

Catholic Biblical Federation

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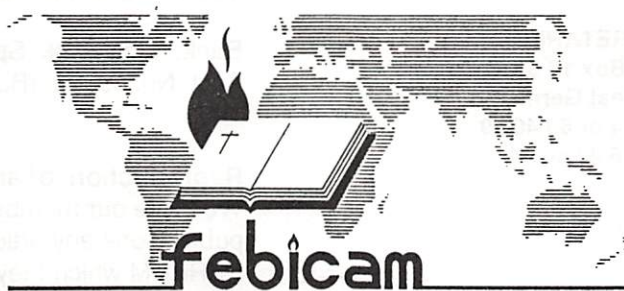
Bulletin

*Sei
verbum*

The IV Plenary Assembly in Bogotá (27 June - 6 July 1990)

- Final Statement
- Keynote Adresse
of the President
- Contribution
of Fr. Carlos Mesters:
"The Bible in the New
Evangelization"

**Yo hago nuevas todas las cosas
Je fais toutes choses nouvelles
I make all things new**



English Edition

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) 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 CBF 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 CBF*

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

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CONTENTS

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- * **The Assembly of the Catholic
Biblical Federation:
A Service of the Word
by Bishop Ablondi** 4
- * **The Final Statement of the
IV Plenary Assembly** 7
- * **The Keynote Address
of the President** 19
- * **The Coordinators
of the Federation** 24
- * **The New Executive Committee
and Administrative Board
of the Federation** 24
- * **The Bible and the
New Evangelization
by Carlos Mesters, O. Carm** 25
- * **The Message of Pope Paul II
to the Assembly** 40

For information
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subscription renewal
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Bulletin Dei Verbum,
see page 2.

Editorial

Vienna, Malta, Bangalore, Bogotá ... four cities which hosted Plenary Assemblies of the Federation. Every six years the delegates of the member organizations of our Federation meet to discuss the past and to find common orientation for the future. The fire of the last Assembly has hardly burned out.

After reading the various reports, one can say without boasting that the Assembly of Bogotá has been successful in a very special way. This success derives not only from the two weeks of the delegates' reflection in the Colombian capital, but also from the hard work of preparation throughout the last two years.

Does this mean that there has been a totally successful outcome? No, because an essential element is still missing: the fruits to come. Now the work begins. Now the time has come for the members of the Federation to put life into the guidelines which were set up during the Assembly and which are summed up in the Final Statement.

The double issue of the present Bulletin is entirely devoted to the Assembly of Bogotá. After a quick overview of the Assembly by Bishop Ablondi (pages 4-6), you will find the Final Statement, a beacon of the encounter in Bogotá (pages 7-18). By all means this Final Statement should not become bits of pious wishes filling the corners of our memories or of our archives. The members of the Federation should be concerned with distributing this statement, studying it, commenting and explaining it, and searching for practical applications to extend it, or more succinctly: making it live. In spite of its name, this Final Statement does not mark an end, but rather a point of departure, an overture.

Within the limited frame of the Bulletin, it is not possible to publish the entire collection of the documents of the Assembly. We will restrict ourselves to the major papers and to the report of the general secretary. In this issue you will find the inaugural address of the President (pages 19-23) as well as the paper of Fr. Carlos Mesters (pages 25-39); the following issue will contain the paper of Bishop Onaiyekan and the report of the general secretary. The preparations for combining all the documents of the Assembly in book form are now under way.

A new epoch begins for the Federation. Let's move on!

Marc Sevin

The Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation: A Service of the Word

Bishop Alberto Ablondi

After ten days' work, on the afternoon of the 6th of July 1990, the moderator of the day invited me, as President of the Catholic Biblical Federation (formerly the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate), to declare "officially closed" the Fourth Plenary Assembly. I preferred to give this solemn moment a different focus: "An Assembly such as this cannot be declared 'closed,'" I said, "because the closure is like the earth which covers over the seed so that it begins new life."

The Assembly in fact has revealed such hopes for a fruitful future in the service of the Word of God, in the Church, for the world.

A great hope, certainly, but one solidly based on clearly grace-filled moments of the Lord and the sense of responsibility of the participants. The Assembly must be understood and evaluated from these perspectives:

- the 140 representatives of the Full Members (Episcopal Conferences) and the Associate Members,
- the 70 nations represented (from Taiwan to Colombia, from Ireland to Kenya);
- the path taken by the Assembly which meets every six years in different continents - Vienna, Malta, Bangalore and now Bogotá;
- the long letter signed by the Pope himself with its careful recallings of history, with its timely pastoral orientations, and with an appreciation for the achievements of the Federation;
- the constructive and authoritative messages from Archbishop Edward Cassidy, President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity (the body from which the Federation was born and to which it now relates), from Cardinal Willebrands, and from

the previous presidents of the Federation, Cardinal Koenig and Zoungrana;

- the participation of the Latin American Church through the visit of the Archbishop of Bogotá, Cardinal Mario Revollo Bravo; and the informal address by the President of CELAM (Latin American Bishops' Conference), Bishop Dario Castrillo-Hoyos; the letter from Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, President of the Bishops' Conference of Colombia;

- the presence at various times, enriched with a pointed intervention emphasizing the openness to collaboration, of the General Secretary of the United Bible Societies, Rev. Dr. Cirilo Rigos.

All these elements contributed to putting into perspective the importance of the theme of the Assembly, "The Bible in the New Evangelization," in light of the 25th anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum.

It was a real theme, compelling and not improvised. Through prayer and continental meetings, the members of the Federation had been preparing the work of the Assembly for months.

Thus, it could deal with the theme in a clear and gradual application of theological and human values to the concrete pastoral situation.

The basic premises were given in the opening address of the President with both historical and forward-looking criteria, by the speech of the Nigerian Bishop John Onaiyekan on the "actuality" of Dei Verbum, and by the biblical-methodological deepening of Father Carlos Mesters.

The human context of our times was the second phase and was entrusted to a presentation by experts; it was a necessary path for understanding

the way of the Church's evangelizing presence and finally the role of the Bible in the New Evangelization.

The serious involvement of all participants was witnessed by punctuality, preparation and attention. One of the participants said to me, "We all feel ourselves called to something important."

But also the organizational criteria made a contribution; I would say a determining one.

In fact, every stage of the theme came to be discussed first in the characteristic environment of a certain homogeneity, such as subregional groups (for example in Europe, those of Latin-speaking, Northern and Slavic countries).

These were followed by meetings of confrontation and integration in regional, i.e., continental groups. These were reported for open debate to the whole Assembly.

Meanwhile the committee responsible for producing the Final Statement gathered and put the emerging elements into order. This was one of the many organizational components which facilitated the work; and the Assembly paid tribute to the General Secretary of the Federation, Father Ludger Feldkämper with the largest and the most merited applause.

Prayer, as was said above, supplemented the meetings with full Eucharistic celebrations, shared by the various continental groups, with moments of meditation and dialogue in subregional groups, and with biblical reflections on passages, which had been communicated in advance, to bring the voice of the whole Federation to the Assembly.

Besides reflecting on the theme, the Assembly dealt with organizational details, such as the restructuring of its Constitution, and the election of the new Executive Committee. This committee was chosen with universal representation and with careful attention to the most delicate areas in the life of the Church and of the world. In addition to the members by right (or *ex officio*), the following countries are represented in the Executive Committee: Cameroon, Yugoslavia, Hong Kong, Philippines, Brazil and Mexico.

An indication of the substantial and numerical development within the Federation was provided

in that the continents were concerned with the urgent need for establishing continental and sub-continental Executive Committees, with the goal of articulating the increasing needs of the various areas and deepening the value of inculturation.

But the "Final Statement," amended first through additional interventions and written corrections, and then discussed in Assembly paragraph by paragraph, is a true synthesis of all the work; it is the Federation's offering to the Church; it is a research document for evaluating the Word of God in the New Evangelization and for the needs of humanity today.

To understand its importance, let us look at a synthesis of the themes that are developed.

The *first section* specifies the call to the New Evangelization with the constant newness of the Word of God and the newness of the world. In this connection, the appeals of John Paul II and his predecessors are documented, also the Latin American ambience, which the Assembly welcomed, is a voice present with its values and its torments

In the *second section* the "significance" of the New Evangelization is inspired by the meeting on the road to Emmaus, because the permanent force of the Resurrection seeks a reactivated capacity to the fears, to wastes, to fatalism and to power.

The *third section* logically tackles the human context of this New Evangelization: the context of cultural pluralism, that of the socio-politico-economic sphere and ecological imbalances.

The contexts of diverse religions are recalled for dialogue, as are the diverse and divided Christian groups for ecumenism; those people who are now marginalized by totalitarianism and those who are reawakening out of such marginalizations are not forgotten.

Finally, emphasis is placed on the context of the Christian communities with their deep and urgent needs for biblical animation.

The *fourth section*, after an ecclesial and human perspective, confronts the new "method" of reading the Bible. A newness, which, without renouncing the richness of tradition, calls us to listen to the Word of God, vis-a-vis the Church and with respect to the situation and to human suffering.

The "Exodus," with the poverty which it denounced and the riches which accompanied it, ought to be an inspiration.

The "practical conclusions" are contained in the *fifth section* and are articulated in "recommendations to the whole Church" (an echo of Dei Verbum for the priority of the Word of God); in "recommendations to the Federation" for regional and subregional development; and "recommendations to organizations and members of the Federation." Various aspects are underlined: the need for adequate formation of a ministry of the Word, with particular attention to women in biblical translation; the use of the Bible as prayer; reading in small groups; and attention to the liturgical dimension of the Word of God.

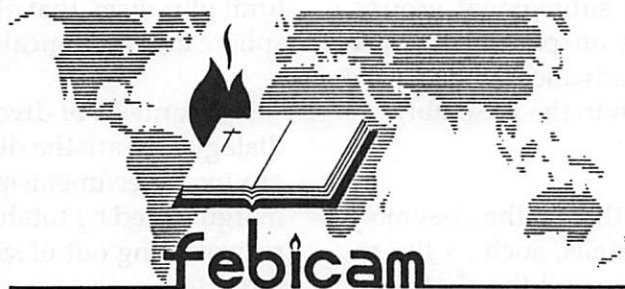
There is a recurring theme which returns many times - as an evaluation of experience always most

diffuse - the celebration of a Bible Sunday, Bible week or Bible year.

These pastoral orientations continue with appeals for the effectiveness of the Word of God, challenged by fundamentalism, by sects, by attacks from the socio-politico-economic sphere, by formation of youth, and by the role of women.

The conclusion of the document is a word of hope which opens up as a living reality the work of the Assembly, "We have the assurance of the presence of the Risen Christ: this is the heart of our faith. We have the gift of his Spirit, who is hovering over the face of our earth, causing the emergence of a new world order. We can, therefore, commit ourselves to this New Evangelization with confidence because we are sure of the truth of his words, 'Behold I make all things new.'"

**Yo hago nuevas todas las cosas
Je fais toutes choses nouvelles
I make all things new**



**IV Asamblea Plenaria
Bogotá - Colombia
Junio 27- Julio 6-1990**

FINAL STATEMENT

of the IV PLENARY ASSEMBLY

of the CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION

Bogotá, Colombia, June 27 to July 6, 1990

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation (formerly the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate) took place in Bogotá, Colombia, from June 27 to July 6, 1990. About 140 delegates and invited observers from 70 countries representing the five continents took part in the Assembly. It was providential that the Plenary Assembly coincided with the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of "Dei Verbum," the Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation.

1.2 The theme of the Assembly was "The Bible and the New Evangelization." The key biblical text adopted for the Assembly was "Behold, I make all things new" (Isa 43,19; Rev 21,5).

2. PART ONE: THE CALL FOR A NEW EVANGELIZATION

2.1 The theme "The Bible and the New Evangelization" was chosen for the Assembly in line with the general call of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, for a New Evangelization in the whole world as we move into the third millennium. "Reflection on the Bible face to face with the New Evangelization acquires a greater importance for a new proclamation of the Word of God, the Good News of salvation" (John Paul II to the IV PA). The Assembly was deeply aware of the great changes and newness around us, in the world at large and in the Church of God.

2.2 The newness in the world around us is manifested in many ways and has deep significance:

a) the incredible possibilities of science and technology in controlling nature, including the very makeup of the human person;

b) automation, new media, and the computer revolution are all leading to an internationalization of the processes of production, modifying labour relations and provoking a new organization of our economic and social systems;

c) the danger of total destruction - atomic and ecological - still hangs over humanity raising a new awareness of the necessity of defending life and our planet;

d) a rediscovery of ancient cultures and peoples and the emergence of the so-called "third world" into a community of nations calling for new relationships between peoples;

e) the growing awareness of the dignity of women and their right to equality with men in all sectors of life;

f) the increasing phenomenon of fundamentalism in all religions with the danger this poses for peaceful co-existence;

g) the sudden political upheavals of Eastern Europe breaking down the old alignments of forces in the world, with the great uncertainties about the future course of events.

All these are causing the emergence of a totally new world order which is beyond our expectations.

2.3 The Church of God finds herself in the midst of this newness. If the primary task of the Church is evangelization, she is challenged to a New Evangelization in response to the newness around her. The call for the New Evangelization is therefore not only timely but necessary. In fact the present call for a New Evangelization can be traced back to the new Pentecost which was Vatican II in the Church of our days, as Pope John XXIII prophetically envisaged when he called the council. Already in 1975, Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* spoke of a new era of evangelization.

2.4 There is in fact a basic newness about evangelization itself. This consists in the fact that it is the saving work of the Lord Jesus himself. In him God has made all things new. Therefore, Christian evangelization is always new. Ours is not the first nor will it be the last project of a New Evangelization. Indeed, every generation must discover anew the newness of the Gospel message. The Bible remains a constant point of reference. The Word of the Lord lasts forever (Isa 40,8). The Scriptures cause to resound in the words of prophets and apostles the voice of the Holy Spirit (DV 21).

3. The New Evangelization in the Latin American Context

3.1 As our Plenary Assembly meets in Latin America to reflect on the New Evangelization, we join the Latin American Church in celebrating and thanking God for its five hundred years of evangelization. We share their concern for a New Evangelization in this important moment of their history.

3.2 The first evangelization, in the fifteenth century, left a deep imprint on this continent. However it also had its shady sides. Many self-sacrificing and zealous missionaries, true heralds of the Gospel, came to offer a generous testimony to the love of Christ and brought the gift of faith to this land. This testimony was often compromised by the political and economic interests of those, who also claimed to be Christians, through their unjust exploitation of the riches of this land, as well as through their lack of respect for the human rights of the people who lived here for centuries.

