

# Catholic Biblical Federation

No. 23

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Bulletin

*Dei  
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 these great tasks.

+ Alberto Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno  
President of the CBF

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

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

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### Editorial Team:

Ludger Feldkämper, Florencio Galindo,  
Heinz Köster, Marc Sevin.

### Production:

Heinz Köster, Cheryl Osteros, Marc Sevin, Christa Wehr

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to renew  
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for 1992?**

## Editorial

"Reading Sacred Scripture means opening the heavens" was a favorite phrase of St. John Chrysostom. By combining all of our endeavors of the entire Catholic Biblical Federation membership from all continents, we achieve one step further in providing easy access to Sacred Scripture. One can without a doubt state thanks to their efforts that some more heaven shines upon the earth! Once again our *BULLETIN* will report on this undertaking.

In Latin America, 160,000 members of the Confederation of Latin American Religious (C.L.A.R.) have resumed the old practice of the *lectio divina* and have adapted it to our times. Our *BULLETIN* continues the publication of the CLAR theologians' excellent study. The superb guideline to the *lectio divina* practice deserves wide spread recognition among biblical animators. It could serve as a base for reflection in institutes, schools, and bible groups (p. 4-8).

Several congresses, seminars, and national meetings were held in the wake of the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá. The leaders responsible for the biblical apostolate in Mexico convened for the first time in a national congress and decided to expand their work program (p. 9-10).

The Plenary Assembly of Bogotá resumed a resolution of Bangalore, viz. to further Bible Sunday, Bible Week, and Bible Month. The African members of the Federation in spite of difficulties arising, for example from the immense distances in their countries, courageously opted to join this undertaking (p. 11-12).

How should the biblical pastoral ministry be evaluated? In order to avoid sclerosis, repetition, or triviality in the biblical work, you must face this question! From Francophone Switzerland, we received an evaluation screen which you may adapt to your own situation (p. 8. 13-14). In case you have already elaborated a similar method, the general secretariat would appreciate learning about it which would provide an opportunity to bring it to the attention of others through the *BULLETIN*.

Fr. Feldkämper, General Secretary of the Federation, was invited as *auditor* to the Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops. In spite of his sobering impressions about the biblical-pastoral ministry gathered during that meeting, he remains optimistic (p. 15-16).

"Reading Sacred Scripture means opening the heavens." Much still remains to be opened. It's worth our effort!

Marc Sevin

## LECTIO DIVINA - Heart of the Religious Life (Part Two)

*With the return to Sacred Scripture in the aftermath of the last Council, the old practice of the lectio divina has found new actuality. The Confederation of Latin American Religious (CLAR), for example, recommended the practice to its 160,000 members. It is not an intention here of taking over the approach to the Sacred Scripture as practiced in the 12th century, but to adapt it to the necessities of our time. The theologians of CLAR propose, therefore, a guideline to the lectio divina for Latin America today. This BULLETIN here continues the publication of this document (cf. BDV 22, p. 8, 13-16).*

### **B. The Meditation: to ruminate, to dialogue, to actualize**

The *reading* answered the question, "What does the text say?" The *meditation* will answer the question, "What does the text tell me, us?" What does God want to tell us, the religious, in Latin America, following the voice of the gospel, consecrating our lives to God and the people? The *meditation* is the effort to actualize the text and to place it into the horizon of our lives and of reality on a personal and social level. The text, written for us, must also tell us something. In the dynamics of the *lectio divina*, the *meditation* occupies a central place.

Guigo says, "*Meditation* is the intellect's careful activity that with the help of its own insight searches for the knowledge of the hidden truth." What is this hidden truth? Through the *reading*, we discovered how the text corresponded to the context of the epoch, what position it took vis à vis the conflicts, what message it carried to the people. Because the situation has changed since the past, the context and the conflicts are no longer the same. Nonetheless, faith tells us that the text, even though it portrays situations of remote centuries, must have a message for us today. The text must leave a permanent value, a value leading to the same conversion or change it caused centuries ago. The hidden truth then, Guigo is talking about, is an existing message for today's context that must be discovered and actualized through *meditation*. How should one go about the *meditation*?

The first method of practicing *meditation* is to follow Guigo's suggestion: One has to use one's mind and reason to be able to discover the hidden truth. One enters into dialogue with the text, with God, asking questions which challenge the intellect and allowing the text into the horizon of our life. *Meditation* makes room for

reflection: Which differences and resemblances are there between the ancient situations of the text and ours today? Which conflicts of yesterday are still existing today? Which ones are different? What is the text's message for our situation today? What can I, living in Latin America, change through my behavior? How does the text justify or condemn us, the religious? What should grow in me/us according to the text?

Another method of *meditation* is to repeat the text, to ruminate it, to chew it until one discovers the true meaning. That it is what Mary did when she retained all the events in her heart (Lc 2, 19.51). The psalmist recommends it to the just man, "Happy is the man who never follows the advice of the wicked...but finds his pleasure in the Law of Lord, and murmurs his law day and night" (Ps 1,2). In this way, Isaiah defined with emphasis, "Following the path of your judgments, we hoped in you, Lord, your name, your memory are all my soul desires." (Is 26,8). After *reading* and discovering the meaning, it is advisable to sum it all up into one sentence, preferably from the same biblical text, in order to retain it in memory and to repeat and ruminate it throughout the day until it becomes part of our own being.

