

Catholic Biblical Federation

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Bulletin

*Sei
verbum*

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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).

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Editorial

"The Church which 'venerates the divine Scriptures' may be divided into those who more or less read them, and the majority, who only receive the scraps ... Therefore, it is one of the goals and means of the 'reformatio ecclesiae' of the II Vatican Council 'to provide easy access to Sacred Scripture for all the Christian faithful'. This observation by a theologian on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of *DEI VERBUM* may strengthen the members of our Federation in their conviction: this partition must be lifted so that all may fully participate in the table of the Word (p. 4-7).

In Latin America, many have worked hard so that the People of God would not be kept away from this table. Bible reading, for example, in the basic Christian communities results in a maturity and vitality which is extraordinary. Information from Brasil and Cuba testify to this (p. 16-18). This year, looking back on 500 years of Christianization of Latin America, our *BULLETIN* wants to be particularly informative about the wealth of this experience. Thus to begin with, we borrow from the Confederation of Latin American Religious a reflexion on "Lectio divina, the heart of the religious life". This ancient practice of the Church has indeed resurged to a new life and timeliness. It could very well show itself as an excellent means to put more than scraps in front of Bible readers (p. 8, 13-16).

The Plenary Assembly of Bogotá strongly recommends to its members that they promote Bible Sunday, Bible week or Bible month. Here once again a pastoral opportunity is in the offing where the Word may become the true nourishment. The answers to our questionnaire on this subject coming from Europe present a contrasting picture. There remains enough scope for further initiatives (p. 11-12).

The members of the Federation are invited to broaden their efforts, initiated by the Final Statement of Bogotá, so it may create a greater impact. A priest from Austria relates how this document is a source of inspiration for the biblical pastoral ministry in his parish (p. 9-10).

Don't hesitate to mail to the Secretariat in Stuttgart reports of your experience in the domain of the biblical pastoral ministry. The experiences of some, as modest as they might be, can be of profit for others. Thank you very much.

Marc Sevin

The Relationship between Scripture - Church

(by Maurice Vidal)

Last year, the biblical association "Évangile et Vie" (Gospel and Life) Full Member of the Catholic Biblical Federation, and exegetes in France organized a conference on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the Vatican II Constitution DEI VERBUM. On that occasion, the theologian Maurice Vidal, pss, gave a talk on the relations between the Scriptures and the Church. This historical outline shows the way the Church has worked towards the Bible over the last few decades and what goals are left to be achieved.

The elaboration of the Constitution *DEI VERBUM* (DV) has been excessively conditioned by the heritage of the occidental debate regarding the relationship between Scripture and the Traditions (Council of Trent) and THE Tradition (II Vatican Council). In either case, one may judge that the importance accorded by *DEI VERBUM* to the Scriptures (4 chapters out of 6), as well as the manner in which it talks about THE Tradition - in the singular - approximating it to the Church herself - leads one to assume that the question has shifted from the couplet of Scripture-Tradition to the other couplet, Scripture-Church.

Therefore, while attentively listening to the conciliar text, we will reflect upon the correlation between the "reformatio Ecclesiae" - under disguise of the more innocent word "aggiornamento" - on the one hand and the "reformatio" of the relation Scripture-Church on the other, the two go together. This "reformatio Ecclesiae" has often been analyzed theologically (de Lubac, Martelet) as a sacramental shift within herself, namely of the Church of holy institutions (especially the sacred hierarchy), to the Church of theological life of all of the people of God and, as a consequence thereof, as a shift in view of the world and of the history of mankind. "The Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God - which leaves room to conclude that the theologians may not know it that well - offers to everybody the possibility of being associated with the pascal mystery" (GS 22, 5). It is this orientation which we will try to recognize in the mutual relationship between the "reformatio Ecclesiae" and the relationship of Scripture-Church.

Scripture and Church

Saying that the Scriptures are the Book of the Church is nothing new. One could transform here the formulation of Henri de Lubac that has become famous, "The Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church" and say, "The Church makes the Bible and the Bible makes the Church". The joint formation of the Scripture canon and of the Church shows this clearly enough, but no activity in the current life of the Church shows it better than the celebration of the liturgy. Chapter

VI of *DEI VERBUM* begins quite squarely with the reminder that the Church maintains a common veneration for the Scriptures and for the body of Christ adding, "especially in the sacred liturgy" (DV 21).

The mutual relationship between Scripture-Church is such that, at times, one of these poles is more preponderant than the other. For example, it is the public ecclesial usage that canonizes the Scriptures which the Church receives. Conversely, since the 11th century, movements of the "reformatio Ecclesiae" in the Occident, have been leaning upon the authority of Scripture in order to be more Gospel-like. All of this even before the group of readers was developed first by alphabetization and then by printing and spreading the books. Thereafter, the specialized study of the Bible (like that of any ancient text) has created a place of reading different than the ecclesial, be it in its private form, as in personal reading, be it in its official magisterial or liturgical form. More recently another place of reading has followed suit, that of society: bookstores, religious esoteric corners, where different editions of the Bible are on display.

Today we also rediscover the mutual relationship between the Scripture and God's people or the Church in a twofold manner: by new insights into the history of the Bible's formation, of its canonization, and of its interpretation, but also through our further knowledge regarding the text and the production of meaning in the interaction within the text itself - which does not say everything or just anything, but says many things, plus the listeners/readers seen as individuals and as a social group.

The Bible for all Baptized

At the beginning of Chapter VI we read "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerated the body of the Lord, since from the table of both, the Word of God and the body of Christ, she unceasingly receives and offers the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy" (DV 21). We must however guard against taking this tranquilizing assertion at face value, which occurs frequently in official documents, i.e.: "the Church has always maintained that...". Whenever she reformed herself she did so because she ceased to do something good! One could for example venerate the body of the Lord very well without receiving it in communion!

This Church which "venerates the divine Scriptures" may be divided into those who more or less read them, and the majority, who receives the scraps, perhaps in a language which has become incomprehensible to the masses. Therefore, it is one of the goals and means of the "reformatio ecclesiae" of the II Vatican Council "to provide easy access to Sacred Scripture for all the Christian faithful" (DV 22). This presupposes translations and distribution of the Bible. It also presupposes frequent reading of the Bible, not only by the clergy and other servants of the Word, but by all the Christian faithful who are "urged earnestly and specifically" (DV 25). This presupposes finally the confidence of the hierarchical Church in "the sense

of faith" in the faithful, whom the reading of Scripture is not only allowed but urgently recommended. One may regret that the reading, recommended to all the faithful, has not been more strongly linked with the reading by the magisterium.

In this respect, it is good to measure the way the Catholic Church has made during the last few decades. In order to do this, one may read the two versions of the article, "Bible reading", in two editions of the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (dated 1931 and 1958). The comparison is all the more interesting since within the space of only twenty seven years written by the same author, namely Prof. Anton Stoner, commentates differently. In 1931 he writes, "the Church as always, rejected the assertion that Bible reading is necessary for everybody, she has done this in consideration (note the first reason!) of the Catholic rule of faith to prevent handing over Bible reading to subjectivism, she has done it out of respect for the Word of God," (what a way of paying respect!), and she has also done this for other reasons and protective measures based upon the God given exclusive competence of the ecclesial magisterium. The Catholic practice is justified by the history of errors, especially of the Protestant parties, which, born from free Bible reading, undermined more and more the belief in the divinity of Sacred Scripture" (Sp. 290).

Twenty seven years later, in 1958, (therefore before the Council), the same professor writes, "Jesus and Paul, (Mt 4, 4; Rom 15, 4) speak of the salvific value of Bible reading in such positive terms that obviously the early and medieval Church also recommended Bible reading. Impartial research today admits that in the past, Bible reading in native languages was widely spread, even in the Middle Ages" (Sp. 366).

Exegesis and the Magisterium

Just like Luther and Calvin, the Council cannot recommend direct Bible reading by the majority of the faithful without being preoccupied with the "correct usage of the divine books" (DV 25). The distribution of "versions... with necessary and fully adequate explanations" does not suffice. Beyond that, it is necessary that the Church "prepares as many ministers of the divine Word as possible" (DV 23) who may take advantage of the work of exegetes and theologians. This work must be accomplished with "appropriate means" ('aptis subsidiis') and "under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office of the Church".

The effort to once again read, under this viewpoint, the commentary which Prof. Joseph Ratzinger wrote in 1967, at that time still professor at the university of Tübingen is worthwhile, "The problem which the historical-critical method raises for theology cannot be solved by rejecting this method or by prohibiting it more or less. The work of the exegetes must be carried out with loyalty to the mind of the Church" (secundum sensum ecclesiae) and "under the watchful care of the Magisterium ('sub vigilantia Sacri Magisterii'). "Vigilantia" was chosen instead of "sub ductu, under the guidance" as read in an earlier edition of the text, in order to express that the function of the teaching office is

not that of preceding, for progress is the business of science. The teaching office has the negative function of marking the impassable terrain. The juxtaposition of the two formulas, "under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office" and "appropriate means" expresses however once again the internal tension of ecclesial exegesis, a tension which as such cannot be suppressed, but must be sustained as a tension, (Spannung)". (Commentary to *DEI VERBUM* in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 1967, S. 576).

Open Meaning

All the precautions requested by *DEI VERBUM* for the correct usage of the Scriptures do not secure, and do not want to secure a singular reading. First of all, because THE Bible, in the singular, is in reality a library of many books (in Greek "ta biblia"), whose unity is attributed by the faith of God's people to its one divine author. The revelation of the divine plan of salvation to bring together everything in Christ as the head is far away from explaining and unifying everything in the biblical universe! Since the meaning of the text is not as if it were hidden in the text, deposited by God, and thus, unique and unchangeable like God, it does not suffice to apply THE appropriate method, old or new, to discover it. A convincing and important interpretation that appears to us as THE original meaning of a passage of Sacred Scripture is not purely and simple THE meaning of this passage, but its plausible meaning for us, resulting from the interaction between Scripture (which once again does not say just anything), Tradition, and the world in which we live" (A. Schinder, 1977).