4. The New Evangelization and the Biblical Apostolate

4.1 The New Evangelization is a preoccupation of the whole Church: from the head to the members, at both universal and local levels, with varying emphases in different parts of the Church. The task belongs to the whole Church and its implementation must touch every aspect of the life of the Church: kerygmatic proclamation, catechesis, liturgical celebration, service to the world, theological reflection, pastoral practice and institutional structures.

4.2 The biblical apostolate is an important aspect of the New Evangelization. "All the preaching of the Church, like the Christian religion itself, must be nourished and directed by the Holy Scriptures" (DV 21).

4.3 It is in this context that the Catholic Biblical Federation must locate its own role in the New Evangelization. The specific concern of the Federation is to make sure that the Bible takes its rightful place in this project of the universal Church, at different levels and in different regions, to identify how the Bible can best be used to promote it, and what the Federation can do to act to promote and support such endeavours. Thus the journey of the Federation from Vienna through Malta and Bangalore to Bogotá is a gradual build-up under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of an organized biblical-pastoral response to the challenges of the New Evangelization.

5.**PART TWO:
WHAT WE UNDERSTAND
BY THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

5.1 Faith tells us that God is present in life, in nature and in history (Pss 8,1-10; 19,2-7), since everything was created in Christ and for Christ (Col 1,15-16). The Spirit of God is at work in all of humanity (Wis 8,1), leading it towards Christ through different paths and gifts (cf. John 14,2). Therefore, we have to listen to the living Word that God speaks to us in order to be able to proclaim it (DV 1).

5.2 Nevertheless, we are like the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24,13-35). We sometimes still do not perceive the presence of Christ, who walks with us (Luke 24,16). Looking at the life and history of our peoples, we are not always able to recognize within them the presence of Christ the way Paul did with regards to the history of his people, when he said: "The rock was Christ!" (1 Cor 10,3).

5.3 Faced with new challenges, we need new methods. We need an evangelization that is "new in its ardour, new in its method, new in its expressions." (John Paul II, Speech to 19th Plenary Assembly of CELAM, Haiti, 9th March, 1983).

5.4 We, the disciples, in order to be able to evangelize, must allow ourselves to be evangelized, that is:

- to feel the challenge and the crisis of the newness (Isa 43,18-19);
- to go through darkness and the experience of not knowing (Lam 3,2,6; Isa 42,18-20);
- to experience the temptation of following other paths (Matt 4,1-11; Mark 8,33; Heb 4,15);

in order to experience, through radical obedience (Heb 5,8; Phil 2,8), in a new and gratuitous way, the friendly face of God who makes life arise from death (Phil 3, 10-11; Eph 1,18-23) and to experience that Jesus is the Lord (Acts 2,31; Phil 2,11).

5.5 This new experience of God will give us new eyes to understand what God realized in the past and, with the light of the past, discern the signs of the Reign of God which is coming about in the life and in the history of our peoples.

5.6 In this way, the Spirit of Jesus will make us capable of understanding the Word that he addresses to us (John 14,26; 16,13). Guided and strengthened by the Spirit, we will be witnesses, even to the ends of the earth. Then we shall be able to recognize, like Peter, the Resurrection of Jesus present in events (Acts 2,14-36; 3,11-26); to open the Scriptures, like Philip, (Acts 8, 26-40); to discern, like Paul, the presence of the God of Abraham in the cultures of peoples (Acts 17,22-31); to denounce, like Stephen and Paul, what is wrong in religions and cultures (Acts 7,1-54; 14,11-18); to embrace, like the community of Antioch, those who are not Christians (Acts 11,19-26); to denounce, like Paul before Peter, what is wrong in the Church itself (Gal 2,14); to perceive, like Paul, that God continues to lead all peoples to Christ (cf. Eph 1,9-10) so that all might have life, and have it to the full (John 10,10), and that God might be all in all (1 Cor 15,28).

5.7 From this new experience of God in Jesus Christ, a new ardour is born which produces courage and leads us to say: "We cannot keep quiet! We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 4,19-20). This new ardour will become in us a force and a light that will help us be the leaven of a new humanity (Matt 13,33), the guarantee of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa 65,17). This ardour forces us to announce the Good News of the Reign of God in the same way as Jesus did on the road to Emmaus.

5.8 The two disciples were in a situation of death in which we recognize what many of our peoples are experiencing: they are afraid (John 20,19) and flee from Jerusalem (Luke 24,13); they are no longer able to believe in the small signs of hope, since they refuse to believe in the women (Luke 24,22-23); they await a glorious messiah and, thus, are not able to perceive the glory of God in the death of Jesus (Luke 24,21). "We were hoping he would be the one who would liberate Israel, but...!"

5.9 Jesus arrives as a companion and friend, who walks with them. He listens and dialogues: "What are you discussing?" (Luke 24,17). Concerned about the situation of the two disciples, Jesus wishes to help them transform the cross, a sign of death, into a sign of life and hope.

5.10 This attitude of dialogue, of listening and of embracing is the first step towards the New Evangelization. It means to live thirty years in a humble and unpretentious manner in Nazareth in order to learn what to announce during the three years of public life.

5.11 The second step is to help the disciples read events with new eyes. Jesus goes through the Scriptures, through the past, through tradition. He goes through what they already knew. The Scriptures, re-read in the light of the Resurrection, clarifies the situation in which the disciples found themselves.

5.12 The pedagogy of Jesus is wise. The NEW which he announces is not totally new. It is an ancient newness that is found in the history and in the hope of the people. Jesus draws the veil away from it: "How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24,25-26). Reading the Scriptures in this way, Jesus breaks the erroneous vision of the dominant ideology and prepares the disciples to discover the presence of God.

5.13 In this way Jesus places the event, the cross, within the broader perspective of God's design and, thus, the disciples discover that they are not lost. The history of the world continues in the hands of God.

5.14 Jesus uses the Scriptures, starting from the concrete problem of the disciples, and discovers in the situation new criteria for listening to the texts. With the help of the Scriptures Jesus gives light to the situation and opens a horizon of hope. At the same time he helps them perceive the mistakes and calls for conversion.

5.15 But the Scriptures by themselves do not necessarily open our eyes, do not make us see. They barely make our hearts burn inside (Luke 24,32). What opens our eyes and makes us perceive the living presence of the resurrected Christ is the concrete gesture of sharing (Luke 24,31). The sign of sharing brings about the community, in which Christians have all in common (Acts 2,44-45; 4,32-35). The highest expression of this communion is the Eucharist which reveals to us the sacramental dimension of the Word of God. This is the third step of the New Evangelization which opens our eyes and makes us discover the presence of the Good News of the Resurrection in our life.

5.16 It is now that the newness of the Resurrection gives light to the life of the two disciples. If Jesus is alive, then there is with him a power stronger than the power that killed him. Here is the root of freedom and courage. Now they themselves are risen and are reborn. The cross, a sign of death, becomes a sign of life and hope.

5.17 The result of the New Evangelization: instead of fear, courage is reborn; instead of fleeing, they return to Jerusalem; instead of dispersion, they gather in community; instead of the fatalism that accepts what happens, a critical conscience that reacts before the power that kills; instead of unbelief and desperation, faith and hope. It is the resurrection on the road. It is the new and victorious life that thus enters into history (Eph 1,18-20). It is this conversion which is transforming reality, creating new ways of human living together.

6. PART THREE: HOW DOES THE NEW EVANGELIZATION BECOME GOOD NEWS

The variety of contexts in which we live today requires that our proclamation of the Word should affect the lives of the people and allow it to become the Good News of salvation for all. We shall now examine these contexts one by one:

6.1 The Context of Cultural Pluralism

The Second Vatican Council has described the Church as a reality in the world (GS1). This demands from her that her identity based in Christ be constantly rediscovered in her relationship with the peoples and cultures. The Church has seriously to encounter the cultures of the world. The Word that she has to proclaim becomes effective only in as far as it becomes significant for these cultures. The Pentecost event brought the Gospel into contact with different cultures and languages (Acts 2). Throughout the entire history of the Church, continuous efforts at inculturation have been made. The Word became present in the world through the action of the Spirit, just as it happened at the incarnation of the Word in the womb of Mary. This is an ongoing process closely linked to the ministry of the Word. Therefore inculturation of the Gospel message becomes a necessary condition for any meaningful ministry of the Word.

This will have serious consequences both for the Word and for the world. It will unfold the riches of the Gospel. It will question the ambiguities present in human cultures. It will give greater relevance to the Word for the people. It will demand that the Church review her methods of proclamation, and evolve a new hermeneutic (making the exegesis of the text relevant to the context) in the interpretation of the Word. The Word will thus become a reality in continuous communication with the world. This communication will build up the Reign of God in which the riches of all nations will be brought to the glory of God (Rev 21,24,26).

6.2 The Context of the Socio-political and Economic Situation

The Bible must become a book for the world because we cannot understand the Bible without the human reality in need of salvation, nor can we understand the human reality without the Bible. Looking at the world of today we realize that it is a world which suffers from injustice, exploitation and inequality. Some expressions of this are:

- the widening economic gap between north and south, rich and poor
- the exploitation of the resources of the so-called "third world"
- the injustices of patriarchal and sexist systems
- the violation of human rights
- racial discrimination and national conflicts
- the evils of social systems that use political power to oppress the people and that produce victims.

To all this we can also add the changes brought about by secularization, materialism and technology.

We require a new vision of faith where all human beings can experience their brotherhood and sisterhood with the one God, our Father and Mother (Hos 11,1-9; Isa 49,15). Our biblical apostolate should question this deformed world. The light of the Gospel should enable us to discover and destroy the idols we have made and dispel the shadows that prevent human beings from walking in the light of God (Rev 21,24).

6.3 The Context of Today's Ecological Imbalances

The earth is a common heritage which God has given to the whole human family (Lev 25,23). But modern colonialism, motivated by economic interests, strengthened by political power, scientific and technical progress has exploited the resources of the earth in such a way that today we are faced with the danger of serious ecological imbalance. The use of creation was not so much guided by human need as by human greed. There is a growing awareness in many people, especially the young and women, of the need to care for creation. This consciousness, however, has only recently entered into the awareness of the Christian communities.

Therefore we need a critical re-reading of Genesis 1-11 and other biblical texts in order to rediscover the relationship between humanity and nature; we need to strengthen the other biblical traditions which regard human beings not only as the center and crown of creation, but also as part of it (Job 38-39; Ps 104; Prov 8,22-31 etc); we need to discover ways and means of forming Christians for the biblical-pastoral ministry in view of these ecological questions.

6.4 The Context of Multi-religious Situations

Christianity in some regions today finds itself in the same situation as ancient Israel in its exile. The Christian communities are living in the midst of other religious groups. Some of these religious groups are reviving their religious traditions and at times they become aggressively fundamentalist. Therefore, our ministry of the Word has to take into account the religious reality of the people around us. We should pass from an apologetical approach to an approach of dialogue based on Vatican II. In some cases, especially with Islam, this may not be easy. However, it is always necessary to maintain our Christian openness without renouncing our right to proclaim the Gospel and to criticize tendencies in religions to violate human rights and human values.

Our openness to these religions should enable us to discover our own common basis as believers in the same God, journeying towards the same destiny. Thus we shall build up a society united in hope even if, at times, we cannot have one community of faith with people of other religions. In this way, the Bible will become the book of hope for all peoples. This is the Good News that we can proclaim to them. In order to do this, the Church has to become aware of the fact that she has to function as leaven in the midst of the world.

6.5 The Context of People Emerging from Totalitarian Systems

The recent events of Eastern Europe and the return to democracy in some Latin American countries should be interpreted as part of the history of salvation. We may compare it to the return of ancient Israel from the exile. The life of the people of God after the exile was not the same as it was before. Any effort that ancient Israel made to restore the pre-exilic state met with the disapproval of God.

The biblical-pastoral ministry therefore should enable us to proclaim the Word in such a way that a new society, and a new Church, which are able to maintain the values of the exile can be built, as it enjoys the benefits of freedom.

6.6 The Context of the New Awakening of Marginalized Groups

Our world today experiences more than ever the cries and groans of groups that have been marginalized for ethnic, linguistic, economic, social, sexist or political reasons. While some of these groups are minorities, they form great majorities in some nations.

The Bible is one of the few books within humanity which has stood for the oppressed and the marginalized. As ministers of the Word we are called to continue the mission of liberation. We see that these marginalized groups, who have been evangelized, are now evangelizing. Our biblical ministry, therefore, should enable Christian communities to listen to the Gospel that these oppressed peoples preach to us and to respond to the exigencies of the Word through constructive action towards building a society of justice and freedom for all.

6.7 The Context of Ecumenism

The spirit of ecumenism is a universal phenomenon today. The various Christian Churches and ecclesial communities work together in many areas of Gospel witness and service to the world.

The Bible should strengthen this common commitment. Our efforts at an ecumenical reading of the Bible should aim at building up communities that are based on Christian love and communion.

6.8 The Context of Christian Communities

The Church, which is entrusted with the proclamation of the Gospel, continually needs to renew her structures and methods of evangelization. The Bible must become more and more the book of the Christian community. The laity in a special way must have a greater access to it. The whole ministry of the Church should be understood as a ministry of the Word (Rom 15,16; PO 2; LG 21; GS 38).

This would require a change from a ritualistic and legalistic understanding of the ministry of the Church to a more prophetic and proclamatory approach.

7.

PART FOUR: A NEW WAY OF READING THE BIBLE

All the different ways of reading the Bible are not equally apt, although they all have been adapted fruitfully in the past. The New Evangelization to which we are committing ourselves demands from us new ways of reading and proclaiming the Word, in continuity with the sound tradition of the Church. This should enable us to discover God's plan today in our midst and to respond to it adequately and relevantly.

7.1 We should start with the reality in which we actually find ourselves today, and we should allow the Word of God to throw light on this reality. This would entail on our part, attentive listening to the God who speaks through the Scriptures, through his Church, and through the human situation. In this process the joys and sorrows of the world will have to become the joys and sorrows of the disciples of the Lord (GS 1). Such a reading will reveal to us the true face of God, not the God of abstract philosophy, who remains unmoved by the events of the world, but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose face in Christ and through the coming of the Reign of God is turned in loving compassion and concern for all those who suffer in every age and are struggling to find meaning in their lives.

7.2 We should read the Bible in a prayerful setting. The Bible is the Word of love, addressed by a God of love. It is not primarily a description of himself but a communication of himself to his people. In order to understand this Word, it is necessary to create an attitude of openness in love to this God. Only then can we truly enter into the message that is communicated. This has to take place both in private reading and community reading, especially in liturgical celebrations. In the liturgy this Word is translated into signs that relate to life. Even ritual actions become proclamation. The saving presence of Christ in the liturgy is thus proclaimed both under the sign of Word and Sacrament.