By ruminating it in this way, we place ourselves under the judgment of the Word of God, "The Word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts." (Heb 4,12) "No created thing can hide from him; everything is uncovered and open to the eyes of the one to whom we must give account of ourselves." (Heb 4,13). We religious often hide behind masks and idols, ideologies and conventions, reassessed doctrines and human traditions (cf Mc 8-13). Through *meditation*, the Word of God will, little by little, remove the masks, reveal and break the alienation in which we find ourselves so that the Word we have heard, ruminated, and mediated will come to life again.

Cassian makes an allusion to another important aspect of the *meditation*, as an effect of rumination. He says, "Instructed by what we ourselves feel, we no longer perceive the text as something we have only heard, but as something we ourselves experience and touch with our hands, not like a strange and unheard of story, but as something we produce from the depth of heart, like an image of the feelings which forms part of our own being. We insist: It is not the *reading* which allows us to reach the meaning of the words, but our own experience acquired beforehand in our daily lives." (Collationes X,11). It seems there is no longer a difference between the Bible and our life, between the Word of God and our own word. According to Cassian, it is in this "quasi identification"

with the Word of the Bible where we find its secret meaning for us. Cassian says that perception of the text meaning does not come from study, but comes from life experiences. For the sake of comparison, we borrow from the domain of electricity: The scholar provides the wire, the acquired experience creates the energy, the *meditation* pushes the button which causes the energy to run through the wire and ignite the bulb. The wire combined with the energy are necessary to create the light. Energy creates light just as life experiences create meaning. Life illuminates the text, and the text will illuminate life.

The *meditation* deepens also the personal dimension of the Word of God. A word has its proper value not only through the idea it communicates, but also through the person pronouncing it and by the manner in which it is pronounced. In the Bible, God leads us and he does it with much love. A word of love unleashes strength, liberates energies, remakes the person. Through *meditation* of God's Word, the human heart is lifted to reach the dimension of God. This is when the mystical dimension of the *lectio divina* emerges to the surface. A worker from Pernambuco says, "I have observed that whoever lets the Word of God penetrate himself will be sanctified. It is like this: the Word permeates you and you can no longer separate what comes from God and what comes from you, neither what is the Word of God nor what is your own. The Bible has caused this within me." (Por tras da Palavra, No. 46, 1988, p. 28).

Through the *reading*, one reaches the shell of the letter and through *meditation*, one tries to break it to find the fruit of the Spirit, "He is the one who has given us the qualifications to be the administrators of this new covenant, which is not a covenant of written letters but of the Spirit: the written letters bring death, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Cor 3,6). The Spirit acts in Sacred Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3,16). Through *meditation*, the Spirit of God communicates with us, he inspires us, he creates in us the attitude of Jesus Christ (cf. Phil 2,5); he allows us to come to the complete truth in Jesus (cf. Jn 16,13); he reveals to us that we cannot do anything without him (cf. Jn 15,5); he intercedes for us in a way that could never be put into words and gives us freedom (cf. 2 Cor 3,17). It is the same Spirit who fills the whole world (cf. Wisdom 1,7). In the past, he animated Judges and Prophets, today he helps us discover spiritual meaning, this is precisely what God's Spirit wants to communicate to today's Church through the biblical text.

*Meditation* is an individual and a communitarian activity. When everyone shares what they feel, discover, and absorb when encountering the Word of God, more is expressed than in the single words of the individual. The common search makes the ecclesial dimension of the

Bible come to the foreground and reinforces in all the members the communal aspects of faith. For this reason, it is so very important that the Bible is read, meditated, studied, and prayed not only individually, but also and above all in a community. It is the book of the Church, the community.

When is the moment to pass over from *meditation* to *prayer*? It is not easy to say just as it is difficult to say exactly when a person passes from youth into adulthood. There are, however, some criteria. The *meditation* actualizes the meaning of the text until it becomes clear what God demands from us, religious, who live in Latin America. Once God's demands are clear, the moment has arrived when one must ask the question, "Now, what am I going to say to God? Do I accept or not?" Our incapability and our weaknesses become apparent when God's demands are clear. This is the moment for *prayer*, "Rise! Come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your love." (Ps 44,26). Once it is evident that God calls us to the exploited and the poor and hears their cries, the moment has arrived when we must unite our voices with the cries of the poor so that God may listen to our clamors and come to liberate his people. In other words, *meditation* is the seed of *prayer*. It is necessary to nourish it and then it transforms into *prayer*.

### C. Prayer: to implore, to praise, to ask

Through *reading* the text, we pose the question, What does the text say? Through *meditation*, we ask, What does the text tell us? And, through *prayer*, the question is, What does the text want us to say? How does it want us to answer God? The moment has come when we need to give our answer, when we have to express our reaction provoked by the Word heard and meditated before God. Guigo says, "*Prayer* is the fervent impulse of the heart before God asking to avoid the evil and to concede the good".

This, however, does not mean that there is no prayer at all during *reading* and *meditation*. The attitude of prayer is present since the commencement. At the beginning, we invoke the Holy Spirit through *reading*, by which there are always short moments of *prayer*. *Meditation* is already an act of *prayer*, because it transforms itself into petitions. However, the dynamics of the *lectio divina*, even though always accompanied by *prayer*, still requires a special moment consecrated to *prayer*. That moment is the third step.