The Body of the Scriptures and the Body of Christ

Thus, we are obliged not to hypostatize THE Bible and even less THE Tradition as if they were a person speaking to us, in order to establish the proper authority of Sacred Scripture. *DEI VERBUM* (24) goes so far as to say, "The Sacred Scriptures contain the Word of God (The Council of Trent said "the Sacraments contain the grace they signify") and since they are inspired, really are the Word of God". Therefore the conclusion, "so the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology".

However, things are not that simple. This is indicated by the very importance which is contributed to the usage of Scripture, be it the Church's usage, not without approximation and hesitation, that allowed the canonization of the Scriptures, be it concerning the very variable and selective, often very negligent use of the Scriptures, always venerated as the Word of God. Looking at the list of biblical quotations of the II Vatican Council is sufficient evidence. Though almost all the books of the New Testament are quoted, there is only a limited number of references to but half of the Old Testament books; this is much less than the references to paper documents, but let us not cling fast to the Council. What did the great St. Irenaeus know about the Old Testament? "One gets the impression", André Benoît writes, "that he had a

predilection for a series of 'testimonia', i.e. selected quotes to prove the coming of Christ". Let us not talk - I say this with fraternal humor - about the theologians and the Protestant world. Moltmann for example is well known for his references to Sacred Scripture through some selected quotations and commentaries of present day exegetes. We recognize well, through all of these forms of usage of Sacred Scripture, that the Word of God today is the library used by the Church.

In *DEI VERBUM* (21) we see that the Sacred Scriptures "inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing impart the Word of God himself without change and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the Prophets and Apostles". This is possible only because, as is said further below, "the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them". Yet, what believing and prayerful reader, in search of God, has never been put to the test by the silence of God in what we call his Word, including the incarnate Word, the Word made flesh? Precisely, is it accessible to us in the symbolic play of different bodies: in the body of a person, of scriptural, of the eucharistic and of the Church. A fortiori, the scriptural body cannot be isolated from the symbolic structure of the whole. Origen even thought - in contrast to the fixation of the Middle Ages, upon the "corpus verum" of the Eucharist - that the true body will be the future body, the body of the resurrection of all the members of Christ.

Inspired and Inspiring

These reflections permit us to come back to the inspiration of the Scriptures, which was dogmatically defined by the I Vatican Council, they should help us to localize it, not solely in the constitution of the text, but also in the divine institution of the early Church, who provided herself with her Scriptures and with her sacraments (K. Rahner's explanation would go in this direction). They should likewise enable us to recognize this inspiration in the dialogue about which *DEI VERBUM* speaks and in the dialogue between the Scriptures and ourselves in the community of the Christian faithful. *DEI VERBUM* (11) here quotes the classical text, "All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproving, for correcting, for instruction in justice; that the person of God may be perfect, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3,16-17). This basic text speaks explicitly about the inspiration of the Scriptures, but in a more comprehensive process of fruitfulness.

Is it not a rule for reading Sacred Scripture which we have received from St. Jerome who writes, "Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written"? (22). Scholastic theologians attributed the unity of the Church to the unique Spirit present in Christ and in each member of his body, a formula taken up by paragraph 12. We therefore say likewise: One and the same Spirit in the Scriptures and in us, listening, reading. Doesn't the mystery of the Holy Spirit exist in being "koinonía" in person? Being common to the Father and the Son, „he receives as his own the names which are common to both of them“ (Augustin).

The Authority of Scripture

By affirming that Sacred Scripture is the Word of God, *DEI VERBUM* wants to recognize the excellence, the sovereignty, the proper authority of Scripture for the Church's faith, thinking, instruction, the life and action, who receives it as God's Word. Precisely for this reason, "Like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture" (21). This phrase has been discussed at length. Between the excessive formulation, "One must regard the Scriptures always as the norm, as the authority which judges and rules the preaching and the Christian religion" and the other one which speaks only of being "nourished by Sacred Scripture", the Council retained a formulation in the middle, which nonetheless preserves the idea of ruling, (regere).

This "regimentum", (it is better to say it in Latin!) of Sacred Scripture has proven beneficial in regaining a concept of revelation which does not reduce it to a divine instruction of truths to be believed, but sees it, like the Bible, tied to the history of a people, a history summed up in Jesus Christ and at the same time open towards the universality of humanity. „Jesus Christ led revelation to perfection by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally the sending of the Spirit of truth" (4). The Council did not draw attention to the limit of Scripture, for not everything termed here as revelation can be handed down by words and in writing. The Council, likewise was not able to distinguish in *DEI VERBUM* clearly enough between the foundational apostolic tradition and the received tradition. Precisely, this point that an exceptional convergence came about, as never before, between the Protestant observers and the most traditional-minded bishops of the conciliar minority, who both feared that the Church, in this confusion with Tradition, might be placed anew, above its origin.

Due to the important place of narration in them, the Scriptures articulate "the theological necessity and the narrative contingency, the inevitable divine design and the unforeseeable human contingency" (Paul Ricœur). Since, in the Gospels we are dealing with a narrative/an account, the question, not raised by dogma, is unavoidable: "and if it had been any different?" If there are truths to be believed - and there are - and if the faith in Jesus Christ evokes and screens orthodoxy, and even before orthopraxis in the following of Jesus, the rule of the Bible is likewise beneficial, without being sufficient, to recognize the order and hierarchy of truths in the Catholic doctrine. Order and hierarchy, not according to the juridical degree of authority with which these truths are being taught, but according to their "relationship with the foundation of the Christian faith" (Decree on Ecumenism, 11). Bringing this into perspective is necessary above all at a time when the social effects of identity, which do not by themselves coincide with the

sense of faith, risk to overestimate certain ways of faith, certain practices, or certain behavior as signs of Catholic identity without them being necessarily closer to the Christological center of the profession of faith.

Respect for the Bible of Israel

Opening up to the Scriptures, likewise opens the Church towards others outside of herself and above all towards the other within whom the Church was born: Israel. Martin Buber wrote that Jews and Christians have "a book and a hope" (ein Buch und eine Hoffnung) in common. Indeed the book in itself does not suffice. How many Christians over the course of centuries didn't think that the Bible, after it had become the Bible of the Church, speaks from beginning to end, basically and lastly, about themselves and Jesus Christ? The "shoah" (holocaust) in our century was needed to force the Churches to thoroughly revise their relation to Israel, so that we began to understand that the people of the Bible still exist, and that we must try to understand their comprehension of themselves, including their way of Bible reading. One may compare, above all, the guidelines published in 1985 by the Commission of the Holy See regarding the relations with Judaism, guidelines aiming at the correct presentation of the Jews and of Judaism in the preaching and the catechesis of the Catholic Church.

What we call the Old Testament, may appear even less as a useless heritage about which Harnack asked himself in 1923, why Protestantism still wanted to regard it as a canonical document. "To reject the Old Testament would have been a fault in the second century, which the Church, in her majority, avoided with good reason. To guard the Old Testament in the 16th century was a blow of fate, from which the reformation could not yet withdraw itself, but to still preserve the Old Testament in the 19th century as a canonical document, is only the consequence of religious and ecclesial paralysis". We, on the contrary, recognize with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his moving meditations from prison, that the christological concentration of the New Testament may pass too quickly over to the last but one realities and make us forget the important human dimensions of salvation. We learn to listen once again to the promises to the people of the Bible. With N. Lohfink, dreaming about the Church as a real community, we ask ourselves, about the accomplishment of these biblical promises. This makes us see the structural limits of the Church, in her mission to the service of the Reign of God, in relation to what she terms the world. This also lets us see the width of what Moltmann calls, "the future of the Risen Crucified" when we, according to the Scriptures, recall the cause of his death and the meaning of his resurrection.

Spreading the Bible and Mission

A last opening regarding the relation between the Bible and the Church: *DEI VERBUM* (25) recommends to Catholics a service which the Protestants have been dedicated to for a long time, namely, the distribution of Bible editions for use

by non-Christians. One could of course say, that the Church here rejoins a state of affairs. One may see in it also a form of this missionary opening up, which we owe to the II Vatican Council, an opening up, which in the first place is not inspired and governed by the conviction that everything outside of ourselves is bad, but by the Church's confidence in the strength of God's Word and the freedom of the Holy Spirit, whose sacrament in the world, and only a sacrament, is the Church. Contrary to what we hear from 2 Thess 3,1 „through the reading and study of the sacred books, let 'the Word of God run and be glorified'" (26), the Word of God pursues its course not only by reading and studying of the Bible but precisely also by the itinerary of evangelization.

Thereby an opening up towards the world of the nations will come about, of which the Bible gives testimony, this world of the nations who stand before the Chosen People and stand face to face with her and in whom God is not absent. P. Beauchamp has written in one of his apt formulations, whose secret he alone knows, „The Jewish people is overwhelmed, and very much so, by their own book. It does not only carry their own signs but also those of the nations. Yet what happens successively in history, and then was gathered on the pages of the book and on the screen of memories, became simultaneous in the Church because the time has been fulfilled. However, the entrance into fulfillment is a transition and presupposes a threshold, the one which Christ passed when he died."

There, in the Passover of the crucified Lord, whose death the Church proclaims until he comes, in the celebration of the meal, until he comes, there in reality, everything is accomplished. Not by a new Scripture which would complement the old, not by a new law, though of the same nature, which would correct the old, not by a new rite which would be more effective than the old, but in the body of Jesus Christ given for all in the opening up of a perfect sacrifice which was offered „once and for all". There is also in this event, accomplished not directly in the Church, (herself particular, even though from her origin extremely open to all nations) but in Jesus Christ who is our peace; in this want becomes manifest the paschal transition of the nations, of the cultures, of the religions towards their perfections.

