

Catholic Biblical Federation

No. 21

4 / 1991

Bulletin

*Sei
verbum*

* * **A Simple Method of
Communal Bible Sharing**
(pages 4 - 8) * * * **Follow-up
of the Plenary Assembly in
Bogotá** (pages 9-12) * * **The
Bible in 100 Weeks: an Exper-
ience from Japan** (pages 13-16)
* * * **From the Life of the
Federation** (pages 17- 19) * * *
**Address of Pope John Paul II to
Representatives of the United
Bible Societies** (page 20) * *
**Bishop Ablondi - 25 Years in
Livorno** (page 8) * * *

English Edition

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is an international fellowship of Catholic organizations involved in biblical-pastoral work. The members foster mutual service among all local churches.

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

Furthermore, it is the intention of the CBF to promote biblical studies, support the production of pedagogical aids for a better understanding of biblical texts, and assist in the formation of ministers of the Word, such as biblical animators, 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

" 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).

Bulletin DEI VERBUM No. 21 4/1991

October - December

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

Editorial Board:

Ludger Feldkämper, Marc Sevin.

Editorial Team:

Michelle Carrera, Heinz Köster,
Marc Sevin, Christa Wehr

Conditions of subscription for 1991:

- Ordinary subscription: US \$15
- Supporting subscription: US \$30
- Third World countries: US \$10
- Students: US \$10

(US \$ 3 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 c/o Bulletin Dei Verbum
Dept. (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.

* * * * *

CONTENTS

* * * * *

* A Method of Bible Sharing	4
* Bible Sharing in the German Speaking Countries	6
* Bishop Ablondi celebrates 25th Anniversary	8
* Follow-up to the Bogotá Assembly	
• A Discussion on the Final Statement (Spain)	9
• Bible Sunday, Week, Month in Asia / Oceania: Answers to a questionnaire sent by the General Secretariat	10
* The Bible in 100 Weeks, An Approach to the Bible (Japan)	13
* From the Life of the Federation	
• AMERICA	
. Argentina: Bible Year in the Diocese of Quilmes	17
. Colombia	18
• AFRICA	
New Director of BICAM	18
• ASIA / OCEANIA	
. Papua New Guinea	18
. India	19
. Malaysia	19
• EUROPE / MIDDLE EAST	
. Italy	19
. Lebanon	19
. Czechoslovakia	19
. Austria	19
* Address of Pope John Paul II to Representatives of the United Bible Societies	20

Editorial

With a broad smile and a perceptive look, he receives his visitors with open arms as if he had been waiting for them a long time. The people of Livorno wanted to celebrate Bishop Alberto Ablondi's 25th Episcopal Anniversary, during which time they have come to appreciate the warm humanity of their Bishop. They don't hold it against him that at times he leaves the diocese to pursue some great issues of the universal Church, like those of the Bible. The Catholic Biblical Federation joins the well wishers of Livorno with „sincere thanks, Msgr. Ablondi!", (p. 8).

Could a thirst for the Bible be one of the fruits of the Council? Indeed with numerous Catholics there exists a growing thirst for reading the Bible. How will the thirst for this book be quenched? If it were only under the assistance of specialists, then God's people would hardly find access to a personal reading of the Bible as is found in these small groups of Bible sharing. In all of the continents, the simple methods which guide, correct and influence the groups have flourished. In this issue, we publish one of these methods with roots in Asia, (p. 4-6). In South Africa several methods have met with great success. The funding agency, Missio Munich, has collected four of them and presented them to the German speaking Churches. This exchange between the Churches of different continents could provide a valuable opportunity, as Dr. Ort Kemper, the director of the „Katholisches Bibelwerk" indicates, (p.6-8).

In the perspective of exchanging experiences in the biblical-pastoral field, Fr. Le Dorze describes a practice in Japan of reading the Bible in 100 weeks, (p. 13-16).

The Final Statement of Bogotá should not gather dust on the bookshelves. Fortunately, the members of the Federation try to work with it, to apply it to actual situations, and translate it into the terms of life. We would like to receive the story of these real life applications here at the Secretariat in Stuttgart. All of your initiatives are useful to us! In this Bulletin you will find a summary of experiences in the biblical-pastoral ministry in Spain, (p. 9-10).

One of the practical recommendations of the Final Statement of Bogotá is the practice of Bible Sunday/week/month/year. This seems to be the very wish of the Pope himself, „In order to educate the faithful in this school of the Word of God, it would be very useful to promote a Bible week or month", (p. 20).

We are still in the process of evaluating the questionnaires on Bible Sunday. The region Asia/Oceania can look back on a long practice of Bible Sunday, (p. 11-12).

A diocese in Argentina organized a „year of the Bible", (p. 17-18). This good news deserves our attention.

We wish all of our readers a good and fruitful year of the Bible!

Mark Sevin

A Method of Bible Sharing

The expression "Bible Sharing" may defy a clear definition. But it always refers to a group of people who gather together to listen in common and in prayer to God's Word addressed to them today and to live it accordingly.

For effective Bible sharing, "methods" have been developed which correspond to the preoccupations and needs of the Bible groups. Depending on the participants, their situations and countries, these methods assume different colors.

Knowing other methods and models may lead to modifying and improving one's own practice. In any case, a Bible sharing method may hardly be exported in its entirety since it may be identified too much with the group where it originated.

The method described below has been developed at the John Paul I Biblical Center (JPIBC) in Vigan, Philippines and promoted through its Basic Bible Seminar. It has found wide acceptance in the Philippines and in other countries.

Even though only a short explanation is presented here, experience has shown that the Basic Bible Seminar mentioned above or a similar thorough introduction to Bible sharing is highly recommendable for a responsible and fruitful Bible sharing. For further information on the Basic Bible Seminar please write to: John Paul I Biblical Center, 2700 Vigan, Ilocos Sur, Philippines.

The Simple Method of Bible Sharing

INTRODUCTION

I. The Group

Four to six persons who in trust, openness and respect listen in common to the Word of God, and try to answer it; persons who on the basis of the Word of God, through mutual self-communication, try to find their way towards a deeper Christian community.

II. The Atmosphere

For Bible sharing, a quiet atmosphere is really necessary. That is:

Freedom from noise, thus a place where the group can meet undisturbed,

Freedom from time pressure, thus sufficient time should be available, (according to experience, a group of five people needs about 45 - 60 minutes for this method).

The participants sit in an open circle (not around a table), so that each one can not only hear the others but also see them.

A burning candle in the midst reminds the participants that Christ, the Word of God, is the light of the world (Jn 1,1,9; 8,12; 12,46) and that he is present in the midst of those gathered in his name (Mt 8,20). All of this helps towards creating the right atmosphere.

III. The Group Facilitator

He or she need not be an expert, because it is not his/

her task to convey actual knowledge. Their task rather is to lead the group in the Bible sharing by announcing the individual steps of the method. He/she may also lead the opening and closing prayer, or may ask for a volunteer. He/she may invite someone in the group only to read, but not to share.

IV. The Bible and the Scripture Text

It is advisable, but not absolutely necessary, that all members have a copy of the Bible in the same translation. It is recommended to take one of the three readings of the Sunday liturgy for this Bible sharing.

V. The Method

The group decides on the model they will use (prayer - response, action - response, or a combination of both) before beginning each session.

It is recommended to use the model prayer - response for the first few times, and then the group may choose to go on to the action - response. After that, the two may be used alternately.

THE THREE MODELS

Model A Prayer - Response

- Opening prayer or song

The participants will try to become aware of God's presence. Jesus said "Where there are two or three gathered in my name, there I am in their midst." (Mt 18,20). Also a prayer of petition would be appropriate according to the words of Scripture, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening" (1 Sm 3,10) or "You have words of eternal life" (Jn 6,68) or a petition to the Holy Spirit, who can open our ears and free us from everything that would hinder us from hearing God's word or a hymn to the Holy Spirit, "Come Holy Spirit", etc.

- First Step

First contact with the TEXT, with the "dead letter".

Reading of the text - One member of the group reads it aloud, the others participate by listening, and/or reading it silently.

Silence - After the reading, all observe silence for about three minutes, during which they go over the text once more. They choose a word or words, phrase or phrases, verse or verses that strike them.

Sharing - After about three minutes, the facilitator invites the group members to share the word or words, phrase or phrases, verse or verses that struck them. They are not to give any explanation, only a striking word, phrase or verse with the corresponding verse number. For example, "I was struck by the word 'light' in verse 5" (in 1 Jn 1). No explanation is given, nor the reason why this particular word, phrase or verse is very striking.

- Second Step

The "dead letter" of Scripture becomes the living WORD for me (and perhaps, through me, for others as well).

Reading of the same text - After all have shared upon the invitation of the facilitator, another member reads the same text aloud. The others again participate silently.

Silence - and listening to the WORD for me (about

5 minutes) - After the reading all observe deep silence for about five minutes, during which each member listens intently to God's personal message to him/her. Prompted by the text and/or the sharing of the other group members, something will emerge as most meaningful to each group member, and true to their own experience or applicable to their own lives. While listening, the participants ask themselves, "What do you, God, want to tell me personally for my very concrete life?"

Sharing of the Word for me with the others - After about five minutes the facilitator invites the group members to share what they have heard in the depths of their heart. In order to keep the sharing on a personal level and to refrain from moralizing, they will try to use only the first person singular (I, me, my, mine). It is a matter of simple sharing, not of discussion nor of preaching in the sense of moralizing. The word of Pope Paul VI may be recorded here "Is there any other way of handing on the Gospel, than by transmitting to another person one's personal experience of faith?" (Evangelii Nuntiandi)

- Third Step

The WORD demands a RESPONSE.