The attitude of *prayer* facing the Word of God should be that of Mary, "...let what you have said be done to me..." (Lk 1,38). The word Mary heard was not a word of the Bible, but much rather a word perceived in the events of

life when the angel came to visit her. Mary was able to perceive it because the *meditation* (cf. Lk 2,19.51) had purified her view and her heart. The pure in heart perceive the action of God during the events of life (cf. Mt 5,8). Praying and singing (cf. Lk 1,46-56), they integrate pureness into their lives. The attitude of *prayer* must be realistic and not naive; therefore, it is achieved only through *meditation*.

*Prayer* prompted by *meditation* may be a spontaneous prayer which arises from the *lectio divina* itself. Depending on what we hear as Word of God through *reading* and *meditation*, *prayer* may be an act of praise or of thanksgiving, of supplication or of pardon; it may be even a rebellion or a imprecation as in the response of Job, Jeremiah, or several psalms. Like *meditation*, it is important that spontaneous *prayer* not only be a personal expression, but also reflect the dimension of a communitarian expression.

Through *meditation*, *prayer* springs forth which may bring to mind already existing prayers. In this context, the breviary, the prayer of the hours, is considerable help. The breviary spreads the *reading* throughout the day according to each hour. The monk heard the Word, he memorized it, and took it with him to meditate upon it during manual labor. This was the case for Guigo. *Prayer* was attached to the psalms which were distributed over the different hours of the Divine Office. One of the first tasks of a monk, when he entered a monastery, was to learn the psalms by heart, which would help him in his dialogue with God. Today, we can no longer resume the medieval monk's daily routine. The times have changed. Nonetheless, the inspiration, the model, and the challenge remain the same: to recall a psalm at the moment when one needs it; to take a phrase of the Bible along and have it present during the day, during free moments, during work, in the bus, in the fields; to create a custom corresponding to our way of life and attaining the same goal as before.

A word is weighed not only by the idea it communicates, but also by the power it conveys. It does not only say something, but also does something. An example is the sacrament of the Eucharist. The word "This is my body" brings about what it says. In the creation story, God speaks and things come into being (cf. Ps 148; 5; Gen 1,39). The Jewish people had a more profound sensibility than we do today to sense the value of these two aspects of the Word and to unite them. In their language, they said, "dabar" which signified at the same time, word and action. The Word speaks and it does, it announces and it enlivens, it instructs and gives life, it illuminates and strengthens, it is the light and the force, the Word and the Spirit.

The *lectio divina*, with roots in the Jewish people, has a high respect for these two aspects and keeps them together. Through *reading*, one discovers the idea, the message which the Word teaches, hands on. Through *meditation* and above all through *prayer*, a space develops where the Word causes what it says, produces what it announces, communicates its power, and above all, gives us strength for the way. The two aspects cannot be separated because both of them are united within the unity of God, in the bosom of the Blessed Trinity. Since eternity, the Father pronounced his Word and empowered it with his Spirit. The Word became flesh in Jesus, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit resides in him.

Unfortunately, these two aspects of the Word have been separated in pastoral practice. On the one hand, there are many charismatic movements; on the other hand, there are the liberation movements. The charismatics are very dedicated to prayer, but they often lack a critical vision. Sometimes, they do not practice the *reading* as it should be practiced. They do not place the text in its original context; therefore, they have the tendency to stray into fundamentalism and individualism when interpreting the Bible. For this reason, their meditation and their prayer often lack the real foundation in the text and in reality.

The liberation movements have a critical conscience; they perform a good *reading*, but sometimes they lack perseverance and faith when it is a question of facing human situations which in the scientific analysis of reality does not contribute anything to the transformation of society. They find it difficult to understand the usefulness of dedicating themselves to the prayer of the hours without immediate result. If the steps of the *lectio divina* are performed well, it can be an aid to correct these faults and to bring together again what should not have been separated.

In *prayer*, everyone reflects his personal itinerary on his way to God and in his effort to empty himself in order to make room for God, for brother and sister, for the poor, for the community. Here is when one may meet the dark night with its crises and difficulties, with its deserts and temptations; these are the moments to pray, to meditate and to confront oneself with the light of the Word of God (cf. Mt 4,1-11).

When is the moment reached to pass over from *prayer* to *contemplation*? There is no answer. *Contemplation* is what remains in the eyes and in the heart once the *prayer* is terminated. It is the point of arrival of the *lectio divina*. It is also the point of departure to start again with the *reading*, with *meditation*, and *prayer*. *Contemplation* is like the fruit of the tree: It already contains the seed, and it grows little by little to slowly reach maturity.

## D. Contemplation: to discern, to act, to savor

*Contemplation* is the last step of the *lectio divina*. It is the point of arrival, but it allows for a new departure. Thus, it is through an always renewed process of a *reading - meditation - prayer - contemplation* - that we grow in comprehending the meaning and power of the Word of God. The moment never arrives when one could say: "I have reached the entire goal of the Word of God for my life!" There remains always a possibility for a clearer view, for a more profound *reading*, for a more demanding *meditation*, for more devotion to *prayer*, for a more transparent *contemplation*, until all veils will drop, until the reality will be transformed and the fulfillment of the Kingdom will arrive. Until then, however, a long journey remains (cf. 1 Kings 19,7).

