

# Catholic Biblical Federation

**N°17**

**4 / 1990**

**Bulletin**

*Dei  
verbum*

**25th anniversary of the  
promulgation of the  
Dogmatic Constitution  
on Divine Revelation  
DEI VERBUM**

**\***

**The Constitution DEI VERBUM,  
25 years after its promulgation -  
Perspectives of the Catholic  
Biblical Federation**

**Report of the General Secretary  
to the Bogotá Assembly about  
the Federation from Bangalore  
(1984) to Bogotá (1990)**

**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 interconfessional 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, lectors 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*

## Bulletin DEI VERBUM No. 17

4/1990

October - December

**Bulletin DEI VERBUM** is a quarterly publication in English, French, German and Spanish.

### Editorial Board:

Ludger Feldkämper, Marc Sevin.

### Editorial Team

Arlene Browne, Heinz Köster,  
Marc Sevin, Karin Stenzel

### Conditions of subscription for 1990:

- Ordinary subscription:	US \$12
- Supporting subscription:	US \$25
- Third World countries:	US \$ 8
- Students:	US \$ 8

(US \$2 must be added if the 4 issues are to be sent air mail)

In order to cover production costs we request that all those who can, pay the supporting subscription rate.

Do not forget to indicate in which language you wish to receive the Bulletin: English, French, German or Spanish.

A subscription consists of four issues beginning at the time payment is received.

For Full and Associate Members of the Federation the price of subscription is included in the annual membership fee.

Please send your subscription fee to the General Secretariat of the Federation (address opposite).

Bank: Liga Bank, Speyer  
Acct. No. 59820 (BLZ 54790300)

### Reproduction of articles

We invite our members to reproduce in their own publications any articles printed in BULLETIN DEI VERBUM which they consider to be of interest to their readers unless a statement to the contrary is given. Opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors, and not necessarily of the CBF.

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

GENERAL SECRETARIAT  
Mittelstr. 12, P.O. Box 10 52 22  
7000 Stuttgart 10  
Germany  
Tel. (0711) 60 92 74 or 60 40 99  
Fax: (0711) 6 40 56 44

The Catholic Biblical Federation  
is an "international Catholic organization of a public  
character" (cf. Code of Canon Law, 312.1.1).

\*\*\*\*\*  
**CONTENTS**  
 \*\*\*\*\*

- \* The CONSTITUTION  
 "DEI VERBUM"  
 after 25 Years:  
 CBF Perspective  
 by Msgr. John Onaiyekan  
 Bishop of Ilorin, Nigeria 4
  
- \* Report of the General Secretary  
 of the Catholic Biblical Federation  
 to the Bogotá Assembly  
 Fr. Ludger Feldkämper,svd 12

**Copies of the  
 Final  
 Statement of  
 the Bogotá  
 Assembly  
 and the  
 Constitution  
 of the  
 Federation  
 are available  
 from the  
 General  
 Secretariat in  
 Stuttgart in  
 English,  
 French  
 German and  
 Spanish.**

## Editorial

This issue of the BULLETIN continues to present the main documents of the Bogotá Plenary Assembly. Although this issue presents only two of them, they contain an immense amount of valuable information.

On 18 November this year, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of DEI VERBUM. The Catholic Biblical Federation cannot forget that it owes its existence to this Counciliar Constitution on Divine Revelation. The Federation was founded, in fact, to implement the recommendations of Chapter VI of DEI VERBUM. Therefore, the members of the Executive Committee invite all the members of the Federation to commemorate this event, in some way. Now is the time to celebrate the anniversary and not wait for thirty or fifty years! Now is the time to take stock and see where we stand regarding the directives given by the Council and to evaluate our achievements and failures! In his paper given at the Assembly in Bogotá, Msgr. Onaiyekan, Bishop-Coadjutor of Abuya, the new capital of Nigeria, recalled the importance of DEI VERBUM for the Federation. His reflections could serve as a basis for examining how we have implemented the recommendations of DEI VERBUM.

Fr. Ludger Feldkämper's report on the work of the Federation between the Assemblies of Bangalore in 1984 and this one of Bogotá gives a picture on the biblical apostolate around the world during the past six years. It is filled with information and reflections. The General Secretary spared no efforts in helping the members of the Federation develop the biblical pastoral-ministry in their respective areas. His report proves that the Constitution DEI VERBUM did not turn out to be a dead letter, but rather it has brought fruits more abundantly than ever expected. This is a good sign for the twenty-five years to come!

Marc Sevin

# The Constitution DEI VERBUM after 25 Years: CBF Perspective

**Msgr. John Onaiyekan**

## INTRODUCTION

In November 1990, it will be twenty-five years since the promulgation of the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation "Dei Verbum." In the life of an individual, twenty-five years seems like a long period, about a third of a normal life span. But in the life of the Church, it is a relatively brief period. If ecumenical councils are seen as occasions for sowing seeds of new ideas, then we need to give those ideas time to germinate, grow and bear fruit.

In both content and spirit, "Dei Verbum" (DV) is typical of that novel, and often revolutionary, concept which characterized the teachings of the Council. To unlearn old ideas in order to absorb new ones is a tedious process for most people. It is not surprising, therefore, that the revolutionary ideas of Dei Verbum have at times met with resistance, or rejection, or simply a benign neglect. The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, a few years ago during an audience granted to members of the WCFBA\* said: "Up to now, the Constitution 'Dei Verbum' has been too neglected."<sup>1</sup> The papal lament should become for us a challenge to take Dei Verbum more seriously. What better occasion is there for doing this than a Plenary Assembly of the WCFBA held twenty-five years after Dei Verbum?

On the other hand, we must acknowledge what the Spirit has done for the Church in the area of biblical apostolate during this past quarter of a century. Efforts will be made to document this progress later in this paper. The ideas of the Council have reached the whole Church. The impact is more deeply felt among the younger members of Christ's faithful, both ordained ministers and laity, most of whom know of no other Church but the post-Vatican II Church. In particular, Dei Verbum has set in motion a real biblical revolution in the Catholic Church, which started slowly and is now a raging fire at the grass-roots level in many parts of the world. The mission lands of Africa, Asia and Latin America have experienced the power of the Word of God in Scriptures breaking through every barrier of culture and language. The more ready access to the inspired texts has now made it easier to speak about God in the language of every people and culture.

I do not intend to give here a full commentary on Dei Verbum; this has been done in different languages by people far more competent than myself.<sup>2</sup> Rather I will invite this Assembly to reflect with me on the document in two stages; first from the beginning to the end of chapter five; then we shall take chapter six on its own and examine it in more detail. A third and final part will assess the role of the WCFBA in meeting the challenges of Dei Verbum in the Church of our days.

\* At the 1990 PA the Federation changed its name to CBF.

Although my reflection will necessarily depend on my experience as a busy Nigerian bishop, I will try to reflect the world scene to the extent that this is accessible to me. I am glad to acknowledge in this regard how much my mind has been broadened because of my close association with the WCFBA during the last six years that I have had the privilege to serve on its Executive Committee.

## PART I: Dogmatic Section

### 1. A Dogmatic Document

As the name clearly shows, Dei Verbum is a "dogmatic constitution" whose intention is "to set forth the authentic doctrine of divine revelation and its transmission" (n. 1). What we have is, therefore, a dense and comprehensive summary of the current official position of the Church on the different dogmatic matters raised. Thus, the whole Constitution can be seen as a dogmatic treatise in five chapters, with a pastoral conclusion as a sixth chapter.

However, even in its dogmatic preoccupation, the overall pastoral aims of the Council are not lost sight of. Right from the beginning the universal kerygmatic objective is spelled out: "so that the whole world may by hearing the message of salvation come to believe ... hope, and ... love" (n. 1).

The opening sentence places the whole agenda of the Council within the context of being "devoutly attentive to the Word of God and confident in proclaiming it." Right from the beginning, we see the idea that attentive listening is a necessary prerequisite for an effective proclamation of the "Word of God," an idea that runs through the rest of the document.

The document operates with a broad concept of the "Word of God," as latter chapters will show. But here, the key idea, "Dei Verbum," is placed as the opening words thus giving the whole Constitution not only an appropriate name, but a point of constant reference.

### 2. God Speaks by Revealing Himself

Chapter I deals with the general concept of revelation, presented in the broadest sense possible and yet profound in its implications. We can speak of the "Word of God" only because God has taken the initiative to communicate himself and his will through revelation. It is an act of God's "goodness and wisdom" (n. 2) within a universal scope having its centre and apex in "Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh." The action of God in the "history of salvation" is made known to us in the "divine plan of revelation...in deeds and words that are closely interconnected."



God's self-revelation is presented in concentric circles of progressively sharpening focus (n. 3). First, creation as a whole offers an "abiding witness" to God. Then mankind in general, both before and after the fall, has the privilege of both God's self-revelation and an invitation to "heavenly salvation." The "loving care" of God over the human race is "without any intermission" - and we can add, without any limits of race or nation. It is within this universal "loving care" of God that the special call and roles of Abraham, Moses and the prophets of Israel take root and grow as divine preparation for the universal saving Gospel of Christ. God's Word to mankind has its definitive expression in Jesus Christ (n. 4).

When God offers himself in revelation, we receive him with the "obedience of faith" made possible and perfect by the Holy Spirit. All this nevertheless leaves intact the God-given role of human reason in the search for truth, both natural and divine, in line with the traditional doctrine of the Church in these matters.

In this chapter, one is struck by the stress on the broad universal scope of divine revelation. This links up well with the well-known concern of Vatican II for inclusiveness, openness, dialogue with and witness to all of humanity. As far as God's revelation is concerned, no one is left in total darkness. Everyone is within God's plan of salvation. The God whom all creation reflects and bears witness to has revealed himself to all of humanity, to each according to the measure of grace given by the Spirit. We have here already a theological justification for the policy of positive appreciation of all that is good, noble and true in the religions of the world. In the same context, the sacred books of the world religions can be seen as a reflection of "that light which enlightens everyone coming into this world" (Jn 1:9).

On the other hand, by representing divine revelation as growing dynamically within a history of salvation culminating in Christ but continuing uninterrupted to the end of time, we are reminded that we can always grow in the knowledge and love of the God of our salvation through the Spirit that is given to us.

### 3. Transmitting Divine Revelation

God could have made himself known to each individual directly and in sufficient measure for salvation. In that case the question would not arise of transmitting divine revelation from one person to the other, or from one generation to another. But since God has made community an essential dimension of human life, the need arises for provisions to ensure the faithful transmission of God's revealed truths from one generation to the next.