Reading of the same text - After all have shared, another member of the group reads the text a third time, while the others listen and/or read silently.

Silence and personal answer to the WORD - After the reading the group observes deep silence once again, during which each person tries to answer what has been perceived as the personal Word of God. There ought to be a real correspondence between the Word and the answer, for instance, expressing one's trust if the Word was a promise, one's obedience if it was a command. The prayer could also be praise and thanks, repentance, petition, intercession, depending on the message received.

Sharing of the personal prayer response - I express aloud the personal answer of my heart to the Word I have received, so that it may be confirmed through the Amen, (expressed or in silence) of the other participants.

- Concluding prayer or song

A prayer of praise or thanks, a song or the Lord's Prayer recited by the group together, fit very well as a conclusion to the common Bible Sharing.

Model B Action - Response

- Opening prayer or song

- First Step

Same as in Model A: prayer - response

- Second Step

Same as in Model A: prayer - response

- Third Step

The WORD demands an ANSWER

Reading of the text - as in model prayer - response

Silence and personal answer to the Word - (about 5 minutes): Here I ask myself (or I ask God) how I can put into action in the concrete circumstances of my life the Word that I have received.

Sharing of the personal action response: Each participant shares with the others how he/she wants to live the Word. Bible sharing groups, which form a natural community (family, religious community, classmates, colleagues at work or office etc.), could try to reach a conclusion on how they, in common, as a community, could try to live their answer.

- Closing prayer

Same as in Model A: prayer - response

Third Model Combination of the Prayer and Action - Response

Prayer and action response could also be combined, this of course would require more time, since this combination consists actually of four steps, but it is not necessary to read the text a fourth time, followed by the period of silence, in sharing the action - response, the prayer - response could be integrated as well.

DETAILED EXPLANATION AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE METHOD

I. The Three Steps: TEXT - WORD - RESPONSE

The TEXT is the objective form of the Word of God, independent from myself and given to the ME. God speaks first, he takes the initiative.

The WORD of God is a personal Word, a Word from person to person. It is addressed to me and it is spoken to me, and I am at stake. It strikes me and it means me.

Whenever God speaks to me I have to answer, his Word demands my ANSWER. Thus, a dialogue is opened up, in prayer and in life.

II. The Reading of the Same Text Three Times

The advantage of a common reading aloud of the text or letting it ring in my ears, should not be underestimated. For that reason, the reading should never be reduced to once or twice in order to gain time.

- * In this way the text sinks in better.
- * Also, people who are unable to read, or have difficulties with reading (children, analphabets, the blind, handicapped) can thus participate.
- * Though the text remains the same, the understanding of it is deepened step by step. With each new reading of the text, all that has been shared is heard once again.
- * Through reading the text three times, it is referred to time and again, so that during and after our sharing, we stick to the text and orientate ourselves to it.
- * Finally, through the three times reading, we express our conviction that faith comes through hearing, and the inspired text is more important and more significant than whatever we may say in the sharing.

III. Triple Silence

The minutes of silence are of great importance. They are the bridge from reading to sharing.

- * The minutes passed silently are not a time of passive waiting for the sharing to begin, but moments of the deepest personal activity. Unless the Bible sharing emerges from silence and a personal encounter of the Word, it easily drifts into mere chatting.
- * Only in quiet and silence are we able to listen to the text, to listen to whatever emerges in our hearts,

and to listen to what the others have to say. It is therefore recommendable to remain in silence even after the sharing of each person in order to listen to the echo of what has been said and to let it sink in.

* The time suggested for silence is not to be measured with a stop watch, it is to be understood as an approximation. In groups who have become used to this method the times of silence are rather longer than shorter.

* As to what happens in the silence of the second step - letting God speak personally to oneself - the following may serve as an explanation:

- When I listen attentively to what is happening within me, I notice what is emerging within me. Inspired by reading the text two times, and by the first sharing of the group, some part of the text will become particularly important, be it related to personal experience or to concrete life situations in the present or in the future. When the inner voice (my conscience) says "yes" to what moves my heart, what I have perceived as significant to the Word of Scripture, then I may take this as God's personal Word to me (not necessarily for everyone else).

* As to the silence of the third step - speaking with God personally - I try to find a real correspondence between the Word and the response. For example, an invitation, a summons or a commandment could be answered by an expression of obedience; or of repentance that I so far have not followed this Word; or a petition for help in following the invitation given.

IV. Triple Sharing

This is the goal of reading and of silence, through sharing, my listening and answer to the Word will not remain a personal, but become a communitarian activity.

The first step - This sharing has preparatory function which can be compared with preparing the soil (plowing, harrowing) before sowing or planting. It aims at a greater attentiveness, expectation and curiosity regarding the text.

* With many texts of Scripture, especially with the liturgical readings, we are all too familiar. We seem to know them already and do not expect new insights.

* When someone says: "this or that in the text struck me" (even without giving a reason for this fact), I perhaps ask myself, what is so striking in this particular text? If this, or similar questions are fostered, the text will be approached anew with greater expectations.

The second step - God's Word is rich and deep, it can not be exhausted or fathomed by any individual, but everyone may make his/her own contribution. Together we are hearers of the Word and may complement each other with our insights.

Experience tells us that the most personal is also the most common, an example is that the listeners of a homily tend to be much more attentive when it regards the concrete and personal rather than the abstract and general.

The sharing of what is very personal, or intimate is a sharing of the person oneself. This presupposes confidence, but on the other hand, through this sharing, confidence is strengthened and deepened. In other words, the sharing of self and the sharing of persons creates and builds community at a deeper level. Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation, EVANGELII NUNTIANDI (On the Evangelization in the Modern World) says "Is there any more effective way to proclaim the Good News than by a personal sharing of one's own faith conviction?" (EN 46).

The third step - Each personal prayer addresses God. However, it is good to express this personal prayer aloud, so that the listeners may confirm it, either aloud or in the silence of their heart, with their "Amen" (1 Cor 14,16; 2 Cor 1,20). According to the Lord's promise, such common prayers will be heard (Mt 18,19). The sharing of the personal prayer response is done for the same reasons and the same way as sharing the personal word.

Bible Sharing in the German Speaking Countries

The Catholic funding agency MISSIO - Munich has published four methods of Bible sharing of the Missiological Institute Lumko in South Africa. On this occasion the director of the Catholic Biblical Association of Germany (Katholisches Bibelwerk), Fr. Franz-Josef Orttemper has proposed some reflections on the method of Bible sharing which we publish here in extracts.

The author points out the positive possibilities which these methods, developed in Africa and widespread in many countries, may indeed offer. The biblical-pastoral ministry in German speaking countries from whose perspective Fr. Orttemper is writing may learn from the experiences of other continents, especially as regards popular Bible reading with simple Christians. The biblical-pastoral ministry in Europe must, however, take into consideration the scientific mentality which permeates numerous layers of the European society today. It will, therefore, also develop and cater to other methods which are obliged to modern scientific biblical research.

— Potential —

Bible sharing has found an astounding reception in recent years. It is quite evident that many Christians have a great need to experience spiritual encounters and growth. People are searching for a way to relate the Bible to their own lives.

Exegesis is often experienced as too academic and not spiritual enough for the average person. The method of Bible sharing may encourage the individual to open up and express themselves in a group setting.

In many parish communities special Bible sharing groups have been formed. Furthermore, Bible sharing has been introduced in already existing groups that have special tasks within the community. At times, even full-time personnel of a parish use it, particularly where a relationship of trust exists between the members of a group, which, unfortunately, is not always the case.

In many parishes, the priest holds a Scripture discussion with members of the community, as a part of his preparation for the Sunday homily. In this way he learns about the needs and troubles of his audience and how the respective Scripture text relates to their concrete situation. Through Bible sharing, many have again become attentive to the message of the Bible. It encourages groups to read the Bible communally and may also foster a personal confrontation with the message of the Bible. This is certainly the case if one does not whimsically select only one's pet texts, but also permits oneself to be challenged by some "uncomfortable" texts.

— One good method, among others —

Among others, Bible sharing is one good method of a pastoral approach to the Bible. Over course of time it will not be the only one. Certainly one should never make it absolute. Above all, it is not a method for everybody. Just as with everything in life, the tastes differ, people grow and change. Some prefer Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake, others, the Rolling Stones. In situations where critical questioning or the results of modern exegesis are emphasized and called for,

this method is hardly appropriate.

There, the time honored practice of an ongoing education with a lecture and following discussion continues to be valid!

— Problems —

Origin of the method

The method of Bible sharing in seven steps originated in South Africa. This raises the question: can it be used in our situation? It originated in a culture which has not been influenced by the European tradition of "enlightenment". As a result our situation demands that we take into consideration the results of historical critical research of the Bible.

God's voice must not be mistaken for one's own!

The method of Bible sharing presupposes correctly that wherever people gather in HIS name, there the Risen Lord himself dwells among them and speaks to them. Of course, one must be mindful of the danger of emotions, or rather a sort of "overheated religious temperature" invading the group. Above all, one must be careful not to mistake one's own subjective opinion for HIS voice. It is a basic insight of biblical faith that the presence of God does not depend on us! God cannot be manipulated by any kind of magic. He shows and reveals himself and speaks to us when HE wills! Therefore a great deal of critical distance from personal ideas and emotions on the part of the participants is needed, at least for the leaders.