The *contemplation* unites within it the entire way during the *lectio divina*: Until now you have found yourself placed before God; you have read and heard the Word; you have studied and discovered its meaning. Thereby, you have accepted its obligation; you have begun to ruminate so that it may enter into the dynamics of life, that it may be passed from your head to your heart. You have transformed all this into *prayer* before God and into the project of your life; the salt of the Word has been assimilated in your life and has given it a new taste; the bread of the Word has been chewed and it has given you the strength for new action. Now finally, keeping all this in your mind and in your heart, you begin to have a new point of view, enabling you to see and to evaluate life, the events, the history, the way of communities, the situation of people in Latin America, the poor. It is God's viewpoint on the world which communicates itself in this way and extends itself. You see in a new way; you savor in a new way; you act in a new way. *Contemplation* comprises the entire human being.

St. Augustine stated that God restores in us the power of *contemplation* through Bible reading, and it helps us decipher and transform the world so that it becomes a new revelation of God, a theophany. *Contemplation*, understood in this way, is contrary to the attitude of someone who withdraws from the world and chooses to contemplate God. *Contemplation*, as the result of the *lectio divina*, is the attitude of someone who searches for depth of the events, to discover and savor the active and creative presence of the Word of God, and to become more deeply involved in the transformation process which the Word provokes throughout history. *Contemplation* does not only meditate the message, but also tries to put it into reality; it does not only listen, but also puts it into practice. It does not separate the two aspects of speech and action; it instructs and animates; it lightens and strengthens.

For the fundamentalists, the Word of God is found exclusively in the Bible. World, life, and history are all perverted or vicious. They believe that one can save oneself only by applying the Word of the Bible to one's life and by withdrawing from the world, from politics, from the struggle of the people, from the problems of the suburb, etc. *Contemplation* corrects this false vision and converts us. It allows us to discover that God is not absent from the daily reality. It is us who do not see his presence. We are the ones who are blind (cf. Is 42,19). The *lectio divina* gives us an ointment; it opens the eyes of the blind, letting us distinguish. It lifts the veil and helps us discover and live the presence of God today as it was lived throughout history; to perceive how Christ, the center of all, lets us pass over from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It allows us to discover the meaning of things and gets us involved with building God's Kingdom.

*Contemplation* is, according to Guigo, the last step of the "monk's ladder" to reach the clouds and penetrate the secrets of heaven". Here, the future is already anticipated in the present time; the gratuitous beginning of happiness which we expect from God and that which we try to establish by our own efforts. Guigo uses different expressions to describe this, "The *reading* searches for sweetness of eternal happiness, *meditation* encounters it, *prayer* asks for it, and *contemplation* savors it. The *reading* brings nourishment to the mouth, the *meditation* chews it and digests it, the *prayer* verifies its taste, and the *contemplation* sweetens it to refresh and give joy. The *reading* touches the shell, the *meditation* penetrates the kernel, the *prayer* formulates desire, and the *contemplation* tastes the desired sweetness which has already been reached." He continues, "*Contemplation* is an elevation of the spirit above oneself; suspended in God, it savors the joys of eternal happiness." What attracts our attention is the insistence of Guigo's description of *contemplation* as a tasty digestion of sweetness existing in the Word of God. Through *contemplation*, according to him, the experience of God suspends all, revitalizes all and for an instant, anticipates something of the joy which "...God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2,9).

Guigo speaks in the words of the 12th century. A peasant of North-East Brazil in the 20th century expresses the same things with his own words: "Since I have begun a course in Bible School, I have felt that the Bible is not a joke. It demands much from a person; it demands that we live what we hear, read, and learn from the Bible. I have thought that I could not keep up with this rhythm, and I have reflected on quitting Bible School. But then, I carried on, and I realized that if I let myself be penetrated by the Word of God, it will sanctify me. It is in this way that the Word will enter into me; I can no longer separate what is from God and what is from me; nor what is the

Word of God and what is mine. The Bible has caused this in me." (Por tras da Palavra, No. 46. 1988, p. 28).

The entire process of *lectio divina* is explained in these words. The description is one even Guigo could be envious of. To taste the (demanding) sweetness of the Lord and to feel the joy of his presence in the middle of us is what happens in the life of a peasant in North-Eastern Brazil. There are numerous persons like him, thousands. *Contemplation* is what we see come to life in the communities. In spite of the struggle, the suffering, the defeat, the threat and deceit, the poverty, the hunger, and the illness, the joy of the people remains undestroyed. Joy in spite of all! It is the promise of Jesus that becomes reality here, "...that joy no one shall take from you" (Jn 16,22). A joy which springs forth from a great certainty, the sure presence of friends during difficult times, and the definite presence of God at all times. That joy springs forth from hope, to go forth, be victorious from the struggle, and to ameliorate this world as the song says, "Our joy is to know that one day the people will be free, for Jesus Christ is the Lord of the world, our hope will become reality!" *Contemplation* is all of that!

*Contemplation*, the final step on the ladder, allows rest and repose for a new beginning. It is like climbing a very high tower. You reach the first platform of the ladder with three steps: *reading, meditation, and prayer*. At a window of the first platform you take rest and contemplate the countryside. Then you continue to climb to the second

little platform with the help of another ladder, comprising likewise three steps: *reading, meditation and prayer*. At the second window you take rest again and contemplate the same countryside. It seems to be more beautiful and so you continue to climb; always more and more enticed in a process which never comes to an end. You always take the same steps, you always admire the same countryside. The more you climb, the deeper your vision and the wider and more realistic the countryside is. You distinguish your house and that of your neighbors. You find there in the middle of your life the future of your own destination. And thus, continuing, you begin to climb with companions, exchanging your ideas, and helping one another so that nobody is left behind. And so we continue to climb higher and higher until we reach God to contemplate him face to face (cf. 1 Cor 13,12) and in God our brothers and sisters, the reality, and the countryside are a complete and definite vision.