Chapter two of the Constitution deals with this process of transmission. As regards what is to be transmitted, we are introduced, rather abruptly to the concept of Gospel, which here has the meaning of the total message of Christ. Before Christ, the law and the prophets prepared and announced the Gospel. After Christ, it is entrusted to the apostles and their successors for onward transmission. Here again, we see Christ, as the centre and apex of God's self-revelation to humanity.

The apostles preserved and handed on the Gospel in the form of oral preaching, living examples and institutions. What they handed on was what they had received from Christ in a variety of ways: "from Christ's lips, from their association with him and from his works, or from what they had learned from the promptings of the Holy Spirit" (n. 7). We should note here the important role of "the promptings of the Holy Spirit" in shaping the witness of the apostles, to whom the Gospel was entrusted by Christ.

Closely linked with the apostles are the "apostolic men" who with the apostles "under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit set down the message of redemption in writing." For the first time, writing is mentioned as a means of preserving and transmitting the message of divine revelation. But in order that the Gospel may survive in a living and integral form, the apostles passed on their roles to the bishops as successors.

Thus, the Gospel is transmitted in the form of an apostolic tradition preserved in the living Church and "expressed in a special manner in the inspired books" (n. 8). Almost effortlessly, the document moves smoothly into the long-debated issue of the relationship between Scripture and tradition. Scripture itself is part of tradition, which in turn is presented with a comprehensive scope.

Tradition, which comes from the apostles, grows dynamically in the Church with the assistance of the Holy Spirit acting in all members of the Church. It is expressed not only as a set of ideas or doctrines oral and written, but also in the practice and life of the believing, praying and serving Church. In relation to Scriptures, tradition gives rise to Scriptures, fixes its canonical limits and ensures its authentic interpretation. Tradition is the living channel of God's uninterrupted conversation with the Church, the Bride of his beloved Son. It is in tradition that the entirety of the Word of God is handed down. In so far as this has been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is Scripture. Therefore, the certainty on all revealed truths is not derived from Scripture alone: "non per solam scripturam." This is no doubt a reference to the classical Protestant doctrine of "sola scriptura" - although not in any polemic spirit. Indeed, Dei Verbum rejects the idea of two sources of revelation. Both Scripture and tradition form "one mirror...in which the Church...contemplates God" (n. 7). They form "a single deposit of the Word of God entrusted to the Church" (n. 9).

The Church to which the Word of God is entrusted is not a amorphous mob. There is an authority charged with the office of authentic interpretation of the Word of God whether in Scripture or in tradition. This office is entrusted "to only the living Magisterium of the Church" (n. 10). What the "Magisterium" means is not defined. It is perhaps taken for granted. But Dei Verbum notes that the Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God. It must serve the Word and listen attentively to it even before proclaiming, teaching and interpreting. The chapter closes with a beautiful picture of Scripture, tradition and Magisterium as three legs of a tripod held together by the same one spirit of God.

Reading chapter two of Dei Verbum brings two practical observations to mind. First, one notes that the document is quite sober and "restrictive" in its treatment of the Magisterium especially vis-a-vis the deposit of faith. It decidedly rejects the tendency to equate tradition with the Magisterium. This is further underscored by emphasizing the role of the faithful in the dynamic growth, recognition and correct interpretation of genuine Christian tradition. The second observation concerns the place of Scripture within tradition. The biblical revolution in the Catholic Church, especially in Third World nations, is a blessing to thank God for. But, at times, one wonders if sufficient notice is being taken of what Dei Verbum says on tradition and how it relates to Scripture. Is there not a tendency to go "sola scriptura"? The question "Is it in the Bible?" has become a major preoccupation of many Catholics, as they make often futile attempts to find adequate biblical basis for everything the Church says and does. Often we see here the influence of non-Catholic fundamentalist groups. It is important to maintain constantly a proper "Catholic" attitude in these matters.

#### 4. Inspiration and Interpretation

In chapter three, Dei Verbum narrows its focus on that special expression of divine revelation which is in written form, namely Sacred Scripture. It is a very dense chapter which distills the fruit of a long tradition of theological reflection and magisterial teaching on how divine revelation came to be expressed in writing. It touches on the thorny questions of inspiration, canonicity, divine and human authorship, truth and inerrancy of Scripture as well as outlining sound Catholic principles of biblical interpretation. The basic question of how God acts with the human sacred writer to produce the inspired text finds no ultimate answer except in terms of an analogy with the mystery of the incarnation. In this realm of faith, it all comes out quite "logical." If God could condescend to reveal himself in the Lord Jesus, is it beyond him to express his message of redemption through human authors? Paragraph II gives an excellent summary of how the Church now officially explains this "wonderful condescension of the eternal wisdom."

The emphasis on the need to apply valid principles for interpreting Scripture shows that the inspired text is not always self-explanatory. The long history and copious record of doctrinal errors and Church division are a sad proof of this. Even the New Testament authors knew that Scripture is not to be interpreted at will (2 Pet 3:16).

The aim of biblical interpretation is to perceive what God willed to communicate by the words of the sacred writer. The interpreter must therefore investigate "what the sacred writer really intended to signify." This method must pay attention to literary forms, take note of the Spirit by whom the Scriptures are inspired, work within the living tradition of the Church and take account of analogy of faith. These are tasks which not everyone can perform. There are those within the Church who have the special mission as *exegetes* to penetrate, understand more fully and explain more deeply the sense of Scripture.

Theirs is a specially valuable service to the Church as a whole, as the faithful profit from the fruit of their studies. They also render special service in preparing the ground for the judgment of the Church, especially in disputed matters.

The final arbiter in matters of biblical interpretation is the "Church," by which we are to understand the Magisterium, as the last sentence of paragraph twelve clearly shows.

From these rather technical discussion, a few observations come to mind:

a. Looking back over the past century, one sees a refreshing consistency in the attitude of the Church to modern methods of Scripture studies. Her cautious reaction to early extravagant claims of so-called "high criticism" was later proved to be sound. In general, on many points, scholars are today no longer as sure as their predecessors claimed to be. It is hard not to see in this the breath of the Spirit guiding the Church.

b. Dei Verbum strikes a delicate balance between crass fundamentalism and dry rationalism. The respective roles of divine and human agents in both the writing and the interpretation of Scripture are affirmed and kept in equilibrium.

c. The explosion of Catholic biblical scholarship since Vatican II has been due largely to the ideas of Dei Verbum, which liberated the Catholic exegete from undue doctrinal restrictions. On the whole, this freedom has been used responsibly and with copious fruit. Catholic exegetes are among the best Bible scholars today in a field of intense ecumenical competition.

d. However, it seems more needs to be done to bring the fruits of high exegesis down to the grassroots. For example, the link between biblical scholarship and biblical apostolate still needs to be better forged - although efforts have been made in this direction recently. In this connection, the interest shown by the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, in the programmes of the WCFBA is a welcome development. Such a good link is important if we are to stem the tide of fundamentalism among Bible enthusiasts and remove the needless suspicion which conservative wings of the Church often entertain in respect to Bible scholars. The scholars on their own part are challenged to direct their energies towards meeting the real spiritual needs of the people of God, who seek from the Scriptures nourishment, consolation and life.

If the bridge is not built, we may fall deeper and deeper into a situation where the charismatics depend on the Spirit alone, and the conservatives stick to their old manuals and devotional books, while the scholars keep turning out irrelevant scientific papers for their exclusive audience.

e. In spite of it all, I believe that somehow the Scriptures have a way of speaking intelligibly to whoever reads or listens to it with faith and love. This is an encouraging thought.

#### 5. The Old Testament

The Old Testament is the sacred book of the chosen people of Israel. But like the rest of divine revelation of which it is a part, it has the whole of humanity in view, just as the call of Israel is a function of the salvation of the whole human race. This became quite clear at the fullness of time in Christ who is

the fulfillment of the Old Testament dispensation. Therefore, the Old Testament has universal value. It also has permanent value, as an inspired writing that was also the Scriptures of the early Church.

In relation to the New Testament, it is as preparation, prophetic announcement and typological image. It contains "much that is imperfect and provisional" (n. 15), (*imperfecta et temporaria*), but even these are to be read in the context of a "divine pedagogy."

The Christian has many reasons to revere the Old Testament. Apart from being inspired by God, it contains a vivid perception of God, sublime doctrine about him, saving wisdom on man and life and a rich treasure of prayer.

There is a close relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament: both make up the Gospel message and one clarifies and interprets the other.

Dei Verbum affirms strongly that the Old Testament is part of the "Gospel message." This is in line with the ancient constant tradition of the Church. There is, therefore, no room to imagine that it is perhaps "less inspired," though often we tend to think so.

There is reference to the "imperfect and provisional" things contained in the Old Testament. If for the people of Israel these are by way of divine pedagogy due to the hardness of their hearts (Mt. 19:8), for us, all these have to be read in the light of the New Testament. Examples of such "*imperfecta et temporaria*" are polygamy, (Gen. 29:30; 2 Sam 3:2-5), divorce, (Dt. 24:1), extermination of whole cities by "herem" (Jos 6: 18-24; 1 Sam 15), and the law of revenge (Ex 21: 24-25). Jesus in the sermon on the mount showed how such Old Testament texts are to be "fulfilled." "It was said ... but I say ..." (Mt 5:21-22), "I give you a new commandment..." (Jn 13:34).

There is, therefore, no room to hide behind Old Testament texts for taking anti-Gospel positions, for example in areas of war and peace, marriage and family morality. A Nigerian Church founder and leader died a few years ago, leaving behind over thirty widows, claiming as his patron and model, David, the friend of God. Before Christians seek support for Holy Wars in Exodus and Judges, they ought first to read the Gospels attentively.

The "imperfect" things of the sacred writings of world religions can also be seen as "divine pedagogy." That they contain much that is good and true which is a preparation for and invitation to the Gospel message is an authentic Vatican II teaching.<sup>3</sup> A long discussion on the theological status of the non-Christian Scriptures at the Bangalore Assembly generated a lot of heat and little light. Can these Scriptures, like the Old Testament be said to be "part of the Gospel message?" In the broad sense of "Gospel" found in Dei Verbum (n.7), an affirmative answer may be allowed. But I believe it will be causing needless confusion to say they are "inspired."