Caution with one's cherished ideas

In some Bible sharing groups one gets the impression, after some time at least, that they gradually fall prey to a sort of inbreeding of their own pet ideas. They turn in circles and make no headway. Regardless of the biblical text, one knows in advance what Mr. X or Mrs. Y are going to say. On the other hand, fortunately a good number of Bible sharing groups feel the need to deal once in awhile with exegetical questions in a systematic manner. Groups without a solidly theological biblical background will gradually run out of inspiration. In fact, the members of Bible sharing groups, as a rule, are very grateful for such offers of ongoing formation and consider them a precious enrichment.

The danger of the group withdrawing into its own shell

Unfortunately, Bible sharing groups may withdraw from the everyday affairs of their parish life. In this manner the community threatens to break apart into several small circles. In their isolation the members feel safe and at home, with no desire to venture out into the trite run of normal community life. This danger exists, of course, not only in Bible sharing groups, but also in charismatic and similar groups. Obviously this phenomenon poses a serious challenge to parish communities in general and their pastoral leaders in particular.

The temptation of fundamentalism

Here and there, groups threaten to drift away into a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible. Especially the "naive" reading of the Bible implies the great danger of moving away from one's reality in a sober and modern world. Solid exegesis to accompany Bible sharing is a great help to put the group's feet on the solid ground of reality.

A good introduction is necessary!

The difficulties raised thus far do not speak against Bible sharing, but underline the need and importance of a sound introduction, as well as a solid accompaniment of the group. The full-time pastoral agents must not leave the groups to themselves. Of course, they need not do the introduction and accompaniment all by themselves. Everywhere there are teachers of religious education and theologically trained lay people, no doubt ready and willing to accept such a task. (If these participate in Bible groups, it is very important that they refrain from talking too much and from railroading the group with all their professional knowledge!) It would be ideal to organize an introduction for Bible sharing groups over an entire weekend. This can be an opportunity to discuss the virtues and difficulties in different ways of Bible sharing. One could also talk about how to conduct and organize such professional accompaniment of Bible sharing groups.

— Accompaniment —

A responsible accompaniment of the groups is extremely important. They should not be left to themselves. Well accompanied, such groups have a very positive, constructive impact on parish communities, like a vitamin which injects new vitality. Above all, their leaders need spiritual accompaniment. Here various models and possibilities may be thought of. In a community in which Bible sharing has been practiced for many years, the parish priest or another person responsible in the community may invite those concerned to a meeting every three months. There he has a chance to discuss with them the problems that have arisen. Next, Bible sharing is practiced and reflected upon in this group of leaders. Such a program reinforces relationships and prevents the individual groups from drifting slowly away from the community. It would also be desirable to develop ongoing formation workshops, at least for leaders of Bible sharing groups.

— The importance of scientific exegesis —

All the necessary spiritual deepening in the world can never dispense with the necessity of seriously taking up the challenge of modern biblical science. Though there is no room for this within the dynamics of Bible sharing, still, it could take place during special meetings where, for example, an invited expert would offer members an opportunity to discuss the questions that have arisen. It would be ideal to schedule, several times a year, an evening for the purpose of information. Thus, over the course of the years a systematic introduction to the different books of the Bible is guaranteed.

By the way, the widespread hostility against "modern exegesis" is primarily unfounded! Those who study its results opt to experience them as an incentive and an aid to the growth of their faith. To appropriately interpret old texts which originated in another time and culture is a laborious task, however, one that is richly rewarded! Here a text from the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation DEI VERBUM of Vatican II should be remembered: "Since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest through their words." Furthermore, "for the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of perceiving, speaking and narrating that prevailed at the time of the sacred writer and to the customs men normally followed at that time in their everyday dealings with one another." (DV 12)

It goes without saying, the average Christian does not need to plow through heavy exegetical commentaries and painfully look up thousands of footnotes! Nowadays, there is a good supply of popular literature where Bible groups may find an abundant amount of very useful information.

— Selection of text —

The selection of texts is of decisive importance for Bible sharing groups. A continuous reading of an entire biblical book is one option. A group may also choose to use the respective reading of the daily liturgy. Thus, the group avoids just picking the raisins out of the cake and or running into the more difficult texts. Utilizing the liturgical readings also underlines the fact that Sacred Scripture is a book of the Church.

Following a "guide for Bible readings" is a decisive point in order to avoid a biased selection of favorite texts and ideas. The Word of God in Sacred Scripture is not merely to confirm our own ideas but must always challenge and correct them. Often, it is even beneficial to us when Bible texts are in downright opposition to our own ideas. We need such confrontations! After all, orientation along the lines of a Bible reading guide fosters necessary soberness. One may also choose a small group, along with the full-time personnel of a parish, to select the texts. Also, this procedure imparts the awareness that the text has been "assigned".

— Connection to the community —

Close ties of the Bible sharing groups to their parish

community is of overriding importance. This is also true for all other groups in the community. In I Cor 12-14 Paul sets forth a decisive criterion for the legitimacy of Christian groups: that they „build-up“ the community. This theme runs like a guiding thread through all of these chapters. Never underestimate the danger of groups withdrawing from the community, or even looking down somewhat disrespectfully upon the "ordinary" community. The present development of the Universal Church seems to even further such centrifugal tendencies. All the more must we withstand such tendencies. In any case, Paul, facing the charismatic awakening in the Community of Corinth, is very adamant that the charismatic groups neither place themselves above the community nor grow away from it. Rather that they see and acknowledge their co-responsibility for the community. In this way will they strengthen the community and, thereby, assist it to become a living community.

In some parishes Bible groups prepare the liturgy for the Bible Sunday in January. They move publicly in the consciousness of the community. In this way it becomes clear that the Bible group or the Bible sharing group does not exist by itself, apart from the community, but rather, understands itself as a group in the community and for the community.

The complete text of Fr. Ort Kemper is originally in German, and available from the General Secretariat.

BISHOP ALBERTO ABLONDI CELEBRATES 25th ANNIVERSARY

The citizens of Livorno wanted to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Bishop Ablondi's appointment, giving evidence of their affection for a man who has been a great blessing to the entire community. In the course of the Eucharistic celebration held on the occasion, Fr. Feldkämper, the General Secretary of the Federation, expressed his appreciation to Bishop Ablondi for his commitment to the Presidency of the Federation.

In the same manner, he wished to commend the people of Livorno, for having accepted that the ministry of Bishop Ablondi reaches far beyond the borders of their diocese. Since one of Bishop Ablondi's favorite phrases is that the history of the faithful must become prophetic, no doubt the term "prophetic" qualifies his own actions.

"...I would like to express the greetings and good wishes of the Catholic Biblical Federation. In his letter, which we just have heard, the Holy Father himself mentioned that Monsignor Ablondi is the President of the Catholic Biblical Federation. Therefore, Monsignor Ablondi, in the first reading of today's Eucharistic

Celebration, has chosen the verses from the Book of Numbers which provided the theme for the Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation in 1984: "Would that all God's people were prophets". Just during this Plenary Assembly Monsignor Ablondi took over the Presidency of the Federation.

For seven years now I have had the great pleasure to work under him, as the General Secretary; nonetheless he has never made me feel that he was my superior. Throughout these years we have been, and we still are, not only co-workers, but much more, we are friends, brothers. In the Catholic Biblical Federation we are committed to the ministry of the Word. One could say that Monsignor Ablondi, through his personal charisma, has become a minister of the Word par excellence! Without a doubt, what characterizes Bishop Ablondi more than anything else, what touches everyone in contact with him is his exceptional attention to the individual person.

There is a prayer in the Oriental Liturgy that pleases me very much, in which one asks the Holy Spirit: "Make that we become visible words of God!". I don't know whether this prayer is also a favorite prayer of Monsignor Ablondi, but it seems to me that this petition has already become a reality in him: a visible Word of God, a visible word of the love of God!..."

Follow-up to the Bogotá Assembly

The Final Statement of Bogotá must not collect dust in the archives of our various biblical organizations. On the contrary, it should offer an excellent opportunity for reflection to look back and to develop new perspectives for the future. In a short time, this document has served numerous biblical teams as a working tool. We would be grateful if the General Secretariat in Stuttgart could be informed about studies along these lines, regardless of whether they are in preparation or have been implemented, even if these reports appear in the form of a rough copy or semi-final draft.

As an example, we are reproducing the results of a workshop held in Spain. The Bible House (Casa de la Biblia), a Full Member of our Federation, organized a meeting for the biblical animators of its St. Paul Association in Sept. of 1990, only a few months after the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá. During this seminar the Final Statement was studied in groups. The following article lists answers to some of the questions concerning this study of the Final Statement of Bogotá.

A DISCUSSION ON THE FINAL STATEMENT

1. What challenges, in your opinion, does the New Evangelization pose for the biblical apostolate?

**The most important challenges:*

- Inculturation.
- As a personal challenge, the work of Bible groups to form a biblical mentality within the community.
- To start with a personal and communal experience of God which leads us to translate the kerygma into the language of people today and prepare a biblically founded catechesis.

**Other challenges:*

- To decide the thrust for the new evangelization.
- As an expression of the prophetic message, to denounce all forms of injustice.
- To give the liturgy of the Word back the place it deserves during the Eucharistic celebration.
- Forming the parish councils so they start their work on biblical foundations.
- All biblical activity must be conscious that giving more weight to Bible reading is one of its prime tasks.
- To stand up against a new spirituality centered on abnormal phenomena.
- The need of evangelization by means of the Bible.
- To be attentive to the signs of the time.
- The urgency to establish open and direct dialogue with all the realities of our time.
- The necessity to listen to people today and respond to their unrest with new methods.

**Summary: some important points resulting from this exchange):*

- The newness of the Gospel receives its new dimension in every era.
- Evangelization must include the dimension of experiencing God.
- To give the liturgy of the Word in the Eucharist its due importance.
- The importance of biblical formation.