*Contemplation* is all of this, and much more! "Much light, many bright clouds, and joyful people singing... I think it is a little bit of resurrection which is still in our dreams. Cautious people will not succeed in seeing the consolation of the Resurrection because it always occurs under the shadows of suffering and struggle. And this will go on, but I know eventually Resurrection and happiness will arrive for the people, more splendidly than my dreams ... One day, finally, Resurrection will descend upon our earth!" These are words of a mason. Let us give thanks to God!

## ANALYSIS OF A BIBLE WORK PROJECT

*In October 1992, the Federation representatives from the Southern European Region will meet for the fourth time, this time in Malta. In view of this meeting, Marcel Durrer from the French speaking part of Switzerland, has prepared a questionnaire which may prove helpful to evaluate a Bible work project. Evaluation is an important step to ameliorate the practice. We publish the proposed questionnaire because it can provide new ideas for our readers.*

By analyzing our working methods and various experiences, we can determine what pastoral criteria are useful and will mutually enrich each one of us. This analysis will help us decide which type of biblical ministry we should promote in our respective countries.

It is the task of each one of us to choose, analyze, and draw pastoral criteria from the biblical pastoral ministry practices that most represent our own region.

The analysis of a pastoral practice demands a certain distance from oneself and from what one is doing so that the discrepancies between the envisioned goals and the reality can be seen. A well done analysis will open up possibilities and point out dynamic aspects as well as weaknesses. This analysis will also demonstrate what we need to ameliorate, correct, and modify in our biblical work.

The proposed questionnaire has been designed to provide an analysis of a pastoral practice, i. e. a practice performed in the name of a community mandated by agents of the Church community. It offers a chance to ask numerous questions, and in this context, it is necessary to make two methodological remarks.

- Not all the questions are necessarily pertinent for the biblical practice to be examined; one must make a selection.
- Other questionnaires at your disposal may prove useful for all or part of the analysis.

## Follow-up to the Bogotá Assembly

### The First National Congress for the Biblical-Pastoral Ministry in Mexico

*Following the recommendations of the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá (1990), the Department of Biblical-Pastoral Ministry of the Mexican Bishops' Conference, full member of the Catholic Biblical Federation, took the initiative and organized the First Biblical-Pastoral Congress held in Mexico from 26-29 August 1991.*

*The Bishops made the following recommendations:*

#### A. The Word of God and the Bible

1. Bishops, priests, and religious, together with all those responsible in the pastoral ministry should take the initiative to achieve the purpose of the biblical-pastoral ministry; they should not be content with the hope that people may come to them, but much rather that they must go forth to meet the people.

2. Further centers for biblical formation should be established which includes a National Biblical Association and schools on diocesan, deanery, and parish levels corresponding to the respective needs and possibilities.

The offer of further introductory and advanced biblical courses, in which the Conciliar Constitution *DEI VERBUM* should have priority, is to be increased.

3. The entire biblical-pastoral ministry should be planned and coordinated on diocesan and national level.

4. Publications should be carefully prepared and include:

- well-founded, simple, and affordable biblical aids;
- a Bible with pastoral annotations adapted to the situation of Mexico;
- guidelines for understanding the Constitution *DEI VERBUM*;
- magazines and bulletins which keep Mexican history alive and help communicate important biblical-pastoral experiences.

5. An atmosphere of biblical prayer beneficial to priests and people alike should be fostered above all by the prayer of the hours.

#### B. Building up Christian Communities with the Word

1. The biblical renewal must begin with continuous formation of priests by helping them prepare homilies and catechesis authentically based on the Gospel.

2. All apostolic groups and ministers must also receive adequate formation so that they may reach common criteria and fundamental attitudes. Such formation should include initiatives to analyze reality in order to facilitate the actualization of the Word of God.

3. The services of the Word should be multiplied in order to have a greater variety of celebrations of the Word and increase of communities sharing the same faith.

4. The biblical-pastoral ministry should be the motor of all pastoral activities. It should be integrated in the overall pastoral plan and affect all recognized groups.

A department for biblical-pastoral ministry should be established in every region.

5. Since the majority of the baptized did not experience a genuine encounter with the Lord at the moment of religious instruction, catechesis should start out with the first proclamation of the Good News (Kerygma).

6. The catechism should be revised so that the Gospel becomes a profound inspiration.

7. The popular piety towards the Word of God should be revitalized through the renewal of the pastoral practices: feasts of the patrons and saints, novenas of saints, pilgrimages, prayer of the rosary, etc.

8. The liturgy should be renewed:

- to favor the prayer of the hours among the faithful;
- to reserve moments of intense silence during the liturgy which favors the assimilation of the Word of God;
- to organize worthy and well-prepared celebrations;
- to prepare a well-thought out homily.

#### C. Transform the country of Mexico through the Word

1. The formation and study program of seminarians and priests, formation houses, apostolic movements, biblical animators, etc. should offer a solid preparation in the *biblical* aspect (in light of modern scholarship, to read the Word of God and search for a correct interpretation); in the *anthropological* aspect (in which the cultures of the respective country must be taken into account and appreciated); in the *social* aspect (by giving impulse to the analysis of reality in which people live today); and also in the *apologetic* aspect (in order to stand up firmly against the sects).

2. Adequate and simple methods should be employed for the homily and biblical instruction taking into consideration the economical and cultural situation of the less favored members of society. This presupposes an adjustment from the responsible leaders who will use corresponding means to improve communication between the groups.