## 6. The New Testament

The New Testament writings are an abiding and divine witness of all that God had done in Christ. The chapter concen-

trates attention largely on the four Gospels because they "have a special preeminence" within the whole of Scriptures, as the principal witness to the life and teaching of Christ.

Here again, we have a beautiful summary of the current doctrine of the Church concerning the Gospels as faithful, honest and true accounts of what Jesus did and said. This doctrine makes adequate allowance for the processes of composition of the Gospels: from events, through full understanding of oral and written traditions to the final Gospel text. The emphasis, however, is on the truth of the Gospel. The text in paragraph 19 stresses this with many words and phrases.

The Church affirms the historicity of the Gospels, which faithfully relate what Jesus really did. The evangelists retained the character of the original preaching; and imparted an honest and true account. All this they did so that we may know the truth.

The brief paragraph twenty on the other New Testament writings presents them as completing and confirming the message of the four Gospels.

The special importance of the New Testament and the "preeminence" of the four Gospels should be reflected in our Bible translation projects. This seems to be already the case.

One wonders how this is reflected in our normal Bible study programmes. Can we introduce people to the whole Bible, while respecting the relative importance of the different parts of Scripture? The liturgy does this in lectionary. We have here a good model.

The chapter gives a fairly clear position of the Church as regards the issue of the historicity of the Gospels. This leaves plenty of room for scholars to indulge in their speculations.

In these speculations, it does not seem that much firm breakthrough has been made recently. We are treated to many theories and hypotheses which seem to make little or no difference in the substance of the Gospel message. In fact, extravagant theories of earlier days are giving way to more sober positions.

In any case, since the Gospels are not written for experts alone, our people should be allowed and assisted in seeing and hearing the Lord Jesus in the pages of the Gospels, as the evangelists honestly and truly intended.

## PART II: Pastoral Directives

### 1. The Bible and the Church

Chapter six of Dei Verbum carries the title "Holy Scripture in the life of the Church." As this title indicates, we have here a brief but comprehensive outline of what the place and the role of Scripture should be in the Church. It is here that more practical issues are discussed and pastoral directives given. It presents a ready syllabus for checking to what extent the ideas of Dei Verbum have been implemented in the Church. It is no wonder that the WCFBA reproduces this chapter as the first of the documents in the documentation section of its official Directory - even before the Constitution of the Federation.

It is there described as "the orientation point for all engaged in the biblical apostolate."<sup>5</sup>

The chapter opens by declaring in very strong terms the importance and veneration which the Church attributes to the Scriptures; nothing less than what she gives to the very Body of the Lord "sicut et ipsum Corpus dominicum" (n. 21). And this is a matter of a tradition as old as the Eucharist where on the same table, the bread of life is received and given to the faithful both as Word of God and Body of Christ. That there is one table is brought out well in Flannery's English translation: "from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ" ("ex mensa tam verbi Dei quam Corporis Christi").<sup>6</sup>

Scripture, along with sacred tradition, and never on its own, has always been and is considered the supreme rule of faith: always Scripture with tradition, as explained in chapter II.

Because Scripture "communicates ... the Word of God, and causes to resound ... the voice of the Holy Spirit," it is a necessary nourishment and rule for all Church preaching and Christian religion in general.

Since God our Father speaks to us, his children, in the sacred books, they have a force and power (vis et virtus) that supports and energizes the Church. As for the children of the Church, they get through the Scriptures "a strengthening of faith, food for the soul and a pure and never failing (perennis) source of spiritual life." Thus, what is said of the "Word of God," that it is "alive and active" (Heb. 2:4) is also valid for Sacred Scripture.

A few points are worth stressing in this paragraph:

a. We need to keep reminding our people of the genuine biblical tradition of the Church. That we do not have the custom of carrying the Bible around does not mean that Catholics are ignorant of its contents. In the liturgy, Scripture reading is an essential part of every Eucharistic celebration. Our doctrines, even when expressed in the classical catechisms, have biblical basis, no matter how remote and indirect. Often because we cannot quote a series of chapters and verses, or trade texts with as much facility as Protestants seem to do, we tend to underestimate how much we are familiar with the biblical message. There is no need for our Catholics to adopt an attitude of inferiority, especially since the more recent developments in Catholic biblical apostolate.

b. It is against the background of the above observation that one can more easily appreciate the rather striking claims of Dei Verbum that: "just as the Church has always venerated the Body of Christ, so she has always held in reverence the Sacred Scriptures." It is only of recent, however, that we are witnessing a revival of the ritual expression of the veneration of the Sacred Scriptures, e.g., enthroning the Bible, procession with the lectionary, etc.

c. There is a subtle distinction made between the "Word of God" and the "sacred books." One is contained or made acces-

sible in the other. It is important to keep this distinction in mind, otherwise merely equating the "Word of God" with the book will lead to the fundamentalist position that borders on "bibliolity," i.e., worship of the Bible. While it is important to make the actual biblical texts available, it is not the same as the "Word of God" which lasts forever and saves. In this regard, it is consoling to know that the "Word of God" can still be made available in other ways to those who have no access to Bibles, e.g., the illiterate and those too poor to afford a Bible

## 2. Wide Open Access to Holy Scripture

It is declared as a basic principle that "for Christ's faithful the approach to holy Scripture should lie wide open" (n. 22). This principle is behind the long tradition of versions and translations in the Church, a tradition that dates to the pre-Christian era in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, which the Church "accepted as her own." Other ancient translations into some classical languages of the East and West soon appeared, to make the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament accessible to many who understood neither Hebrew nor Greek. The Council makes special mention of the Latin Vulgate which has for many centuries enjoyed a great prestige in the Church.

The tradition of translation is an ongoing process, "since the Word of God ought to be available at all times." As the Church breaks new cultural and linguistic grounds, old translations are redone and new ones are made to cater to an ever-growing variety of languages. The Church must take care that these translations are "suitable and accurate," and as far as possible from the original languages of Scripture. Finally, provisions are made for Catholic involvement in interconfessional translations under certain conditions.

Before Dei Verbum, it was not always obvious that access to Scripture ought to be "wide-open" to the faithful. The frequent strong warnings against misuse of Scripture and prohibitions of unauthorized editions gave most average Catholics little impression of a wide open access to Scriptures. The once frequent Protestant contention that Catholics are forbidden to read the Bible was, therefore, not without basis. While biblical studies by scholars and clergy were encouraged and promoted, the same can hardly be said about the access of the faithful to Scripture. Dei Verbum marks a definite new policy, stating what "ought" (oportet) to be.

But since Dei Verbum, a lot has happened. There has been a real explosion in Catholic Bible production, especially in rich nations with copious possibilities of human and material resources. But even in the poor nations, the past twenty-five years have seen an unprecedented increase in the number of Catholic translation projects. A cursory look through Pict Rijk's "A Guide to Catholic Bible Translations" brings this out very clearly.<sup>7</sup>

The need for Bible translations and production is greatest in the Third World countries where the obstacles of finance and expertise are greatest. In most cases such projects depend largely on the financial backing of foreign funding agencies.



The WCFBA has been playing a great role in coordinating and promoting many of these translation projects and linking them up with available sources of financial assistance.

There are many obstacles in mission lands to that wide-open access to Scripture advocated by Dei Verbum. Many languages still have no translations. Where there are translations, the cost of putting a copy of the Bible into people's hands is beyond the reach of many. And even when the Bibles are made available in accessible language and cost, too many people cannot read. There is, therefore, need to encourage access to the biblical message through other channels than reading, e.g., listening to the Scriptures read by others, audio tapes, drama story telling, and audio-visual aids like cinema, television and video tapes.

Modern technology in the computer culture is opening up almost limitless possibilities for storing, arranging and retrieving information. The efforts of places like "Centre Informatique et Bible" of the Abbey of Maredsous in Belgium, are going a long way to put computer technology at the service of the Word of God. The Pope's message for the 24th World Communication Day, 1990, touched on this matter of modern computer culture with reference to Sacred Scripture. Although computer technology is still a luxury of elite nations and persons, the expectations are that it will soon be accessible to all, rich and poor alike. We look forward to that day.

Again, in mission lands, providing "suitable and accurate versions" depends largely on what expertise is available for translation projects. In most cases, we have to make do with a provisional low quality translation while waiting for the experts to arrive. Protestants have often followed this realistic approach. Very rarely do we have people with direct access to the original languages of Scripture. We generally have to work largely from other "accurate versions."

As regards ecumenical versions, the text of Dei Verbum represents a major breakthrough, even though the tone is still very cautious and restrictive. Very clear conditions are laid down: suitable opportunity, permission of Church authority, and a joint translations effort. Later documents of the Church show a more positive tone.<sup>8</sup>

Recommendation 3.3.2 of the Bangalore Assembly was in line with the Spirit of the Church when it talked of "encouraging translation... of the Bible, preferably on an interconfessional level..."

The "Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible" jointly published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the United Bible Societies is a necessary point of reference. First published in 1968, a new updated second edition was published in 1987. In many local conditions, it may not be possible to apply all the terms of the "guidelines"; but the terms are wise and valid. In some concrete cases, local Church authority may find that informal Catholic participation in United Bible Societies translations project, or even outright adoption of an existing non-Catholic version would be better than having nothing at all.

### **3. Deeper Understanding of Scriptures: n. 23**

It is not enough to have access to the Scriptures; it is even more important to strive, with the Church, towards an ever deeper understanding of the inspired text. To build on past foundations, the Church encourages the study of the fathers of the Church, both East and West, and of liturgical traditions, since the liturgy is a privileged context for deep and rich understanding of Scripture.

Exegetes have the role of investigating and interpreting the sacred books. They should work in collaboration, making use of suitable subsidiary studies, under the watchful eye of the Magisterium. Their efforts should aim at promoting the service which the "ministers of the divine Word" render the people of God. They are solemnly encouraged by the Council to continue in their important mission and proceed "according to the mind of the Church."

Since the publication of Dei Verbum, a lot of progress has been made in Catholic circles in scientific exegesis. Many publications, associations and research institutions with biblical orientation have sprung up. Similarly, in accordance with *Optatam Totius* (n. 16), seminary formation has seen generally marked improvement in the biblical component of the theological programme. As mentioned earlier, this has had a positive ecumenical impact; Catholic exegetes now discuss freely across denominational lines and are now fully in the mainstream of biblical scholarship. We note here again the need to do more to bridge the gap between scholars and the people at the grassroots.