2. What does Bible reading offer the Christians in regard to the challenges of the New Evangelization?

**Aspects, particularly insisted upon:*

- Discovering answers to meet new and unknown situations.
- New zeal which prepares us to discover the living presence of the Risen Christ in the sharing and dialogue which build the community.
- A new experience of God that opens our eyes so we comprehend what God has done in the past and are able to discern the signs of God's realm today.

**Other contributions:*

- Rereading of the Old Testament.
- To accentuate that the Bible is on the side of the marginalized.
- View of what evangelization has been from the post-apostolic era on.
- To discern solutions for situations similarly difficult for the people of God in the Bible and for us today.
- Realize that we ourselves need to be evangelized at all times.
- Discover the newness of Jesus' new teaching.
- To see events with new eyes.

**Summary:*

- Bible reading provides new materials and models.
- It is a place to encounter God who evangelizes us.
- It helps us to see the world from another view point.

3.a) How do the above mentioned aspects affect your life?

b) Do the answers, provided by the Bible, appear appropriate to you?

a) To the first question:

- Despite all disappointments, the way of love according to the prophet Amos remains, without

becoming guilty of the situations of injustice.

- To humanize the world and encounter it with respect by placing oneself on a ground of faith in God who is father and mother as Hosea says.

- As in the times of the prophets, injustice, exploitation, violation of human rights, racial discrimination, destruction of nature, perversity of social structures, etc. are obvious.

- Urgency to pass from an apologetic attitude to a readiness for dialogue.

- To further ecumenical cooperation which makes us discover our common base as believers in the same God.

- To face the numerous realities present in our communities: unemployment, marginalization, etc.

b) To the second question:

- The Bible offers many answers, yet more biblical experts and appropriate literary means are needed to lead to these answers.

- The answers offered by the Bible are useful; they must, however, be different - not in their substance, but in their presentation - in view of the present day problems.

- The answers of the Bible concerning injustice are endangered to be forgotten in the striving to build up better human living conditions.

- The example of the early Christian community to act prophetically and in an engaged manner is also valid for our time.

- Ecumenical Bible reading favors the building-up of communities based on love and communion.

- Pentecost shows that differences dwindle when the Word succeeds to unite.

**Summary:*

a) There is a necessary religious pluralism, even within the Christian community.

b) The Bible may offer responses to vital questions (as for example the questions on ecology).

4. How does this reflection influence your approach on personal or communal Bible reading?

**The most important:*

- No single method of Bible reading is self-sufficient. One must read the Bible by informing oneself at the same time (study) in a spirit of prayer, meditation and contemplation (pray) with the conviction that its message can incarnate itself in our own lives (live).

**Other accents:*

- The Bible is not out-dated.
- There exists a relation between God and man.
- The texts must be adapted to the times in which we live today.

- The Gospel must be read as if we were "in love" with the Bible.

- In a personal Bible reading there is a dialogue with God to learn what he expects from me.

- Communal Bible reading allows for establishing relationships which may prove of great value.

- The Bible treats our relations with God in the context of a community of faith.

- Sacred Scriptures enlighten our life and

transform it.

**Summary:*

- Not every reading of the Bible is necessarily good. The reading must be accompanied by Bible study and be done in a spirit of prayer and service.

- This reading must be tied back to one's own life.

- This reading must contribute to building-up the community.

5.a) Which recommendations of the Final Statement of Bogotá could be realized?

b) And how could we put them into practice in our own biblical organization?

a) Recommendations:

- To reread the Constitution DEI VERBUM.

- To help priests make simple people discover that the Bible is the Word of God.

- To train catechists, placing the accent on the biblical aspect.

- To nourish popular devotions with the Word of God.

- To center the Christian family life around the reading of the Bible.

- To make the importance of DEI VERBUM better known to our members.

- To initiate a manifold and profound use of the Bible.

- To further biblical formation and distribution in our parishes.

- To start formation courses in Bible reading.

- To use the means of communication for the propagation of Bible reading.

- To care for the distribution of biblical instruments.

- To establish better contacts with other biblical organizations and foster a collaboration with them.

b) Within our own biblical organization:

- To assure on-going training of the associate members of our biblical organization.

- To prepare easily accessible materials.

- To circulate information on biblical meetings.

- To respond to the needs of the handicapped by creating adapted biblical instruments.

- To offer a Bible for the handicapped.

- To alert the bishops that they must give the Bible its due place.

- To prepare instruments for the pastoral ministry of the youth.

**Summary:*

- To help the priests in the work of the biblical pastoral ministry.

- To make DEI VERBUM known.

- To train catechists.

- To create means for use by the handicapped people.

- To enrich popular devotions by means of the Bible.

- To offer a better formation in our own biblical organization.

- The spread of the Word of God is also the mission of the laity.

- The necessity of means.

- A much greater spread of the Bible.

The Bible Sunday, Week, Month in Asia/Oceania

The Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá recommends the celebration of the Bible Sunday, Week, Month, Year. The Secretariat in Stuttgart sent a questionnaire to all members of the Federation in order to compile information on what is actually done in this regard. In the last issue of the Bulletin we included a report on the answers which reached us from Latin America (BDV no. 20, p. 10-12). In this edition we are presenting a summary of the main information which reached us from countries in Asia and Oceania.

We received 27 answers from a total of 55 questionnaires sent, about the same number as in the case of Latin America. Of Asia/Oceania it can be said that the Bible Sunday or the Month of the Bible is already a generally established practice on the rise among Catholics.

The answers originate from:

National biblical associations: 11 (Australia, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Thailand)
Regional Coordinators: 1 (Southeast Asia)
Diocesan or interdiocesan centers: 11 (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Korea)
Religious congregations: 2 (Japan, Hong Kong)
Lay organizations: 1 (India)
Publishing houses: 1 (Daughters of St. Paul in India)

An already established tradition

Asia appears to be one of the regions of the Federation where the apostolate in the true sense of the word has been developed most, i.e., as a pastoral activity directly drawn from the Bible. As a matter of fact all the answers mention at least the Bible Sunday or the Bible Week as a practice reaching back several years (between 8 to 20 years). Furthermore, the Bible Sunday or Week receive a special importance in the pastoral ministry of parishes, dioceses, and including countries. The question which now arises in several places is how to renew and fill with life such practices due to the fact that repetition may produce a certain monotony in these things. Bible Sundays or Weeks are accompanied by certain activities dedicated to the Bible (celebrations, song festivals and posters contests, biblical exhibitions, the ceremony of enthroning the Bible in families, quiz and so on...).

A Month of the Bible is less frequently celebrated (in Hong Kong, Indonesia, and in the Philippines).

In the Philippines, the year 1989 was officially declared as the "Year of the Bible"

There are, however, some countries where the celebration of the Bible Sunday is not yet known, but even there the need is felt to introduce it as soon as possible.

As in Latin America, it has become evident that most of these celebrations take place among Catholics, in spite of the fact that ecumenical collaboration is highly appreciated.

What becomes evident

The answers compiled show the usefulness and even the pastoral necessity of certain activities which lead the faithful to become aware of the need of reading the Bible in order to strengthen and deepen their faith.

"The effectiveness varies from diocese to diocese, from parish to parish. Much depends on the motivation of the animators. Where enthusiastic animators have been found, such celebrations turn out to be a great success. Hence, one of the things that we are doing is to motivate the animators."

"The Church has fixed various Sundays for specific purposes: Mission Sunday, Vocation Sunday... Bible Sunday, however, seems to be optional. Thus it gives the impression that while it is good to celebrate a Bible Sunday, it may not be that necessary."

Goals

The goal seems to be quite clear for everybody: To make God's Word accessible, so that the faithful, members of the Christian community find nourishment by this Word for their lives.

"Familiarity with the Holy Scriptures and the use of it for prayer and in everyday life."

"To possess and read the Bible and to work towards an increasing importance in the liturgical readings... - to provide biblical materials."

Topics

The topics vary considerably; they are chosen in answer to local concerns and according to liturgical times.

"The topics deal with the different aspects of Christian life. Mainly the thrust has been the use of the Bible in deepening one's faith. Socio-economic problems have not been taken up." (India)

"The topics chosen by biblical diocesan organizations and commissions focus on evangelization in order to enable the laity to acquire more knowledge on Scriptures and to help motivate them to assume a greater commitment in the task of evangelization." (India)

"Themes are discussed at the National Commission meeting. Emphasis is placed on a more efficient distribution, study and use of the Scriptures in daily life." (Sri Lanka)

"The topics are chosen on the basis of the Word of God in the Gospel according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in prayer. Priority is given to spreading the Word of God among the people of the region, so

as to enable the Church to prepare for a chosen race and kingdom for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (India)

■ "The themes are selected by the various committees and groups. Emphasis is placed on getting the people to read and study the Bible, individually and in groups; and to continue reading the Bible throughout the year. The main goals are to make God's Word living and life-giving in the Church of Japan." (Japan)

■ "The topic is usually "the Word of God". The main goal is a people aware of God's message of salvation." (Thailand)

■ "Emphasis is placed on the roll of the Word of God in the building of a nation, a community, a family, and how the Word of God is related to life (and vice versa)." (Philippines)

Organization and Resources

The picture here is the same as in Latin America. Bible Sunday is frequently organized on a national level, where a commission prepares the team and materials. At times, on the diocesan level, under the responsibility of a center or the diocesan biblical commission members. In either case, much painstaking preparation is done.

The time or dates chosen during the year differ much from country to country. However, many give preference to the special seasons (Advent, Lent).