3. The National Department for Biblical-Pastoral Ministry should produce means which are adequate for a socio-political and economical analysis; they should establish criteria to avoid a reductionist reading of the Bible; they should favor the knowledge of the social doctrine of the Church and her documents, above all the Constitution *DEI VERBUM*, so that people may finally become conscious of their human dignity.

4. The communities should indeed be a place of encounter and dialogue, where the Word of God is lived and heard, where people share what they are and own, and where a truly fraternal atmosphere will develop. Only in this way, Catholics will receive what they need for their faith and not fall prey to the temptation of sectarian groups.

5. Groups and actions should be fostered which favor a person's integral development, their values as children of God, the defense of human rights, and the respect for the preservation of

the environment. Furthermore, they should also strengthen their influence in the strategical centers of power.

6. Diocesan and regional Bible centers should be coordinated through a person responsible for the biblical-pastoral ministry; if possible, he/she should be an expert in Sacred Scripture.

7. Biblical experts should offer Bible courses which always take into account the situation in Mexico, the different cultures, and the urgent promotion of justice and preservation of human rights.

8. For the sake of the Christian endeavor to build up the Reign of God, lay people should be motivated to get involved in politics and search for a change, in the light of the Gospel, of the country's socio-political and economical structures.

9. The formation of responsible leaders in the biblical-pastoral ministry should be expanded to cover the different languages and cultures of the country.

(The Spanish original text of these recommendations is published in the quarterly *LA PALABRA HOY*. The entire issue No. 62 is dedicated to the First National Congress for the Biblical-Pastoral Ministry in Mexico: *LA PALABRA HOY*, Fr. Gerardo Mellert, Calle 65, No. 7-68, Bogotá, Colombia).

## Bible Sunday

*"We again stress the importance of Bible Sundays, Bible weeks, months or years in the life of the parishes and dioceses."*

(Final Statement of Bogotá, 8.3.4.3)

*The celebration of "Bible Sunday" is still unknown to numerous Catholic communities. This reservation may partially derive from the numerous "special Sundays" during the year; therefore, it appears difficult to introduce another special Sunday, namely "Bible Sunday." Certain animators prefer to advance modestly in this venture. In the following report, the French speaking part of Switzerland promotes Bible Sunday and spreads it out over three Sundays giving it the time of the homily. This easy structure proves to be effective.*

To avoid overcrowding one single Sunday with supplementary activities, the proposal is to celebrate Bible Sunday for three consecutive Sundays and have it during the Eucharistic celebration instead of the homily. Etymologically the word 'homily' means dialogue, conversation, talk; therefore, this idea is not at all a

'novelty' in the Church. The approach allows habitual community participation of the faithful and favors progress from one Sunday to another.

The Bible is the book of the Christian community. It is not a book solely for specialists, but a book for ordinary people. The aim of Bible Sunday is to reinforce the ecclesial "tissue" and bring practicing Christians into contact with the text, inspiring them to practice Bible reading everyday.

**On the first Sunday**, the animators provide additional information to that which has already been published in the parish bulletin, present the project, and offer the faithful first contact with the biblical text. This should include a symbolic act performed during the liturgy, for example, exposing the value of the book, liturgical proclamation, procession with the gospel, etc. The act should demonstrate to the community the importance of the Bible for the life of the Church and each of its members.

**On the second and third Sunday**, in addition to symbolic and liturgical elements, the emphasis is placed on the common reading of the biblical text by all the faithful.

The goal is to make Bible reading a habit for the faithful, by appropriate means, under an animator's guidance. The team of animators leads the reading interaction with the congregation, thereby, inspiring the faithful to read and discuss the text with their neighbors.

The dialogue between the animators and the faithful may take the following forms:

**Form a:** An animator enters dialogue with formed groups within the congregation. He asks questions to a few of the groups, using a mobile microphone, and later proposes to the congregation a synthesis based on elements provided by the groups.

**Form b:** The groups constitute themselves in the pews, and the work instructions are handed out to them. The animator randomly chooses one group to come forward.

At the end of the activity, the animator enters into dialogue with the chosen group and delivers a synthesis.

NB: The animators may combine forms a and b by alternating between dialogue with the groups from the congregation and dialogue with the chosen group. The animators also have the option to renounce the report of the group discussion and propose their own synthesis instead.

If space allows, it is advisable to use visual media such as a banner or a projector which could provide clearer instructions and elaborate the results of the dialogue. This method provides recollection of the Bible Sunday readings and discussions from one Sunday to the next.

[A booklet of 36 pages 'Dimanche de la Bible' (Bible Sunday) describes this method in detail. Further information: CCRFP, 29 Bd de Grancy, CH-1006 Lausanne.]

## The Bible Sunday, Week, Month in Africa

*Under the above rubric, we publish the summaries of the responses to our questionnaire on Bible Sunday, Week, Month, and Year which the General Secretariat sent out to the members of the Federation last year. After bringing to you the summaries on Latin America (BDV 20, page 10-12), Asia/Oceania (BDV 21, page 11-12), and Europe (BDV 22, page 11-12), we now provide a summary about the African countries. As you already know, the Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá strongly recommends the celebration of the Bible Sunday, Week, Month, and Year.*

From the 31 questionnaires sent out, 14 were completed and returned. This figure is comparable to the general average of the other regions within the Federation. However, it must be stated that the French speaking part of Africa is less represented than the English speaking part. Therefore, much remains to be done until the Federation is finally known throughout this immense continent.

