaking part of the country. This year's theme was: "Life Through Action - Community and Mission in the Acts of the Apostles".

Further information: SOCABI, 7400 boulevard Saint Laurent, No. 519, Montréal, Qc H2R 2Y1

Kenya, Nairobi: Fourth Congress of the Catholic Exegetes of Africa

The "Pan-African Association of Catholic Exegetes" conducted its fourth Congress from 25-29 July 1989 with over 40 participants from 13 different countries. The theme was "The Johannine Communities".

The participants' papers dealt with "Faith in the Gospel According to John: the Johannine Communities and the Power of the Roman Empire"; "Jesus and the Jewish Authorities"; "Worship"; "Sacraments"; "The Presence and the Action of the Holy Spirit in the Johannine Communities". These studies were presented in view of inculturating the Gospel message. Some observations during the Congress: Africans, like all humankind, are called to faith witness; in order to lead other faithful to Christ as Christians, he has to detach himself from some aspects of his ancient community. The Church in Africa is called upon to motivate African Christians, to spread the Kingdom of God - the people of God - into all the world.

The next Congress for African Exegetes will take place in 1991 in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. The theme will be "Universalism and Mission in the Bible; the Evangelization of the Poor".

Further information: Documentation et informations Africaines, No. 529, B.P.2598, Kinshasa, Zaire

Mexico: Biblical Department of the Bishops' Conference

The Biblical Department of the Mexican Bishops' Conference has as its goal to promote a biblical-pastoral ministry for the Christian community. With inspiration and support from the Word of God through a new evangelization, the Christian faithful can be fortified to respond to the challenges of society in the actual situation of the country.

The place occupied by the inspired Word in the missionary role of the Christian community should be brought to greater awareness.

The department helps the pastoral animators to find in the Word of God, inspiration to propose solutions for the present day problems of the country.

It promotes the concept of the Christian community living from the Word of God while still retaining the riches of the Mexican heritage, thus melding both into one culture.

Among their activities are the following:

- organizing a National Catholic Biblical Department which serves the country more efficiently;

- supporting the work of the Mexican Biblical Association;
- establishing a federation of biblical institutes and schools;
- organizing an annual meeting of the directors of Biblical Centres;
- facilitating a better communication of the significant activities of the biblical-pastoral ministry among the parishes, monasteries, Catholic colleges, basic communities and apostolic groups;
- fostering formation courses of biblical pastoral animators (summer courses either general or more specific) and to collaborate with them;
- providing bibles and adapted biblical materials;
- organizing the national biblical meeting in 1991;
- participating in the Latin American biblical-pastoral meetings proposed by the Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM) and the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA).

The Biblical Department has published a small brochure "The Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Mexico" which defines the biblical-pastoral ministry in Mexico as follows:

"The biblical-pastoral ministry relates to the life of the Church and identifies itself through reference to Sacred Scripture. The nature and function of this sacred book in the Church influences the function and nature of the biblical-pastoral ministry.

1. The Bible is the Word of God written for the salvation of all, and its evangelizing, sanctifying and liberating force is the soul, the point of reference and constant confrontation of the essence and action of the Church.

2. The Bible is the book of the People of God; together with the sacraments it builds up the community. The Word convokes, gathers and commissions the community to celebrate the covenant by means of the sacrifice. The Bible is "Someone" whose will and salvific mysteries are not only announced, but are also alive and celebrated. The biblical-pastoral ministry is the base and soul of all authentic pastoral service in the Church.

3. Revelation is understood in the historical process of the People of God and in the context of the different cultures. The Word is the saving and liberating dialogue of God in the actual situation of the country.

Sacred Scripture must be read in the context of our Latin American and Mexican situation, in the light of Church documents, especially those of Medellin and Puebla, in accordance with the preferential option for the poor, in order to help our communities satisfy their hunger for the Word of God, to discern the signs of the time and to project eschatological hope into the community."

Further information: Comision episcopal de evangelizacion y catequesis, Departamento biblico, Secretariado Nacional, Calle Habana 148, Col. Tepeyac-Insurgentes, 07020-Mexico, D.F.

United States: Bible Study Programs

Contrary to the popular opinion that there is little or no interest among Catholics in reading the Bible, biblical apostolate experts have observed a definite trend in the opposite direction. In fact, American Catholics have a number of excellent Bible Study Programs available:

The "Little Rock Bible Study Program" from Arkansas develops materials and methods for small groups isolated in country parishes. Catholics learn about the Bible without scripture experts or parish priests having to be present. Reading assignments are taken from the booklets of the popular Collegeville commentary. Because of the program's effectiveness and the growing scarcity of priests, Little Rock is now a major program used in such city center areas as the Archdiocese of Chicago.

The "De Sales Program" also originated in an area of isolated parishes, the Baker Diocese in Oregon. It brings experts and highly developed teaching aids to any parish or living room by means of professional video cassettes. Each instruction unit consists of two 20 minute conferences accompanied by group discussion materials. Over 6 thousand parishes now use the "De Sales Program".

The "Renew Program" has awakened the need for long term follow-up. Bible Study and biblical spirituality are the most requested subjects of "Renew" graduates.

The "Adult Interdependent Learning Program" aims at a scripture study which brings life and Bible reader together. (See description below)

Parallel to these pedagogically well-constructed courses exists also the possibility to participate in additional programs with other materials offered by different institutes and publishing houses such as Acta, Benziger, Franciscan Communications and Liguori.