7.3 Our reading of the Bible should enable people to discover the true content. All efforts to interpret the Bible in order to justify political and ideological positions should be considered as a betrayal of the message. It should provoke the people of God to conversion and commitment in the service of the brothers and sisters. When it is read in the community of believers who are open to God, it can give us strength to be faithful to our vocation of service in the world.

7.4 We should be careful to avoid the danger of fundamentalism in the reading and interpretation of the Word of God. This can be achieved by taking into account the following elements in our reading of the Bible:

1. The Bible is a book that deals with our relationship with God in the context of a believing community and not a book that gives the scientific explanation of this world.

2. We have a gradual unfolding of the pedagogy of God in the Bible. Therefore in interpreting texts the total content and the global dynamism of God's plan which culminates in Christ must be taken into account.

3. Since the Bible uses a variety of literary devices in the interpretation of the Bible, care should be taken to explain them using a proper methodology.

4. Finally it is not possible to read the Bible and understand its message independently of the community and historical context in which it lives.

7.5 Our way of reading the Bible should give a new thrust to our biblical apostolate:

1. *a thrust from the book to the Word:* Our duty is not above all to multiply and distribute Bibles, which is of course important. It is rather to make the Word of God alive in the hearts of all our brothers and sisters in the world.

2. *a thrust from the institutional structure to a creative presence:* Structures and organization remain necessary, but even more, imagination, creativity and above all a contagious faith in the liberating power of the Word of God are important.

3. *a thrust from clergy to laity:* We must be convinced that every Christian is responsible for spreading the Good News and that lay men and women are in a privileged situation to reach every person of this world in need of salvation.

4. *a thrust from a private reading to a transforming presence in the world:* Of course, personal piety will never become obsolete. But the Spirit of God which inspires the Scriptures tends to make all things new. It is a leaven that aims to transform societies, a fire that purifies us from our sins, a love that fills the gap between rich and poor, a light that gives sense to our lives and guides us in the only true way to happiness.

5. *a thrust from the Church to the Reign of God:* The Church, like Jesus, is a servant. The spouse of Christ is not her own goal. Her fulfilment is made up of humble service to the world as she gathers humanity in a new community of love around Christ.

8. PART FIVE: PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Preamble

In order to make sure that the Bible is not only possessed and read but also believed and lived, we make the following recommendations:

8.1 Recommendations to the Whole Church

8.1.1 We appeal to Bishops and Bishops' Conferences to ensure that the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum is implemented in the various dioceses and regions through the establishment of biblical-pastoral centers or institutes.

8.1.2 We appeal to Bishops and Bishops' Conferences to give the biblical apostolate the priority it deserves in their pastoral endeavours and to encourage it through the formulation of a biblical-pastoral plan and through the conscientization of the faithful through pastoral letters on the biblical apostolate or other appropriate means such as the celebration of Bible Sundays, weeks, months or even a Bible year, especially in those areas where this is not yet a practice.

8.1.3 We appeal to Bishops and Bishops' Conferences to dedicate the next Synod of the Bishops to "biblical-pastoral ministry" so that the relative neglect of the Conciliar Document "Dei Verbum" may be set right.

8.2 Recommendations to the Catholic Biblical Federation

8.2.1 We appreciate the present structuring of the Federation on the regional and subregional levels, and we appeal to the Federation to ensure that these structures are effective and function to promote the biblical apostolate.

8.2.2 Regional and subregional structures should be supported and developed.

8.2.3 There should be closer contact, greater collaboration, and mutual assistance through the sharing of information, resources and material within the Federation.

8.3 Recommendations to the Members

8.3.1 *Material for the biblical-pastoral ministry*

We appeal to members of the Federation to make available:

- Bibles in various languages and for various categories at affordable prices, in collaboration with the United Bible Societies and other such organizations;
- special pastoral editions of the Bible and commentaries;
- biblical-pastoral material, courses, etc
- audio-visual material, especially for the illiterate

8.3.2 *Structures for biblical-pastoral work*

We recommend the establishment of appropriate structures, such as biblical institutes, biblical centers, biblical commissions, for the formation, promotion and coordination of biblical-pastoral work.

8.3.3 *Formation of personnel*

8.3.3.1 Conscious that the biblical apostolate cannot be effectively carried out without well-trained agents, we strongly recommend the solid formation of animators, facilitators and coordinators for the biblical apostolate at all levels.

8.3.3.2 Lay people should be given a privileged place in this formation, given the fact that they have a particular role in the New Evangelization. This formation should place great emphasis on both the content and the process.

8.3.3.3 The formation and spiritual life of the clergy and the religious should be based on the Bible, not only on the intellectual level, but especially on the experiential level, considering their role in the biblical-pastoral ministry and proclamation of the Gospel.

8.3.3.4 The use of the Bible as a source of personal prayer and spiritual nourishment through Bible sharing and prayer groups should be an integral part of the formation in seminaries and formation houses of religious.

8.3.3.5 We appeal to biblical scholars and exegetes to make their knowledge more available for the pastoral work.

8.3.4 *The pastoral use of the Bible*

We recommend that members of the Federation develop and strengthen the use of the Bible in the life of the Church.

8.3.4.1 Through contextual reading in groups in order to interpret the texts with a relevance to the life of the people, new methods are to be developed so as to make this Bible reading more effective.

8.3.4.2 A privileged place for reading and interpretation of the Bible is the small Christian communities. It is necessary to train leaders who can animate such communities. In a multi-religious context, we should encourage the formation of basic human communities in which the members will be able to reflect on human issues and values in the light of the Bible and other scriptures.

8.3.4.3 The whole liturgical celebration should become a proclamation of the Word. For this we recommend the following:

- selection of texts which take into account the life situation. The books of the Hebrew Bible, especially the prophetic and wisdom literature, should not be neglected. The order of Sunday readings should be revised in this sense;
- there should be no celebration without a homily or some other method of interpretation, because the Word can be found in the life of the people only by interpreting it;
- the songs in the liturgy should have greater biblical foundations;
- the liturgical language should reflect the richness of the biblical images of God, humanity and creation.

In order to achieve these aims, we again stress the importance of Bible Sundays, Bible weeks, months or years in the life of the parishes and dioceses.

8.3.4.4 Biblical retreats for clergy, religious and lay people should be organized. For this it will be useful to prepare retreat kits which can be adapted to various regions.

8.3.4.5 The Christian family life should have its center of unity and strength in the Word of God. For this it is necessary to make family prayer an occasion for reading and reflecting on the Word of God. The various events of family life should be interpreted in the light of the Bible. In order to achieve this it is necessary to form training centers for leaders of families in parishes.

8.3.4.6 The Christian communities - parishes, dioceses and local Churches - should listen to the Word of God in order to be evangelized themselves. Metanoia according to the biblical message should build up a Church that is more oriented to its lay people, and less clerical in its mentality.

8.3.4.7 Popular devotions should be conducted in such a way that, through them, the Word of God enters into the prayers and lives of the people.

8.3.5 *Biblical-pastoral work as an answer to the challenges of today's life*

8.3.5.1 Inculturation

The proclamation of the Word of the Bible should take into account the cultural diversity of people. It should interpret them prophetically in the light of God's Word, denouncing the evils and highlighting values so that it may become clearer that the Word of the Lord fulfils the legitimate aspirations of men and women.

8.3.5.2 Dialogue with other scriptures

The Word of the Lord must become Good News for all religions. This can be achieved through a dialogical approach to their scriptures, by reading these scriptures together with the Bible in order to interpret human events and values. It is necessary to prepare manuals that can give guidelines to conduct such sessions of dialogue.

8.3.5.3 Fundamentalism

In order to counteract the dangers of sects and biblical fundamentalism, we recommend the following:

- solid biblical formation which will enable people to interpret the Bible correctly;
- foster openness to a God who speaks in human history and to read the Bible in that context;
- distribute information, e.g., statements that have already been made on this matter.
- Bible based Christian communities should be formed.

Where there is the special challenge of an aggressive fundamentalism in other religions, we recommend an adequate biblical formation which deepens the faith of Christians so that they may remain faithful, even against all pressures.

8.3.5.4 Socio-economical and political challenges

Bible centers should take into account, in a very special way, the presence of the poor in their context and should realize that God's Word today comes to us especially through them. For this, Bible groups for the marginalized people should be organized, and those engaged in animating these groups should become first and foremost, listeners of the Word that emerges from the midst of the poor. They should learn to read the Bible in a spirit of openness to these people.

A prophetic use of the Bible demands that it be read in the context of the socio-political situation. This means that commentaries on the Bible should be prepared which throw light on, and challenge, unjust social structures, violation of human rights, and situations of oppression and exploitation.

It also requires that we join with and encourage all groups and movements that are in favour of justice, peace and solidarity with the oppressed.

We also ask all those who are working in the biblical-pastoral ministry and the whole Church, in collaboration with other Churches and religious groups, to urge governments to announce a biblical shabbat, or Jubilee year, before the year 2000, so that the foreign debts of the poorest nations of the world will be cancelled instead of becoming an eternal debt.

8.3.5.5 Formation of the youth

The youth of today carry within them the promises of tomorrow. The Word of God is active in them. They should, therefore, be trained to listen and respond to God. They are also the evangelizers of today and tomorrow. As such they are capable of evangelizing the adults. Adequate Bible editions and biblical programs which can answer the demands of today's life, will enable them to fulfil this mission. For the same reason the catechesis of the youth should be based on the Bible.

8.3.5.6 The role of women in the Church

The lay people, and especially women, are going to have an important role in the life of the Church. Therefore, we strongly recommend the following:

- the Church and the biblical-pastoral work should assist in all efforts to emancipate women in the

different countries, nations and cultures. Prostitution and any other exploitation of women, such as in tourism, should be denounced in the name of God.

- women should especially be encouraged to become agents of the proclamation of the Word. They should be given the opportunity to take over responsible and leading positions in the biblical apostolate and in the Church. Women should be better represented in national and international commissions and also in the Federation itself.

- the Bible is very rich in texts dealing with women. These often unknown texts should be given back to the people of God, because the women of the Bible show the way to the Reign of God and throw light on the role of women today. Biblical texts that are hostile to women or stand in a very sexist or patriarchal tradition of interpretation should be proclaimed always with a critical comment made on them.

- women have to be involved in Bible translations and in the revisions of these translations as a guarantee that their needs will be heard.

8.3.5.7 The challenge of the ecological problem

The Bible speaks about creation as a gift that God made to the whole human family. In order to respond to the serious ecological imbalances of today, the biblical pastoral-ministry should help to alert Christians to these problems and support all groups which are engaged in these matters.

Ecological problems should be a theme for Bible Sundays, Bible weeks, of retreats, of Bible groups and of every biblical and theological formation in colleges, seminaries and universities. The injustice that has been done, and continues to be done, to creation must be recognized as sinful in the light of the Gospel.

We encourage all Churches to co-operate with peoples and groups who are concerned with these ecological challenges.

8.3.6 All the members of the Federation are invited to ensure that these recommendations are made known and put into practice for the good of the Church and human society.

CONCLUSION

9.

At the first Pentecost all those who received the Spirit became prophets of the Word. They were sent into the world to begin the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. We believe that the same Spirit is in our midst today inviting us to be prophets of the New Evangelization.

We can fulfil this mission by allowing ourselves to be transformed by the Word of the Lord as were the first disciples.

We can fulfil this mission by looking towards the wider horizon of the world, leaving aside our selfish dreams and narrow ecclesial-centered mentality.

We can fulfil this mission by setting aside our fears and self-centered sense of preservation and plunge into the world that is struggling to become the Reign of God.

We have the assurance of the presence of the Risen Christ; this is at the heart of our faith.

We have the gift of his Spirit, who is hovering over the face of our earth, causing the emergence of a new world order.

We can therefore commit ourselves to this New Evangelization with confidence because we are sure of the truth of his words, "BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW."

* * *

THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT

Monsignor Alberto Ablondi

There is one phrase from the prophet Isaiah which should go with us at every moment of our Assembly, helping all of us to focus on the Bible and on the man of today in the New Evangelization: "See, I am doing something anew! Now it springs forth, do you not recognize it?" (Isaiah 43, 19)

(Incidentally, I apologize for the use of the generic term "man," but it expresses best in Italian what I wish to say. I am of course addressing my message to both women and men.)

The Word of God in the New Evangelization

These words from Isaiah translate joy, urgency and responsibility. What is our response? "Bible and the New Evangelization." It is a response which signifies mission; and face to face with this mission our churches draw their inspiration from a visual image, the first of many which will accompany us in this reflection: in this case, the figure of Moses who exclaimed to the Lord (Exodus 33, 12): "You, indeed, Lord are telling me to lead this people on; but you have not let me know whom you will send to help me ... if you do not come with us, do not make us leave" (15). And the Lord replied, "What you have just said, I will carry out, because you have my full confidence because you are my intimate friend" (17). Today these words once more present a fuller reality to us when we think that not only is the Lord present in the midst of his people with his Word, but he has also entrusted to this people the ministry of his Word. "Bible" means therefore to be with the Lord; it is to be sent with his Word.

A. A New Evangelization, that is to say, new humanity

This presence of the Lord gives us courage, like Moses, when we observe today's man at whom the New Evangelization is aimed.

It is man who has a problem, almost a fear, as did

Moses, because he stands open to a new journey. Yes, a new journey, because man is never content with conquests already made; because in man there is always an "after" and there is always an open space. With the statement, "we are making man in our own image," God has given him the continuing capacity to create and be re-created. A newness, furthermore, in which he also involves all creation, the "creation which groans."

Precisely because man does not yet feel one with all creation, he needs to be accompanied in this birth-growth process of "joy, hope and sorrow" in which the Church as "Gaudium et Spes" recognizes him. Furthermore, the Church with the Bible and the world of today both live the dawn of the third millennium with all its new aspects, both positive and negative.

B. The Newness in the Word of God

Out of the convergence and exchange in the dialogue between God in his Word and man, like the reciprocal quest between the Father and the Son, the concept and thus the profound meaning of the term New Evangelization are born. Moreover, the Bible is not new to this adventure of beginnings. It bears "historical" witness to so many "beginnings" of God in its history: from creation to the new vocation of Abram and of Moses; from the roll call of Mary to the disciples at Pentecost; to the Church which, with the Word, is the continuous "beginning anew" of God.

In this line of continuity therefore one can speak of the antiquity and the newness of the "New Evangelization." When the Pope speaks of New Evangelization, therefore, he does not wish to express a distressing fear, a pure deprecation of evil, a slogan of the moment, or a mobilization which can overpower man. The Pope, and we with him, are guided by the perception of a real difficulty of man meeting truth and at the same time "glad tidings," for man's illumination, conversion and consolation. Above all, we are comforted by a stronger faith than ever, for when man "cries out, the Lord hears him" (cf. Exodus 3, 8; Matthew 15, 22).