Thus, we can better understand the relationship between the Scriptures and the body of Christ with which chapter VI of *DEI VERBUM* begins and concludes. The new Scripture, "the final letter" (P. Beauchamp), the book which must be eaten - which is bitter and sweet at the same time - the law which is apt to be written by the Spirit into the hearts, is the body of Christ nailed to the cross. "As far as I am concerned," Ignatius of Antioch once wrote to the Christians in Philidelphia, „my archives are Jesus Christ, my inviolable archives are his cross, his death and his resurrection and the faith which comes from him". Archives, accessible for everybody, even for an analphabet, especially for everybody who suffers and tries to hope. Archives which allow us - if we "eat" them in the Holy Spirit - to become living Scriptures ourselves, bearers of God's Word and witnesses of God's love.

Lectio Divina Heart of the Religious Life

Lectio divina is an often repeated term in Church language today, to many Christians however, the meaning of this expression is unknown. It signifies simply the regular Bible reading, the systematic access to Sacred Scripture as a spiritual source for Christian life, and an impulse for renewal movements in the course of Church history. Indeed, this has already been the case in the early Christian communities which founded their communal life on the basis of Sacred Scripture and within it found a new zeal for their missionary activity. Furthermore, Sacred Scripture provided the guideline for the beginnings of monastic life in the deserts of Palestine and Egypt as well as for the foundation for the mendicant orders in the Middle Ages. In this context, the *Lectio divina* forms part of everyday life for Christians.

Unfortunately in the Catholic Church, a certain fear of frequent and uncontrolled usage of Sacred Scripture by the laity is one of the most unpleasant after effects of the counter-reformation. In 1546, this fear led to the prohibition of the use of the Bible in the vernacular language by the Council of Trent. In the aftermath of this Council, a phase of growing distrust of the clergy and an estrangement of the people from the Scriptures developed which lasted well into our times. Gradually Bible reading was replaced by „spiritual reading“.

Only a few years before this development of Church history, the evangelization of Latin America began. This explains how the popular Catholicism which originated there is, on the one hand, characterized by its biblical roots, typical of beginnings, yet, on the other hand has an increasing and lasting distrust and the estrangement from the Bible, grown in the centuries subsequent to the original evangelization. The usage of the Bible shrunk to a minimum, namely to liturgical readings and to its application in preaching and catechesis which is not really splendid in regards to its objectivity and faithfulness to the Word of God.

Once access to the Bible was blocked, secondary elements of religious practice sprang forth, like mushrooms from the soil, in the form of veneration of the saints, pilgrimages, novenas and other devotions which aim above all at finding consolation and help in hopeless situations. Evangelization as a deepening of faith remained superficial and got stuck in the starting holes; it didn't even touch in any way the most central realms of life like the social structures and the economical and political spheres. Obviously, without being firmly rooted in the Bible, evangelization does not succeed in finding the right way to build a Christian society. Today, 500 years later, these characteristic features of Latin American popular Catholicism still serve as a substratum of the entire cultural life which should not be underestimated, yet at the same time they also prove to be weaknesses which burden the Church heavily in view of the present day challenges and are frequently exploited by the new religious movements, especially the sects, against the Church

The call to a New Evangelization which is to remove

the weaknesses of this historical development by enlivening the positive elements and energizing them with new incentives was voiced as early as 1968 by the General Assembly of the Latin American bishops in Medellin. The label New Evangelization was then picked up by Pope John Paul II as catchword for the mission of the universal Church on the threshold of the third millennium. Thereby the Church was to transmit the Christian message as a decisive factor in the renewal of the world order.

With the appeal of the bishops to the New Evangelization a reminiscence on the Bible started among the Christians of Latin America. This happened at first in the basic communities, the Bible circles and the reflection groups among the poor population on the outskirts of the large cities and in the countryside. These people, who make up the majority of the population, express their faith here, their Church membership and the Bible inspires them in their prayer life as well as in their struggle for human dignity and justice. What these Christians are doing is basically nothing else but practicing a modern version of the lectio divina in a community as was the normal practice among the monks of former times. In monastic life it was called "collatio".

Many of the religious who accompanied and furthered this movement right from the beginning have experienced in recent times a strong desire for Sacred Scripture as the main source of their spirituality and as a driving force for their missionary work. On account of this, the lectio divina has also regained validity and timeliness. The Conference of Religious of Latin America (CLAR), the umbrella organization of some 160.000 religious men and women of the entire subcontinent, has worked out the following document as an inspiration for the "New Evangelization" and recommended it to its members. Here, the historical development of the lectio divina is described rather briefly and its essential elements more extensively. We publish these reflections in this and in the next issue of BULLETIN DEI VERBUM in the conviction that they may prove useful for our members in all the continents.

INTRODUCTION

The *lectio divina* is an important aid to Bible reading. Rooted in an old Church tradition, it appears that it comes to the forefront whenever we try to reading the Bible within the following three criteria :

1. Start with the reality in which we live.
2. Read within the context of the faith that we profess.
3. Read with a deep respect for the Word we are receiving.

Unobtrusively, it has again emerged among those people who have tried to read the Bible in community. When we, as religious, try to make the *lectio divina* our own, we approach the source which has in the past fostered the religious life and nourished it, and which in the present sustains and brings life to the basic ecclesial communities.

After a brief historical review, and some general reflections, we shall investigate the four steps which comprise the *lectio divina*: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. These are the different phases of the individual, as well as the communal reading of the Bible. However, they are

Follow-up to the Bogotá Assembly

Bogotá as an Inspiration for the Biblical-Pastoral Ministry in the Parish Community

The General Secretariate's request that the members of the Federation share how they tried to implement the guidelines of the Final Statement after Bogotá has not remained unanswered. We have received several answers. Fr. Peter Granig, of Austria, a participant of the Plenary Assembly, contributed to the genesis of the document, and experienced the environment in which it was born. In this article he poses the question of what this document now means for the biblical ministry in his own parish community in Villach, Austria. Other parish priests, likewise discovering the Bible as an important means for handing on the Christian faith, ask themselves this same question. We thank Fr. Granig for his critical and thought provoking reflections, a contribution to a meeting of the Administrative Board of the Austrian Catholic Biblical Association, (Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk), and we are happy to publish them, in an abbreviated form.

I. The importance of the Final Document does not lie so much in the abundance of its suggestions, proposals and recommendations for the biblical-pastoral ministry. More significant are the participant's multifold experiences expressed in this document, the encounter itself and the exchange it made possible, as well as the contribution of communities in the city of Bogotá. Such experiences are like the flesh and blood of the document; which, without them, might be considered a "skeleton". Fr. Granig summarizes his experiences as follows:

1. Europe today has lost its decisive importance for the Universal Church. 2. Today, new religious inspiration can be found where people, with the help of a communal reading of the Bible, try to live according to the Gospel. This is also verified by experiences of the Federation's General Secretary in other Continents. 3. Fr. Carlos Mesters, said in Bogotá "God's first Word is our own life."; the life of every single person remains a secret, (Rahner); God's love story with a person may be considered as "small holy scripture", (J. Fischer). 4. People are, with all their conviction, working for the Word of God, as indeed the true Word of God. Among all these experiences however, the celebration of the Sunday liturgy with poor people in one of the barrios of Bogotá was the most impressive. Precisely because it happened to be the day of his 25th anniversary as a priest, he could better understand what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven".

II. The Final Document of Bogotá therefore is to be examined, above all, not in view of new insights, but rather in view of handing on new experiences in using the Bible. Within this perspective, Fr. Granig demonstrates where he sees the new "thrust" of which the document speaks. While the document mentions five examples of

study, he would prefer to speak about a new emphasis, and gives ten areas of change:

1. From an individualistic to a communal reading of the Bible.
2. A biblical apostolate built on the Bible reading of the people, rather than on the lessons of the experts, without however renouncing biblical scholarship.
3. From a patriarchic reading, to a reading in partnership with the community.
4. From a one-sided intellectual usage of the Bible, to a well-rounded understanding of the Bible, "with the entire body".
5. From a Bible reading intent on nurturing one's own soul, to a Bible reading in service of the missionary task of the Church, (Acts 4, 20). Bible reading without the readiness to be sent out to proclaim the message heard becomes sterile.
6. From a theoretical, thesis and hypothesis laden usage of the Bible, to a life-related and life-changing Bible reading which is close to life and changes life.
7. From a repetitive, to a creative usage of the Bible, open to new discoveries, awakening and deepening authentic faith.
8. From a man, Church and Christ centered reading of the Bible, to a rediscovery of the pneumatic dimension of Sacred Scripture. Thereby Bible reading will be thematically broadened and enriched.
9. From a fetishism of methods, to a synthesis which combines the "classical" form of the Bible reading, (starting from the Word and finding life) with the "new" form, (starting from life and arriving at the Word).
10. From a Bible reading within the perspective of our privileges and our self-indulgences, to a reading from the perspective of the poor, and the experience of poverty.

III. Using the example of the biblical apostolate in his parish, Fr. Granig illustrates how these theses can be concretely filled with life. The Bible group meets monthly and has chosen the Acts of the Apostles for the year 1990-91. The title of the program is "The Way of the Gospel". The Acts are being read from the special viewpoint of how the Gospel reached the nations, how it came to the individual cities and to definite people. Hence, the Acts of the Apostles as "the Book of Evangelization". The themes of the meetings are:

1. The Acts in the consciousness of our people: Which passages are generally known? The beginning of the spread of the Gospel, in the power of the Holy Spirit, (Acts 1-2, 13).
2. The first model of evangelization, (2, 14; 2, 47).
3. The growing Church poses priorities and creates new services, (6, 1-7).
4. A God fearing person finds faith, (8, 26-40).
5. The chosen tool of evangelization, (9, 1-22).
6. The first pagans are baptized, opposition, fear,

narrow-mindedness, the behavior of Peter and the Jewish Christians, and the centurion Cornelius, (Acts 10).