### **4. Scripture in Theology and Ministry of the Word: n. 24**

The place of Scripture in theology is described under the two rich concepts of foundation and soul. Scripture, along with tradition, puts theology on a firm basis. This also makes theology a living spiritual experience, instead of its being a dry and lifeless speculation. There is here again the usual nuanced formulation of the relationship between Scripture and the Word of God. Holy Scripture contains the Word of God; but in so far as it is inspired, it is also truly the Word of God. The ultimate objective of theology should be to promote "the ministry of the Word" in its broadest sense, a ministry that is sustained and fortified by the words of Scripture.

If theology is knowledge about God, then it must listen to what God says about himself in divine revelation, especially in the inspired texts. Since Dei Verbum, it has become a standard methodology to make "biblical themes" a point of departure of all theological speculation, as advocated in *Optatam Totius* (n.16).

Today, there is a necessary emphasis on inculturation in theology. Acknowledging the basic role of Scripture in theology helps to put into proper perspective the inherited overlaying clothing of philosophical systems and speculative constructions. The Scriptures remain a permanent source and valid rule for every attempt to express the same Christian faith for different cultures.

The “ministry of the Word” should be to occupy a place of priority in the interests of the Church - as it did in apostolic times. “We cannot neglect the ministry of the Word to serve tables” (Acts 6:2). There may be a difference in how this priority is expressed from one circumstance to another, but it must be there.

### 5. Bible Reading: n. 25

Dei Verbum strongly recommends the reading and study of Scriptures to all categories of Christ’s faithful. Most immediately concerned are those who in any way hold a lawful mandate to exercise the ministry of the Word. Three groups of people are specifically mentioned, namely: priests, deacons and catechists. Before undertaking to pass the Word to others, they need to inwardly listen to and be themselves personally nourished by the inspired message. For their part, the faithful must acquire the habit of frequent reading, and thus, get to know Jesus. The famous saying of St. Jerome is quoted here with approval: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is indeed ignorance of Christ.” The faithful should also go beyond merely reading the biblical texts. Other ways of “approach to the sacred text” are recommended, first of which is the liturgy followed by spiritual reading, instructions and other aids approved and promoted by the pastors of the Church. Prayer should accompany Bible reading as our response to God talking to us in Scriptures.

A definite responsibility is placed on bishops “with whom is the apostolic doctrine” to ensure the correct use of the Bible. This responsibility is especially in the provision of versions with adequate explanatory notes, so that people may have a secure and useful acquaintance with Scripture.

But Bible reading is not only for the faithful. Even non-Christians are to be encouraged to read the Scriptures by making available to them special editions with suitable notes.

That ministers of the Word must themselves carefully listen to and be nourished by the Word is not merely a matter of sound pedagogical method. It is a spiritual condition for effectively passing on the living Word. Scripture scholars and Bible instructors need to remind themselves often that they themselves need to be personally nourished by the Word.

There are now many methods of Bible sharing which integrates study with prayer. That this practice is growing in variety and popularity is surely a gift of the Spirit. The impact on the lives of many is there as a concrete fruit for all to see.

Dei Verbum advocates the production of special editions of the Bible for non-Christian readers. I am not aware of any such project. This seems to be one of the neglected areas of the Council document. We note, however, that in most places, especially in the mission lands, we are still struggling to meet the needs of the faithful for Bibles. How can we think of Bibles for non-Christians? For their part, non-Christians do not always welcome the offer of the Christian Bible. It is on record that some fanatical Islamic nations actually ban the importation of Bibles, even for private use. We hear that in Saudi Arabia, Bibles are put on the same list with pornography and hard-

drugs as prohibited goods. In Nigeria, some fanatical Muslim parents react strongly against the Gideons distributing Bibles to their children in school. But on the other hand, many Muslims freely read the Bible and are familiar with its message. Indeed, Muslims in Nigeria are on the whole more familiar with the Bible than Nigerian Christians are with the Quran. It seems some Buddhist countries also forbid Bibles.

Circulating the inspired text among non-Christians in editions specially adapted to their needs can be a powerful way of spreading the Gospel message. And so it should be done “with enthusiasm” whenever possible. In many cases, however, “discretion” is called for more than enthusiasm.

### 6. A Prayer and a Hope: n. 26.

Dei Verbum concludes with a prayer and a hope. It prays that as the faithful read and study the Scriptures, the Word of God may grow and fill their hearts. This is a prayer that will be heard to the extent that each faithful fervently reads and assiduously studies the sacred writings. The hope is for a new impulse to the Spiritual life of the Church, a hope that is well-founded on the experience of the Church in the salutary impact of preserving devotion to the Eucharist. The biblical revival has brought about in many places a veritable explosion of spiritual life and Christian devotion. The hope of the Church has not been misplaced.

## PART III: Dei Verbum and the WCFBA

At many points in the course of the foregoing reflections, we have had occasions to highlight ways in which the WCFBA has been contributing towards the proper implementation of the directives of Dei Verbum. All that is left at this stage is to put together a few general observations by way of an assessment and conclusion.

### 1. A Product of Dei Verbum

Right from the beginning, the WCFBA has been conceived and understood as a response to Dei Verbum, especially to the various practical directives contained in Chapter VI. This text of Dei Verbum is one of the foundational documents of the Federation. There is constant reference to it in the official documents of the Federation; e.g., the Constitution (Art. III) as well as in all the curial and papal addresses compiled in the Directory of the Federation. From all this, it is clear that the agenda of the Federation is as vast as that of Dei Verbum itself. The list of the activities performed by the Federation teams all over the world compiled from reports sent in preparation for the Bangalore Assembly shows that this vast agenda has been well-covered.<sup>9</sup>

### 2. Not a Private Work

In his message to the Bangalore Assembly, after outlining the work which the Federation has set itself, his Holiness Pope

John Paul II declared: "The work of the Federation is not a private one. Rather it is a work of the Church."<sup>10</sup> To bring the Word of God within the reach of the whole world through the promotion of the biblical apostolate in its many forms is a task which engages the attention of the whole Church, and is "entrusted in the first place to the bishops and episcopal conferences, and in a very particular way to the chair of Peter."<sup>11</sup> The Federation seeks to help the pastors of the Church in carrying out their duty in this regard, not to compete with, less still to work against them. The Constitution ensures this harmony by acknowledging as "Full Members" only those who represent national episcopal conferences.

### 3. A Good Track Record

From its simple but highly authoritative origins in the meeting of Catholic biblical organizations called with Papal mandate by Cardinal Bea, then President of Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in April 1968, the Federation has taken root all over the world and grown to its present stage. Its organization and self-understanding developed gradually over the years, not without some soul searching, as some of the heated debates in the Bangalore Assembly proves. But the important thing is to be active in the field under any organizational framework. The activities of the Federation have been increasing by leaps and bounds since the beginning.

The impact of these activities is felt especially in the mission lands - which also happen to be in most cases the poor lands. But the growing interest and involvement of the older and richer Churches have resulted in a mutually enriching "exchange of ideas, information, pastoral helps and material aids..."<sup>12</sup> This collaboration should continue, because, to paraphrase Psalm 133, it is good and sweet when brothers work together united for the spread of the Word of God.

### 4. Attention to Grass-roots Efforts

As a worldwide organization, the Federation must of necessity undertake international activities, e.g., publications, re-

gional meetings, plenary assemblies, training courses like the Dei Verbum Course in Nemi Rome, etc. But the success of the Federation will depend on how effectively it has been able to promote the biblical apostolate at the grass-roots level, be this national conference, diocese or especially parish. This is where the action is.

## CONCLUSION

The Plenary Assemblies have become major reference points in the fast moving history of the WCFBA. In this Assembly, we are looking at the last twenty-five years since Dei Verbum and the efforts of the Federation to promote its directives. Our prayer and hope is that we shall all come down from this city of Bogotá built on a mountain filled with enthusiasm for the Word of God which lasts forever.

\*\*\*

### NOTES:

1. Quoted by the President of the WCFBA, Bishop Ablondi, at the end of his address to the Plenary Assembly of the UBS in Budapest in 1968.
2. For a Standard Commentary in English, see Vol III of VORGRIMMER, H. (Ed) Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, New York, 1989, pp. 155-272.
3. See for example, *Lumen Gentium* (n. 16); *Ad Gentes* (n. 3).
4. For a scholarly commentary on this point see ROLLA, A. "Le 'cose imperfette e temporanee' dell' A.T. alla luce dell'antico vicino oriente" in ASSOCIAZIONE BIBLICA ITALIANA; Costituzione Consiliare DEI VERBUM: Atti della XX Settimana Biblica Brescia, 1970, pp. 387-398.
5. WCFBA Directory p. 37.
6. The CTS translation by BARTON, J.M.T. would suggest two tables by its rendering: "Whether this comes from the table of the Word of God or from that of Christ's Body..." DV 21.
7. RIJKS, P. A Guide to Catholic Bible Translations Vol 2 Stuttgart 1982. The whole of Vol 2 is devoted to Africa.
8. See for example the document published on February 22nd, 1975, by the then Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, titled "Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National and Local Levels." Here "Common Bible Work" is second in a list of fifteen areas suggested for collaboration. It is noteworthy that at this point, the WCFBA is expressly mentioned. The document can be found in FLANNERY, A. Vatican Collection Vol 2 Leominster 1982 p. 153 - 182. See also *Enchiridion Vaticanum V*, 1096 - 1106.
9. WCFBA Directory p. 25 - 28.
10. op. cit. p. 63.
11. op. cit. p. 62.
12. op. cit. p. 60.

## IN MEMORIAL

Fr. Stephen Hartdegen, OFM passed away on 19 December 1989 in Ringwood, New Jersey (U.S.A.) at the age of 82. He devoted his 67 years as a Franciscan, 57 of those as a priest, to his passion for promoting biblical research and the pastoral use of the Holy Scriptures. He accomplished his mission through dedicating more than 50 years as a member of the Catholic Biblical Association of which he was chairman from 1957 to 1958, and as the director of the U. S. Center for the Catholic Biblical Apostolate (1970-1988), a subdivision of the Bishops' Conference (USCC). He was the first to introduce the CBF in the USA and served as a member of the Executive Committee until the Malta Plenary Assembly in 1978. With his generosity he resolved some of the financial problems which the Federation had in the early years of its development. Even at the time of his death he refused to stop working for the Lord by saying: "I still have a lot to do."