THE HISTORICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS NEW MEETING

The ancient and current tradition of referring to the Word of God as the "Bread of the Word" signifies that the Bible and the life of the people of God are together one history. Therefore to understand today's meeting, it is interesting to give thought to other meetings in the past. In this way we will be able to enrich, qualify and distinguish our meeting today in the New Evangelization.

a) In the times of the Fathers, the Bible comprised almost the entire area of theology, the pastoral area and catechesis in particular. With the Fathers there is the intimate knowledge of the absolute value of the Bible which inspires pastoral action, all oriented to make the Sacred Book known to all the people of God.

b) In the medieval period the interest shifted rather to content, and thus there was born the theological "Summae," almost biblical theology, with their own forms and categories. In a certain sense, they limited the richness of the Bible. The Bible itself remained only in the hands of the monks.

c) In the modern age, a further shifting has taken place from the Bible and its content to "how" the Bible says what it says. It is the birth of biblical criticism. But, as Claudel stated, "Catholics will respect the Bible while standing far away from it." Meanwhile catechesis is lost in the often dry synthesis of the catechisms, and only a facile synthesis of the sacred history is reserved for the people.

d) The present age received the message of "Dei Verbum," whose twenty-fifth anniversary we want to celebrate during this Assembly. It will be "Dei Verbum," not by itself, but in the context of the whole Vatican II Council, which will inspire the responsibilities of the New Evangelization; and in it lies our task to the apostolate and the biblical-pastoral ministry.

Even before the Council however, the Spirit had already given rise to new responses, when, at the beginning of this century, patristic, liturgical and biblical renewals were being promoted in the Church. It was as if by providential design the Spirit wanted to make a meeting of our Church with that of the Fathers, so that accepting the past could provide a rich contribution to the future, that is, our time of the New Evangelization. In comparison with this past, so rich and full of great expectations, the Words of God to Moses in the first

visual image sustain us, "you have found favor with me and you are my intimate friend."

THE FEDERATION AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

Having realized the "always-new" mission of the Church and the new aspects of man today and, after having considered the historical development of the Bible with its richness of tradition, the focus of the New Evangelization cannot be considered, in this Assembly, on only a general level, comprising the responsibility and competency of the whole Church.

On the contrary, the responsibility and competency of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate must be addressed on the specific level. Guided by the preceding observations, our duty is to establish a deep dialogue between the Bible and man today.

Therefore in this "journey," as described, we are inspired by a second visual image: the scene in the Gospel of John (12, 21) in which some Greeks approach Philip and said, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus."

Maybe this is the basic desire which man today has and towards which our responses in their various forms are to be directed.

A. WITH THE BIBLE TO PRESENT JESUS: THE CHRISTOLOGICAL AND CHRISTOCENTRIC DIMENSION TO THE FEDERATION. (The Greeks want to know Jesus.)

"It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal Himself ... (and so) the invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addressed men as his friends and moved among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company" (DV 2). At the center and heart of the Bible is the living God who communicates and who says, Jesus is the Christ. Therefore, the first pastoral dimension of the Federation's service is christological and christocentric. It should help man to seek Christ in the Scriptures. The Bible is in fact a book which bears witness to the Risen Christ; it is the Word of the Lord. The Church must teach man to listen to it. The task of the Federation is to create a "Church of listeners." In order to achieve this, we should suspend temporarily the prevailing intellectual interest in the Bible and focus on re-establishing an openness of the heart to listen to the Word of God.

Some moments of our Christocentric apostolate will be:

1) Enlightenment: above everything else, importance must be given to the figure of Jesus always the Master confronting the events of today and the history of yesterday. In such a way the Bible will assume a function,

critical of emerging idols; it will compel that which is hidden and obscured to be revealed; it will dismiss every idol. This is an important need in the heart of every man and modern society.

2) Mission: or rather, the delivery of the Word is not only for a culture but also for each individual in the culture. "Go and preach; those who believe will work signs" (Mark 16, 17). This missionary endeavor should not only make Jesus the Master present in the world, but also Jesus the Servant; Jesus the Master with the bread of the Word and Jesus the Servant with the bread of the table. In the Bible as in the Eucharist, there are always two sides: the ritual side of receiving and listening and the social side of sharing.

B. WITH THE BIBLE FOR COMMUNION: THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL AND DIALOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE FEDERATION (After the dialogue with Philip, the Greeks meet Jesus)

The God of Scripture is the God who "gives me the Word" because he speaks with me; but he is also the God who "offers me the Word" because I speak with him in a relationship which brings about communion and dialogue between him and his children. Thus dialogue between man and God also becomes dialogue between men.

Therefore, the Word of God gathers the community together and the Word becomes, at the same time, a rule for the community and its instrument of dialogue. "The Words of God, expressed in human language, have in every way become like human discourse, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took to himself the flesh of human weakness, became human" (DV 13). The Word of God is therefore presented to us in its beautiful human dimension, not only as a vocabulary but also as dialogue. This dialogue is an absolute criterion for the biblical apostolate, as a style and condition of the New Evangelization. The Word, in fact, becomes dialogue by its own force, its own origin and by its own purpose.

This Word, which is born in the intimate dialogue of the Trinity, revealed in Christ's dialogue with man, should become the basis for establishing a dialogue between God and his people. It should provoke an ecclesial dialogue within the people of God between people and ministers; it should bring about dialogue between the people of God and brothers and sisters of other faiths. Thus the Word of God should find in Christians some artists and inspirers of this dialogue. For the New Evangelization this opens up many different avenues of dialogue that the Federation should pursue:

1) Dialogue with adults: unfortunately we have a Church in which children and often "infantile" adults

predominate. In them the Word has not grown, nor does it give direction or nourishment to their various callings. For the biblical-pastoral ministry dialogue will be necessary between the Word of God in its strictness, in its constructive force, in its hope, in its various callings and the differing moments of the callings in which man lives.

2) Dialogue within the Church: The different communities which welcome the Word of God in their inculturation do not offer only a human addition to the Word of God. These words realize a "new incarnation" through the power of the Holy Spirit. These fruits of inculturation, and also of incarnation, are the work of the Holy Spirit and should become part of the dialogue among the different elements within the Church, that is among the various parishes, local churches and the churches on different continents and in different cultures. Thus the world and man will be enriched by the Word of God, always anew through the Holy Spirit.

3) Ecumenical dialogue: Man today needs to listen to a voice which creates unity from many divisions, and not to a voice which already adds to the many fractures, even within churches. For this the "Word" has already contributed to the richness of dialogue between separated Christians. In this aspect the Federation has a beautiful relationship with the Biblical Societies. The "Guidelines" are an expression of interconfessional collaboration. By translating and distributing the Bible, they have created the possibility of interconfessional dialogue on the basis of the Word of God. I want to emphasize that this ecumenical dimension for the New Evangelization is even more important than before. Just some days ago, the Holy Father spoke about evangelization, explaining how the evangelization of the first millennium was made in the spirit of a united Church, and how the second millennium brought with this evangelization also the divisions of the Churches around the world. Now the Pope says "When the special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops deals with the theme of the New Evangelization, we must keep that reality in mind. The effort to attain Christian unity has taken shape gradually through the ecumenical movement, and it is a fact that the Second Vatican Council has made it a primary commitment in the programme of the Catholic Church's renewal." I believe that these words of the Pope, addressed to the European bishops on June 5th, are very useful for our Assembly.

4) Even among other religions, dialogue focuses on the intimacy of the Word of God. With it, enriched by the Holy Spirit, the Christian meets his brothers and sisters of other religions, discovering and emphasizing those fragments of the Holy Spirit which are found in the Sacred Books: "The Church rejects nothing of what is true or holy in these religions" (Nostra Aetate 2). In particular a careful and constructive dialogue among the three "children" of Abraham - the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims - must stand at its heart, made urgent by this historical moment.

C. THE BIBLE ALWAYS FRUITFUL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE PNEUMATOLOGICAL OR MISSIONARY DIMENSION OF THE FEDERATION (When the apostles speak to Jesus about the desire of the Greeks, Jesus speaks of "the grain of wheat, which if it does not die, does not produce fruit")

"Dei Verbum" is also enlightening on this level: "the apostles handed on what they themselves had received - whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit" (DV 7).

This horizon of the Spirit which continually and anew incarnates the Word should provide the new "protagonists" of the New Evangelization and the Federation adequate "means" to satisfy the many expectations of man today.

1) The New Protagonists

After examining the purposes, the whole approach can be summarized in one expression: the Federation must contribute to the prophetic reawakening of all the people of God.

a) First of all, the Word of God, through the New Evangelization, must rediscover within the Church the role of the laity, a role based on their baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, which recognizes the just entitlement of the laity with regard to the Word. It is a people of God, who, inspired by the Word to transform the world, should reveal "every deed of the prophets" (cf. Numbers 11, 29) without unfairly favoring the cleric and the sacraments at the expense of the Word of God.

b) Among the laity, women merit particular attention. Why not think of women as particular human places of inculturation? Through their listening and their intuition, the Word is able to assume newer, fuller and more beautiful meanings for the whole world. In this sense Mary is the great inspirer. With this specific contribution, even in the New Evangelization, one can again seek that human unity which God wanted in creation and which Paul underscores in Galatians 3, 28.

c) The New Evangelization cannot forget the most effective protagonists: "the poor." Naturally it will not be limited only to material poverty. There are in fact those who are poor in bread, in culture, in faith and in reading and writing. For those who are poor in bread, it is necessary that the Word of God does not become restricted to the charity of helping; instead with the Word, it is necessary to confront the North-South conflict, the problems associated with the outstanding debts of the poorer countries, the problems of justice, peace and saving creation.

There is in fact another need which should be discovered in the world, that of creation. The "Word" helps in seeing the world not as creation abandoned to the control of man, but as a dimension of man. In the light of the biblical account of creation, the universe in fact should be considered such a preparation for, and a part of, the body of man. This body which everyone shares with present men and which prepares for those to come.

We must, therefore, prepare ourselves to come face to face with a creation full of needs, and truly in need, because of the proliferation of arms, ecological waste, poisons, and the explosive human situation.

2) The Means

We come to a discourse about the means. With what means will the Federation confront these horizons so as to offer itself to the incarnation of the Spirit so that what it does will become "New Evangelization"?

I believe that in this Assembly we should consider the various ways and means by which the Federation is engaged in the apostolate and the biblical-pastoral ministry - with its 20 year tradition. However, I will limit myself to emphasizing some aspects which to me are necessary, in the hope that these points will lead to the development of other methods during this Assembly.

- the formation of "pastoral and biblical apostolate ministries";

- the spreading of the Word of God to people who await it with great need and who do not even possess a Bible;

- the celebration of "Bible Week" to awaken the people of God to the New Evangelization and to make the ecclesial community understand the New Evangelization;

- the "regionalization" of the Federation and at the same time the convergence of the whole Federation towards those central points of the world which will become determinative, such as the Pacific area and China;

- the collaboration with the Biblical Societies to make the New Evangelization more effective and at the same time to offer a witness to unity in the Word of God;

- attention to a prominent use of the means of social communication in spreading the Word of God;

- the connection with all other flourishing biblical initiatives, not only in dioceses, but also in religious communities, in various movements and in different traditions.

D. THE BIBLE FOR THE WORLD ... INVITES THE FEDERATION TO CONSTANTLY LISTEN TO THE MAN OF TODAY

The three dimensions of the Federation indicated till now are only a part of its reality. The Church is in fact also the "world." Therefore, along with the christological, communitarian and missionary dimensions, the Federation, through the New Evangelization, should discover the world and discover in itself the world—a world which is expressing urgent needs invoking the New Evangelization or revealing itself open to the New Evangelization.

Now the visual image that can help us is the figure of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who is reunited with his brothers in their moment of need. Need restores the family in love, which thus cancels out the guilt of the past (Genesis 45). Let us listen, therefore, to these our brothers and sisters of the world. They have such a great need that perhaps they are our future. In fact when Jacob, in such great need, went fearfully to Joseph, God said to him, "Do not fear! I will make of you a great nation" (cf. Genesis 46, 3). On hearing this, I hope to give voice to all mankind, not only to the brothers and sisters of the western world, who are closest to me. The work of six years of the Federation should help me achieve this objective.

Thus our goal as the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate will be to "open the Gospel where the world is knocking"; being careful not to repeat the error of a century ago, when during the epoch of the French Revolution, the idea of liberty and the dignity of man became almost dangerous and undervalued.

Here then stands man at our door, or rather at the door of the Word, which the Lord has given us.

- It is man deceived by Marxism which promised freedom from so many chains - the "freedom from." It is also man deceived by capitalism which promised freedom as happiness in achieving one's end - the "freedom for." Man must now discover the third and real dimension of freedom; that of communion - the "freedom with." Communion means to give one's life for the other; this giving of self carries on to the freedom of the Resurrection. May the Word of God educate him to this true and complete freedom.

- It is man, who, in the midst of many needs, has the greatest need, that of knowing love. In fact in the world, an environment is being created which is not conducive to love. Life is affected by machines, robotization, television and inefficiency. Thus our goal is to present the Bible, above all the Gospel, as the great teacher, not only of love, but also of "knowing love." Never more than at this moment in time, in which man invents unreasonable ideas, is it necessary for man to "take away a heart of stone and give a heart of flesh" (cf. Ezekiel 36, 26).

- It is man who must become adult. It has recently been said that we are born old and should become little children. Jesus first said this, "unless you become like little children." The true adult, according to the Word of God, is therefore the little child, not in the infantile sense, where he does not grow, but in the joy of discovering life in the beauty of free gifts. Well then! the Bible should assist in the growth of the true adult because only the Bible can present valid goals and strengthening values to man today who knows what he does not want but does not succeed in discovering what he really wants.

- Finally, it is man, who instead of "creating," consumes. Let us beware! Against all these needs of the Bible, we find ourselves face to face with man today who "uses" everything with indifference: he "uses" cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, conferences and also the Bible. The Bible must not become a consumer good! It must courageously confront man, making him discover his need to "be creative" with the idea of love. Thus, man today, passive, fed up and dangerous will bring back the purpose of his origin: man made "similar to God," a son "fully conformed to the image of Christ."

May the New Evangelization, and therefore the Church, with the help of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate, be as Joseph, who "threw his arms around the neck of his brothers (the men of today) who had come from afar; they cried together and were successful in talking" (cf. Genesis 45, 14-15).

Biblical-Pastoral Center DEI VERBUM Nemi (Rome)

The next formation course for leaders in the biblical-pastoral ministry is scheduled to be held in English from:

26 Aug. 1991 to 19 Dec. 1991

Registration deadline is 15 February 1991

Applicants for this course should write as soon as possible to:

Missionari Verbiti
Director, DEI VERBUM
Via dei Laghi 52
00040 Nemi (Rome), ITALY
(Tel: 0039-6-936 83 66)

Please communicate this information to others who may be interested in this course.