7. Antioch, the first (ecclesial) evangelization center; also: Persecution serves the Spreading of the Good News, (11, 19-26). The community sends the best from among their midst, (13, 1-3).

8. How does the primitive Church handle their conflicts, and reach decisions?, The Apostle Council in Jerusalem, (15, 1-35). For this Bible meeting the following work sheets are being used:

- What controversy had to be clarified?
- What immediately triggered off this controversy?
- What first steps were taken to reach the solution?
- Who composed this meeting?
- What procedure was chosen?
- What criteria were set forth to search for, and find, a solution to the controversy?
- What solution was proposed? Who proposed it?
- How were the decisions communicated to those concerned?
- How did those concerned react to the "Apostle's Decree"?
- Compare Acts 15, 1-35, with Gal 2, 1-10.

9. The dealer in purple cloth and the prison guard find faith. The Second Missionary Journey, (Acts 15, 36-16, 40). The Way of the Gospel to Jerusalem, Athens and Rome.

10. Being a Christian According to the Acts of the Apostles; conversion, faith, community of the faithful, disciple, brother, Christian, follower of the "new" way, witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit.

IV. Critical remarks on the Final Document. The analysis of the situation today, (first part)

seems to be too general, too superficial for Europe. For example, a reflection on the so called "post-modern age" is missing. In the opinion of many, the traditional models of life have passed, new models for the future are yet to be found, but reflection is lacking. In our culture: post-authoritarian, post-solidarian, post-materialistic, post-transcendent, post-Christian, yet still religious, (P. Zulehner), people look for refuge in a world which is smaller, easier to survey and to live in. Further characteristics of the present day situation are: secularization, religious indifference, individualism, tension between freedom and responsibility, a general change of values. As to our pastoral experience: We will be unable to evangelize as long as we are unaware and uninformed of the listeners, of the message, their questions, needs and desires. We would seem to be "sowing on concrete", (Bishop Elchinger, Strassbourg).

Regarding the question of how to understand the new evangelization, (second part), Fr. Granig quotes the decisive sentence, the goal and heart of evangelization is "the new experience of God". What counts in the end, is to recognize signs of God's presence in one's own life, and not just to produce and distribute Bibles. Thus, the fundamentalistic and the restorative misunderstanding of the new evangelization may be averted".

Regarding the new way of reading the Bible, (part four) and in reference to the "Year with the Bible 1992", Fr. Granig points out the thrust must come "from the Book to the Word". The task of prime importance is to teach Christians how to use the Bible, and read it fruitfully.

A Sub-Region of the Federation Faces the Final Statement of Bogotá

In continuation with the 4th Plenary Assembly of the Federation in Bogotá in 1990, representatives of member organizations of the Federation from North East Asia gathered for their first subregional meeting from 30 October to 3 November 1991 in Seoul, Korea. Delegates from Japan, Korea, Macau, Hong Kong and the Chinese Catholic Biblical Association reflected on their experiences in the field of the biblical-pastoral ministry and discussed further possibilities for more effective cooperation within their subregion. In the light of the Final Statement of Bogotá and with regards to the particular needs of their respective countries, they tried to decide where to place priorities for their future biblical-pastoral ministry.

1. The most frequently mentioned priority was formation: formation of leaders for the biblical pastoral ministry, and especially formation of lay people (Final Statement 8.3.3, especially 8.3.3.2).

2. Matters of structure and organization were also a priority for several countries although the needs of these countries are different from one another. For Korea, the concern was for coordination and

facilitation of efforts already being undertaken. For Macau, it was a matter of getting started - obtaining the endorsement of the bishop, setting up a center, forming small communities. For Taiwan, the concern was in establishing a biblical commission (8.1.1; 8.1.2; 8.3.2).

3. A third shared priority was that of responding to socio-economic and political challenges (8.3.5.4). We are seeking to read the Bible in the context of the socio-political situation, to make possible the formation of Bible groups for marginalized people, to encourage those who are working for justice, peace and solidarity with the oppressed.

4. Several countries saw as a priority the provision of resources, materials and the like, and the setting-up of centres for sharing of ideas, information and resources (8.3.1).

5. For those from Japan, a priority was the Bible and the family. They wish to respond in their context to the call of Bogotá (8.3.4.5), "Christian family life should have its center of unity and strength in the Word of God."

The Bible Sunday, Week, Month in Europe

Under this rubric we bring a summary of the responses to our questionnaire on Bible Sunday, Week, Month, Year which was sent from the General Secretariat to the members of the Federation. After Latin America, (BDV 20 page 10-12) and Asia/Oceania, (BDV 21, page 11-12) we now follow with a summary about the countries of Europe. As you know, the Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá recommends the celebration of the Bible Sunday, Week, Month, Year.

From the 62 questionnaires, 29 were returned. Statistically, there are less responses in comparison with Latin America and Asia/Oceania. However, it must be considered that in Europe, some Federation members strongly support the work of the Federation, even though they themselves are not exclusively active in the biblical-pastoral ministry. Thus, the number of responses from Europe roughly corresponds to the amount received from other regions.

The Answers originate from:

National Biblical Associations: 9 (Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland)

Sub regional Coordinators: 2 (Austria, Spain).

Diocesan or Interdiocesan Centers: 9 (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, England, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Switzerland).

Religious Orders: 8 (Austria, England, Germany, Italy, Switzerland).

Communities: 1 (Germany)

Two Different Situations

From the responses it is clear that the countries of the sub-region Middle Europe, have known of the practice of Bible Sunday and more frequently Bible week for quite awhile (with a Bible Sunday as opening or closing of the Bible week). This is the case mainly in the German speaking countries. The large portion of Protestant population in these countries may, in part explain this situation. Bible week is mainly prepared on an ecumenical basis.

In contra-distinction to this, Bible Sunday and Bible week are practically nonexistent in Southern Europe. There are the occasional exceptions, like in Portugal, where the Capuchins have been putting much effort into the biblical-pastoral ministry and among other things foster a Bible week on parish levels.

Apparently, there is even some sort of distrust regarding the initiation of this practice. This phenomenon may be observed mainly in Catholic countries. The Protestant minorities of these countries celebrate their own Bible Sunday, under the leadership of the local Bible societies.

How can this lack of interest in most Southern European countries be accounted for? Some explanation may be derived from the responses we received, however, since they deserve a more precise analysis they must be considered carefully.

First, the thrust in the biblical-pastoral ministry in Southern Europe is placed mainly on the popularization of biblical studies. Indeed, there are many books which enable serious contact with the Bible itself. The same is true for the German speaking countries. However, as already mentioned, the necessity of ecumenical cooperation has led to a common celebration of Bible Sunday and Bible week.

A second reason is the role of the liturgical and catechetical movement. In the countries of Southern Europe this is broadly based on the Bible and does not leave much room for a properly conceived biblical-pastoral ministry. In other words, the biblical-pastoral ministry is being handled for the most part by the liturgical and catechetical movement.

A last and perhaps most influential reason, is the increase of theme centered Sunday services in the Catholic Church. The Bishops, on the contrary prefer to restore Sunday as the "Day of the Lord", and hesitate to add even more thematic services on Sundays. Some priests ask themselves whether it is at all necessary to dedicate one Sunday per year especially to the Bible, since, in reality, every Sunday should be biblically orientated!

Finally, we realize that those responsible in the biblical-pastoral ministry have started a Bible program, involving the formation of Bible groups for example. They feel they are unable to conduct a Bible Sunday or Bible week due to a lack of trained personnel and time.

This global situation, for the moment, is more and more evident in the countries of Southern Europe. Responsible catechetical experts and directors in Italy, for example, are conscious of the necessity for a more biblically oriented pastoral ministry; they have decided to institute, within the catechetical office of every diocese, a biblical department. The responsible leaders in the biblical-pastoral ministry in Southern Europe will make greater efforts, in their own original ways, to introduce Bible Sunday and Bible week. It is not desirable to institute a Bible Sunday on a national level through a decree from above, but rather, to have parishes, Bible groups, priests and catechists organize their own Bible Sunday. There is hope to start a movement in this manner, which would provide a more personally specified biblical-pastoral ministry.

Furthermore, in Europe, the relations with the former Eastern bloc countries are fortunately becoming more stable. Also, in some of these countries proposals have been made for a Bible Sunday or Bible week this year. Support is needed of neighboring countries with their long traditions in this practice. "A new wind is blowing in our countries" writes one of them.

Goals

Where Bible Sunday or Bible week already exist there is one main goal: deeper faith experience. Bible weeks try to give a taste for Bible reading and to lead to a better understanding of the Bible, to give suggestions for the biblical apostolate in the parishes and to form Bible groups in which the participants learn how to deal with biblical text. Primarily, it is a movement which starts with the text, in order to relate the readers to one another.

Another goal, becoming more and more important and connected with the first one is to make the Bible the book of life. The answers to the questionnaire clarify that the leaders in the biblical-pastoral ministry are not only interested in spreading biblical scholarship, but above all in making the Bible the book of life for the communities. This movement starts from the life of the readers and wants them to share their faith experiences with one another.

The Means

The ways and means to organize Bible Sundays and Bible weeks in the respective countries are rather different. The preparation is entrusted mostly to the implementing organizations which delegate to small ecumenical groups. The orientation is often given in the form of small booklets with

proposals for celebrations, homilies, Bible studies and discussion. Other materials, posters, audio-visual cassettes, films, excursions, quizzes, competitions, etc are also made available. Some countries also offer Bible exhibits with definite themes, like Austria this year, "The Future of the Bible".