In many answers lack of availability of priests is deplored. They appear to be completely tied down and absorbed by their daily pastoral chores.

Requests

In many answers to the questionnaire requests for assistance are made, especially for financial help.

■ "We are interested in receiving materials for a Bible Week and Bible Sunday".

■ "Bibles are in fact very costly and it is beyond the reach of a common man. Our association, with its limited resources can offer Bibles at 50% of the real price, and even then we reach only about 10% of the Catholics. You may try to help us in this regard."

■ "We wish to get a book about "the biblical apostolate" and financial help".

■ "We are not in a position to respond to all requests, due to economic and infrastructural constraints, even though there are growing demands for the celebrations of our Bible conventions from all corners of our region".

■ "We are encouraging the individual dioceses to assume their responsibility rather than being totally dependent on the national level for the celebration. We also try to convince them of the need to employ new forms of celebrating Bible Sunday or Bible Week such as biblical contests, song and drama competitions".

Results and evaluation

It is not enough to prepare and celebrate just one Bible Sunday/Week/Month, many respondents insist on the need that there must be a certain follow-up, and also an evaluation what has been done so far in order to improve future ventures.

"Every year during the month of July, annual Bible conventions are held wherein the biblical celebration is evaluated during the workshops. A report on these workshops is published and sent to all parish priests and

lay ministers of the biblical apostolate as guidelines for adoption in their areas." (India)

"We are evaluating the success of our celebrations on the basis of the ever increasing participation of people in our programs. We observe in many participants notable changes in their way of life." (India)

"We are evaluating according to questionnaires, an evaluation session, the responses from the participants and the degree of participation." (Hong Kong)

"The biblical celebration is a very significant event even though it is held only for a week once a year. It has an impact in letting people know about the existence of the Bible Week and this leads them to think of the Word. However, just celebrating Bible Week is not enough for an active commitment to the biblical apostolate. Much territory continues to remain idle." (Japan)

"The Catholics have already access to the Bible. The number of Bibles sold, and the interest and participation in biblical activities give rise to hope for an increasing solidarity among the faithful, a better family life and a greater participation of the faithful in social welfare." (Indonesia)

East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) Manila, Philippines

"Training Ministers of the Word"

is the title of a six month course (June 28 - Dec. 18, 1992), being conducted by the EAPI, in order to prepare men and women, clergy and laity in Asia for assuming responsibility in the biblical-pastoral ministry.

For registration and/or further information write to:

The Secretary
East Asian Pastoral Institute
P.O. Box 221 U.P. Campus
1101 Quezon City, Philippines
Phone: 63-2-98 70 10
Fax: 63-2-9217534

Please circulate this information among the people responsible in the biblical-pastoral ministry and to those interested in further training.

THE BIBLE IN 100 WEEKS

An approach to the Bible

presented by: Fr. Marcel LE DORZE, MEP Tokyo

PART I

General Presentation

The Church, through the Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation and in the Constitution on the Liturgy, is always inviting us to listen attentively to the Word of God, spoken beyond all frontiers and centuries to every man of good will. To answer this call and this need, we suggest here a program and method which will permit us to better understand the message of the Bible, as we read it from the beginning to the end.

This experience goes back, so to speak, to that of the disciples of Emmaus, who profited from an accelerated retelling, directed by Christ in person.

GENERAL PRESENTATION

In practice, all the participants read the same passage of the Bible at home during the week, and then take part in a weekly meeting in order to share that same passage in a prayerful context.

This program, experienced over many years, spread out through one hundred weeks, supports the reading process. The Bible on the whole, brings to us the religious experience of a well defined people, an experience which took place in the past and in a given historical context. Consequently this program, as much as possible, takes into consideration this historical and cultural context.

The program of some one hundred weeks is spread out over a period of three years; namely two years for the Old Testament and one year for the New. Adding here and there some periodical reviewing to get one's bearings, the total may become one hundred and twenty weeks...But never mind that! The objective is to read the whole Bible, and not only to understand it better, but to pay more attention to listening to God who continues speaking to us even today.

A true challenge! But the first thing to do is to suggest this challenge to the faithful in a realistic way, with the conviction that a good number of them are able to accept the challenge and are even desirous to have the opportunity of doing so. We must ask them to accept the challenge...while on their part they have, of course, a strict right to have their pastors introduce "the Book" for them.

A Weekly Meeting

As a rule, the weekly meeting should last two hours. The number of participants should not go beyond twenty. The ideal would be around ten. Nevertheless, a small group of four to five could also be very interesting.

Features of the meeting

- Singing of a psalm
- Reviewing, answering questions (about 25 minutes)
- Sharing and prayer (about one hour)
- Coffee break (10 minutes)
- Intervention of the animator who presents the passage to be read the next week
- Singing of a psalm or final prayer

The Meeting - In Detail

- Singing of a psalm

Preferably a song of praise, relating to the content of that day's meeting, and, as much as possible, a hymn which the group will find easy to sing. Failing this, the reading of a psalm as an opening prayer.

- Review

Time given to reviewing is always rather short. It will be an opportunity for the animator to recall what has been read and perhaps forgotten; a time to underline events of importance, and tie them up with what will follow, notably the New Testament and the person of Christ.

He/she could also tie this up with the actual experiences of the liturgy and of daily life.

It is also a good time for answering questions, without however, becoming too distracted by them. As a matter of fact, it is often preferable to reserve certain explanations for a little later, outside the framework of the meeting.

The role of the animator is evidently very important. What we expect from him/her is neither an abundance of explanations, nor a display of learning, but simply very low-key, very clear, precise explanations.

The way to proceed is very important and can be done according to the background and circumstance of the group. The simplest way may be to go around the table, even partially if the group is too large; each one giving his own idea of the answer. For example, to the question, "What would you say about Abraham?", the first person would give an answer and allow the others an opportunity to provide an answer.

In any case, the animator should avoid two dangers: that of being carried away in an authoritative speech, or of lingering beyond his share of time, taking the risk of being embarrassed by lack of time for the meeting.

- Sharing

Sharing is the essential point and characteristic trait of this kind of biblical group.

We proceed around the table. Each one can freely express oneself, saying whatever we found in our reading, or what was striking to us. It is not expected that the person give a summary, a commentary, or an exhortation. It will suffice to say very simply what was found in the reading, why it was striking, what remains impressive...as time is very limited, each one will have to be content with pointing out two or three things, which they find most striking.

During this time, the group listens in silence, each one taking notes if it is helpful, always attentively enjoying the Word which comes to us through another. In other words, no questions, no correcting, no remarks, and especially no compliments. All this helps to create and maintain a climate of total confidence within the group, so that everyone will feel truly at ease, to listen to the Word of God and its vibrations.

Experience tells us that beginnings are delicate times. From the beginning, through mutual influence, the participants readily modify their reading and make it a real "spiritual reading".

- Prayer

Let us return to the first person who speaks...they talk for two or three minutes. Once they have said what they have to say, they recollect themselves for a moment, then, in a voice that can be heard, they continue in prayer.

This prayer is improvised, said aloud, and the group answers, saying: "Lord, hear our prayer" or some equivalent answer. Thus, the prayer of one becomes the prayer of the whole group.

The animator will have to watch, especially in the beginning, that this prayer is really, in its formulation, a true prayer directed to God, and not a vague kind of wish: "I pray that we have nice weather Sunday". This formation in prayer is fundamental. It can be done through appropriate advice given to the group as a whole, so as to make everyone understand how we should pray and how we are to address God.

Briefly, this is how the meeting progresses, each one of the participants in turn makes a statement and formulates a prayer. This is where the essential of the meeting lies. And lastly, the animator also makes a statement to express what they found in their reading, and then continues like everyone else, with a prayer to which is added one Our Father, sometimes a Psalm or an Ave Maria may be added, especially when the name of Mary has been mentioned during the course of the sharing.

- The coffee-break

A ten minute break is useful! Certainly one should not think that it is a waste of time! Because it is at this level that a community is formed. Coffee and cake are the group's donation. Select one or two to be responsible for this.

- Intervention of the animator

After the break, there is usually very little time left. It must be used intelligently. To summarize what has been said, and especially, what has not been expressed, the animator will have many things to say...but will have to remain low-key in words, speaking clearly and precisely. He/she will, most of all, stress the important points of the sharing.

He/she should then announce the next lesson. Presenting it in its historical context, stressing, if need be, the literary style so as to smooth away any possible obstacles. For example, one is not to expect someone to read Jonas or Daniel without a word of introduction. In the same way, at the very beginning, in presenting the reading of the Creation account, placing them in the historical context of the Exile in Mesopotamia right from the beginning.

- Conclusion

A final, very important thing, is to know when to be silent, and when the time has come to break off, even if there remain many things to be said. After all, since the program runs for three years, it will still be possible to meet again, and let us recall that the Lord, in his way, has taken his time, two thousand years, to speak to us, and he still has not said his last word!

Conclude with the singing of a Psalm and a blessing if the animator is a priest. Then, "See you again next week!"

HOW TO READ AT HOME

Set aside half an hour or one hour each day. Consequently, have the courage to change certain habits in order to free yourself from them.

Before opening the Book, always say a short prayer, calling upon the Holy Spirit. And do the same after closing the Bible, after reading and meditating. During the reading, always take notes, summarizing each chapter in a few lines. This notebook will become precious later, for reviewing and remembering.

After having read attentively and meditated, close your eyes for a moment, and let arise in yourself the words, the gestures, the attitudes which have created some impression within you. Report this at the next group meeting. Take notes in order not to forget.

In the above way, prepare your personal prayer, the one which will be said during the sharing. Take note of it, it is important that, during the meeting, these notes should not be read, but spoken.