Regional (R) and Subregional (S) Coordinators of the Catholic Biblical Federation (1990-93)

AFRICA

BICAM (Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar)
Fr. Wynnand Amewowo (R), Nairobi, Kenya

AMERICAS

Latin America

Fr. César Mora Paz (S), Bogotá, Colombia

USA/Canada

Fr. Michael Walsh (S), Washington, D.C., USA

ASIA / OCEANIA

South Asia

Fr. Jacob Theckanath (S), Bangalore, India

Southeast Asia

Sr. Clara Antoni, ijs (S), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Northeast Asia

Ms. Cecilia Chui (S), Hong Kong

Oceania

Fr. Wim Hoekstra (S), Sydney, Australia

EUROPE / MIDDLE EAST

Middle Europe (AMB)

Dr. Norbert Höslinger (S), Klosterneuburg, Austria

Southern Europe

Fr. Santiago Guijarro (S), Madrid, Spain

Rome

Fr. James Swetnam, sj (S), Rome, Italy

Middle East

Msgr. Antonios Naguib (S), El Minia, Egypt

During the Plenary Assembly, the members elected the new Executive Committee for the following six years. Here follows its new composition:

Executive Committee (1990 - 1996)

Ex officio Members:

Msgr. Alberto Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno, President

Fr. Pier Francesco Fumagalli, Representative of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican

Canon Prof. Dr. Bernhard Krautter, Rottenburg

Full Member Representatives:

AFRICA: Cameroon (Bishop Cornelius Esua, Kumbo)

AMERICAS: Mexico (Obispo Mario de Gasparín Gasparín; Querétaro)

ASIA / OCEANIA: Hong Kong (Fr. Dominic Chan Chi Ming, Hong Kong)

EUROPE / MIDDLE EAST: Yugoslavia (P. Marijan Fucak, ofm, Zagreb)

Associate Member Representatives:

EAST ASIAN PASTORAL INSTITUTE: Manila, Philippines (Fr. Geoffrey King sj, Moderator)

ARQUIDIOCESIS BELO HORIZONTE: Brazil (Sr. Rosana Pulga, fsp)

The Administrative Board of the Catholic Biblical Federation also was elected. It corresponds to the legislation of the Federal Republic of Germany where the General Secretariat is located:

Administrative Board (1990 - 1996)

Canon Prof. Dr. Bernhard Krautter, Rottenburg, President

Abbé François Tricard, Catholic Bishops' Conference of France, Paris, Vice-President

Mr. Jos Rijks, Steinbach i. T., Treasurer

Fr. Bernhard Rudolf, svd, St. Augustin

Brother Ferdinand Poswick, osb, Maredsous

THE BIBLE AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

“Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21,5).

Carlos Mesters, O.Carm.

Introduction

On 9th March 1983 Pope John Paul II invited the Catholic Church of Latin America to a New Evangelization in view of the celebration of 500 years of evangelization of the continent in 1992. Later Papal statements have opened this call to the whole Catholic Church, in view of the evangelization of the world for the third millenium.

The insistence on the New Evaneglization is not a simple internal question; rather, it is the internal reflection of the “aggiornamento” (John XXIII), that is to say, of the desire that the Church update itself with the NEWNESS of God, which is apparent in the signs of the times. In realizing this desire, the Bible can offer great help.

In the Bible, the word “evangelization” appears mostly in the period of the exile and in the time of the New Testament. They were the times, as also today, when the necessity of a New Evangelization was felt. This offers us a path for our reflection on the “Bible in the New Evangelization.”

The first part describes how newness challenges us today to a New Evangelization as it challenged the people of God in the time of the Exile. The second part examines how the New Evangelization was articulated in exilic times. The third part provides a brief complement, taken from the New Testament.

PART 1: THE CHALLENGE OF THE NEWNESS OF TODAY AND YESTERDAY

1. The newness of today which challenges us to a New Evangelization.

1.1 Newness on a world-scale

Never before in the whole of human history has so much newness appeared at any one time and on such a large scale, as at the end of this century. A newness which is ambiguous: it brings with it great opportunities and also tremendous risks. It can save life, and kill it. The older

vision of the world, no longer able to interpret this newness, is in crisis and seeks new paths. Some of the aspects of this newness are:

1. a close-to-unlimited possibility in the area of analysis and knowledge: science penetrates the most intimate secrets of cells and the furthest secrets of the universe;
2. the increasing possibility that human beings can change the course of nature itself, to realize things which until recently seemed unimaginable;

- 3 the discoveries in psychology which are modifying the traditional concepts of behaviour and human responsibility;
4. the automation and internationalization in the processes of production and commerce which are modifying the work relationship and provoking a new organization of the economic and social systems;
5. the threat of total destruction which hangs over everything; the menace - atomic and ecological - is bringing forth a new conscience in defense of life;
6. the unforeseen events which have, in the last few weeks, destroyed the apparently solid regimes of Eastern Europe, command the rectification of previous forecasts for the future;
7. the awakening of ancient cultures, of nationalities, and for us, in Latin America, of the Indian and the Negro, questions the actual forms of culture and organization;
8. the awakening and growing organization of the poor in the Third World are modifying the relationships between peoples;
9. the awakening of the woman with her rights, her dignity and equality, as has never been seen before in the whole of human history, which is a dawn of unforeseeable happenings;
10. the awakening of ancient religions, which reveal a missionary vigour much stronger than that of Christianity;
11. the frightening growth of Fundamentalism in nearly all religions which permits the appearance of irrational forces that threaten established systems;
12. the means of communication which has transformed the world into a large village and which influences human behaviour and thought.

Humanity as a whole is taking a new direction. And how are we Christians reacting? How do we read the signs of the times? How do we capture the calls of God and transform them into Good News for the people?

1.2 Aspects of this newness in each continent

This newness has manifested itself in different ways in each continent and has caused specific problems for evangelization, which have not occurred before.

Latin America: A Christian continent. Nearly half the world's Catholics live here. The growing impoverished situation of the majority of the population has mostly been generated by a system which claims to be the defender of Christian civilization. We, Christians, in that we are Christians, are historically responsible for this tremendous injustice. Nevertheless, the poor are reacting. Guided by their experience and practice and by the reading of the Bible, they have rediscovered the liberating dimension of the Gospel and have begun to put the New Evangelization into practice. Theologies of liberation have explained what Christian communities are already living. This new reading of the past and the Bible is provoking many conflicts. How can a liberating reading of the Bible be done?

Africa. The native cultures, abolished and discredited by the colonizers, are awakening and entering into conflict with the expressions of Christianity which have their origin in European cultures. How can the message of the Gospel be made incarnate in the new cultures of the people?

Asia. The most ancient religions of the world are reawakening. How is it possible to be ecumenical with those religions which do not venerate the God of Abraham? At the beginning of Christianity it was not necessary that a pagan become a Jew in order to take part in the salvation which Christ brought? Does a faithful Buddhist have to accept all the practices of the Roman Catholic Church so as to share in the salvation which Christ brought us?

Europe and North America. Technical achievements and growing autonomy are secularizing life and radically questioning the meaning of the Christian faith for life. How

can faith be made relevant for those who neither perceive nor experience its necessity for life?

1.3 The shadow of mistakes and sins

Apart from all these challenges there remain those which are the fruit of our mistakes and our sins of the past and the present: the extermination of the Indians, the slave trade, colonial politics, the holocaust which exterminated millions of Jews, the politics which has resulted in the tragic situation of the Palestinians, the merciless exploitation of the poor of the Third World because of their foreign debt.

These and so many other errors are the reason why the name of the Father of Jesus Christ, instead of being recognised as Good News for the poor, is blasphemed as the "god of the whites," who menaces the poor through their exploitation and extermination (cf Rom 2,24). We were not able to reveal His love!

How can we be the Good News in the different situations of the diverse continents? The challenge of the newness has never been so strong. Faith tells us that God is present and active in this newness. But his presence is so new and so hidden that we do not yet perceive or experience it at this time. The old evangelization is not able to reveal it!

2. The newness that challenged the people of the exile to a New Evangelization

The Babylonian captivity was the major crisis in the history of the people of God. They lost everything which up till that moment had been the support for their faith:

- the land, whose possession was the expression of God's faithfulness to his promises;
- the temple, where God lived in the midst of his people;
- the kings, who in God's name, guided the people.

All was destroyed. Their own identity as a people was smashed, just as a plate that falls to the floor. The people were lost: without power, without privilege, without direction, dispersed within a vast empire. The captivity was darkness (Lam 3,2.6), the experience of nothingness,

chaos; darkness, waters, desert (Gen 1,2). God appeared to have rejected his people forever (Lam 3,43-45).

There was no announcement which could have given hope to the people. The old evangelization was not able to interpret the events. God appeared to have lost control of the world. The new master was Babylon, which said, "I shall remain always a sovereign mistress...I and no one else!" (Isa 47,7.8). The break with the past seemed to be total, and the people said, "I tell myself my future is lost, all that I hoped for from the Lord" (Lam 3,18); "I do not know what it is to be happy" (Lam 3,17), "God has abandoned us" (Isa 49,14), "The daughter of Zion is now a widow" (cf Lam 1,1), she lost her husband, and was left without God (cf Isa 40,27; Ps 22,2).

But God did not abandon his people (Lam 3,31). He continued to be present with the same love as before (Isa 49,15). Not only with the people but also in the surrounding world, where profound changes were taking place with the arrival of Cyrus, king of Persia (Isa 41,2-5.25; 45,1-7). Nevertheless the people lacked the eyes to perceive it (Isa 42,18-20; 43,8). How can one help the people discover the Good News of this presence of God, a presence so new and hidden that it was difficult to perceive and accept (cf Isa 52,14-15; 53,1; 45,15)? Here is the challenge of the New Evangelization, so great for yesterday as for today.

Concretely, the challenge is this: to capture and experience the newness of God present in human history, "new in its ardour"; to verbalize it and transform it into good news for the poor, "new in its method"; to incarnate it and express it in the new forms of life, in such a way that the people can perceive it reaching into their lives and, through this, to an awakening that their mission is, "new in its expression."

This challenge gives direction to our reflection on "The Bible in the New Evangelization." The way in which we will analyze the steps of the New Evangelization in the time of the Exile - how it arose and was articulated - will give us the main conclusion of our exposition, to know: How the Bible can assist in making our Evangelization, as the Pope says, "new in its ardour, new in its method, new in its expression."

PART 2: HOW THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GOOD NEWS WAS RENEWED IN THE TIME OF THE EXILE

1. The seed of the New Evangelization: "New in its ardour."

1.1 The new experience of God

In the midst of this crushed and disintegrated people lived the disciples of Isaiah. Even without the traditional supports of their faith, they did not cease to believe. The crisis, instead of causing them to lose their faith, was an occasion for purification and rebirth. They discovered the newness of the hidden presence of God and were able to transform it into Good News for the poor (Isa 49,9-11; 52,7-10; 61,1). The realization of this experience of God was reflected above all in the images which they created.

On the one hand, there were the familiar images that revealed a new personal relationship with God: God is Father (Isa 63,16; 64,7); he is like Mother (Isa 49,15; 46,3; 66,12-13); he is Protector, go'el, redeemer, liberator (Isa 41,14; 43,14; 44,6); God is the Husband of the people (Isa 54,5; 62,5).

On the other hand, there are images which reveal a new perception of God's action in nature, in the history of the people and in politics: God is Creator of the world (Isa 40,28; 51,13 etc) and of the people (Isa 43,15 etc). He is the First and the Last (Isa 44,6; 41,4; 48,12). He does not like chaos (Isa 45,18-19), but confronts it and defeats it with the creative power of his Word (Gen 1,3ff; Isa 40,8). He is stronger than the powerful oppressor who frightens the people (Isa 40,12-18). He liberates, leads and saves his people with his creative power (Isa 40,25-31 etc).

In a word, in this new experience, they again meet the God of their ancestors and discover that he is still YHWH, God with us. Without this experience of God they could never have arrived at the New Evangelization.

1.2 A new reading of the past

The new experience of God gave new insight to a better understanding of what God had done and taught in the past. On the one hand, it helped to point out the errors and

limitations which had kept the Good News of God a prisoner of the dominant ideology of the times of the kings. On the other hand, it was the source of light and creativity for rethinking, one by one, the values of the past, to free them from limitations and errors in order to adapt them to the new situation. Thus the newness could be received like a new child at home, without being condemned as foreign, bastard or heretical.

These are some of the signs of this new reading of the past, which make us feel close to the environment which gave rise to the New Evangelization:

1. The people of God are now not a race, but foreigners have become part of it (Isa 56,3.6-7).
2. The land will be distributed even to foreign residents (Ezek 47, 22-23).
3. The Temple will not only be for the Jews but for all the people (Isa 56,7).
4. The cult is universal and foreigners participate in it (Isa 57,7).
5. The priesthood is now drawn not only from Levi or Zadok, but also from foreigners (Isa 66,21).
6. The Kingdom is now not the kingdom of David, limited to a territory, but the universal Kingdom of God himself, who assumes power and begins to reign (Isa 52,7; 43,15).
7. The Anointed One (the Messiah) and SHEPHERD now is not the Davidic King, but Cyrus, king of Persia (Isa 45,1; 44,28).
8. The election is no longer a privilege, but a service extended to all the people: a mission of justice, to be "the light of the peoples" (Isa 42,1-9; 41,8; 49,6).
9. The Law of God is sought and obeyed by all people who find in it light for walking (Isa 2,1-5; Zech 8,22-23).

10. Purity now does not come from human observance but from divine acceptance, since God accepts as pure the sacrifices even of the pagans (Isa 66,20; Mal 1,11).

11. Jerusalem is now no longer the capital of Judea but the centre where all peoples come together (Isa 60,1-7).

In these texts the incredible courage and ecumenical opening which caused this rethinking are apparent. They had imitated the Creator. They knew how to be creative. They had passed beyond the frontiers of tradition, and faithful to the true tradition, they dreamed of a new world. "The former things have come to pass, and now I declare new things" (Isa 42,9). They wanted everything new: "a new heaven and a new earth" (Isa 65,17); a new exodus (Isa 41,18-20; 43,16-20); a new covenant (Isa 54,10; 55,3; 61,8); a new people (Isa 43,21); a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36,28); a new law imprinted on the heart (Jer 31,33). "I have made all things new" (Rev 21,5). Liberty and faithfulness characterize this new reading of the past. The dangerous memory of the people reveals itself in this reading of the past.