The Form and the Themes

The forms which the Bible Sunday or the Bible week may assume vary greatly. Evening conferences, celebrations, reflections in small groups... Liturgical seasons, like Advent and Lent offer proper occasions for an especially appropriate celebration.

A so called Bible month, in the proper sense of the word, does not exist in Europe, but different biblical-pastoral organizations offer biblical courses over a longer period of time.

The year 1992 is being celebrated by all Christian Churches in Austria and Germany as "The Year with the Bible", an occasion for numerous events around the Bible.

Also, there are no fixed rules for choosing the themes. Sometimes, the usual questions of the faithful regarding the Bible are being discussed, (How to understand the Bible? questions arising from the Bible; the biblical languages and the biblical writings; the history of the Bible; the Bible today), or one chooses a special topic like a definite biblical book or liturgical texts, or one stays with a definite theme, like Bible and women, biblical spirituality, prophecy etc.

Results

Many answers underline the positive effects of Bible Sunday and Bible weeks and the gain participants draw from them. The biblical apostolate thereby receives new impulses. New Bible groups come into existence. Some also point out the difficulties, for example, with young people who show little interest in such offers.

Paradoxically, the Europe which appears in and behind the answers is simultaneously a serious continent with a long tradition in the realm of Bible Sunday and Bible week, and a new continent in which much remains to be done, above all by the Catholics in Southern Europe. At this moment, one senses a strong biblical movement. There is one wave of this movement which is much stronger than we realize today: the search for a Bible reading which relates the Bible with the life of its readers.

also behavioral patterns which characterize our encounter with the Word of God. We try to point out how they are made up and how they are intertwined with one another, and may give direction to our Bible reading.

Historical Summary

Originally, the *lectio divina* was nothing more than the Bible reading of the first Christians to foster their faith, their hope and their love. The *lectio divina* therefore is as old as the Church herself, which lives from the Word of God and springs from it like a river from its source, (DV 7.10.21). The *lectio divina* is a believing and prayerful reading of the Word of God starting with faith in Jesus who said, "The Holy Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of everything that I have told you", (Joh. 14, 26; 16, 13). The New Testament, for example, is a result of the first Christians' reading of the Old Testament, in the light of their problems and of the new self revelation of God, through the resurrection of Jesus, who continues to live in the community.

This believing and prayerful reading of the Bible has subsequently nourished the Church, the communities and all Christians. Originally, however, it was not a methodically regulated reading, but simply the handing on of proper traditions from generation to generation, through the communal sharing practice embodied in the people.

The expression *lectio divina* was coined by Origen. In his view, a useful reading of the Bible demands energy, attention and perseverance.

"Day by day we must return to the source of Holy Scripture"; this however, needs energy and it can be achieved only through prayer, "prayer is absolutely necessary to comprehend divine things". "In this way", so Origen concludes, "we shall comprehend what we are contemplating and in what we hope". In his reflections, we have a summary of all that makes up the *lectio divina*.

The *lectio divina* has become, as stated above, the backbone of the religious life. It was from the listening, meditating and praying upon the Word of God that the monastic life developed in the desert. The consecutive renewals and changes in the religious life referred again and again to the *lectio divina* as their trademark. The monastic rules of Pachomius, Augustine, Basil and Benedict make Bible reading, physical labor and the liturgy the three feet upon which the religious life is built.

The organization of religious life into four steps came about only recently in the 12th century around 1150 A.D. Guigo, a Carthusian monk, wrote the book, „Scala Monachorum", (ladder of the monks). In the introduction, he addresses himself to the beloved brother Gervasius. Before explaining the theory of the four steps, he tells him, "I have made up my mind to communicate to you some of my reflections regarding the religious life of the monks. You know this life from experience, I, however, only from theoretical study. Thus, you will judge

and improve upon my reflections." Guigo also wanted the theory of the *lectio divina* to be evaluated and corrected from the experience and practices of the monks.

Then he explained the four steps in this manner, "When, on one day after my physical labor, I reflected upon the spiritual activity of man, I suddenly had the idea of the ladder with the four spiritual rungs: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. This is the ladder upon which the monks may ascend into heaven from earth. Even though the ladder only consists of a few steps, they are unusually high, so that though the lower part stands on earth, its upper part reaches the clouds and penetrates the secrets of heaven." Guigo then shows how each of these steps, in its own peculiarity, triggers off in the reader of the Bible the proper effect.

He summarizes the whole in the following way, "The reading is a continuous and eager research of Holy Scripture. Meditation is a careful activity of the intellect, who, with the help of its own insight, searches for the knowledge of the hidden truth. Prayer is the motion of the heart towards God to ask him to remove evil and grant goodness. Contemplation is the elevation of the spirit above oneself to savor the joys of eternal happiness hovering in God." In his description of the four steps, Guigo summarizes the old tradition and changes it into a tool of Bible reading in order to introduce young people into the monastic life.

In the 13th century, the Mendicant friars tried to create a new way of religious life that was embedded deeper into the community of the poor. They turned the *lectio divina* into the inspiring source of their renewal movements, in view of the results from the life and the writings of the first Franciscans, Dominicans, Servites, Carmelites and other Mendicant friars. Through their way of life, they knew how to place the *lectio divina* close to reality and into the service of the poor and of the marginalized of that time.

Then a long period followed in which the *lectio divina* cooled off. The Bible reading was not even fostered in the monastic life. This was the unlucky consequence of the Counter-Reformation in the life of the Church. Thus, for example, St. Theresa did not have any access to the complete text of the Old Testament. A "spiritual reading" however, was recommended. The fear of Protestantism led to the loss of contact with the source!

The II Vatican Council finally returned to the old tradition, and recommended the *lectio divina* with a special emphasis above all in the Constitution *Dei Verbum* (DV 25). As a novelty, the *lectio divina* finally emerged in the communities in which the poor began to read the Word of God. Only in most recent times have the religious begun to cultivate and deepen it. It would be nice if we religious would profess the words of the monk Guigo, and tell the communities, "We have made up our minds to share with you some of our reflections on the spiritual life, for you know this life from experience, we only know it from the theoretical study. You

therefore, will be the judges and correctors of our reflections".

2. General Reflections on the *Lectio Divina*

Through the *lectio divina* we try to experience what the Bible sums up by saying, "The Word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance" (Dt 30, 14). In the mouth by the reading, in the heart by meditation and prayer, in the practice through contemplation.

The *lectio divina* has the same goal as the Bible, "To learn wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" (2 Tim 3,15); "Teaching, refuting error, guiding peoples' lives and teaching them to be holy. This is how the man who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work" (2 Tim 3, 16-17); „Patience, comfort and hope for one another" (cf Rom 15,4); „To help one another by learning from the mistakes of our fathers" (cf. 1 Cor 10, 6-10).

The *lectio divina* presupposes some principles which must always characterize a Christian reading of the Bible.

a. The Unity of Sacred Scripture

The Bible forms one large unit in which every book, every sentence, has its proper position, and plays its proper role to reveal to us the plan of God. Its individual parts are like bricks that make up a large wall, only together do they render the outline of the divine plan. The principal of the unity of Scripture prohibits the separating of parts, tearing them out of their context, or proposing them as isolated and absolute statements. One stone alone does not make a wall. One stroke alone does not make a painting. The Bible is not a pile of bricks, it is a livable house.

b. The Actuality: the Incarnation of the Word

When we, as Christians, read the Bible, we must not forget life. We must always keep it in our minds and we must discover in the Bible, as we do with a mirror, what we are experiencing in the moment. The Bible becomes a reflector of what happens in the life and in the hearts of all. We discover that the Word of God has not only become flesh in the times past but also today in order to be with us and to help us to encounter the present day problems and to realize the hopes of people today, "If only you would listen to Him today!" (Ps 95, 7).

c. The Faith in Jesus Christ: who continues to live in the community.

We read the Bible, starting with our faith in Jesus Christ, who lives among us. Jesus is the master key to our Bible reading. The faith in Jesus Christ helps us to comprehend his importance in our lives. Bible reading in community contributes to the goal that Bible, Tradition and life become a living unity.

The *lectio divina* started with very simple methods on the level of the people:

- a. Reading again and again, until one becomes familiar with what has been written there.
- b. To learn by heart what has been read, and understood, to repeat it orally, to rehash it until it goes from the mouth and from the head to the heart and enters into the bloodstream of one's own life.
- c. To give God an answer in prayer and ask that he might help us to realize in our lives what his Word demands from us.
- d. The result is a new light in the eyes which allows us to savor the Word and to see the world in a new way. With this light in our eyes, we begin again to read and repeat, and give God an answer again and again. This is a process without end, which repeats itself but never in the same way.

Still, another reflection to the reach and the goal of the *lectio divina*. The Word at first is a means to convey something. The words, ours as well as those of the Bible address themselves in the first place to the intellect which can perceive the thoughts. A word however, is not only a vehicle for the ideas, it also has other dimensions. It possesses for example, a "poetic" power (poetic comes from the Greek verb *poiein*, and means "to do, to make"). The word not only says something, it also does something, it makes something. When we study the Bible, as a rule we are only concerned with discovering the thought or the message of the Word of God. The *lectio divina* goes one step further, and tries to also do justice to the further dimensions. The result is more comprehensive understanding.

The Four Steps of the *Lectio Divina*

The four steps of the *lectio divina* are: Reading (*Lectio*), Meditation (*Meditatio*), Prayer (*Oratio*), and Contemplation (*Contemplatio*). It is not always easy to distinguish one from the other. What some may consider reading (*lectio*) is already meditation for others. The reason for this lack of clarity lies in the nature of the *lectio divina* itself, within its dynamic process in which the different steps follow one after the other. They flow into each other, as the transition from night to day. At dawn some may say, "It is still night", and others will say "The day has begun". Furthermore it is a question of four permanent attitudes, the attitude of reading for example continues during the entire process of the *lectio divina*, but with a different intensity, dependent upon which step the person or community is emphasizing. Focus should be maintained upon the characteristic principles of each step, so that together they provide a whole, fulfilling environment, manifest within the *lectio divina*.