Cooperation of the family is necessary for perseverance. Reading aloud certain passages is highly recommended, as is getting all of the family, especially the children, to listen to the Word of God. It is one way of progressing together.

Some practical items of advice

As much as possible, avoid holding such meetings on Sundays. Besides Holy Mass, it would require much time spent in meetings, always on Sunday, and for three years! As a matter of fact, this reading is intended for those who are already baptized or on their way to Baptism.

Avoid making a selection of texts, for example, the readings found in the Breviary or those of daily Mass. Essential passages are there, for sure, but everything is not there. There are many passages missing, which could not be done in a public reading, but nevertheless give a very great human depth to the message of the Bible.

Our reading is rapid, it does not permit the lingering over a word or controversial verse. Rather this reading permits a better understanding of the outline of the Bible, that is, of the important events and the successive stages of the message. We perceive strongly what God repeats untiringly.

To make the best of this reading, even rapid reading, we must necessarily sacrifice less important things which could become obstacles. For example, if someone is already engaged in some activity which requires much time and energy, it will be difficult for them to have two things on hand at once. We must choose.

It is altogether inadvisable to read commentaries, even reputed ones. As a matter of fact, efforts must primarily be brought to listening to the Word of God and to Prayer: if not, there is a risk of losing the way. The usual editions, like the Jerusalem Bible or an Interconfessional (Ecumenical) Translation, which carry introductions and some brief explanatory annotations, usually will be sufficient.

A last word of advice to the animator. The animator must learn to keep silent for most of the meeting; this is very important. If the animator speaks too much, the participants will keep silent, and will willingly let him speak. But those are not the rules of this exercise. The contrary is demanded: the animator keeps silent, and the group speaks! The animator keeps silent to let the Holy Spirit speak to those who are groping in search of Him.

HOW TO START A GROUP?

In starting a group, there are different ways to proceed, which are all valid. Here is one possible approach.

1 - First, it is advisable to make the project known a few months in advance, so prospective candidates may make arrangements to facilitate their participation. This invitation is addressed to everyone, and excludes no one.

2 - After this early invitation, announce a preparatory meeting for imparting information, open to all interested. At this meeting, clear and concrete explanations are given on what the Bible course is about. It is especially important to grasp the idea that it does not mean coming each week to listen to conferences on the Bible, but rather, involves reading the text by oneself.

At the end of this meeting, names may be taken and the day and time of the first Bible group meeting announced.

3 - First meeting (suggestions)

Part One: if possible, meet in the chapel for a celebration of the Word.

- Read and comment on the passage of the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24)
- After some singing of a Psalm, read the passage of the healing of the deaf-mute (Mark 7,34)
- The reading is followed by the priest's imposition of hands upon each of the participants: "Ephphatha"...It is today!
- Prayer of invocation
- Our Father and Hail Mary, and the singing of a Psalm

Part Two - in the meeting room

- First, a brief recalling of the method which will be followed.
- Briefly present the history of the people of Israel, and the formation and composition of the Old Testament.
- Underline the context of the Exile in Babylon when giving an introduction to the passage on Creation, to be read this week: two chapters of Genesis.
- Note, without insisting too much, on the differences in the Yahwist and other sources.
- Give notice at this time, there are only two chapters to this week's program, but in the future, the food will be more abundant...

PART TWO

For Future Participants

WHAT RESULTS MAY WE EXPECT FROM THIS EXPERIENCE?

Intellectual knowledge

We now read the Bible with the primary aim of knowing it better. In this world, more and more dominated by mass media preventing us even from reflecting, we Christians need to assert our own identity more forcefully, to express our hopes, and to propound our vision of the world more clearly. We will then, first of all, read the Bible in order to know it better.

In a purely intellectual field, it is normal to experience some curiosity towards events related in the Bible, which are at the origin of Christianity, and also towards the principal persons whose names we often hear mentioned: such as Abraham, Moses, David and especially Jesus Christ.

Who are they? What did they do? What do we have in common with them? Their faith experience has been a determinant for all of mankind. How has this religious experience been expressed, and how has it been transmitted to us? Aren't we all going through the same experience?

Here we suggest that the Bible course be like a planned visit from beginning to end. What matters, is that we accept guidance with humility, lots of humility! This intellectual reflection will let us see better where the

accents have been placed, and will enable us to read more attentively, and understand the message better.

This type of reading is for everyone.

A human formation

On a totally different, and rather secondary level, owing to the biblical and pedagogical methodology, the participants will receive another kind of training.

***We learn to express ourselves.**

In fact, each participant will, every week, make his own statement and his personal prayer within the group. In reality, this small speaking exercise in public requires a great psychological effort. It will be a painful experience, even to the last meeting! But this effort is highly rewarded. It becomes a source of great joy, renewed every week. There precisely is the secret of the method.

Through such practice, the participants gradually learn to express themselves before a group, getting used to clarifying their thoughts, and expressing them in their own words. What they do weekly in the group, is on the whole, a profession of faith in the midst of the community.

***We learn to listen.**

We also learn to listen to the others, which is more difficult than is generally realized...to learn to listen! The animator will have to be particularly careful on this point. Because we risk becoming engrossed in what we have to say when our turn comes, or again be distracted by what we have just said, thus totally forgetting to listen to the others.

We learn to express ourselves, and we also learn to open our ears to listen with humility to what the others are saying, even to those who are not eloquent...it is not rare to hear surprising reflections that really seem to be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, this education of the ear leads us naturally to listen to the voice of him who speaks in silence. We learn to listen to God who never ceases to speak to us. We could say in our turn, with the young Samuel, "Lord, speak! Your servant listens." (2 Samuel 3,9)

An authentic formation of faith

This reading not only guides us to knowing better the history of Christ and the contents of the Bible, but also leads us to a better knowledge of God, and to a more personal relationship with Christ.

Needless to say, this reading, this listening to the Word of God is done within the Church, with faith and respect, in conformity with the interpretation commonly admitted by the Church, in an attitude of prayer, unceasingly invoking the light of the Holy Spirit. In other words, this reading will be altogether different from that in which interested non-Christians who consider the Bible as a literary and venerable work, may engage.

From the beginning an attitude of faith is required on the part of the participants, an attitude of listening to the Word of God, always living and actual. God speaks to us today beyond time, his Word continues to tell the mystery of his infinite love. We are invited to receive this Word in an attitude of admiration and of praise.

This reading makes us discover that the Holy Spirit was active long before Pentecost. And in the often ambiguous attitude of the persons in the Bible, we are invited to recognize our own portrait, which is often ambiguous

too. We are constantly invited, under the motion of the Holy Spirit, to revise our life and to be converted: "Return to me and I will come back to you!" as the Lord repeats to us constantly, (Zc 1,3).

Each page of the Bible leads us towards him, who is the Alpha and the Omega, Christ Jesus in the paschal mystery, inviting us to enter with him into this mystery of death and resurrection.

This way will take us straight to a better understanding of the mystery, which is taking place in the sacrifice of Holy Mass, a memorial actualizing for us today all that the Bible contains.

In this way we discover Christ Jesus, who keeps working in his Church and through his Church, actualizing for us the gesture of the Exodus, to take us to the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Reading over the Psalms, we feel invited to sing them as Christ himself. He made his own all these cries and appeals, when he said, "I cry to you Father, during the day and during the night"...and from now on, in union with Christ, making our lips his, we will sing them...Me? It is also Christ with me! (Psalms 42;77;88 etc.)

In short, we are invited to a long meditation on the paschal mystery, to a long retreat which will last three years.

SUMMARY

This reading has nothing magical about it and its results are not guaranteed. Nevertheless, an extended experience has shown clear and surprising changes in the hearts of individuals, as well as evident signs of the work of the Spirit in their respective communities.

The following points have been noted:

- The participants gradually became more attentive and really started listening.
- Above all, they discover a sense for God, and quite naturally the sense of man and of his vocation.
- They discover a God close to them, a God who is not a God of vengeance, but a Father who shudders at the ungratefulness of his children.
- They appreciate God's patience and forbearance and his humor (Josea 11,8)
- They discover the real face of Christ, the Son who willingly lowered himself so far as to die on the cross, while the Father cries to us, through the mouth of David, "Do not touch my son!" (2 Samuel 18,5).
- They discover the sense of sin and of mercy.
- The participants are drawn out of their isolation, and become conscious of their belonging to a Christian community formed by Christ and gathered by him.
- The participants develop a taste for prayer. They appreciate the sacraments better, ALL the sacraments, beginning with baptism.
- They follow the reading and prayers of Mass better. They are attentive to the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ: it is today that all this is realized.
- They do not fear the non-Christians, especially the Jehovah's witnesses embarrassing questions any more.
- Parents understand that it belongs to them to transmit "the message of salvation" to their children "You shall say all this to your son!" (Ex 12,26; Deut 6,20).
- They take pleasure in answering their children's questions, and the children are filled with admiration at the fact that their parents also study perseveringly.
- The participants have become, even without knowing it, leaders prepared for other tasks as Christ's witnesses, just as much in the Church as in society.

- Henceforth, they appreciate the benefit of a period of prayerful reflection and renewal, such as a spiritual retreat, even of short duration.
- It is suitable to add another requirement. They expect much from their priest, and more particularly, that he speaks first of all about God!...And blessed is he who listens to the Word of God and puts it into practice!

IN CONCLUSION

The lesson of the disciples on their way to Emmaus.

The disciples on their way to Emmaus considered themselves to be very well informed. They believed they knew everything regarding Jesus of Nazareth, even to the very last story. Nevertheless, they were disappointed. Actually, they had understood nothing as yet. Isn't it the same with us?