Fr. D. S. Amalorpavadass, one of the most outstanding Indian theologians, was another "pillar" of the Federation. He died in a car accident on 25 May 1990. "Fr. Amalor" (\*1932) contributed much to the renewal of the Catholic Church of India in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, especially as the founder and director of the National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (1966-1982) in Bangalore. As one of the founders of the CBF and through his contributions as a member of the Executive Committee and as the moderator of the two Plenary Assemblies in Malta and Bangalore, he decisively influenced the forming of the Constitution and the Federation's biblical-pastoral work in general. In 1982 he founded the Anjali Ashram (an Associate Member of the Federation), a center for the dialogue between Christianity and the traditional Indian Spirituality, and was its director until his death. He is buried in the chapel of this center.

May they both rest in peace!

# GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

When I assumed the responsibility as the fifth general secretary of our Federation in 1984, I presented myself to the participants of the Bangalore Plenary Assembly as their co-worker - as those of you who participated in that assembly may remember.

Now, after six years, I do not only want to give an account of my performance as your co-worker, but on our "co-worker-ship."

In a report on partners working together it is not possible - nor even desirable! - to clearly distinguish what is to be attributed to one partner and what to the other. Progress and achievements are to be credited to all of them. However, if I report on the past six years of the Federation, I do it from the viewpoint of the General Secretariat, focusing in particular on the activities of the general secretary. My and our office's contributions amount to giving assistance to the life and progress of the Federation according to the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, and thus helping our members fulfill their own tasks (and not doing their jobs for them!).

What is the task we have set out to accomplish together as co-workers? What have we achieved? What remains to be done? These questions are not just the topic of the general secretary's report! For almost two weeks we will be busy answering these questions. My report then has to be complemented during these days. In doing this our purpose will not be to come up with a perfect record for our archives, but to work out a plan which takes into account both our reality and our dreams, God's Word of both promise and challenge!

## BODY

### A) Our tasks as co-workers in the biblical-pastoral ministry

Our tasks as (representatives of the) members of our Federation and co-workers in the biblical-pastoral ministry are two-fold: the Federation as a means, and the biblical-pastoral ministry as a goal; both are ultimately directed towards evangelization, towards the "new evangelization." Our tasks are partly spelled out in our constitution and in the Final Statements of Malta and Bangalore. But they also emerge from and become evident in new situations and challenges!

#### I. The General Secretariat's Service to the Federation

Before some remarks about the General Secretariat's service to the Federation, let me recall briefly the origins of our Federation and its mandate.

##### 1. First of all, the Federation and its official mandate.

1.1 The Federation has officially been founded as the organization in the Catholic Church for the biblical-pastoral ministry.

Historically, initiatives of several people and directives of Pope Paul VI and Cardinal Bea led in 1969 to creating an instrument for the implementation of the Second Vatican Council's norms on God's Word in Sacred Scripture. Any doubts on the official character of the Federation must have been eliminated with the recognition of her constitution by the Vatican Secretariat of State in 1985 by which she became an "international Catholic organization of a public character" (Code of Canon Law, 312, 1.1).

1.2 The Federation is thus indebted to the Second Vatican Council for its origin. Associations with the same goal are welcome to join as members. But at the same time, the Federation as such has to remain true to the legacy and commitment given her by the Council.

#### 2. Secondly, the General Secretariat at the service of the Federation

2.1 Time and again during the past six years, we had to emphasize: the Stuttgart office is not the Federation. The Stuttgart General Secretariat is an office at the service of the Federation.

2.2 Consequently, and because of the federative nature of our organization consisting of autonomous members, we resist "running" the Federation from our office in a centralized manner! Decentralization makes for greater participation. Our principles, as has been said already, are those of solidarity and subsidiarity. Our only task is to assist our members in doing their very own tasks. We do not want to give directives; we favor exchange and interaction.

2.3 In line with the nature of the Federation and because of the lack of financial resources, our office operates on a rather modest scale. Normally we have six people, two half-timers and four full-timers. In order to cope, nevertheless, with the increasing workload of our growing Federation, we have tried somewhat to make up for lack of personnel by keeping in step with technological developments.

#### II. The Services of the General Secretariat

Our office renders mainly three services:

1. *First of all:* the service of close personal contact with the members of the Federation with her officers and committees (the Executive Committee, the Administrative Board and the regional coordinators), and with organizations of similar concerns (like the funding agencies, the United Bible Societies, etc.). These tasks are to a large extent handled by the general secretary himself, through personal visits and attending meetings as well as through correspondence. Thus, his time is divided between presence in the office and travels.

The Executive Committee is convinced that to a great extent progress and achievements in the Federation are due to personal contacts and visits - not only by the general secretary.

Bishop Ablondi has done much traveling on behalf of the Federation (e.g. to Singapore, the Philippines, China, Portugal, etc.). From our office Fr. Piet Rijks went to Colombia, Bolivia, Rwanda, Zaire and Kenya; Fr. Marc Sevin to Cyprus (twice), Rwanda, Zaire and Canada (together with François Tricard).

2. *The second service* of the office: exchange of information on the members and their activities. This is done mainly through our Bulletin Dei Verbum, which succeeded Word Event, of which Fr. Marc Sevin is the editor.

a) The Bangalore PA had recommended that we promote the distribution of Word Event and La Palabra Hoy (3.1.2.8) and also "make material available in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese."

Word Event, published only in English, had aimed at being a biblical-pastoral review. In 1986 the EC decided to produce a publication less ambitious than Word Event, but serving more members of the Federation better. We felt a biblical-pastoral review went beyond the possibilities of our office. To be a pastoral it had to be concrete and "in context." Furthermore, we could ill-afford to publish only in English - leaving many of our members unserved. Thus, the format of our publication became more modest; and the readership was widened. As a result the Federation has become much better known, since the Bulletin is being published in three languages and since our members are encouraged to republish from the Bulletin what they find useful. For the material published in the Bulletin we rely on our members - either through their publications mailed to us, through personal correspondence or visits with them. We proposed to the EC members and regional coordinators that each issue should focus on one region. A calendar of contributions for these regions was drawn up. Only a few contributions came in, but on the whole the system did not work.

b) La Palabra Hoy has continued to appear in its traditional form, edited by the regional office of the Federation in Bogotá. On several occasions it has been discussed whether, in addition to La Palabra Hoy the Bulletin Dei Verbum should be published in Spanish. This Plenary Assembly could perhaps decide on this issue.

c) After the Bangalore Plenary Assembly our office also published the Documentation of the III Plenary Assembly, the directory in six languages (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese) and several information leaflets.

d) The "Handbook for the Biblical Apostolate" recommended at Bangalore (3.4.1) has not been realized to date. We met several difficulties in this connection:

- It was not sufficiently clear what was really meant by such a handbook. For some people the above-mentioned directory served the purpose.
- Our office felt overcharged by such a recommendation for lack of personnel (especially after we undertook the publication of the BDV in three languages!) and for lack of expertise (the same objection prevailed that was raised against publishing a biblical-pastoral review).
- In the 1987 EC meeting it was felt that a biblical-pastoral handbook could best be realized at the regional levels of the Federation. Both Latin America and Asia promised to work out such a handbook. Two attempts were launched in Latin America, one in Spanish and one in Portuguese; hopefully some day

they will be completed and see the light of the world. We cherish the same hope for Asia!

e) One publication worth drawing attention to is the "Guide to Catholic Bible Translations" by Fr. Piet Rijks, in charge of the projects department of our office. Volumes I (Pacific) and II (Africa) have been completed after many years of intense diligence and dedication. The next volumes, scheduled to appear, will be Asia and Latin America. The catalog resulted from Fr. Rijks' work of evaluating biblical-pastoral projects for the funding agencies.

3. *The third service* rendered by our office is that of helping our members and others in obtaining funds for their biblical-pastoral projects. Fr. Piet Rijks has done this very ably since 1979 by evaluating these projects and recommending them to the European Catholic Funding Agencies. Over the years a relationship of confidence has been established between our office and the funding agencies from which not only our members and project applicants benefit, but also our office. The financial support of our office, as is detailed in the treasurer's report, comes to more than 60% from funding agencies.

A word of sincere acknowledgement is due on this occasion to my co-workers in the Stuttgart office. Often the general secretary is given credit for what the General Secretariat staff should have been praised. And in the daily run and grind of our office work, their hard work and dedication are often taken for granted. On this occasion and in public, I would like to make up for this and I am sure you join me in thanking them.

## **B) The tasks of the Federation and our office**

After these general and introductory remarks on the Federation and the General Secretariat let me now take up the two tasks or concerns of the Federation and of our office, namely to promote the Federation and to promote the biblical-pastoral ministry.

### **I. Promoting the Federation**

Under this heading I will deal with 1) membership, 2) the organization and structure of the Federation, and 3) our relationship with organizations of common concern.

#### **1. Membership**

Promotion of the Federation means, first of all, gaining new members. Our constitution (Art. IV, 3.3) and the Bangalore Plenary Assembly Final Statement (3.2.1 and 3.3.11) remind us of this duty incumbent on all members.

##### **1.1 Statistics**

Our statistical overview shows that at present 72 Full and 158 Associate Members are affiliated with our Federation, an increase of 12 and 63 respectively.

A few Associate Members have cancelled their affiliation. Another 20 - all of them dioceses in the United States - have been dropped from our list. They had become affiliated as a result of a fund-raising drive conducted by the late Fr. Stephen



Hartdegen in 1984. After that, in spite of regular letters of invitation and inquiry, they showed no further interest in the Federation.