A. The Reading: Making the Word One's Own, Respecting It and Placing It into Context

Reading (*lectio*) is the first step in the process in making the Word become part of the reader: read, read, read! We have to read much in order to become familiar with the Bible so it may become our word, which will express our life and our history, for "it was written down to be a lesson for us who are living at the end of the age" (1 Cor 10, 11). This process of appropriating the Word by the

people is already being done in the basic Christian communities.

The reading is a very elementary activity: to read, to pronounce the words properly, and to enunciate loudly. The first step is very important and very demanding. It must not be done in a superficial manner. (For many people the Bible is the principle means of alphabetization).

Through reading (*lectio*) we enter into a relation with the Bible as with a friend. Between the manner of living with people and the manner of living with the Bible, there exists an enormous similarity. Both demand maximum levels of attention, respect, friendship, dedication, silence and readiness to listen. Both, the people and the Bible do not defend themselves when they are being attacked or manipulated but in the end, they succeed because of the fatigue of the aggressor. Bible reading helps to open ones eyes to read the life of the people and vice versa.

Reading (*lectio*), as well as the life with the poor people must not depend on the taste of the moment; both demand from the individual a consistent and continuous determination. The reading must be persevering and take place every day. It demands self-denial and discipline, it must be unselfish, gratuitous and geared towards the reign of God and the benefit of the people.

Reading (*lectio*) is the point of departure and not the point of arrival! It demands that the reader is placed on a firm terrain, and prepares the reader and the text for the dialogue of meditation (*meditatio*). In order that meditation does not become the fruit of imagination, but that it is done on the foundation of the reality of the text, it is necessary that the reading is attentive and respectful of certain criteria. "An eager study is done with an attentive spirit", that is what Guigo the Carthusian says. This impartial attitude towards the text, in trying to bring out the meaning of the text itself, independent of our own thinking, prevents the text from being manipulated and adapted to our own imagination. At the same time, this opens the way for the text, in our dialogue with God, to play an independent role. The reading also creates within the reader a critical, considerate and respectful attitude towards the Bible. It is precisely in the reading where exegesis makes its contribution to the correct functioning of the *lectio divina*.

The reading (*lectio*), understood as a critical study, helps the reader to analyze the text and to place it in its original context. This study is held on three levels.

A. On the literary level, it helps to look at the text very closely, and to analyze its composition through the use of simple questions: Who? What? Where? Why? How? When? How does the text fit into the literary composition of the book?

B. On the historical level, the text analysis helps to recognize the historical context in which the text came into existence or in which the recorded events happened. Four aspects of this context may be investigated, economical, sociological, political

and ideological. It also helps to identify the conflicts which are the base of the text, or which are reflected within it.

C. On the theological level, it helps to discover the message which the text, under the given historical circumstances, addresses to the people, that is to recognize how the text reflects their conflicts; what God intended for his people, how he revealed himself, how the people accepted this message etc.

A scientific investigation of the text is not an objective of the reading. It is a means to reach the goal. The measure of the use of exegesis in the *lectio divina* does not depend upon the exegete, but on the demands and circumstances of the readers. To drill through a wall, different drills may be used depending upon the wall's composition. The objective is the same, however: to get through the wall. A drill for marble would not be used to make a hole in a wall of cardboard!

The goal of the reading (*lectio*) is this: To drill a hole in the wall between the text of yesterday and the today of our lives, in order to open up a dialogue with God in meditation. Which drill is necessary to see through the wall that separates us? On the one hand the "assiduous study, done with an attentive spirit", (Guigo), on the other hand "our own experience of life", (Cassian). Paul VI said that one must procure for oneself a certain affinity between the "actual interests (today), and the events of the text (yesterday), to become ready to listen (dialogue)" (25 Sept. 1970). In other words, the drill is this: the simultaneous deepening of the text of the past and our experience of today. Sometimes the *lectio divina* does not produce results, nor does the text release the message. This is not due to a lack of study of the text, but a lack of critical deepening of our own experiences, today, here, in Latin America.

The reading, done in the right way helps to overcome fundamentalism. If it is not done in the right way, it may further fundamentalism. The fundamentalistic temptation is in the head of many people, and it separates the text from life, from the history of the people and sets it apart as the unique manifestation of the Word of God. The history of the people and of the community wouldn't have anything to say about God and his world.

Fundamentalism disregards the action of the Word of God in life. It is the total absence of critical consciousness. It distorts the sense, the meaning of the Bible and furthers, in the interpretation of the Bible, moralization, individualism, and spiritualism. This is an alienating vision which is most welcome to the oppressors of the people, because it prevents the oppressed from becoming conscious of the injustice of the system built up and maintained by those in power. To overcome fundamentalism, is possible only in a successful reading of the Bible, in which the reader sees the original context of the Word and recognizes in it the reflection of today's human situation rich in conflicts, confusion, and controversy.

Where does the reader pass on from the reading to

the meditation (*meditatio*)? It is difficult to mark an exact moment in which nature passes from spring to summer. It differs from year to year and from country to country. There are, however, some criteria. The objective of reading (*lectio*) is to read and study the text until it becomes, without losing its autonomy, a mirror, which reflects some of our own life experiences. The reading should make us familiar with the text until it becomes our own word. Cassian says, "Penetrated by the same sentiments with which the text was written, we are being transformed, so we ourselves become authors". This is the moment where we realize that God, through the text tries to talk to us and to tell us something. In this moment, we incline our heads and we guard silence, listening, "I am listening to what the Lord is saying", (Ps 85,9). This is the moment when reading (*lectio*) is being transformed into meditation (*meditatio*), and where one passes on to the second step of the *lectio divina*. (Continuation of this report in BULLETIN no. 23)

From the Life of the Federation

AFRICA

West African Bible scholars have established an organization with the goal of promoting biblical research and making their work accessible to the faithful through popular publications. They are also promoting the biblical apostolate in the region.

Further information: Prof. C. Gnako, Institut Catholique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ICAO), 08 BP 22, Abidjan 08, RCI

THE AMERICAS

America, in particular Latin America, will have a special place this year in the news media. In the center of attention will be the 500th anniversary of the "discovery" of the "New World" by the Spanish and Portuguese, followed a little bit later by the French, English and Dutch. Culture, politics and commerce will go out of their way to celebrate or to deplore this event, depending upon the perspective under which one judges what has happened after 1492 in America and in Europe. A chronicler of this former time once wrote, "It is the most important discovery in history, since the creation of the world, except for the incarnation of the Son of God". Today, historians see in this date the beginning of the supremacy of Europe over the other continents with the consequential events, both positive and negative. Also at that time, began the very urgent problem of the worsening relations between the so called "first" and "third" world. For the universal Church, this memorable date means 500 years of spreading of the Christian message in a world which was unknown until that time, and where today half of the Catholic population of the world lives. The year 1992 marks for the Church of Latin America, above all, 500 years of her existence, and must therefore be celebrated "without triumphalism, but also without an inferiority complex" as the Spanish magazine, "Pueblos del Tercer Mundo", (Peoples of the Third World), formulates. The most diverse opinions regarding the meaning and form of such a celebration are being voiced. However, it is undeniable that in these 500 years of Christian history there is much to be thankful for to God and for which Christianity can be proud of. At the same time there is much to deplore, what must never happen again in the future, because

it does not honor God's name. The General Conference of the Latin American Bishops, together with the Pope, will deliberate on these points when they meet in October 1992, on Santo Domingo, in the Caribbean, in order to set up guidelines for the future of the Church in the continent.

This year will also bring more attention to the theoretical and practical recommendations which our Federation formulated during the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá. The plenary assembly was held in Latin America for this reason. It met under the theme "New Evangelization", an expression which came into existence there, and which is especially connected with the future of this local Church. The clearer the essential features of the "New Evangelization" are delineated, the stronger will be its close ties with Holy Scripture, and therefore the necessity to further the biblical apostolate and affirm its guiding role.

During this year the BULLETIN DEI VERBUM will give special attention to biblical news in connection with the 5th century of evangelization in Latin America. The sub-regional secretariat of the Federation in Bogotá, in its magazine "La Palabra Hoy" (The Word Today), will likewise treat this theme thoroughly. The first issue of this year is dedicated to the development of the biblical apostolate in light of the General Conference of the Latin American Bishops, and the efforts to have their Churches permeated with the living heritage of the Second Vatican Council.

Brazil

The coordination of the Catholic Biblical Federation in this sub-region of Latin American, insisted upon during the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá, has already lead to more intensive contacts between the coordinator, Fr. Gerardo Mellert, svd and the different zones, due in part to the invitation of the zonal coordinator, Fr. Valmor da Silva, OFM Cap and of Sr. Rosana Pulga, FSP, representative of the associate members of the Federation in the Executive Committee. Brazil, pioneer in the biblical apostolate, was the goal of one of the first journeys of Fr. Mellert from May 24 to June 19, 1991. Fr. Mellert became acquainted with the initiatives of the Brazilian biblical-pastoral ministry, many of them efficiently organized. In the following report you will find a description of places and organizations which are giving the most important impulses to the biblical-pastoral ministry in the country.

1. The National Brazilian Bishops' Conference (Conferencia Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil-CNBB)
The *Linea 3 Bíblico-Catequética* with their president, Dom Albano Cavallin, Bishop of Guarapuava, and the dynamic collaborators, Fr. Juventino Kesterling and Inês Broshuis, have decisively fostered the biblical apostolate. With the help and collaboration of the CNBB the following organizations implement various programs.