We think we know! Actually, it may only be moments of knowing, without any overall synthesis. We must stop and listen to what Jesus wishes to tell us, leisurely, patiently listening to what the books of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets have to say about him. He will be telling us that it all concerns himself: who was, who is, who is to come. He is the Word...His Word is actual, living and at work beyond the unfolding of time.

Listening to him, we also will gradually feel the great joy of realizing that our eyes have been opened to the light, recognizing the true face of Christ, who walks with us along all roads of the world, Christ whose roots are in the Old Testament and the people of Israel.

PROGRAM OUTLINE

1 Gn, 1-2	40 Zp, 1-3	70 Sr, 1 42,14
2 3-5	Na, 1-3	71 42, 15-51
3 6-11	Hab, 1-3	72 Ws, 1-19
4 12-19	41 Jr, 1-12	73 Mk, 1-8 5
5 20-25, 18	42 13-23	74 9-1
6 25, 19-36	43 24-39	75 1 et 2 Th, 8
7 37-50	44 40-52	76 Ga, 1-6
8 Ex, 1-7,7	2 K, 24-25	77 1 Co, 1-7
9 7,8-15	45 Lm, 1-5	78 8-13
10 16-23	Ba, 1-5	79 2 Co, 1-7
11 24-34	Jr (Letter)	80 8-13
12 35-40	Ob, 1	81 Rm, 1-6
13 Lv, 1-16	46 Ezk, 1-12	82 7-11
14 17-27	47 13-24	83 12-16
15 Nb, 1-12	48 25-37	84 Ph, 1-4
16 13-24	49 38-48	Phm, 1
17 25-36	50 Is, 40-48	85 1 Co, 1-4
18 Dt, 1-11	51 49-55	Ep, 1-6
19 12-26	52 Esd, 1-10	86 Mt, 1-9
20 27-34	Ne, 1-13	87 10-20
21 Jos, 1-24	53 Hg, 1-2	88 21-28
22 Jg, 1-16	Zc, 1-8	89 Heb, 1-7
23 Rt, 1-4	54 Ml, 1-3	90 8-13
17-21	55 Is, 55-56	91 Lk, 1-8
24 1 S, 1-12	56 Zc, 9-14	92 9-18
25 16-31	57 Ps. of Praise	93 19-24
26 2 S, 1-12	58 Ps. of Demand	94 Ac, 1-5
27 13-24	59 Ps. Didactic	95 6-15
28 1 K, 1-11	60 Pr, 1-15	97 1 & 2Tm,10
29 12-22	61 16-31	98 Jm, 1-5
30 2 K, 1-13	62 Jb	99 1 P, 1-5
31 Am, 1-9	63 Sg, 1-8	100 Jude, 1
32 Ho, 1-7	64 Qohelet, 1-12	2 Peter, 1-13
33 8-14	65 Jon, 1-4	101 Jn (Letters)
34 2 K, 14-23	Tb, 1-14	102 Rv, 1-5
35 1 & 2 Ch	66 Jdt, 1-16	103 6-11
36 Is, 1-12	Est, 1-10	104 12-22
37 13-23	67 M	105 Jn (Gospel)
38 24-39	68 Dn, 1-6,13-14	106 7-12
39 Mi, 1-7	69 7-12	107 13-17
		108 18-21

From the Life of the Federation

THE AMERICAS

Argentina

The Year of the Bible in the Diocese of Quilmes

The Diocese of Quilmes declared 1991 as «the Year of the Bible». The whole pastoral thrust of the diocese is focused on the realization of this program.

Since 1981, the diocese has been developing its biblical-pastoral ministry with growing dedication and vigor. The diocese is situated some 10 miles outside the capital and belongs to the industrial belt which stretches around Buenos Aires. Out of its 1.2 million inhabitants, 70% belong to the working class. Therefore, the diocese is strongly marked by the milieu of manual labor. Most families have been hit hard by the economic crisis and by unemployment.

The Local Church tries to be with the people in their anxieties, fears and hopes.

With trust in God's Word, powerful and effective enough to change men and existing social structures, the diocese made the pastoral decision to celebrate a «Year of the Bible in the Diocese». Avenues to justice are sought for the growth of a community of mutual concern. One wishes to build a world of solidarity, where the reign of God may be present and flourish.

➡ *There are different motivations for placing an accent on the pastoral ministry during 1991:*

1. A constant hunger and thirst for the Word of God among the faithful.
2. Pope John Paul II has invited the Catholics of this continent to prepare for a new evangelization, «new» in its expression, in its fervor and in its means, in view of the celebration of the fifth century of the first evangelization in Latin America. Now it is precisely the Bible, where the people can discover the Word of God in its salvific and active presence, that Word which plays a fundamental and decisive role in reaching this new evangelization.
3. The Bishops of Argentina took up this initiative in their pastoral letter of April 25, 1990.
4. The aggressive advance of sects, who use the Bible to manipulate and take advantage of the confusion of the faithful, make all the more urgent and indispensable a biblical formation of the faithful.
5. The fifteenth anniversary of the Diocese of Quilmes.

➡ *Objectives to Be Achieved:*

- To make better known everything existing in the line of the biblical-pastoral ministry, to reinforce and to extend it.

- To discover and construct new ways in which the Bible may penetrate the entire pastoral life of the diocese, may reach the families, as well as the entire realm of social life.

- To establish structures and create conditions in which the thrust of the Bible, through the inspiration of the Year of the Bible, may continue to have its due place within the diocese, also in the future.

- To work hard, so that each family may possess their own Bible.

➡ *Program of action:*

- *To strengthen what already exists and make it more effective.*

- A two year formation program for agents/leaders of the biblical apostolate.
- Bible weeks.
- Biblical courses at the theological formation center of Quilmes.
- Bible groups, like those already existing in different parishes of the diocese.
- Biblical correspondence courses.
- Workshops on evangelization, popular retreats, spiritual re-collection on weekends.

• *Venturing Down «New Paths»*

A. Bible Weeks aimed at an initiation into a popular reading of the Bible

The goal of these courses is to foster in people a simple way of reading the Bible, and make them conscious that the Bible is «the book of the people of God» and fundamental to the Christian community. They will encourage the founding of new groups where biblical reflection takes place. They will help people discover what the ministry of the biblical animator is all about. Six week long courses are scheduled with encounters of three hours each day, Monday through Saturday.

- Five or six people from each parish will be asked to follow the Bible Week (350-400 in all), so they will be able to offer a similar Bible Week (April through August) in their own parishes, adapted to the local conditions.

- Together with the biblical animators chosen from among the people, the diocese will organize a monthly meeting to facilitate the mutual exchange of experiences in the biblical-pastoral ministry. These encounters serve to alleviate potential difficulties, clarify pending questions and deepen the thematic approach.

- In the continuity of these Bible Weeks, ongoing formation will be offered to the Bible groups. One could provide instruments of biblical aid, like those of Fr. Carlos Mesters, eleven small booklets on forty themes which allow a group to cover the entire Bible in a serious, yet simple and popular manner.

B. Bible Weeks for the youth

These Bible Weeks of initiation will be organized during the catechetical course in preparation of confirmation. If at all possible the young people about to be confirmed, should possess their own Bible during this course.

C. Zonal encounters for ongoing biblical formation

Every month, a three hour biblical encounter will be held for the pastoral agents of the five zones in the diocese. There will be five encounters for each zone, from April through August, dealing with the Gospel according to Marc, and other themes to be defined.

D. The monthly courses for continued biblical training

These courses are designed for different pastoral ministers to further their biblical knowledge in a progressive and systematic way, starting with the main data in the history of God's chosen people.

Seven weekends, Friday evening to Sunday noon, will be set aside for this training program. The themes are:

1. What is a popular reading of the Bible? A popular Bible method. The hermeneutical question.
2. Introduction to a general synthesis of the Bible.
3. The patriarchs, Exodus, the conquest of the Holy Land.
4. The monarchy. The prophets.
5. The Exile. The post-exilic period. The restoration.
6. Jesus. The Gospels.
7. The Church. The first Christian communities. The Acts of the Apostles, and the Letters of the Apostles.

E. Bible Month: September

During the month of September, manifold biblical activities will be organized in the parishes and zones. They will reach a climax with the celebration of the «Day of the Bible», the 22nd of September.

The same day also commemorates fifteen years of the diocese's existence.

F. The monthly Bible bulletin of the diocese.

This bulletin will be another means of formation, communication and exchange in the biblical-pastoral work on the diocesan level. It will, also, echo some experiences of other Latin American Churches and of the Catholic Church worldwide.

• The Diocesan Biblical Commission

This project will be handled by the Biblical Commission of the diocese, composed of biblical experts, the responsible leaders in the pastoral ministry, and delegate representatives of each of the pastoral zones, (altogether some 20 people).

■ COLOMBIA : Third Encounter on the Biblical-Pastoral Ministry

From June 1-3, 1991 the third national encounter on the biblical-pastoral ministry took place. Though rightly called the third meeting of its kind, it was the first one under the responsibility of the Bishops' Conference. Bishop Olavio López, responsible for the biblical-pastoral ministry, and the secretary of the Biblical Commission, actively participated in all of the steps that led to the realization of this encounter.

The starting point of this meeting was the wish of the responsible leaders to insist on the use of the Scriptures as the

soul of evangelization and «the principle source of catechesis», and to stress the present demand of the Church to lend a greater vitality to the Word of God. The organization of this encounter was entrusted jointly to the Biblical Center «La Palabra» of Bogotá, the Catholic Biblical Movement of Medellín, and the Subregional Coordination Center of the Catholic Biblical Federation. The participants were presented with a pedagogical summary of the Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá (1990).