But not all were capable of accompanying this re-reading of the past, to be open to the newness which was taking place. All saw the events, but not all perceived its possibilities (Isa 42,20). They were blind (Isa 42,18-19). They were caught up in the past, and, for them, they could not see the newness of God, taking place in history. "Stop dwelling on past events and brooding over days gone by. I am about to do something new! This moment it will unfold. Can you not perceive it?" (Isa 43,18-19).

1.3 A new reading of the present reality

The new experience of God gave eyes not only to re-read the past, but also to face the sorrowful events of the present with realism, critical feeling and a consciousness of mission, and to discover in them the call of God. Let us examine these:

Jerusalem lay in ruins. Its walls broken down, without gates. An open city, unable to be defended. The land had already been distributed and was occupied by others (Jer 39,10). Other people were worshipping in the place of the ancient temple (Jer 41,5). Those who had returned from exile now had no king. They had neither the political nor military power to change this situation. They were only

a small religious group without any importance, lost in the vast empire of the Persians. Cult, land, city, king ... now they were not theirs alone. Whether they liked it or not, they were obliged by circumstances to live with other people. They had no viable alternative. This was the reality: a situation of dispersion. What to do? Ignore it, fight it or live with it?

Seen with the ancient eyes from the time of the kings, this situation was an unacceptable calamity. For that reason, some, like Zerubbabel, Haggai and Zechariah, wished to restore the monarchy. Nevertheless, the disciples of Isaiah, instead of lamenting the past which they had lost, greeted the future which had just been born with such labour pains. They made no effort to re-establish the monarchy as Zerubbabel wanted, but instead they remembered the new mission of the people in the world.

The wind of a storm shakes the flower, scatters the seed, and thus prepares a new flowering. In the same way, the violent event of the Exile shook the people, scattered them as seeds throughout the world and prepared them in a way for a new mission: to be light for all peoples. God took his vineyard from the fertile garden of Palestine (Isa 5,1-2; Ps 80, 9-17) and planted it in the world to be the SERVANT OF GOD for all the peoples (Isa 42,1; 46; 49,6), a "source of blessing for all the peoples" (Gen 12,3). In this way, illuminated by the light of a new experience of God and by the prophecies of the past, the Exile, which had appeared to be a death blow for the people, was converted into a calling of God and a message of hope and life.

A new experience of God, a new reading of the past, a new conscience of reality - these are three poles, inseparably linked within themselves that generated and continue to generate the NEW EVANGELIZATION.

2. The New Evangelization and its methods - "New in its method"

So that an announcement can be Good News of God for the people, it is not correct to speak only about God; he must also be revealed, to be made present. Jesus did not only speak about his Father, but he also revealed him by his attitude and his way of life. What was the attitude of the disciples of Isaiah? What did they do to transform all this into Good News for the people? What did they convey to

an unbelieving and discouraged people in describing and accepting this Good News? Or rather, what was the method that they used and left imprinted in the text of Isaiah 40-66? Let us see:

2.1 An attitude and the witnessing that communicate new vision

Three characteristics mark the evangelizing attitude of the disciples: listening and dialogue, tenderness and reception, simple and renewed language. They did not take the stance of a professor who knows everything, but of persons who like to converse with people. From the beginning to the end they dialogued, asked and questioned, helping them to reflect on the events (cf Isa 40,12-14; 21,25-27; 41,8-16 etc.).

They held attentive conversation, full of tenderness and consolation (cf Isa 40,1; 41,9-10.14; 4,4 etc.). In fact, the first thing that should be done when wishing to help a suffering and discouraged people is to live with them, talk with them and listen to what they have to say. The conversation of the disciples was simple and concrete. They had a new language, full of familiar images: God is Father, Mother, Husband, Protector.

In this way, the disciples communicated something that they themselves had experienced and lived, something of the ancient newness of YHWH, the God of the people. God made himself present in this attitude of dialogue, tenderness and reception. Through the gestures and the attitude of the disciples, the people understood that the God of the disciples was different from the god of the king of Babylonia, even different from what they themselves thought about God. Thus, little by little, the eyes of the people were opened and they began to perceive something of the new things that were happening.

2.2 The arguments that eliminate the old vision

The discouragement of the people was provoked by the oppression which weighed upon them from the outside and by the erroneous ideas from the dominant ideology that from within had crushed their resistance. Because of that, the people were blind (Isa 43,8; 42,19) incapable of perceiving the presence of God in what was happening. Thus part of the New Evangelization is the denouncing of unjust and false causes that impede the people from seeing the presence of God in their lives and in everyday happenings.

One by one the disciples unmasked the power that oppressed and crushed the people: the great leaders: princes and judges (Isa 40,23), prophets and wise men (Isa 44,25), governors (Isa 41,25); the nations of the world and their inhabitants (Isa 40,15.17.22); Babylonia with all its pride in being the most powerful nation (Isa 47,1-15); idols and their worshipers, false gods with their statues and temples, used to legitimize oppression and falsify the image of the true God (Isa 40,18-20; 41,6-7.21-29; 44,9-20 etc.). All this was analyzed with arguments of great precision and sarcasm.

Besides that, the disciples analyzed the events to show their true significance: Cyrus, who had changed the face of the earth and revolutionized the international political scene: it is YHWH who raised him up and guides him (Isa 41,1-5; 45,1-7). The events of history: through them YHWH carried out his plan (Isa 43,8-12). The exile itself that so crushed the people was the result of YHWH's anger; he punished the people for their unfaithfulness, but returned to show mercy (Isa 54,7-8; 47,6; 42,24-25).

In other words, the disciples used reason and common sense to make a critical analysis of the oppressive system. They unmasked the false pretensions and explanations of the dominant ideology; they made the people conscious and helped cure the ancient vision. Thus they inspired the people to perceive the newness of the presence of God in the events of life.

2.3 The new content which reveals the face of God.

The face of God that is apparent in ALL the pages of Isaiah 40-66 has four characteristics which stand out: disinterested love, creative power, faithful presence, demanding holiness. YHWH, the God of the people, is a LOVING God; he reveals goodness which promotes and liberates; he is a STRONG God; he liberates with a creative power which has everything in his hands; he is a FAITHFUL God: his friendly presence never fails and will never fail; he is a HOLY God: he asks for justice, demands faithfulness and sends on missions.

The face of God is a skylight for human life, the root for liberation and Resurrection. It is the eternal Good News for oppressed people. Without this face all becomes darkness. There is no lamp or candle that can replace it. Whoever does not know it does not feel its absence. But whoever finds it does not know how to live without it. The meeting with God revolutionizes life, forces one to dis-

cover what is wrong in us and around us, animates for the struggle, and finally puts everything in its own place, as God wants it.

The people of the captivity were like a bride, who through the faults of others and her own fault, has lost the bridegroom. The absence of the loved one caused her to despair. The object of the evangelizing action of the disciples was to help people find again in their lives the loving, strong, faithful and demanding presence of the Lover: "Your creator is your husband" (Isa 54,5). Only in this way would a courageous people be created to recommence the journey and complete their mission.

3. The New Evangelization and its practice: "New in its expression"

All this leads to a new practice which tries to incarnate the Good News in new ways of living. This practice has much to teach us who are looking for a New Evangelization.

3.1 To make the reality transparent and to reveal the presence of God

The disciples of Isaiah drew the attention of the people to nature, history and politics. By night, they took the people out of their houses and said, "Lift up your eyes and see! Who created all these stars?" (Isa 40,26). They recounted the history of the Exodus (Isa 43,16-17), demanding a refreshment of the memory (Isa 43,26) and insisting, "Remember the things that happened many years ago!" They pointed out the political events whereby Cyrus defeated Nebuchadnezzar and asked, "Who is it that has done all this?" (Isa 41,2) And the answer was always the same: "It is YHWH, the God of the People, our God."

Thus little by little, nature is no longer the sanctuary of false gods; history is no longer decided in favour of the oppressors of the people; the world of politics is no longer the dominion of Nebuchadnezzar. Behind all these things, the characteristics of the face of YHWH, the God of the people begins to reappear. Nature, history and politics are no longer strange and hostile to the people and are converted into allies of the poor, in their journey as the Servant of God.

But the home preferred by God is in the midst of his oppressed people. "I am with you" (Isa 41,10). "You are very precious to me, I honour you, I love you, I change everything for you" (Isa 43,4). "God is not found except in your midst" (Isa 45,14). It is there, in the midst of the poor, that he is found (Isa 45,15); it is there where he should be found (Isa 55,6); it is there where his face wants to be resplendent as "the light of the peoples" (Isa 42,6), in nature, history and politics (Is 58,8).

In the face of this very vast and subduing presence of God in life, in the world, in politics, in the people themselves, the disciples called the people together and shouted: "Blind ones, see! Deaf ones, hear!" (Isa 42,18). The people should open their eyes and receive their God who comes advancing victoriously: "Here is the Lord YHWH! He is coming in might" (Isa 40,9-10), "Don't you see it?" (Isa 43,19). This is the Good News that the disciples proclaimed to the people: "Your God reigns" (Isa 52,7).

3.2 The aim of the Good News of God in the life of the people

The Good News of the Kingdom: What is it? It is not a doctrine which is taught, nor a rule which is imposed. It is not a catechism to be recited, nor an ideology that is transmitted. The Good News of the Kingdom is an EVENT OF LIFE, where God is present, acting now, liberating his people with power, realizing his plan of salvation. It is a WORD which discloses what was unknown in that event and reveals the gratuitous presence of God; it is an ATTITUDE, a WITNESS, a PRACTICE which confirms this presence; it is the WHOLE PAST OF THE PEOPLE which gives witness to it and ratifies it: "This is what we were hoping for a long time!"

To announce the Good News of the Kingdom: What is it? It is to point out the concrete events where this victory of the Kingdom of God is happening and to interpret them in such a way that the unknown and hidden dimension of the victorious presence of God becomes visible. What events did the disciples point out as a manifestation of the Kingdom? There were many!

Here are a few: Cyrus conquering Nebuchadnezzar, giving hope to the oppressed people (Isa 41,25-27); the people leaving captivity, repeating the Exodus (Isa 52,7-12); the people beginning to organize themselves as a

flock around its shepherd (Isa 40,9-11); the people rejoicing with the coming of peace (Isa 52,7-9); the people reacting, strongly resisting the oppressor (Isa 50,4-10); the people consciously assuming the struggle and suffering for the liberation of their brothers and sisters (Isa 53, 1-12); the people returning to their roots, learning a lesson from their past (Isa 51,1-3). These and other concrete and well-known events were signs of the Kingdom: "Your God reigns!" (Isa 52,7). They were signs that God was coming with power (Isa 40,10). "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the heralds who bring Good News" (Isa 52,7). "From now on I show you new things, hidden things you did not know before" (Isa 48,6).

The question that remains for us is: What are today, in the different continents, the new things that can be pointed to as a manifestation of the Kingdom, as signs that God is coming with power to liberate his people and realize his plan?

3.3 To incarnate the Good News into new ways of living together

It is not enough to point out and interpret events. It is not enough to be a response to the hopes of the people. Nor is the witness of the person who announces enough. The witness of community is necessary. The new experience of God can only show that it is true and can be trusted if it can be concretized in a new way of living together. The love of God should translate itself into love of neighbour. Here, on this level, the decisive challenge of the NEW EVANGELIZATION will take place.

After the exile, in spite of the beauty of the announcement, the reality of living together in community was not good. "The just perish, and no one is concerned" (Isa 57,1). There were incapable leaders who were preoccupied only with their own interests (Isa 56,10-12). There was exploitation and poverty (Isa 58,3-4). Because of that, the disciples would insist on the "true fast": "Break the unjust chains, untie the knots of the yoke, and set free the oppressed, tearing off every yoke. Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, taking the homeless poor into your house, clothing the naked when you meet them, and never evading a duty to your kinsfolk?" (Isa 58,6-7). They had asked that the people pay attention to the poor and humble, as God does (Isa 57,15; 66,2). But not only this! They also asked for the practice of righteousness and justice (Isa 56,1), so that the system which was causing poverty would change.

The ideal that orientated them was "a new heaven and a new earth" (Isa 65,17), where the curse of the ancient living together would not exist (cf Gen 3,14-19). They wanted a land without tears and without infant mortality (Isa 65,19-20), where mothers would not be obliged to give birth to their children, only to have them live in adversity (Isa 65,23); a land of sharing, without exploiting the work of the poor, where the worker would be the owner of his production (Isa 65,12-22), free from foreign exploitation (Isa 62,8-9); land without evil, where there is no violence (Isa 65,25). "I shall appoint peace to govern you and make righteousness rule over you" (Isa 60,17).

The concrete project that oriented them in the reconstruction of the people was inspired by the people's past, in the time of the judges. The Good News, "Your God reigns!" (Isa 52,7) recalls the time of the twelve tribes. When, in those times the people were asking for a king, the response was always: "Our King is YHWH" (Judg 8,23; 1 Sam 12,12; 8,7). Now that the monarchy was destroyed by Babylon, the wish to restore the tribal system was reborn (Isa 49,6) and to make a new distribution of the land (Isa 49,8). The time of the Exodus and the Judges was the ideal time of betrothal (Jer 2,2; Hos 11,1-4; 2,16), an ideal that was lost and should be realized again (Hos 12,10). Because of that, now, after the exile, God again became the bridegroom of the people (Isa 54,5; 62,4-5). In other words, the New Evangelization awakened an uncomfortable memory in the people of God. It was during this time of the Exodus and the Judges that faith in YHWH, the God of the people, was incarnated for the first time in a new way of human living together, based on participation, equality and decentralization of power, as expressed in the Ten Commandments.

The greatest temptation that threatens the New Evangelization is always to separate, in practice, the love of God and the love of neighbour: to fast much and to continue practicing injustice (Isa 58,1-12); to have beautiful temples, to have great celebrations and not to be uncomfortable with poverty. This is the same as worshipping idols (Isa 66,1-4). God does not act in this way: "I dwell in a high and holy place, and with him who is broken and humble in spirit" (Isa 57,15). As we have already said, it is on this level that the decisive challenge of the New Evangelization will take place.

Without this incarnation of the Good News of the Reign of God in the life of the community, the New Evangeliza-

tion will be an illusion. It would only serve to give a false good conscience to the evangelizer. It will not be "new in its expression," as the Pope asks. The living community is the platform from which the Good News of the Kingdom is taken. Without this feedback from the community, great campaigns of evangelization do not produce results in the long run.

3.4 The mission of the disciples in the New Evangelization

All these methods that we have been examining brought the disciples to a greater consciousness of their own mission in carrying out the New Evangelization, that is: they should be in the midst of the people, as the people should be in the midst of the nations. Therefore the four Songs of the Servant of YHWH (Isa 42,1-9; 49,1-6; 50,4-9; 52,13-53,12) speak of the mission of the people, as well as of the disciples. We will only bring out some points:

To be a faithful disciple, one should be self-disciplined. Each morning he should take time to listen to the Word that God has for him and that he himself should carry to the discouraged (Isa 50,4-5). He will encounter much opposition that will discourage him. He should find his strength in God (Isa 57,9); he will be persecuted, insulted, made prisoner, tortured and killed (Isa 50,6; 53,3-8). His passion and death nevertheless will be transformed into the Good News for the people and will promote the conversion of many (Isa 52,13-15; 53,10-12).