2. The Biblical Pastoral Service (Serviço de Animação Bíblica SAB)

This center, officially founded in 1985, goes back to 1946. During that year, in São Paulo, the idea was born to conduct Bible weeks, and through the use of courses, lectures, exhibits, radio, posters, etc., to overcome the ignorance and prejudices of many Catholics regarding the Bible. From these Bible weeks the "Day of the Bible" (last Sunday in September) grew forth and in 1971, "Bible Month" began in the Archdiocese Belo Horizonte, which has earned special merits regarding the biblical-pastoral ministry.

The Bible month has three goals:

- To create an awareness that the Bible must be read and interpreted in connection with the life of the people
- To awaken in the families the desire to read the Bible as an inspiration for the solution of daily problems
- To establish a permanent center which could give incentives for different forms of the biblical apostolate.

The Biblical-pastoral Service, with an office in Belo Horizonte under the guidance of Sr. Rosana Pulga, fulfills this function through supporting the parishes in realizing these programs, which have been accepted by many dioceses, even in other countries. As one of its last initiatives, this office distributed some 50,000 copies of the Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá with a recommendation of the CNBB.

3. School for Theology and Pastoral Ministry (Escola de Teologia e Pastoral)

This school was founded in 1982 for the training of catechists and other leaders in the biblical-pastoral ministry of the Archdiocese of Juiz de Fora, MG. Working together with parishes and the diocesan seminary, its goals and programs have been expanded continuously, reaching a current 480 hours of courses being offered in one school year. The Archdiocese is an Associate Member of the Federation.

4. Ecumenical Center for Biblical Studies (Centro Ecueménico de Estudios Bíblicos-CEBI)

With offices in Belo Horizonte, São Paulo and São Leopoldo, RS, directed by twelve people of various Christian backgrounds. They are responsible for different Bible reading programs all of which stress three elements: the biblical text; the reality of the people who read the Word or listen to it; and the community who uses the Bible. The best known collaborators of the center are Fr. Carlos Mesters, and the Lutheran Pastor Milton Schwantes.

5. Verbum Bible Center (Centro Bíblico Verbo)

The center, in São Paulo, is an initiative of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) of the Province of Central Brazil. Every year it offers, in collaboration with CCBI in São Paulo, a two part course of one month each. It aims at offering a well-founded formation for the biblical-pastoral ministry in Brazil and all of Latin America. The Bible course envisioned for 1992 in Latin America, with the theme "500 years of Evangelization", is especially intended for Divine Word Missionaries.

6. Pauline Publications (Edições Paulinas), São Paulo

This publishing house contributes substantially, through its publications, to the pastoral ministry. Its catalogue for 1990 contains 275 titles. In six years of intensive group work, a new translation has been published with the title: "Holy Bible: Pastoral Edition", which is gaining more and more acceptance as a popular Bible version. Edições Paulinas also helped with an ample distribution of the Final Statement of Bogotá.

Other publishing houses in the service of the biblical-pastoral ministry are: *Vozes* of the Franciscans, *Loyola* of the Jesuits and *Ave Maria*, aside from the exegetical and biblical-pastoral publications of the theological faculty of São Paulo, under the directorship of Fr. P. G. Gorgulho, OP.

Cuba

Contacts with Cuba are new for the Federation. This we owe to the interest of Mons. Jaime Ortega Alamini, the Archbishop of Havana. Upon his invitation, Fr. Mellert and Sr. Carmen Rosado, the coordinator of the Caribbean zone, in June-July 1991, introduced the Federation to the Cuban Bishops' Conference and also informed themselves of the situation of the faithful and the Church in Cuba. Their report gives us a picture of the task that lies ahead of the biblical-pastoral ministry in this country.

In contrast to the Latin American continent, Cuba, for thirty years, lived in an atheistic state and in cultural and political isolation, imposed by the government. As a result, today's generation hardly knows Christianity, 95% not even the sign of the cross. Though the people have guarded their Christian memory, the Cuban Church has not experienced the renewal of the Second Vatican Council. In spite of the chaotic situation today, the people are in search of God, and expect orientation and guidance from the Church. Knowing full well that she has passed through a phase of "purification", the Church views the present epoch as "providential". She wishes to use the opportunity in order to come back to life, but in a new way and without the heavy weight of its pre-revolutionary history. "We have freed ourselves from many things, thanks be to God" says one bishop. Presently, in Cuba, there are eight bishops, 219 priests, 329 religious men and women, 234 parishes, and 28 seminarians within a total population of 11 million. Most of the 623 churches and chapels are deteriorated, and many parish priests are to serve between 40 and 200 thousand faithful each.

The present wave of optimism and hope, a "new Pentecost", began in 1987 when, after a slight opening by the government, a national Marian year was held and the statue of Our Lady of Charity, the Patroness of Cuba, was carried through the country. The people slowly lost their fear, and began filling the churches. A similar impulse to renewal was the way of the "Cross of 500 years", a gift of the Pope to the bishops at the beginning of the 5th centenary celebration of the evangelization of the country. Bishops, priests and religious began to overcome their aloofness from the population and they were readily received by the faithful.

The new generation of bishops and priests are convinced that the future evangelization should be, above all, an encounter with the Word of God, and they already see the results of this new evangelization: "The biblical-pastoral work happens with the Bible in the hand", (Carlos Pape, SVD). In a letter to all priests and religious of the country, Bishop Ortega writes, "We need missionaries who are sent to us, only and exclusively, with the Word of God". In this manner, one hopes, the island will not only be christianized anew, but also be able to stand the tide of preachers of well-organized fundamentalist sects.

Among the biblical-pastoral projects, two deserve special attention:

- a. The "biblical encounters" of Fr. Jorge Leger, a Canadian priest of the diocese of Matanzas. He tries to reach three primary goals holding seven meetings for each one: that the people recognize their identity as CHILDREN of God; that they begin to understand and meet each other as BROTHERS and SISTERS (solidarity, justice); that they mature in faith and become, for one another, FATHER and MOTHER,

transmitters of love.

b. The work of the Divine Word Missionaries which began two years ago in the diocese of Holguín. Their method is to form small groups, active and practicing Gospel cells in which people experience that the Church, together with the people, is on the way, and that she identifies herself with their reality. Apart from parish work, retreats are being organized, to accompany the growth of small basic communities and to create a future for the youth, preventing them from emigrating to the United States when the present day regime collapses. The materials for this program are thoroughly Bible-inspired.

Canada

Biblical-Pastoral Colloquy

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Catholic Biblical Association of Canada (Société Catholique de la Bible - SOCABI) from June 6-9, 1991, a colloquy on the theme "Bible and Pastoral Ministry" took place at the Laval University, Quebec. About 400 participants gathered to discuss the challenges and determine the goals of the biblical-pastoral ministry for the 90's. The following summary enumerates these challenges and goals. This document could serve as a basis for similar reflections in other countries. It follows along the lines of the Final Statement of Bogotá.

Access to the biblical message

1. The Bible, above all the Old Testament, should become more easily accessible.
2. Prepare and train responsible leaders for the biblical apostolate.
3. Utilize modern communications media for the proclamation of the biblical message.
4. Foster an "informed" reading of the Bible, to deepen one's faith
5. Create new opportunities for sharing the Word.

Hierarchy

6. Revise the structures of the Church: existing ministries, parish structures, position of laity.
7. Arouse an interest in the priests for the biblical-pastoral ministry, through giving it a formal place in the diocesan structure.
8. Make the institution of the Church a place for the freedom of speech (dialogue) for the Word.

Position of Women

9. Give women the same rights as men in the instruction and ministry of the Word.

Family and Youth

10. Support the family by giving honor to the "ministry" of parents.
11. Address youth and young adults in the biblical-pastoral ministry.
12. Take into consideration the language and habits of youth.

Outsider of the Church

13. Make the Word accessible to all who are living at the margin of society, away from the Church or church celebrations: members of sects, divorcees, homosexuals...

Poverty - Social Justice

14. Proclaim the Word in its liberating power, rather than in its moralizing force.
15. Promote the social dimension of Bible reading.

Community

16. Refocus and further develop the biblical (above all evangelical), dimension of every pastoral activity of the Christian communities.
17. Learn to evaluate life in its socio-economic and religious aspects, in order to gain a deeper access to the Word of God, giving priority to the person and the community rather than to the content.
18. Express the pastoral goals of the Church in biblical terms.
19. Create various concentrations for different persons and groups who are active in the biblical-pastoral ministry.
20. Pass over from religious and biblical individualism to a communitarian view based on the incarnate Word of God.
21. Found basic communities able to respond to the needs of every individual person, where every human dimension, including the biblical, will find its place.

Faith and the Bible

22. Learn to express our faith in a meaningful language.
23. Hand on faith, starting with the Word.
24. Develop an attitude for appropriating the Word, proclaiming it freely.

The Bible and Liturgy

25. Make the celebration of the Word more significant and more deeply rooted in our lives.

Listening

26. Have the creative force of the Word set free in the community, allowing people to speak and search for answers to their own questions.
27. Allow the Word to carry us along, rather than using it for corroborating our own views and opinions.

Life

28. Allow people to appropriate salvation history as their personal and communal experience of God, like a story of love.
29. Recognize our roots in the Word, in view of our situation as believers in a multi-cultural, multi-confessional, non-practicing society.

The participants of the colloquy have suggested the following practical measures in order to meet these challenges:

- "Awaken and heal peoples' memories of the Bible."
- "Give all Bible groups a good introduction to salvation history (OT and NT)."
- "Create new tools for turning theoretical instruction into practical life."
- "Organizations like SOCABI should distribute Bible reading methods which make the Word of God a new word."
- "Publish and distribute materials by which we can read the Word within us."
- "Arouse the interest of ordinary people by easily understandable articles in the publications of SOCABI."
- "Organizations and communities, which generously distribute the gospels and New Testament should likewise offer full Bibles."
- "Make low cost, annotated editions of the Bible more easily accessible."
- "Transform our parishes into small faith communities where the Word of the Lord may run."
- "Increase the number of Bible groups through the formation of animators."
- "On the national level: make biblical-pastoral

experiences and materials known and available on different levels."