### The answers originate from:

National Biblical Associations: 9  
(Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana,  
Lesotho, Ruanda, Sudan, Togo,  
Zimbabwe)

Diocesan or Interdiocesan Centers: 4  
(Botswana, Tansania, Zaire)

Publishing Houses: 1 (Zaire)

### Beginnings

In numerous African countries the biblical apostolate among Catholics is alive for a long time. The Bible has a deserving place in the educational system and in community life; however, the exchange of information between the different pastoral ministries has been difficult because of the huge distances between the countries and the rather modest means of communication.

Until now, the introduction of Bible Sunday was not a main concern of the biblical promoters; however, everything is still in the initial stages. The full and associate members of the Federation have made every effort in the African regions to implement the recommendations of the Final Statement of Bogotá, especially concerning the celebration of Bible Sunday.

## Testimonies

The following testimonies were drawn from the responses to the questionnaires sent out by the secretariat of the Federation:

- "We are implementing Bible Sunday in as many dioceses as time allows. Our goal is to gain more parishes' interest for this idea in agreement with the bishop." (Zaire)

- "This year we would like to conduct a Bible week for the country and focus it at the Catholic level with hopes of expanding it to an interconfessional level in the future. A committee was established to implement this plan." (Botswana)

- "Since 1989, Bible Sunday has existed in our country due to the initiative of the Bible Society with ecumenical participation. The Bible Society finances the materials produced by the Churches. Among the goals of this activity are the following:

- to analyze the problems in Church and society;
- to establish a forceful idea, a leading theme for the year;
- to compose pastoral letters on the Church and diocesan level;

- to collect funds for biblical apostolate support;

- to recruit new friends of the Bible.

We are still entirely in the initial phase." (Burundi)

- "The publication of a complete Catholic Bible edition in the vernacular language (Kinyarwanda) is a good reason to celebrate Bible Sunday and Bible week on parish, diocesan, and national levels. The special occasion will include one day when the new Bible edition is presented and an entire week dedicated to the presentation of the different books of the Bible." (Ruanda)

- "Since 1986, the second Sunday of Advent is celebrated as Bible Sunday. The Bible weeks take place in February, May, June and September, are organized on diocesan and national levels, and are almost exclusively limited to Catholics. The themes are selected on perceived needs." (Sudan)

- "Some parishes have been celebrating Bible Sunday for several years, others are just beginning. Normally it takes place before Lent. The program is usually organized by the Bible Society with little consultation from those who actually conduct Bible Sunday. We set up a National Bible Commission with hopes that those who conduct Bible Sunday have more say in the preparation. We have discovered that Bible Sunday has positive effects on the

faithful and the organized groups within the parishes. Bible study groups are often founded during Bible Week.

For the last two years, the National Laity Council of Ghana has chosen the biblical apostolate as its theme for Laity Week. Many organizations now begin their meetings with the enthronement of the Scriptures, a Bible sharing, etc." (Ghana)

- "Since 1990, Bible Sunday is being celebrated in our diocese. It is linked with the Week of Prayer for Christian unity. The bishop publishes a pastoral letter, the diocesan promoter for the biblical apostolate organizes the preparation, and each parish prepares its own materials." (Cameroon)

- "The Bishops' Conference of Togo has asked us to celebrate Bible Sunday together with the Bible Society. But unfortunately, nothing has happened." (Togo)

- "For over 10 years, the second Sunday of Advent has been proposed as Bible Sunday in ecumenical collaboration. This Sunday is organized and prepared by the Bible Society in cooperation with different Churches. The main theme has always been to motivate the people to support the promotion of the Bible in Lesotho through monetary contribution." (Lesotho)

- "Strictly speaking, we do not have Bible Sunday nor Bible week; however, since 1988, we organized an adapted version of the *Basic Bible Seminar* from the Philippines. In addition to this, we have held Bible festivals and Bible workshops. These biblical events are performed by the Catholic parishes in four dioceses. We try to meet the challenges of Africa, especially in Zaire: to intensify the biblical message, to encourage inculturation, and to develop basic communities. Overall, we have observed a growing interest in the Bible." (Zaire)

- "Celebration of Bible Sunday is unknown; however, some priests use the communication day, which is the first Sunday in August, for distributing the Bible or parts of it." (Tanzania)

- "Since September 1991, some parishes have commenced with the Bible week celebration. This week is prepared by the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy assisted by the biblical department of our pastoral centre. We noticed a genuine interest nation-wide for this week; therefore, we composed a leaflet on the meaning and aim of Bible Sunday. We feel that pilot experience is needed before we embark on a national program." (Zimbabwe).

***"The proclamation of the Word of the Bible should take into account the cultural diversity of people."***

(Final document of Bogotá, 8.3.5.1)

(From pg. 8)

The following proposed evaluation follows a logical coherence (praxeology): observe, interpret, diagnose, improve. It proceeds in four steps:

1. Observe the biblical pastoral practice
2. Theological analysis of the biblical practice
3. Determine the risks and challenges of the biblical practice
4. Formulate pastoral criteria.

## 1. Observe the biblical pastoral practice

Observation is essential for every analysis. To make an accurate observation, which allows a more rapid answer to steps 2 through 4, we need to look at who, what, why, where, when, and how.