One of the disciples gave the following testimony about the way he conceived his vocation and mission. This testimony synthesizes what we have just explained about the Good News of the Kingdom. The same testimony served Jesus to explain his program of Evangelization on the Sabbath in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4,18-19): The Spirit of YHWH is upon me, because YHWH has anointed me. He has sent me

to give the Good News to the poor,
to cure broken hearts
to proclaim liberty for slaves,
to liberate prisoners,
to promulgate the year of grace of YHWH,
the day of vengeance of our God,
to console the afflicted,
of all the afflicted of Zion,
to transform ashes into a crown,
mourning into the oil of gladness, a garment
of splendour for the heavy heart (Isa 61,1-3).

3.5 The errors and faults that interrupted the experience of the New Evangelization.

The New Evangelization, promoted by the disciples of Isaiah, did not last long. It was not carried out as they wished. Nevertheless, the certainty remained that it was possible to realize the project of God if one was faithful.

The New Evangelization, begun during the captivity, became a reality with the reconstruction of the temple about 520 BCE. The writings of Isaiah 40-66 show the beauty of the ideal, the sincerity of the endeavour, and the variety of the problems. In 445 BCE, only 75 years later, the Book of Nehemiah revealed a very grave situation: exploitation within the community. Brother obliged brother to sell his lands, to mortgage his house, to deliver his daughters as slaves (Neh 5,1-5). They were incapable of keeping the two loves - of God and of neighbour - united. They did not know how to fight efficiently those things that were divisive from the very beginning: injustice and exploitation, the desire for money, and the desire to accumulate. Those things grew as a cancer that took over the whole body and destroyed it from the inside. They lacked a more concrete plan which would take into account the economic and social situation.

Thus, by the force of circumstances, Nehemiah, and after him, Ezra, once again began to protect the people from foreign invasion and built three walls around them: of cult, of the law, and of the chosen race. They imposed upon the people a "great discipline" that lasted for more than four centuries.

The seed that God had taken from the vineyard in order to plant it in the world was taken from the world and planted once again in the well-protected garden, far from the world, and there it stayed till the coming of Jesus Christ.

Thus, unfortunately, because of errors and human weaknesses, this very beautiful experience of seventy-five years disintegrated, and the incarnation of the Good News of the Kingdom in the life and history of humanity was delayed. But it was not all in vain; on the contrary!

1. It generated the certainty that, if one is faithful, it is possible to realize and live the Good News of the Kingdom.
2. In its midst the design, the model, appeared that oriented the New Evangelization realized by Jesus and the first Christians.

3. The basic structure of the process of evangelization is the same, in Isaiah as well as in the New Testament. Therefore it could also serve as a model for the New Evangelization that we want to realize now at the end of

this century, for "these events that happened to them serve as an example and were written to instruct us, who are living at the end of the ages" (1 Cor. 10,11).

PART 3. JESUS REALIZES THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

In this third part we shall briefly see how the process of the New Evangelization, begun by the disciples of Isaiah, was taken up again by Jesus and was carried by him to a happy conclusion. Jesus realized the ideal of the faithful disciple written about in the Four Songs of the servant of YHWH. "The Law and the prophets were until John; since then, the Good News of the Kingdom of God is proclaimed" (Luke 16,16). It was the beginning of a new and definitive step in the history of the people of God.

I. Summary of the Good News of the Kingdom announced by Jesus

The Gospel of Mark sums up the Good News in four points:

- 1) The time has arrived;
- 2) The Kingdom of God is here;
- 3) Change your life;
- 4) Believe in the Good News (Mark 1,15)

In the following paragraphs we shall develop these four points:

1.1 "THE TIME HAS ARRIVED" - Read the events with new eyes

Jesus was attentive to the events and the times and "after they made John prisoner" (Mark 1,14) he concluded: "The time has arrived!" The imprisonment of John by Herod brought about the fulfillment of the time and the KAIROS arrived, the moment of God.

Jesus analyzed the events with a different vision. Therefore he perceived things that others did not perceive. "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then comes the harvest? But, look, I tell you, look around at the fields: they are already white, ripe for harvesting'" (John 4,35). He walks throughout the country and calls the people, since the harvest is great, the labourers are few and time urges us now. (Matt 9, 35-38). He sends the twelve and later the seventy-two to tell the people: "The

Kingdom has come" (Luke 10,9).

Jesus helps the people to see the events with different eyes: he causes them to reflect, beginning with what was happening then (Luke 13,1-5); he criticizes the erroneous interpretations of events (John 9,2-3); he uses parables to communicate a critical vision of the reality and of religious practice (Luke 18,9-14; Matt 21,28-32; Luke 10,29-37, etc.) In this way Jesus helps the people to discern the plan of God that is being realized in events. This supposed a double experience in Jesus: a profound experience of God, fruit of his divine Sonship and of his prayer, and a profound experience of the life of the people, fruit of the incarnation and insertion.

Not all accepted the interpretation of the events that Jesus made. The Pharisees and Sadducees could not read the signs of the times (Matt 16, 1-40). Jerusalem and the cities of Galilee were closed-minded (Luke 13, 34-35; 10,13-15; 19,42). Nevertheless, the poor accepted the message (Matt 11,15).

1.2 "THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME" - The newness that caused admiration

All were hoping for the coming of the Kingdom, each one in his own way. For the Pharisees, the Kingdom would come when the law was perfectly observed; for the Essenes, when the country had been purified. The people hoped for the coming for the glorious Messiah. But Jesus did not wait for the coming of the Kingdom. For him, the Kingdom had already come. That was the new tidings.

What is the analysis of the events that made Jesus arrive at this conclusion? The observance of the law was not yet perfect; the country was not purified; neither had there been a glorious sign of the Messiah! So then, where was the Kingdom? What were the signs (Luke 17,20)? Jesus responded: "The Kingdom does not come as the fruit of observance, but it is already in your midst"

(Luke 17,20-21). This was a radically new way to confront the Kingdom and the reality.

Jesus did not say what the Kingdom was. He only said that the Kingdom had come. If the Kingdom had already come then it should be sought and found in the things that Jesus did and said: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind see, the lame walk, the sick are healed, the deaf hear, the dead rise and the poor are evangelized" (Mark 11,5-6). "If I drive out devils by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11,20).

In order to help the people perceive the coming of the Kingdom, Jesus did a new reading of the past, of the Old Testament, and with it he illumined events. In the Synagogue of Nazareth, he used the text of Isaiah to present his own program (Luke 4,18-19; Isa 61,1-2), and concluded: "Today has been fulfilled among you all that you have heard in this passage of the Scripture" (Luke 4,21). The message that Jesus sent to John the Baptist was another text from Isaiah (Isa 29,18-19; 35,5-6). The same expression of the "Good News of the Kingdom" came from Isaiah (Isa 52,7).

Besides that, Jesus used comparisons to help the people understand this mysterious presence of the Kingdom within events: the seed, the yeast, salt, the treasure, the grain of mustard seed, the lost drachma, etc. The poor understood this language (Matt 11, 25), for the Kingdom of God, announced by Jesus, was for them (Matt 5, 3-10). The others, those outside, hear but do not understand (Mark 4,11-12).

1.3 "CHANGE YOUR LIFE!" - A difficult demand

In the first place, Jesus does not ask for "observance of the law and tradition!" He asks for metanoia, that means a change in the way of thinking and of living. The people should change their ideology. Without this, one cannot understand anything of the message of the Kingdom announced by Jesus.

Why change? Because there had been a total inversion of values. The way that religion was organized no longer revealed the face of God to the people: the humanity was at the service of the law (Mark 2,27); the commandment of God was annulled by tradition (Mark 7,8); the temple was above the law of love for one's parents (Mark 7,10-13);

mercy was replaced by observance (Matt 9,13); the justice practiced by the Pharisees no longer revealed the Kingdom (Matt 5,20): the needs of the people were forgotten (Luke 13,15-17); they imposed heavy burdens on the people (Matt 23,4); they blocked the entrance to the kingdom (Matt 23,13).

Change to what? Recognize your own errors and begin a new practice in a new direction: love of God equals love of neighbour (Matt 22,39); the object of the law is to imitate God who makes it rain over all (Matt 5,43-48); to reject the desire that the chosen people of God is to be a privileged people, and begin to conceive that, after you have done everything you can, you will be not more than a useless servant (Luke 17,10); to understand that before God, we are all equal and that in the community, power is service (Matt 9,35); to understand that the Sabbath is for mankind (Mark 2,27), and struggle against the divisions that deny God's plan. In a word, understand that no one has the right to label as "sinner," "unclean," "pagan," "damned" or "ignorant" those whom God has received as his children (Matt 5,45).

Making this change is the same as to die and to be born again. "Whoever is not born again cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3,3). Many did not want to make this radical change; they reacted against Jesus and decided to kill him (John 12,37-41; 11,45-54).

1.4 "BELIEVE IN THE GOOD NEWS" - The hope of the people is realized

All of this newness that began to exist around him, Jesus called the "Good News of the Kingdom." Thus the hope for which people had been waiting for many centuries was realized. Jesus did the same as the disciples of Isaiah: showed the concrete events where the Kingdom of God was happening. In this way, he situated the events within God's overall plan and helped the people to a better understanding of the implications of what was happening.

This Good News was not so good for the doctors and the scribes. But it was truly good for the poor (Luke 4,18; Isa 61,1). So through action and the Word of Jesus, the poor people that lived on the margin as "ignorant," "damned," "unclean" and "sinner" (John 7,49; 9,34) again had access to God. Jesus freed the entrance. The friendly presence of God returned to be universal, close to all, free of the fetters that imprisoned them centuries ago.

Access to the Good News is made by faith: "Believe in

the Good News!" That is, believe in the message of Jesus. But not only that! Believe also, and above all, in him, in his person and accept him as he himself is presented (John 14,1). There is no other way. He is "the Way, the Truth, the Life" (John 14,6). God is made present in his attitude: "Whoever sees me also sees the Father" (John 14,9).

2. The liberating attitude of Jesus reveals the Father to the poor

Jesus lived in a time of profound conflicts and in a hopelessly divided country. There were conflicts in various areas: economic, social, political, ideological and religious. The people had no conditions for finding again or rebuilding unity. Jesus took clear positions in the face of these conflicts, and, in this way, he revealed the ancient newness of God. It would take too long to describe all the aspects of this liberating attitude of Jesus. We will enumerate just a few of the more important points that recalls the New Evangelization of the disciples of Isaiah.

2.1 Jesus lives with the marginalized and welcomes them

In the three years of his itinerant life, Jesus lived, for the greater part of the time, with those who had no place within the social and religious system of the time. Jesus came to be known as "the friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt 11,19). He received those who were not accepted: the immoral (prostitutes and sinners), the heretics (Samaritans and pagans), the unclean (lepers and possessed), the marginalized (women, the sick and children), the collaborators (publicans and sinners), the weak (the poor without power). Jesus spoke for all and did not exclude anyone, but he spoke from the perspective of the poor and marginalized. The call of God that resulted from this evangelizing attitude is clear: it is not possible to be a friend of Jesus and continue to support a system that marginalizes so many people in the name of God.

2.2 Jesus rejects and combats the divisions created by men and women

Within the people there were many divisions which contradicted the will of the Father. Jesus criticized these divisions between neighbour and non-neighbour (Luke 10,29-37), between the holy and the sinner (Mark 2, 15-17), between clean and unclean (Mark 7,1-23), between Jew and foreigner (Matt 15,21-28). He brought new

divisions (Matt 10,34-36) and was a sign of contradiction in the midst of the people (Luke 2,34), as he promoted the fundamental values of human life and the project of God: justice, fraternity, love and honesty. This liberating attitude relativized and shook the pillars of the religious system: temple, sabbath, holy works, ritual purity. This is the reason why Jesus irritated those who were in power.

2.3 Jesus unmasks the hypocrisy of the powerful

Jesus was not afraid to denounce the hypocrisy of the religious leaders: priests, scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23,1-36; Luke 11,37-52; Mark 11,15-18). He criticized and condemned the ridiculous pretensions of the rich and did not have much faith in their conversion (Luke 16,31; Matt 6,24; Mark 10,25; Luke 18,24-27; 12,13-21). Before the representatives of political power, whether it be the Jews or the Romans, Jesus was not affected by the threats, and maintained an attitude of freedom (Luke 13,32; 23,9; John 19,11; 18,23).

2.4 Jesus fights the evils that destroy human life

Jesus came so that "all might have life and have it to the full" (John 10,10). God created life so that it would be blessed (Gen 1,28). But life became cursed through our own fault (Gen 3,14-19). God called Abraham in order to recover the lost blessing (Gen 12,3). Jesus took the project of the Creator over and achieved liberation for human life from all the evil that oppressed it: hunger, sorrow, ignorance, abandonment, loneliness, the letter that kills, oppressive laws, injustice, fear, suffering, sin, death. Jesus fought and expelled the devil, the prince of evil (Mark 3,22-27).

2.5 The Good News of the Kingdom is incarnated in community

The attitudes, gestures and words of Jesus reveal a vision of things, a new point of departure, a new order. The basic values of this new order are incarnated in the small community of disciples formed around him: common purse, sharing goods (John 13,29), basic equality of all before God (Matt 23,8-10), power as service (Matt 20, 24-28; Luke 9,35; John 13,14; Matt 23,11), living together as friends (John 15,15) which causes "a single heart and a single mind" to be created among them (Acts 4,32). Jesus renews from within the relationships between man and woman (Matt 19,1-19).

2.6 Jesus uses a new pedagogy that makes the people grow

This new order is present, as a seed, in the form that Jesus taught things: simple language in the form of parables; reflecting on events and things of life (Luke 21, 1-4; 13,1-5; Matt 6,26); he confronted the disciples with problems from the lives of the people (Mark 6,37); he taught "with authority," without quoting the authorities (Mark 1,22); he attended to the needs of the people, without making distinctions (Matt 22,16); he taught anywhere, and received anyone, including women (Luke 8, 1-3; Mark 15,41); he presented children as teachers of adults (Matt 18,3); he was free and communicated freedom to those who lived with him (John 8,32-36), giving courage to them so as to go beyond obsolete traditions (Matt 12,1-8); he lived what he taught, passed nights in prayer and stirred up in others the desire to pray (Luke 11,1; 5,16; 6,12; 9,18.28; 22,41).