Further information: Franciscan Communications, 1229 S. Santee St., Los Angeles, CA 90015, USA.

United States: A.B.I.L., a Bible Course for Adult Groups
ABIL (Adult Biblical Interdependent Learning) is a parish-based Scripture program conducted in the local parish community under the guidance of a trained facilitator. The program extends over two years (with 20 units each): one focusing on the Old Testament, another on the New Testament. ABIL combines contemporary biblical scholarship with adult learning theory and practice. It offers leadership training in interdependent learning of the Bible and it provides skills for building Christian communities in the process of studying the Scriptures. This pedagogy applies to groups not to individuals. Through the spirit of cooperation and non-competition, adults learn the Bible in a community context. Each group consists of 20 to 24 people. Each year comprises 20 "biblical learning units", written by internationally recognized biblical specialists writing in their particular area of expertise.

The 15 years of experience in Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United States offers ample evidence that a diversity of people can handle the biblical scholarship and can integrate the learning into life. Part of the course's focus is on mastering the essentials and relating them in lively ways to modern life. The methodology used engenders interdependent learning, respect for differences of opinion and creativity.

Further information: ABIL International, 15851 N. Lago del Oro Pky, Tuscon, AZ 85737-9626, USA

TO ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE FEDERATION
To all Episcopal Conferences

Spiritual Preparation for the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá

In preparation for the Plenary Assembly of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate, and on behalf of the Executive Committee which met last May in the Abbey of Maredsous, Belgium, I feel the need to address all Full and Associate members of the WCFBA to ask for their precious cooperation in prayer.

This proposal will be a short and friendly dialogue with those for whom this letter is intended; and so, as if I were listening to them, I would like to respond to two questions which might be addressed to me.

Why pray for the Assembly?

I would answer:

1. Because "participants" in the Assembly should not be the only ones present at Bogotá. In fact, all those who belong to organizations or member communities of the WCFBA should feel directly involved.

Their participation is perhaps best carried out through prayer - asking for success in the preparation of the Assembly, for fruitful contribution by all in its work, and for productivity in the proposals which the Assembly will discuss.

Naturally, prayer will also make it easier for members to come to a deeper awareness of the themes entrusted to the Assembly.

2. Because all Christian communities included in the range of activities of WCFBA members, should be invited to pray in thanksgiving on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the proclamation of DEI VERBUM. It is this Conciliar document which in so many ways has brought the Word of God closer to the people of God through the ministry of the WCFBA.

3. Because in the Assembly we will confront the theme of the New Evangelization, important not only for the Federation but also for the Church; the Assembly should therefore be accompanied and sustained by three important voices:

- the voice of the Father who entrusts us to the Son, the "Word of God";
- the voice of the Son who is continually incarnated in the needs of a world which in so many ways calls for a New Evangelization (Matthew 25);
- the voice of the Holy Spirit who continually inspires the Magisterium of the Church and the *sensus fidei* (sense of faith) of the faithful.

What to do?

I present the following proposals. You may adapt them to meet the needs of the different environments or cultures; or they may inspire other activities.

1. Information about the WCFBA and the Assembly

Members could undertake an initiative by sending a letter to community and diocesan associations, and eventually also to parochial pastoral organizations to provide information about the WCFBA and its vitality, and about the aims of the Assembly.

2. *Homily and Prayer of the Faithful*

Members could ask their Episcopal Conference to propose for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (21 January 1990) a homily on the Word of God in sacred Scripture, on the themes of our Assembly, or on the biblical apostolate, and to provide for the insertion of an intention in the prayer of the faithful.

The readings for this Sunday would seem to be particularly appropriate; however, the "prayer of the faithful" could also be circulated through diocesan or parochial publications. On this date, members are also invited to communitarian and personal prayer in prayerful harmony with the whole of the Federation.

3. *The Celebration of a Liturgy of the Word*

This could be inspired by the two themes of our Assembly: the New Evangelization and the 25th anniversary of DEI VERBUM. Such celebrations could coincide with the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time or another date. An outline is enclosed, which can also serve as a guideline.

4. *Contemplative communities*

These communities should also be involved in preparing for the Assembly through prayer. When invited to become involved, they should be provided with suitable information about the WCFBA and the Assembly.

5. *Bible Sunday or Bible Week*

As fitting preparation for the Assembly, this would be an excellent opportunity to initiate this experience on a parish or diocesan level where it is not yet a custom.

We have noticed an ever increasing spread of this initiative and eventually the Center in Stuttgart will be able to give appropriate information.

6. *Ecumenical Meetings*

Since one of the aims of the WCFBA is collaboration with Bible Societies, some ecumenical meetings would be appropriate in order to present the life of the Federation and to be united in hearing the word of God or to study and deepen together an awareness of the themes of the Assembly.

7. *Days of Prayer during the Plenary Assembly*

Those passages from Scripture on which the Delegates to the Plenary Assembly will be reflecting daily are proposed to all members as their prayer support for the Plenary Assembly. A prayer sheet with these texts might be prepared and made available to all our Members.

And so I have completed my little dialogue with you at this delicate and important moment in the history of the WCFBA.

I ask that the Lord give to each one of us an awareness of the great responsibility which we have in offering our own small contribution. This suggests to us the rule of the Word of God, which through the poor words of human beings, bears, communicates and deepens the immense love of God who saves us.

x *Alberto Ablondi*

Alberto Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno
President of the WCFBA