1.2 Of greater interest than mere statistics, for the sake of describing the profile of the Federation, might be a breakdown of the new members according to different categories and regions.

a) According to categories:

\* Organizations committed to the biblical-pastoral ministry: 22

- Dioceses 3
- Religious orders/congregations 19
  - Provinces 15
  - Generalates 3
  - Associations 1

\* Organizations making the Bible available through

- Translation 2
- Distribution 1
- \* Formation centers 33
- Biblical 18 (one of them also catechetical and liturgical)
- Pastoral 7
- Catechetical 3
- Theological 3
- Spiritual 2

\* Centers promoting pastoral use of the Bible: 5

- Evangelization 4
- Social communications (Media) 1

b) According to regions:

	Full	Associate
Africa	1	4
Americas	4	16
Asia/Oceania	2	22
Europe/Middle East	5	21
	12	63

1.3 For an assessment of the Federation's growth in membership here are some observations and questions:

a) Full Members in our Federation are not the Bishops' Conferences themselves, but rather a center/institution/organization designated by them and functioning as their "action arm" for the biblical-pastoral ministry.

b) Our prevailing constitution contains a clause (Art. IV, 1.1) concerning each country's having only one Full Member. This clause has created some problems. The Executive Committee decided in 1989 to maintain it because membership is not a matter of prestige, but of service. Furthermore, one has to be practical: how many Full Members could multi-cultural and linguistic countries like India provide! In order to avoid disputes we follow the United Nations for "country" and the *Annuario Pontificio* for "Bishops' Conference."

c) Regarding Associate Membership our constitution is rather general: "any Catholic organization or body engaged in any form of biblical apostolate." A list of such activities constituting a form of biblical apostolate has been drawn up for our bylaws.

d) It would be desirable to introduce a third category of relationship with(in) the Federation, that of "sponsors," organizations or individual persons who support Full and Asso-

ciate Members by their financial and/or spiritual contribution. A good number among our present Associate Members would rather fit into such a category.

e) The question of inactive members has come up frequently. What can be done to "re-activate" them? Is this the responsibility of the regional coordinators, of the Executive Committee members or of the General Secretariat?

f) A provision for cessation of membership has been lacking in our constitution so far. In the new constitution reasons for cessation and the procedure will be indicated.

g) The Final Statements of Malta (I, 1; II, 16) and Bangalore (3.3.11) urge the coordination of the biblical-pastoral ministry at the national level. In some countries this recommendation is taken seriously, in others much has still to be done!

I would like to take this opportunity to say a word of whole-hearted thanks to all members that I have come to know in their own setting or during numerous workshops at different levels. For me, the greatest personal gain during these years has been the acquaintance of so many people touched by and committed to the Word of God.

## 2. The Organization and Structure of our Federation

In this section I will touch upon 1) our constitution and bylaws 2) the Executive Committee 3) the developments towards regionalization

### *2.1 Constitution and Bylaws*

Our constitution, as was mentioned above, bears since 1985 the stamp of approval of the Vatican! The experiences during the past few years and the growth of the Federation, however, made the Executive Committee prepare a modified and updated version which needs to be discussed and voted upon during this Plenary Assembly. Preparing bylaws as demanded by the Bangalore Plenary Assembly was not easy - and not possible without having gained sufficient practical experience in the Federation. Now a draft is ready. Since bylaws are an interpretation and application of the constitution, their approval falls within the competence of the Executive Committee.

### *2.2 Executive Committee*

The annual meetings of the EC as prescribed by our constitution have been held regularly.

a) The choice of venue was determined by various considerations:

\* 1985 - Schöntal, Germany (located near Stuttgart). The EC members had a chance to get to know the office of the General Secretariat, of the United Bible Societies, and of other Catholic and Protestant biblical-pastoral institutions, etc.

\* 1986 - Nemi (Rome), Italy. The EC had an audience with Pope John Paul II, met with the Pontifical Biblical Commission, visited the Pontifical Biblical Institute and other institutions of interest. It came to know the locale of the Biblical-Pastoral Course Dei Verbum.

\* 1987 - Königstein, Germany, the site of the funding agency "Church in Need." (The choice had perhaps symbolic value since the Federation's office found itself in financial straits during that year!)

\* 1988 - Chicago, USA. The offer free of charge by Cardinal Bernardin of his seminary was very welcome. This gave us the idea of looking for sponsors for subsequent meetings, and we found one indeed for the next meeting!

\* 1989 - Maredsous, Belgium. Bro. Poswick's abbot graciously offered the Abbey of Maredsous with its rich and many-faceted tradition in biblical-pastoral ministry.

b) The agenda dealt in 1985 and 1986 with implementing the Bangalore resolutions. In 1987 the first decisions were made concerning the 1990 Plenary Assembly so that the meetings of 1988 and 1989 focused on the preparation for the Bogotá PA and its theme, "The Bible in the New Evangelization." The development of regional structures was considered in all of these meetings.

c) The members of the EC are not individual persons (except the three ex-officio members) but member-organizations of the Federation who delegate their representatives to the EC. For the sake of collaboration and continuity, one wishes that the representatives of our members on the EC would not change too often.

d) Two questions have been raised time and again relating to the Executive Committee:

- What is the role of the regional coordinators and their relationship to the EC? Regional coordinators have attended the EC meetings, some of them regularly. They contributed much by sharing information on the Federation in their area and contributed significantly to the discussions, but were not able to vote!

- Is it necessary to have such a large Executive Committee consisting of 16 members? The cost for the annual meetings amount to between 25.000 and 40.000 DM (\$15,000 to \$30,000)

- The EC proposes to modify the constitution in this regard as follows:

- the number of EC members be reduced from 16 to 9 (3 ex-officio, 4 Full Member and 2 Associate Member representatives)
- the EC meet at least every two years (instead of every year)
- the regional coordinators may be invited to EC meetings and to special meetings for these coordinators (bylaws).

On the Administrative Board's activities, detailed reports have been prepared by the (vice-) chairman and the treasurer.

I conclude this section of my report with a word of thanks also to the Executive Committee and the Administrative Board. In meetings with them at least once or twice a year, we became not just a team or a task force, but a true community of friends.

From among these two boards with Fr. Leo Mahon and Fr. Florencio Galindo as their two chairmen, I would especially like to single out and thank our president and our treasurer(s).

Our amiable President Bishop Ablondi has not only contributed tremendously to making the Federation known and respected, but also has made the task as general secretary really easy for me. When the Executive Committee re-elected us in 1988, they felt we had become a good team. Yes, and I may add, we have become friends over the years.

During the past six years two treasurers have ably served the Federation. Before and during the Bangalore Plenary Assembly, I urged Fr. Piet Rijks of the Stuttgart office to assume the responsibility, not heeding his objections that the treasurer should be an "outsider." During its meeting in 1987, the Executive Committee decided to honor Fr. Rijks' earlier plea and to relieve him of the treasurership. Bro. Ferdinand Poswick took over - at a time when the financial situation of our office was anything but good. We owe Fr. Rijks and Bro. Poswick tremendous thanks for taking the bull by the horns in trying to run and improve our finances.

### 2.3 Regionalization

A Federation by its very nature stands for sharing and interaction (cf. Art. III and III, 4). Since the Malta Plenary Assembly international and regional cooperation has been emphasized (cf. No. 13 and No. 18). Its desirability and necessity was restated in the Bangalore Final Statement (3.1).

Now after another six years, the most significant development in the Federation seems to have been achieved in the area of "regionalization." Totally in line with the Federation's emphasis on the local church(es); regionalization not only concerns effective organization, but also doing biblical-pastoral ministry "in context."

a) As documented in the collection of "Final Statements between Bangalore and Bogotá" regional and/or subregional workshops and meetings were held in all parts of the Federation:

Africa:	Regional level: 1990 (Nairobi)
Americas:	Regional level: 1985 (Bogotá), 1987 (Bogotá) and 1989 (Mendes, Brazil). Subregional level: Cono Sur: 1990 (Buenos Aires)
Asia/ Oceania:	Regional level: 1985 (Hong Kong) and 1988 (Singapore) Subregional level: Mandarin-speaking countries: 1987 (Taipei) and 1990 (Hong Kong). South Asia: 1989 (Bangalore) Oceania: 1988 (Sydney)
Europe/ Middle East:	Subregional levels: * Middle Europe 1985 (Budapest), 1986 (Innsbruck) 1987 (Zagreb), 1988 (Brixen/Bressanone), 1989 (Amsterdam)  * Southern ("Latin") Europe 1987 (Madrid), 1988 (Nantes), 1989 (Lisbon)  * Middle East 1985 and 1988 (Cyprus) * Rome: annually since 1985

b) In the Executive Committee meetings we have been groping for a way to divide and subdivide the Federation. Finally, we

arrived at a division into four regions with their respective subregions. This division has not been dictated "from above," but rather developed "from below." Nor must it be considered to be definite. In a division into four regions, namely Africa, Americas, Asia/Oceania and Europe/Middle East, Full Members are rather evenly distributed (between 16 and 20 in each region). Such division into subregions could favor more effective collaboration on a local level.

c) Of utmost importance for regionalization are the subregional coordinators. The pace of progress in the region depends very much on them. This has practical consequences:

- The subregional coordinators need to be given an official status in our constitution.

- Their functions and responsibilities should be formulated in the bylaws.

- Both the members of the respective subregions and the General Secretariat must help the subregions become functional by providing the necessary personal and financial resources.

d) The Bangalore Plenary Assembly recommended the "establishing of liaison with the continental or regional federations of Bishops' Conferences such as SECAM, CELAM, FABC" which has met with various reactions and success.

In Latin America the Federation is officially linked with CELAM's Department of Catechesis. While some of our members are convinced that in the Latin American Church nothing goes without CELAM, others are afraid that the Federation's connection with CELAM is too close!

In Africa, the Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM), a creation of SECAM, has succeeded the Federation's Africa Services. It functions as the action arm of SECAM's Commission on the Bible "Comibible." Because of this dependence on SECAM, more has perhaps been expected from SECAM than of the members of the Federation themselves.

In Asia the Federation has established liaison with the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences through its Office for the Laity - taking seriously the insistence of the Bangalore PA on the laity.

#### c) Word of thanks

Co-workers to whom the Federation is very much indebted are our regional or subregional coordinators. They have no official status yet according to the prevailing constitution; but whatever progress has been made in the Federation during the past six years in "regionalization" is to a large extent due to these coordinators. Advancement along these lines has not moved with the same speed everywhere, but the Federation as a whole is definitely progressing in this direction. The fruits of their efforts are partly documented in the collection of Final Statements.

Though all coordinators deserve credit, some of them may be singled out in particular: Fr. César Herrera, Latin American coordinator since 1979 and "manager" of this assembly; Fr. Wim Wijten, coordinator of Southeast Asia, who has traveled extensively to visit the members in his subregion; Fr. Wim

Hoekstra, of the Oceania subregion for putting much time and energy into our constitution and bylaws; Dr. Norbert Höslinger of Austria who has coordinated since 1972 the Association of Middle European Biblical-Pastoral Organizations (AMB) has tried throughout all these years to keep in contact with representatives in the former socialist countries of Europe: Fr. Dominic Chan from Hong Kong, the first coordinator of the newly emerged United Chinese Catholic Biblical Associations, which will be of utmost importance for our fellowship with the Catholics and other Christians on Mainland China.