2.7 Obedient until death, Jesus reveals the Father

Jesus is the Son of God. This has to do with his relation with God and the constitution of his person. There is no proof for this, but it is accepted in faith, and was the object of a slow discovery on the part of the Christians.

Jesus is the Messiah. This has to do with his relation with people and his mission within the plan of God. He is a total gift of his Father, who did not send just anyone to fulfil the mission of the Messiah, but his own Son.

"Being rich he made himself poor" (2 Cor 8,9). Here a radical option is expressed which cannot be destroyed for any reason whatsoever. Jesus was not a Roman citizen; he had no title; he did not follow a course with Gamaliel, nor did he study in Jerusalem. He did not obtain a doctorate; in his presentation in the temple, his parents made the offering of the poor, two pigeons (Luke 2,24). He was not of the priestly class, he was not a Levite or a Pharisee; nor was he a scribe or a publican, not an Essene or a Sadducee. Jesus was a lay person, a worker, a farmer; he came from Galilee where the social instability was very great. In the local community he was not an elder or a coordinator; he had no protection of any social class. He was known as a carpenter (Mark 6,3) or son of a carpenter (Matt 13,55). He lived in Nazareth for thirty years (Luke 3,23); he did not marry; he was born outside his house in a stable and so from the maternal womb he

suffered the consequences of the oppressive Roman system. Whoever wants to know about the thirty years that the Son of God spent in Nazareth can take the life of any Nazarene of that time, give him the name of Jesus, and you will have his biography. Really, "being rich he made himself poor" (2 Cor 8,9).

That which, for some, is condemnation by destiny and by the system is, for Jesus, the manifestation of the will of God. Here the Father revealed his preference for the poor. Jesus remained faithful to his Father, remaining faithfully on the side of the poor. Until death! Remaining faithfully on the side of the poor, of the suffering people, was the same as remaining faithfully on the side of the Father: "Here I am. I have come to do your will" (Heb 10,7.9). It was not easy to cling to the Father and to the poor. Jesus suffered and was tempted to follow other paths (Matt 4,1-11; Mark 8,33). He had to learn what obedience is (Heb 5,8), but he overcame through prayer (Heb 5,7; Luke 22,41-46). It is difficult to feel in your own body the weakness to which the poor man is condemned. Jesus never looked for an individual way out, never sought privileges for himself. He was born poor, which was the expression of the will of God. He chose to remain faithfully on the side of the poor, which was the decision of the Son, wanting to be obedient to the Father until death, "death on the cross" (Phil 2,8).

All this is the New Evangelization: it is the coming of the Kingdom of God; it is the old newness of God making himself present in the life of the people. It is here that the phrase of Jesus is applied: "Whoever sees me sees the Father" (John 14,9), "Believe in me: I am in the Father and the Father is in me. At least believe it, because of the works I do" (John 14,11). Through this evangelizing attitude, Jesus revealed a God who is different from the God taught by the official religion. It is the new attitude that communicated new eyes to perceive the signs of God in life.

3. The contents of the Good News of the Kingdom (Mark 1,16-45)

The Gospel of Mark is a short manual which announces the Good News. This is not the place to explain this statement. What interests us is to examine closely the text of Mark 1,16-45 which contains, within the general scheme of the Gospel, the objective which the Good News wants to achieve in the life of the people; or rather what is the objective that should be present in the New Evangelization.

The Good News has as its origin and basic content: Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Mark 1,1). The announcement of this Good News does not fall by parachute into the lives of the people, but it is the answer to their hopes (Mark 1,2-3) by way of really concrete persons (Mark 1,4-8); it has a moment of inauguration (Mark 1,9-11), of approval (Mark 1,12-13), and of proclamation (Mark 1,14-15). Then, choosing the data well, Mark described what objective the announcement of the Good News is to achieve in the lives of the people. The following seven points can serve as a criterion for evaluation, in order to examine more closely the qualities of the New Evangelization that we are realizing today:

1. Mark 1,16-20: The calling of the first disciples. The Good News has, as first objective, to gather the people around Jesus, and thus to form community.

2. Mark 1,21-22: The admiration of the people confronted by the teaching of Jesus. The Good News gives birth to a critical conscience in the people with respect to the scribes, the religious leaders.

3. Mark 1,23-38: The expulsion of demons. The Good News fights and expels the power of evil that destroys human life and alienates the people from within themselves.

4. Mark 1,29-34: The healing of Peter's mother-in-law and many others. The Good News attends to and takes care of the sick and tries to restore their lives so that they can be of service.

5. Mark 1,35: Jesus prays in a desert place. The Good News should remain united to the Father, who is its source, through prayer.

6. Mark 1,36-39: The announcement of the Good News throughout the towns of Galilee. The Good News demands that the missionary keeps the consciousness of his mission alive and does not rest in the results already obtained.

7. Mark 1,40-45: A leper is cured and sent to the priests. The Good News embraces the marginalized and tries to reintegrate them in the human togetherness of the community.

These seven points mark the announcement of the Good News realized by Jesus and by the first Christians. Will they also mark the evangelization that we are realizing today?

Where this Good News enters into history, it finds resistance and provokes conflicts. This is what the Gospel

of Mark will suggest when it immediately presents the five conflicts between Jesus and the religious leaders of the time. (Mark 2,1-3,6).

4. The announcement of the Good News of the Resurrection.

The announcement of the Resurrection is at the centre of the Good News of the Kingdom and is the most complete expression of the victory of God over the power of evil which destroys and kills life. Let us examine closely how the Resurrection was announced on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2,1-41) and in the curing of the lame man (Acts 3,1-26). What interests us is to show the basic scheme of the announcement. It is the same as we encountered in Isaiah.

1. An event that causes admiration and seeks an explanation: On Pentecost day, there appeared a strange wind, tongues of fire that passed over the apostles and they began to speak in other languages. The people were perplexed and sought an explanation (Acts 2,1-12). A second famous example occurred with the healing, apparently by Peter, of a man well-known in the city. The people were astonished and sought an explanation (Acts 3,1-10). In those two cases, the people already gave an explanation: "The twelve were drunk" (Acts 2,13). Peter must have some power (Acts 3,12).

2. Use reason to tear apart the wrong interpretation of the event: On the day of Pentecost, Peter used his common sense and said: "We are not drunk, as you think, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning" (Acts 2,15). In the other case he said: "Why are you staring like that? Do you think we made this man walk through our own power?" (Acts 3,12). Personal testimony tears down the incorrect interpretation. What is the true interpretation?

3. The true interpretation begins with the Resurrection event. Here, properly speaking, the announcement begins. The event is explained only by beginning with the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead. "Exalted at the right hand of the Father, Jesus received from the Father the promised Spirit which he diffused. That is what they were seeing and hearing" (Acts 2,33). "God raised him up from among the dead. Thanks to faith in the name of Jesus, this name has strengthened this man whom you see and recognize. Faith in Jesus caused this man who is now in front of you to be cured" (Acts 3,15-16).

4. The new interpretation is confirmed by the Scriptures. Starting with the Scriptures, Peter situated the event within the wider plan of God (Acts 2,16-21; 3,13) and

within the wider plan of God (Acts 2,16-21; 3,13) and showed that the very Resurrection of Jesus had already been announced in the Old Testament (Acts 2,25-28; 34-35; 3,22-25). This same Jesus was given titles and functions that come from the Old Testament: "Christ," "Jesus," "Prophet," "Servant" (Acts 2,36; 3,22.26). The two events, illuminated by faith in the Resurrection of Jesus, are like the sea into which the river of the history of the Old Testament flows. Therefore we say in the creed: "He rose according to the Scriptures."

5. The new interpretation is confirmed by the testimony of the apostles: "We are witnesses to this" (Acts 2,32; 3,15). This phrase is always repeated. The personal testimony is part of the message of the Resurrection. The testimony of the apostles is the basis of the faith of the community. The attitude confirms the truth of the Word.

6. The new interpretation makes the event transparent: The event, thus interpreted, acquires a new dimension. Taken out of its neutral situation, it is converted into a challenge of God to the conscience of those who killed Jesus. This interpretation comes out of the events. It is as if the event said: "You killed Jesus. God did not

approve of your actions, because he raised Jesus, giving him all power that now is being manifested here" (Acts 2,23-24; 3,13-15).

7. The Good News demands a change of life: The words of the apostles made the reality transparent. It revealed the challenge of God and transformed it into Good News for the people. In this way, the Good News appears now as a call for change, metanoia (Acts 2,38-40; 3,19-21. 26). The challenge now does not come from the apostles, but from the very reality enlightened by them. The announcement of the Good News of the Resurrection is not the transmission of doctrine, nor an imposition of morality, but consists in pointing out the events where the power of the Resurrection of Jesus is actualized, and interpreting them in such a way that this dimension comes forth, and is transformed into a challenge of the conscience of the hearers.

Now we are left with the following serious question: Today, in the different continents, within and outside the Church, what are the events in which the Resurrection of Jesus is taking place and that we should interpret as challenges of God in the conscience of humanity?

CONCLUSION

Time does not permit us to explain the whole process of the New Evangelization in the New Testament. Nevertheless now a basic structure in this process is seen. It is the same as that of the disciples of Isaiah. It should also be the basic structure of the New Evangelization that we want to realize towards the end of this century.

We synthesize this work with the words of John Paul II who asks that this evangelization be "new in its ardour, new in its method, and new in its expression."

The New Evangelization will be "new in its ardour" if it is born of a new experience of God, the Father of Jesus, along with a new reading of the past and with a critical reading of the present reality

The New Evangelization will be "new in its method" if it is incarnated in an attitude that transmits what is being lived; if besides an announcement of new contents, it is capable of revealing the face of God to people, and of denouncing that which destroys the life of the people and hinders them from seeing God's involvement in life.

The New Evangelization will be "new in its expression" if it is incarnated into a coherent practice, capable of making the reality transparent and of pointing out the events in which God is coming with power to liberate his people; if it is incarnated into the life of the communities and would be capable of leading them to build new forms of living together, more just, more fraternal, and more human.

Then, the same community will be an efficient sign in which God reveals himself. It will be the letter of Christ, recognized and read by all (2 Cor 3,2-3). Through the community, Jesus continues his mission:

to announce the Good News to the poor
to heal wounded hearts
to announce to the exiles their liberation
and to the prisoners their return to the light
to promote a year of favour of YHWH
to console the afflicted
to change mourning into joy.

The original and official version of this essay is in Portuguese



**To our beloved Brother in the Episcopate
Mons. Alberto Ablondi
Bishop of Livorno
President of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate**

I have been very pleased to hear that the IV Assembly of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate will be held in Bogotá, from June 27 to July 6. Therefore, I send my warmest greetings in the Lord to you, to my other Brothers in the Episcopate and to all the participants in this Assembly, which seeks to bring about new enthusiasm so that the Word of God, as Saint Paul says, "currat et glorificetur" (2 Thes 3,1).

Since its foundation, desired and supported by my Venerable Predecessor Pope Paul VI in 1969, the Federation has undertaken a path of generous service in the spreading of the Bible among the People of God and among the nations and peoples of the world. I am pleased to observe that you now wish to express more clearly in your own Constitution the reference to the Council Constitution *Dei Verbum*, whose directives have inspired your fruitful action in the apostolate over the last twenty-one years. I invite you to remain faithful to the original inspiration of the Federation as a sure guarantee of its future development, and to carry out your activities in the biblical Apostolate with a concerted effort in the various regions, under the direction of the Bishops. The close collaboration that you always maintain with the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Unity among Christians is highly praiseworthy and will also imprint a renewed impetus to the ecumenical movement, since the Word of God does move the hearts of all Christians towards a life of full fraternal communion. In effect, according to the Council, the written Word of God is one of the most valuable elements that build up and give life to the Church (cfr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3); and in the ecumenical dialogue the Sacred Scripture "is a precious instrument in the powerful hand of God to bring about that unity that the Savior offers to all men" (*Unitatis redintegratio*, 21). For this reason, the efforts of interconfessional collaboration in translating the Bible, according to the norms published jointly with the United Bible Societies, must be encouraged.

The Bible, the Word of God written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reveals, within the uninterrupted tradition of the Church, the merciful design of salvation of the Father and has as its center and heart the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected. Therefore, by giving the Bible to men and women, you will be giving them Christ himself, who fills those who hunger and thirst for the Word of God, for true freedom, for justice, for bread and love. The walls of hate and selfishness that still divide men and women and make them hostile and indifferent to the needs of their brothers and sisters will tumble down like the walls of Jericho at the sound of the Word of divine mercy.

Twenty-five years have passed since the promulgation of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* and the task that has to be carried out so as to spread the Sacred Scripture everywhere is still large. To bring this about, great strength is received from the *lectio divina*, that is, from listening and meditating with a burning heart on the Scriptures themselves, as the examples of Mary and the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 2,51; 24,32). We must constantly draw closer to the Bible as the source of sanctification, of spiritual life and of ecclesial communion in truth and charity; as promoter of vocations of special consecration, as the heart of family life, as inspirer of the commitment of the laity in society and as the soul of catechesis and theology. In this respect the Council Fathers teach: "All the preaching of the Church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture... it 'is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified' (Acts 20, 32)" (*Dei Verbum*, 21). The Bible Weeks that your Federation has been promoting successfully for a long time must be a deep experience in the life of the ecclesial communities called together by the Holy Spirit around the resurrected Christ (cfr. Acts 2,42), sensitive to all human suffering and the need for hope, and source for a renewed commitment to mission, to union with God and to the service of their brothers and sisters.

The Bible is also a treasure which in large part is revered in common with the Hebrew people, to whom the Church is united by a special spiritual bond since its beginnings. Lastly, this Holy Book, to which, in a certain way, the peoples of Islam relate, can inspire all interreligious dialogue between peoples that believe in God; and in this way it contributes towards bringing about a universal prayer, acceptable to God, for peace, in the hearts of all.

I fervently hope that the decisions and programmed orientations that you make in those days of study and reflections will be profoundly illuminated by the Holy Spirit, so that they be of service to humanity in this age of such radical and rapid change at the eve of the third Christian millenium. The next General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate and the Extraordinary Synods of the Bishops of Africa and Europe have also been called to respond to the challenges of the New Evangelization in this millenium. In the context of these pastoral needs your reflections on the Bible face to face with the New Evangelization acquires a greater importance for a renewed proclamation of the Word of God, the Good News of salvation. The Resurrected Christ, Savior of humanity and of creation, is the total newness (*novedad total*). All human renewal, brought about by the Holy Spirit, in a certain way, evokes, anticipates and expresses this newness.

And so, while I make fervent prayers to the Lord that he may assist the work of your Assembly with the abundance of his gifts, I am pleased to impart to all the participants, as a sign of benevolence, a special Apostolic Blessing.

Vatican, June 14, 1990

John Paul II