In the participants' judgment the encounter was well organized and proved beneficial to them all. The active presence of Bishop Olavio López was seen to be a positive sign, specifically, a testimony to the interest and the openness of the hierarchy for the biblical-pastoral ministry. The participants gathered information on experience in the biblical-pastoral ministry, and on new methods that have been explored by certain groups. The person responsible for the Archdiocese of Bogotá stressed in particular the positive influence of the «Bible Schools» that have been promoted by the Center «La Palabra», under the directorship of Fr. César Herrera, CSsR, the former Latin American Subregional Coordinator of the Federation.

Some suggestions were made for a future encounter:

- To give less time to theoretical expositions, and more to group work, allowing for more exchange of information and experiences in the biblical-pastoral ministry.
- To favor a greater participation of the diocesan representatives, having established closer contact with them already during the preparatory phase, as well as better contact with the parishes and actively involved lay people.
- To make the progress of the biblical-pastoral ministry more visible, in particular in the liturgical celebrations of the next encounter; lay people should be given the opportunity to direct the celebration of the liturgy of the Word.
- To treat themes of special importance to the parishes, such as: the newness of the Constitution Dei Verbum, the biblical-pastoral ministry and popular religiosity, Bible and liturgy.

AFRICA

The decision-making body of SECAM (Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) has nominated Fr. Laurent Naré, of Burkina Faso as Director of the Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM). As successor to Fr. Wynnand Amewowo, Fr. Naré will become the new coordinator of the region «Africa» of the Federation. Welcome to Fr. Naré.

ASIA - OCEANIA

■ PAPUA NEW GUINEA : Biblical Apostolate in the Diocese of Wabag

The publication of the Bible in Pidgin has been an important event for the Church in this region. One of the efforts in the pastoral service of this diocese is to make easy access to Bible reading feasible for the faithful. The biblical apostolate team proposes a Basic Bible Course as a ongoing formation for the biblical animators in the communities. The goal is to train the responsible leaders to form and guide Bible sharing groups.

Among the biblical activities in the diocese during the past year have been: a Bible exhibit competition, a biblical recollection for diocesan priests, a Bible seminar for those involved in pastoral service, a biblical bulletin for the leaders of the over 250 Bible groups in the diocese, and a Bible course in the Enga language.

■ INDIA : The Catholic Gospel Center in Palai

The center organized 44 short, three day Bible seminars serving all of the dioceses of Kerala. An average of 500 people have participated in each seminar. The theme was «The Word of God».

■ PAPUA NEW GUINEA: The Liturgical and Catechetical Institute

The Liturgical and Catechetical Institute in Goroka, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, has organized a biblical formation course lasting five weeks from Sept. 3 to Oct. 12, 1990, called «Mini-Bible Course of Nemi». The organizers of this course are former participants of the biblical-pastoral formation and training course in Nemi (p. 20). They intended to share their knowledge with the biblical animators of their country. Twenty-four people participated in this biblical-pastoral course, all of them responsible in the biblical-pastoral work of their dioceses.

The subjects covered during the course were:

- The Constitution Dei Verbum.
- A short history of the Catholic Biblical Federation.
- The «Basic Bible Seminar» (a biblical course derived from the Philippines).
- Pedagogical aspects of this Seminar.
- Sickness and healing in the Old and New Testament, and their social aspects.
- The parables of the New Testament.
- The methods of Bible sharing.
- The Bible in light of the resurrection.

During the formation course, the team tried to find a balance between three facets of the biblical-pastoral service:

- Bible study.
- Internalization of the Word of God.
- Communication of the Word of God.

For further information: Sr. Miriam Dlugosz SSPS, L.C.I., P.O. Box 347, Goroka, Papua New Guinea

■ MALASYIA - Encounter of the Federation's Subregional Coordinators

The first encounter of the coordinators of the Federation's Subregion Asia/Oceania was held from June 21 - 23, 1991 in Penang, Malaysia. After a report by the General Secretary, Fr. Feldkämper, on the activities of the Federation worldwide, the coordinators exchanged their opinions about installing regional structures, and regarding the implementation of the practical recommendations of the Final Statement of Bogotá. The participants agreed to publish a «Manual for the Biblical-Pastoral Ministry». This manual would be of an informative nature and

try to define the goals of the biblical-pastoral ministry, supply information about the Catholic Biblical Federation, include addresses of formation centers for use by those responsible in the biblical field, offer information about ongoing formation programs and correspondence courses, give addresses where Bibles could be procured, and point out possibilities for Bible study and Bible sharing groups.

EUROPE/MIDDLE EAST

■ ITALY - Encounter on the Subregion of Southern Europe

Those responsible for the biblical-pastoral animation in the countries of Southern Europe had their fifth encounter in Milan from Oct. 18 - 19, 1991. The next Bulletin will publish a more detailed account of this meeting.

■ LEBANON - New Subregional Coordinator

Fr. Paul Féghaly, a Maronite priest, is the new Coordinator for the Middle Eastern Subregion and successor to Bishop Naguib, El Minia, Egypt. The representatives of the different members of the Federation in this region worked together for several years on a project: «The Reading of the Sacred Scriptures in our Context» the first volume of which was completed recently. Welcome to Fr. Féghaly!

Bishop Naguib who held the position of coordinator until now, has worked with great endeavor to strengthen the activities of the Federation in the Middle East. The Secretariat in Stuttgart expresses its sincere gratitude for these efforts and regrets he had to give up this position due to health reasons.

■ CZECHOSLOVAKIA - Foundation of the Catholic Biblical Association and of the Bible Society

On Sunday, Oct. 27, 1991, during a festive ecumenical celebration, the Bible Society, serving all Protestant Churches in the country, and the Catholic Biblical Association («Katolícké biblické dilo v CSFR») were founded simultaneously for all of Czechoslovakia. The two organizations intend to work closely together.

■ AUSTRIA: 25 Years of the Catholic Biblical Association (ÖKB)

In 1966, Cardinal König, the first President of the Federation, founded the Catholic Biblical Association of Austria (Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk - ÖKB). The purpose of its official foundation, just a year after the Second Vatican Council, was to contribute to the implementation of the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council, and facilitate access to Bible reading. The anniversary of this founding was celebrated on the October 16, in the monastery of Klosterneuburg, near Vienna.

Pope suggests promoting Bible Weeks and Months

"To educate the faithful in this school of the Word of God, it would be very useful to promote a Bible 'Week,' or 'Month' ...". On Thursday, 3 October, 1991, this suggestion was given by Pope John Paul II to Bishop Alberto Ablondi, President of the Catholic Biblical Federation, and to representatives of the United Bible Societies especially of the Swiss Bible Society. The Pope addressed the group in French. Here are some key elements of his address.

"With great joy I receive your visit here today, several days after the liturgical commemoration of St. Jerome. This great scholar tirelessly studied the Scriptures in order to find there his beloved spouse, the Christ, and to conform his whole life to the knowledge of the Lord. In Christ he saw the power of God and the wisdom of God, and he was quite aware that "anyone who does not know the Scriptures knows neither the power of God nor his wisdom". He went so far as to say that "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ...".

Jerome's example strengthens our zeal to serve Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh of the Father. It is he who ceaselessly reveals himself in the sacred writings handed on by the Church's living Tradition. Faithful to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, especially to the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* on Divine Revelation, we are firmly convinced that "this sacred Tradition, then, and the Sacred Scripture of both Testaments, are like a mirror, in which the Church, during her pilgrim journey here on earth, receives everything, until such time as she is brought to see him face to face..."

Thanks to the doctrinal and pastoral principles elaborated and taught by the Council, the interdenominational cooperation of Christians at the service of the Word of God has also become intense and fruitful; today's meeting is another evident witness to it. As the Council

Fathers taught, "like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture" (DV 21). As a consequence, "easy access to Sacred Scripture should to be provided for the Christian faithful" (DV 22) through suitable and correct translations which, if necessary, are prepared in collaboration with our Christian brethren and so "all Christians will be able to use them" (ibid).

The presence here of distinguished representatives of the United Bible Societies and the Catholic Biblical Federation attests to the existence of the fraternal bonds which have developed since the Council and as a result of it in the context of biblical movements and the ecumenical movement which characterize this century...

Before the new horizons of the proclamation of the Gospel, of biblical and liturgical renewal and the ecumenical involvement which are opening up in so many areas of the world - and especially in Central and Eastern Europe today - we are called to join forces in serving the Gospel. The light and energy for this will be able to come to us through a humble, passionate contemplation of the Word of God, such as one learns through the diligent practice of the *Lectio divina*, in prayer and within the Christian community.

In order to educate the faithful in this school of the Word of God, it would be very useful to promote a Bible *Week* or *Month*. The United Bible Societies and the Catholic Biblical Federation could eventually sponsor and organize such study sessions together. Your associations have already formulated serious programs of action during your respective plenary assemblies in Budapest in 1988 and in Bogotá in 1990. I hope that these programs will be better known and implemented and that, for their part, they will contribute to the spread of the kingdom of God..."

(Osservatore Romano, 21 October 1991)

The Biblical-Pastoral Center DEI VERBUM in Nemi (Rome)

The stage of formation for responsible leaders in the biblical-pastoral ministry will be held in English from the 10th of August to the 16th of December, 1992. Persons interested in further information may contact, as soon as possible:

Missionari Verbiti
Director of the Center DEI VERBUM
Via dei Laghi 52
I-00040 NEMI (ROMA)
Tel.: (06) 936 83 66

We thank you for giving this information to those responsible in the biblical ministry and those who may be interested in this course.