### 3. Relation with Organizations of common concern

#### 3.1 The Funding Agencies

a) Since 1972 our Federation has established and constantly improved the contacts with the European Catholic Funding Agencies in order to help our members in financing their biblical-pastoral projects. In step with the emphasis on the local church we do this in a "de-centralized" way.

b) Our office is a service center for both the funding agencies and our members (as well as other agents of biblical-pastoral projects). We try to help both the applicant by suggesting which funding agency would be open to sponsor the project; and the funding agencies by giving an evaluation of the project as objectively as possible. Fr. Rijks has been doing this by unending correspondence and phone calls, and by frequent visits and meetings, especially the annual meeting with representatives of all these funding agencies which is attended also by the general secretary.

c) How the relationship with the funding agencies has improved and exists at the moment is evident from statistics about their growing contributions to biblical-pastoral projects and to the functioning of our office

#### 3.2 Religious Orders and Congregations

Fostering contacts with them has been urged during the Bangalore Plenary Assembly (3.1.2.4). Attempts have been made - though the results may not be overwhelming.

In Austria the Conference of Superiors of Religious (Superiorenkonferenz) has become an Associate Member.

In Germany we were invited several times to the annual meetings of the German Catholic Mission Council (Deutscher Katholischer Missionsrat) - once as a main speaker on the theme "Bible and Mission."

In Latin America we have shown interest in the - unfortunately ill-fated! - project "PALABRA - VIDA" of the Latin American Religions (CLAR). I personally attended a meeting of the team responsible for elaborating the guidelines for the project (Quito 1988). Our Executive Committee has sent a letter of solidarity to the president of CLAR expressing our hope (by recalling the Bangalore commitment to the prophetic ministry!) that the project would continue.

In Rome several visits were made to the offices of the Unions of Superiors General of both Men and Women's Religious Congregations (USG and UISG). Through their channels we distributed brochures on the Federation and the Bangalore

Plenary Assembly as well as the Federation's Handbook/Directory. We also maintained regular contact with SEDOS, the Service and Documentation Center of the Missionary Orders in Rome. Fr. Rijks and I were the main speakers at a one day meeting on the topic of "Bible and Mission." On the occasion of its 25th anniversary, SEDOS has applied for Associate Membership in the Federation.

### 3.3 The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

a) The Federation, since its foundation under Cardinal Bea, has historical links with this Council (formerly: Secretariat). A person designated by the Council, formerly Mons. Mejia, currently Fr. Fumagalli, is an ex-officio member on the Executive Committee. Our President Bishop Ablondi has recently been named a member of this Council.

b) Over the years the Council has shown great interest in the work of the Federation. On several occasions Bishop Ablondi and I have been consulted in matters that concern collaboration with the Bible Societies, especially in connection with the new "Guidelines for Collaboration in Translating the Bible," the "Study Bible Project" of the UBS, and the new Ecumenical Directory.

c) Since the Malta Plenary Assembly recommended "to establish liaison with other bodies such as the Pontifical Biblical Commission" (II, 20), we have invited the Secretary of the Biblical Commission twice to our meetings (1985 and 1986). I myself had a chance to explain the Federation to the members of the commission. In 1986, when our EC's and the Biblical Commission's annual meetings were held in Rome simultaneously, we shared a meal together. But nothing was achieved beyond these friendly contacts. Of great importance, however, is the Pope's address to this commission in April 1989: "Exegesis must serve Evangelization."

### 3.4 The United Bible Societies

a) The Federation's collaboration with the UBS is mentioned and encouraged in our constitution (Art. III, 7) as well as in the Final Statements of Malta (I, 8) and Bangalore (3.3.2 and 3.4.4). Though the most important collaboration should be that on the local and regional levels, the connection between the Federation and the Bible Societies at the global level through the Federation's president and the general secretary has not been insignificant.

b) Bishop Ablondi, for a long time a member of the UBS European Executive Committee and since 1988 a member of their General Committee, participates in the regular meetings of the UBS governing bodies which has given him opportunities to foster contacts between the Bible Society and our Federation.

c) From 1972 till 1988 the General Secretariat of the UBS was also located in Stuttgart. My predecessors and I frequently and conveniently met and shared with the UBS General Secretary, Dr. Ulrich Fick. In this way we kept each other up-to-date on what was going on in our organizations. During my travels I made it a point to pay courtesy visits whenever convenient to the UBS offices.

d) The most significant events in the UBS-WCFBA relationship during these past years have been:

- Participation as invited guests in a meeting of the UBS

general secretary with their four regional secretaries in Lisbon (1985)

- Participation as fraternal delegates in the general council meeting in Budapest (1988)

- Participation in the publication of the new "Guidelines" in Rome (after several years of preparation!) and their presentation to the Pope in 1987

e) On this occasion I would like to express very sincere thanks to Dr. Cirilo Rigos, the present UBS general secretary, for all his efforts made over the years on behalf of the Bible Societies in our common concern - the Word of God in Sacred Scripture.

### 3.5 Media Organizations

The respective recommendation of Bangalore (3.1.2.4) to establish liaison with media organizations like UNDA/OCIC and UCIP has only partially been implemented.

Some Executive Committee members attended UNDA/OCIC regional meetings in Seoul (1985) and Quito (1987).

The general secretary paid a visit to the UNDA/OCIC general secretariats at the beginning of his term of office.

The UNDA/OCIC general secretaries visited the EC during its meeting at Maredsous in 1989. It was agreed that trial copies of our Bulletin Dei Verbum would be sent to all UNDA/OCIC members. It may be worth mentioning in this connection that some media organizations are affiliated with our Federation as Associate Members. One of them, the Center for Bible and Computer of Maredsous (Bro. Ferdinand Poswick) has created its own International Association on Bible and Computer (AIBI). Bro. Poswick's team was recently received in private audience by Pope John Paul II.

## II. Promoting the biblical-pastoral ministry

After having dealt with the promotion of the Federation, I will dwell in this part of my report more directly on the promotion of the biblical-pastoral ministry.

### 1. The biblical-pastoral ministry

In an introductory section I would like to offer some views on biblical apostolate or biblical-pastoral ministry.

#### 1.1 Our Constitution

Article III of our constitution succinctly formulates the purpose of the Federation as "to make the Word of God available to all." From the subsequent detailed list of tasks, it is obvious that biblical-pastoral ministry not only means "promoting translations and widespread distribution" of the Scriptures (III, 1), but also "promoting and supporting the study" of the Bible (III, 3) as well as "promoting a pastoral care that is solidly founded in the Scriptures" (III, 2).

#### 1.2 "Companionship"

Biblical-pastoral ministry may be understood as a companionship. Philip accompanied the Ethiopian on his way - helping him not only to understand the text, but announcing to him the Good News of Jesus, thus leading him to baptism; and the Risen Lord himself accompanied the disciples of Emmaus on their road - from sadness to joy, by opening the Scriptures to them and sharing in table fellowship. Biblical-pastoral ministry entails such and similar companionship and accompaniment.

a) The message at the heart of the Scriptures is a person - Jesus Christ.

b) What is at stake is not giving a beautiful interpretation of a text. God is too great and rich to be enclosed in formula and to be understood by a simplistic interpretation. It is (or should be) accepted that the Bible can lead to different convictions.

c) Without readers the Bible is a dead book. But the readers of the Bible are placed in concrete and different circumstances. From their respective backgrounds and pre-understandings, they approach the Bible with the richness of different kinds of readings. The biblical-pastoral ministry helps in making understood the richness of different interpretations according to time and place. The reading of the Bible in the context of Latin America must not be the same as in Europe, that of Africa not the same as in Asia. This diversity of readings in context ("regionalization!") should not be an occasion for being scandalized but for rejoicing.

d) Confronting and comparing various readings with each other is also a means of not absolutizing a certain reading/interpretation and avoiding the trap of fundamentalism. Biblical pastoral ministry should promote such confrontation.

e) The purpose of biblical-pastoral ministry is not just to comfort us and strengthen us in certitudes, but also to upset us and challenge us, our Church, our Churches. The biblical-pastoral ministry opens to us perspectives unknown yesterday!

## 2. Concrete aspects and activities of biblical-pastoral ministry

Let me now turn to some concrete aspects and activities of the biblical-pastoral ministry in order to assess our achievements and to plan for the future. We will deal with 1) conscientization 2) provision 3) formation and 4) reflection/research.

### 2.1 Conscientization

#### a) Malta and Bangalore

The Malta Plenary Assembly stated the Federation's conviction by saying: "Only through a deeply rooted biblical spirituality can Christians play their specific roles in the world and contribute towards the building of a new society based on Christian vision and values" (I, 1). The Bangalore Plenary Assembly realized that the "biblical ministry" should be "in the mainstream of the evangelizing mission of the Church" (1.3). At the same time it reemphasized "the centrality of the Bible in the evangelizing work of the Church" (2.4.1) which is echoed in its recommendation, "to make the biblical apostolate a priority in pastoral practice and encourage the pastoral use of the Bible which is not limited to liturgy and catechesis" (3.2.2).

#### b) "Too much neglected"

And yet, in this connection we must recall the much-quoted words of Pope John Paul II, addressed to our Executive Committee in 1986, that the Constitution on Divine Revelation has been "too much neglected." In my own experience in the biblical-pastoral ministry for more than twenty years, I have heard innumerable times the complaint from lay people that priests are either not interested in or not capable of introducing them to a responsible and meaningful reading of the Bible.

#### c) Concrete steps

Two steps have been taken to promote a greater awareness of

the importance of the Bible and the priority of the biblical-pastoral ministry.

#### - Bible Sunday/Week/Month

A strong recommendation in favor of celebration of Bible Sunday/Week/Month was made during the Malta Plenary Assembly (No. 8 and 16). Though not repeated in Bangalore this recommendation has not been forgotten.

In various issues of our Bulletin Dei Verbum we have invited our members to share experiences on their celebration of Bible Sunday/Week/Month.

La Palabra Hoy publishes each year one issue exclusively with materials for Bible Sunday.

Bishop Ablondi has gone a step further. In a private audience with Pope John Paul II he suggested the idea of a Bible Sunday for the entire Church - similar to World Mission Sunday. The Pope's spontaneous reaction: Why only a Bible Sunday? Would not a Bible Week be pastorally much more effective?