- "Recognize that the exclusion of women from every official position in the Church is culturally and historically, whereas parish communities would readily attribute these functions to them."

- "Develop an art of recounting the Bible in present day language."

- "Foster solidarity and social bonds with those who are exploited and oppressed."

- "Side with the poor, offer them room, let ourselves be evangelized by them, read the Word with them."

- "Each diocese should establish an office, or a service for the biblical-pastoral ministry."

- "Celebrate a biblical-pastoral year."

- "Involve the diocese in an organized biblical-pastoral plan."

ASIA/OCEANIA

India

The Daughters of St. Paul and the Biblical Apostolate

For the Daughters of St. Paul in India, along with all of the religious orders founded by Don Alberione, the year 1991 has been a "year of the Bible". It has given a new push to the biblical apostolate which the Sisters are involved in, the biblical apostolate being an important aspect of their charism. In the course of this year the Sisters have organized in different places Bible days, Bible weeks and Bible months where they have not only distributed Bibles but also, and above all, have searched ways to make the Word of God more alive among the Christians. In Bangalore, for example, in collaboration with other religious communities a Bible week made it possible to organize different activities in parishes (celebrations, encounters, exhibits, competitions with biblical songs, films, quizzes...). They decided to follow up this activity by installing a program for biblical formation. Further information: Daughters of St. Paul, 143 Waterfield, Bandra, Bombay-400 050, India

EUROPE/MIDDLE EAST

Italy

Reflection on the Biblical-Pastoral Ministry

The responsible leaders in the National Catechetical Office in Italy are aware of the need for a true "biblical-pastoral ministry" for Italy today. They met to study the situation and to envisage possible activities. With "biblical-pastoral ministry" it is not simply a question to favor new initiatives which have as their goal to make the Bible for itself better known, (like in schools for exegesis), but to bring about an encounter of the people of God with the Bible in the pastoral frame of the local church, as a way to faith education, as an original form of adult catechesis. It is therefore a question of putting into practice a biblical-pastoral ministry where the pastoral ministry would be animated by the Bible thanks to the pastoral meditation of the Church.

A "biblical-pastoral ministry" according to the guidelines of *Dei Verbum* chapter 6, did not really get off the ground in Italy. The Bible has practically not been received yet as „book of life“, but much rather as an option, which one may take or leave. It has not been placed into the center of the faith of the Church. Local biblical initiatives are rather occasional and depend upon the good will of the people involved. One may even observe a certain defiance for the biblical-pastoral

ministry on the part of certain bishops. One observes, in a more global manner, the absence of a historical sense, which makes the approach to the Bible difficult for the present day mentality.

The responsible leaders therefore suggest that the biblical-pastoral ministry have a clearly described place in the pastoral service of the Italian Church and that all of the organizations which work in the biblical-pastoral ministry collaborate and coordinate their particular activities. The traditional centers for biblical formation must be enabled to bridge the gap between exegesis and biblical-pastoral ministry. In the seminaries it is necessary to favor a sensibility for the biblical-pastoral ministry. A school of formation for biblical animators could renew the biblical practice in catechesis.

The biblical-pastoral ministry must not be left to the good will of a few people, but must enter into the pastoral plan which is recognized by the bishops' conference.

Further Information: Ufficio Catechistico Nazionale, Circonvallazione Aurelia 50, I-00165 Roma

Questions to Cardinal Martini

On the occasion of the fourth encounter of the coordinators for the biblical-pastoral ministry in the southern European countries held in Milan from the 18-20th of Oct. 1991, the participants met with Cardinal Martini and posed the following questions.

1. How can one arouse the sensibility of the Church hierarchy: of the bishops' conferences, of the bishops, for the biblical-pastoral ministry?
2. The Catholic Biblical Federation proposes the celebration of a synod on the Word of God and the application of the Constitution DEI VERBUM. Could this come true in your opinion and within a reasonable time?
3. How might those involved in biblical research, (exegetes, etc.), put the results of their work better at the disposition of the evangelization and the needs of the people of God?
4. Does the „School of the Word“, in the diocese of Milan, follow the concrete situations of the people, (especially of the youth), and is it an occasion to reestablish, or create a communitarian tissue?

The Cardinal found it easier to first answer the second question for which he seemed to have a clear response: he himself has already proposed several times that a synod on the application of DEI VERBUM and more precisely on the 6th chapter, should be organized. This request has been discussed and approved, upon his initiative, on the level of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, as well as on the level of the Italian episcopal conference. He thinks that such a synod would be very important to the life of the Church.

That the synod is one way to arouse sensibility of all the bishops' conferences and to stimulate the biblical-pastoral ministry on all the levels of the Church, he could observe on the occasion of the last reunion of the German bishops' conference in Fulda: the principal interest and most reactions to the different items which he had exposed on the occasion of this assembly, turned around questions related to the biblical-pastoral ministry and the "lectio divina".

The interest of the bishops is beyond doubt. However, one has to take care that efficient means for the

pastoral ministry, placed at their disposal, are based on sacred Scripture. The majority of the bishops are anxious to make the Word of God better known. One has to look for ways how to answer to this desire. The method is not to submit to them proposals of modern biblical-pastoral ministry, but to present to them ancient initiatives in a renewed form, for example the *lectio divina*.

Regarding the relation between biblical research and the pastoral ministry, the cardinal no longer follows the formation of biblical scholars, as closely as he did during his time at the Pontifical Biblical Institute. He thinks that the appropriation of biblical scholarship must proceed under different forms of refresher courses and instructions; the 30,000 pastoral agents of the Archdiocese of Milan receive a formation which is fully nourished by the Bible; he has created types of parish retreats, for one evening or one week, where one explains a text like Jn 2 or Mt 14; as well as "biblical retreats" for one week, like the one held

for 300 Jesuits in California on the Joseph story (Gn. 37-50); etc.

Regarding the impact of a „School of the Word“, (which is also one way of bringing the results of biblical research to the large public), one must not search too far in evaluating the results. The sower sows and afterwards comes the harvester to gather the fruits. There are, however, signs of impact, in the vocations to the priesthood and the religious life and in the involvement of Christian lay people due, as they say, to this "School of the Word". On the other hand it has become somewhat the habit of the young people and they like to participate. As regards the communitarian threads, one may observe that not only the Bishop, but more than 64 priests animate this movement in the diocese. It is therefore an effort in which the entire diocese participates. Here also youth groups are born who gather again and again for other occasions, but based on the same spirit.

(From a report by Brother Ferdinand Poswick)

MARY: Model of Evangelization

If I were asked which figure of Holy Scripture most authentically reflects the Church in our situation today, and would be a model for evangelization that takes into account our own experience, I would say it is Mary. Mary is distinguished, above all, by the fact that she, throughout her life, was totally dedicated to God. In the account of the Annunciation by the angel, we clearly perceive that she gives up her own expectations and personal plans for the future and becomes totally open to God. She empties herself and loses everything. Before this background of Mary's emptiness, God speaks his eternal Word into the world, it becomes flesh and dwells among us. The Word lives in Mary and Mary gives room to the Word - without propaganda and publicity. We can imagine how Mary formed and lived her life starting out of this totally new reality. Her own words are silenced, so that the Word of God may be present and speak. In the fullness of this Word, she hurries to Elizabeth, and brings joy and blessings to the house of her relative, echoed in the song of praise, the Magnificat. The Word communicates itself. Later, this attitude is confirmed also by Jesus, "The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on my own. The father who dwells in me is doing his works", (Jn 14, 10).

Today, as then, the Word of God wants to take the same way: first become flesh in us, and then be handed on and be present among us. Does not Mary herself exhort us to this? "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2,5). Our daily life is therefore *the* place where we can live the Word of God concretely. Perhaps only one phrase from the Gospels per week or month. The experience with such a word becomes a precious treasure we can share with others who, together with us live the Word. From there results a primacy of life over words, of importance also, it appears to me, for evangelization today. Yes, the words themselves must be a part of life according to the Word.

Furthermore, Mary, in accepting the Word of God, at the same time accepted the cross. Her soul is pierced by a sword. She participates in the agony of her son, and says yes to her sorrow. She understands that God's immense love is being revealed in Christ's death on the cross. She is standing by the cross together with John the apostle, "who took her into his home" (Jn 19, 27). Thus the apostle, as representative of the young church, makes the thinking and living of Mary, his own.

We see how Mary is the model of evangelization. She lives the Word and offers it to the world. She makes herself one with God and with men and women. Mary is truly the prototype of the Church, mother of the Church also. The Church and everyone of us are called to live the word of God, according to the example of Mary, so that Christ can be in our midst. The Lord says, "My mother and my brothers and sisters are those who hear the Word of God and act on it", (Lk 8,21).

According to my experience this means, concretely:

1. In my service in the Church of central Norway, very important to me is my life in conformity with the Word at the present moment.
 2. If the Word is always alive in my daily life, it becomes a blessing for my brothers and sisters who themselves become a Word. The Word creates community.
 3. The fruit of a life in accordance with the Word is joy.
 4. The lived Word becomes a common treasure in the sharing of experiences.
 5. In sorrow and difficulties, the face of the crucified Christ emerges. Our yes to him lets us reach the heart of God.
- The true evangelizer, as Mary shows, is the Word of God itself!

George Müller, Administrator Apostolique, Trondheim, Norway. Address to the European Synod of Bishops, Rome Dec. 4, 1991