So far no further word has come forth from the Vatican. This may be good for the time being. More initiatives should develop "from below" before something is decreed "from above;" objections could be answered; the specifically Catholic way of celebrating Bible Sunday could be clarified. The matter could be discussed also during this assembly. Then some day the time may be ripe for such a universally celebrated Bible Sunday or Week.

#### - Bishops' Synod on the Bible

Another means for "conscientization" could be a Bishops' Synod on the Bible. A proposal to this effect was passed as a recommendation during the Bangalore Plenary Assembly (3.2.7). We have campaigned for a Synod on this topic during and after the Synods of 1985 and 1988 by urging our members to bring this resolution to the attention of their respective Bishops' Conferences. About one dozen conferences answered and expressed themselves in favor. But as everybody knows, other lobbyists with different proposals won!

### 2.2 Provision

Biblical-pastoral ministry presupposes that the Bible is available as a book. This is demanded by our constitution (III,1) as well as by the Malta (I,8) and Bangalore Plenary Assemblies (3.1.2.7; 3.3.2; 3.3.3; 3.4.4). In all those recommendations two elements are stressed, yet another seems to have been forgotten (or taken for granted!).

a) The recommendations are very much concerned with inter-confessional collaboration in translating, producing and distributing the Bible. In fact, the Malta Plenary Assembly goes even beyond the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council. Dei Verbum No. 22 stated: "If, ... these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them." Malta reread this statement and rephrased into a recommendation "that translation of the Bible, wherever possible shall be interconfessional." (No. 8)

In November 1987 the Vatican (then) Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the United Bible Societies jointly



published the "Guidelines" for the practical implementation of the recommendation on interconfessional collaboration.

b) Another concern, especially for our members in the so-called "Third World" or "Two-thirds World" is the publication of low-cost Bibles. Often the price determines which Bible a person will purchase. Because of the low price, people often prefer to purchase an edition published by the Bible Societies. Price is certainly an important factor, but - all things being equal - it should not be the only or even the decisive element. In this connection one wonders at times whether Catholic Bible publishers, agreeing on common policies, could not significantly lower the prices of Bible editions!

c) The third aspect in Bible production, forgotten or taken for granted in the Malta and Bangalore Final Statements, is pastoral usefulness. This is stated very clearly in DV 25: "Such versions are to be provided with necessary and fully adequate explanations so that the sons (and daughters!) of the Church can safely and profitably grow familiar with the Sacred Scriptures and be penetrated by their spirit."

The question comes up frequently: What are "necessary and fully adequate explanations?" Most of the Bible Societies upheld in the past their traditional policy of publishing Bibles "without notes or comment." This policy is now undergoing a revision in that attempts are being made to publish "study Bibles" with introductions and notes, which are, however, mainly linguistic or exegetical, not doctrinal or pastoral in nature.

On the Latin American continent the so-called "Biblia Latinoamericana," intended as a pastoral Bible, has been highly successful. But it has met also with opposition, branded as "leftist" and smacking too much of "liberation theology" by some, not based sufficiently on sound biblical scholarship by others.

For this reason a new project has been started by Fr. Fritzleo Lentzen-Deis, professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute and his co-workers. This new translation will have a twofold commentary: an exegetical and a hermeneutical (pastoral).

Because of its great success in Latin America, the "Biblia Latinoamericana" has been translated into English and published in the Philippines. A similar translation into French is planned for Africa. Several questions have been raised: Is the reading of the Bible "in context" respected? Does a commentary meant for people in one specific context also reach the people in another perhaps quite different context? Have we learned a lesson from the past when Christianity everywhere appeared to be an "import article" from Europe? Or are we repeating the same mistake by simply importing from other Churches?

d) A final question related to "provision" concerns the publication of "editions of the Sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable comments ... for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation" and "the wise distribution of these in one way or another" (DV 25). What has happened to this recommenda-

tion of the Council? What can the Federation do that does not fall into oblivion?

### 3. Formation

After conscientization and provision let us now turn our attention to formation.

#### *3.1 Constitution, Malta, Bangalore*

One of the purposes of the Federation is "promoting and supporting the study and understanding" of the Sacred Scriptures (III, 3). Biblical formation of the various categories of ministers of the Word (liturgical leaders, seminarians, catechists, Bible sharing group leaders, etc.) has been given much attention in the Malta Final Statement (Nos. 2-5.7). Likewise the "establishment of pastoral biblical institutes in Africa and in Asia" was recommended (No. 17). The Bangalore PA not only recommended formation; but it also declared that "God's people have a right to be formed in scriptural knowledge" (2.2.1), that the Bible has to be read both "in the original context" and in "today's context of the different situations" (2.2.3). It advocated "the foundation of institutes for training 'biblical scholars'" (3.2.5), "biblical training of lay leaders" (3.3.7) and "working in close contact with biblical scholars" (3.3.1).

#### *3.2 Urgency*

The urgency of these recommendations is proven by the rampant spread of a simplistic and fundamentalistic interpretation of the Bible. The Bible is an historical book, the product of a time and culture quite different from ours. Hence, this historical dimension has to be taken into account (otherwise we would betray the mystery of the Incarnation - cf. DV 13!). For this reason there is a need for studying the Bible, for taking the results of scholarship seriously and for bridging the gap between biblical scholarship and biblical-pastoral ministry.

#### *3.3 Accomplishments*

What has been done in this regard?

a) Efforts have been made to gain centers of learning and formation for Associate Members of the Federation, for instance the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Catechetical Department of the Salesian University in Rome; the Biblical Department of the Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago; the Biblical Formation Center in Jerusalem; the Pastoral Institutes in Manila (EAPI), Eldoret, Kenya (Gaba) and Bogotá (ITEPAL).

b) In Nemi, near Rome we have initiated a 4 1/2 month biblical-pastoral course for people of every rank and file - for lay people, religious and priests, for both men and women - who have been involved in biblical-pastoral ministry, and who will continue in this field. The course has been conducted three times in English. Originally, also meant to be offered in Nemi in French and Spanish, it may be preferable to organize similar courses in francophone Africa and in Latin America. The Dei Verbum course in Nemi has never been intended as another effort at centralization, but as the beginning or at least part of a network of biblical formation centers of various levels in the different subregions and regions of the Federation.

#### 4. Organization

Another dimension of the biblical-pastoral ministry would be organization - not as an end in itself - but as a necessary and useful means. Enough about our thrusts and accomplishments in this regard has been said above (under B, I, 2).

#### 5. Pastoral reflection and research

##### 5.1 Need

The Federation as a pastoral organization is primarily concerned with the praxis of the biblical-pastoral ministry. And yet, we cannot do justice to this ecclesial enterprise without theological reflection, evaluation and research. This can be and is being done by individuals, but the ideal places for doing theology are doubtlessly seminars and workshops.

##### 5.2 Plenary Assemblies

The Federation's Plenary Assemblies have been occasions for reflection, research and evaluation. In preparation for this Plenary Assembly we have published a preliminary edition of Final Statements accessible to us.

It is interesting to notice, judging from the themes of the Plenary Assemblies, how the concerns of the Federation have shifted and how the Federation has grown over the years in understanding (and doing!) its biblical-pastoral ministry. During the first two assemblies, the role of the Bible and the biblical ministry in the life of the Church was of interest. The very first Plenary Assembly (1972) was occupied with elaborating the constitution of the Federation. Held in Vienna with its pioneering biblical-liturgical tradition since the days of Canon Pius Parsch, "Bible and Liturgy" suggested itself as an appropriate theme. In 1978 on Malta, "Biblical Spirituality and Biblical Catechesis" was on the agenda.

A shift came about in 1984 (Bangalore) with "God's Prophetic People" as theme: "Would that all (of God's people) were Prophets!" Easy access to the Scriptures (DV 22!) had been opened by the Council to God's people. Nourished by the Scriptures, God's people must be a prophetic people, announcing the Good News and denouncing what is contrary to it, thus "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: "Now I am making the whole of creation new" (EN 18). Speaking of the "biblical ministry in the mainstream of the evangelizing mission of the Church" (1.3) and of the "centrality of the Bible in the evangelizing work of the Church" (2.4.1), the Bangalore Plenary Assembly already prepared for the theme of Bogotá: "The Bible in the New Evangelization: Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21,5).

The Bangalore and Bogotá Plenary Assemblies focused not so much on the Church with its various activities which must be rooted in God's Word in Sacred Scripture, but on the world which sets the agenda for the Church and must be transformed by the Word!

##### 5.3 Workshops at different levels

The workshops, at different levels during the past six years as

documented in our collection of Final Statements, have been occasions for evaluation, reflection and planning. The element of theological reflection has been lived and experienced in differing intensity as one can easily discern while reading the Final Statements. This important task of theological reflection must continue and be fruitful for the biblical-pastoral ministry in the future.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude this rather lengthy report in a personal vein, stating some of my own convictions and hopes for the future.

1. The reading of the Bible is an enterprise of the entire people of God in which not only the teaching office (magisterium) and the biblical scholars (exegetes), but also and especially the laity have their competence. A fruitful reading of the Bible results from an interaction and interchange, to which all partners bring their own competencies. However everyone must first be a LISTENER.

2. Because people can afford a Bible and can read it on their own, the need for scholarship and formation in the responsible and fruitful use of the Scriptures is more urgent than ever. This is particularly true because of the rampant fundamentalistic (ab-)use of the Bible.

3. The reading of the Bible "in context," letting the Word take root in and transform the various cultures, making it thus "incarnate" in our world and history, is at the core of the biblical-pastoral ministry. And yet, for a truly "Catholic," i.e., all-embracing reading of the Bible, there must be an exchange and interaction, an inter-cultural and inter-contextual reading, in other words: a mutual enrichment through an exchange of the various readings "in context."

4. God's Word is not contained and enclosed in a book; it is being spoken to us in creation and in the events of history addressed to individuals and communities. Important for the biblical-pastoral ministry is not only the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, but also the Pastoral Constitution on Today's World *Gaudium et Spes*.

5. A world Church as a community of faith can ill-afford closing her eyes to the Sacred Scriptures and the religious traditions of other faiths and persuasions. Discovering and acknowledging in them seeds of the Word, communities of hope could be formed which will prepare ways and serve as instruments towards a civilization of love.

6. Finally, it is my firm hope that "the force and power in the Word of God" not only supports and energizes the Church but it will also by its transforming power bring about "the new heavens and the new earth."

Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, svd