### 1.1 Who / For whom?

- Who are the addressees and the animators of the practice?
- What is their role, their status, their function?
- Who is the potential audience? in reality? What is their social milieu?
- Who has determined the goal<sup>1</sup>, the modalities: the animator or the addressees?

### 1.2 With whom?

- Who are the partners involved in the practice?
- What is the existing relationship between the different partners (equal, less or more responsibility)?
- Who is responsible for what to whom?

### 1.3 What?

- Is it an institutional or a spontaneous practice?
- Is it a Church practice meant for inside or for outside?
- Which results/effects, foreseen or unforeseen, can be observed?

### 1.4 For what?

- What are the objectives and goals of the practice in question?
- What are the motives of the pastoral minister(s), of the addressees?

### 1.5 Why?

- Which authorities (texts, tradition, persons), reasons, and justifications are invoked?
- What are the fundamental options of the practice?
- What are the needs requesting an answer: how were they established (through analysis, experience, inquiry, interviews, etc) and by whom?
- Which are the needs effectively taken into account in this practice?
- Were the objectives negotiated? How? By whom?

1. Concerning the goals, one has to differentiate between the intention of the animator or responsible leader and the objective.

Example:

Intention: Integration of young people into the community life.

Objective: Young people of the community organize transportation to Church for the handicapped during the winter months so they have the opportunity to participate in the Sunday service.

### 1.6 Where?

- In which context (ecclesial, social, etc.) is the practice taking place? Describe it: population, institutions, region, etc.
- Which values are passed on by the milieu?
- What is the position of the animators (who - for whom?) in this context?

### 1.7 When?

- Which historical elements (origin, development, crises, changes, etc.) can be observed that explain the actual practice?
- Which times (evenings, days, weeks, etc.) are used for this practice? How and by whom is the time planned?
- Is priority given to the past, the present, or the future?
- Are the goals and/or projects planned at long, middle, or short term?

### 1.8 How?

- How is the practice organized?
- Which modalities are applied to reach the objectives and which means (human, material, financial) are preferred?
- Which devices and languages are preferred?
- Which pedagogy is preferred?
- Are the participants active? Or are they consumers?

#### • *Synthesis of the observation:*

What are the strengths and the weaknesses, the chances and the limits that emerge from the observation? What are the main problems or challenges of the biblical pastoral practice?

## 2. Theological analysis of the biblical pastoral practice

### 2.1 Images of God

1) What type of relation to God does the practice bring into play? (relation of searching, rejection, welcome, dependency, listening, prayer, proclamation...?)

2) Which countenance of God do the animators of the practice foster and which do they reject:

- in what they say?
- in what they do?

3) Which concrete media does the practice use: places, gestures, configuration of groups, activities, languages?

Are the media coherent with the results of the previous question?

#### • *Synthesis:*

Which image(s) of God does the proposed practice convey?

### 2.2 Images of human beings

1) Which different images of the individual and of humanity does each of the participants carry with them?

2) What are the concrete effects of the practice on the person's development: growth, liberation, regression, alienation, integration?

3) Which life quality is being attained or strived for through the practice?

4) Which responsibilities are preferred or rejected by the practice?

5) Which behaviors, decisions, attitudes, and morals are considered good or bad?

Which ethical directives are pointed out?

6) What position does the individual take in relation to fellowman, to the world, to God?

• **Synthesis:**

Describe the human being resulting from your analysis.

### 2.3 Images of the Church

1) Which ecclesial areas does the practice touch upon: faith education, building of the community, service to the world, Christian growth?

2) Which person or groups are involved in the practice?

3) What is their interrelation?

4) Through whom and by what is the Church represented? Is it coherent with the entire practice in word and fact?

• **Synthesis:**

Which images of the Church does the biblical pastoral practice as a whole convey?

### 2.4 Images of the world

1) Does the world become apparent in the practice?

Under which aspects: economy, ecology, culture, politics, education...?

2) What type of society does the entire practice promote or disqualify?

3) How is the practice as a whole marked by place and time?

• **Synthesis:**

Describe the world as it appears in the biblical pastoral practice.

### 2.5 Integration of the pastoral action in a pastoral plan

1) Does the pastoral action consider the addressees' needs, their progress, and the maturity of their faith?

2) Is the action coordinated with the diocesan priorities, with a pastoral plan, or with global projects?

If not, why and with what is the action coordinated?

Do these priority choices imply modifications of the "ordinary" or habitual pastoral ministry?

3) Which means does the animator rely on (the Bible, creed, sacrament etc) ?

Do they fit into the tradition of the Church today?

4) What kind of Church-world relationship does the pastoral action refer to ?

Does this relationship correspond to the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council and the conditions under which people live today?

## 3. Determine the risks and challenges of the biblical pastoral practice

The challenges and risks of the pastoral biblical practice can be measured or evaluated along the following criteria and references:

### 3.1 In reference to the individual

- Which particular human aspects are the practice concerned with: person, history, short and long relationships...?

- In what sense does the practice have a liberating (salvific) effect for the addressee and for the community?

### 3.2 In reference the Reign of God

- How does the practice contribute in marking the Reign of God, a Reign established to liberate humanity against alienation?

- What hope does it instill for humanity today?

### 3.3 In reference to Jesus Christ

- In what sense and how does the practice join the intention, the action, and the attitude of the word of Jesus and the Creator Spirit he sent us?

- How does it articulate itself with the Good News and the authority of Jesus Christ who judges and liberates?

### 3.4 In reference to the Church

- In what sense is the practice a visible sign of the Church-Sacrament? How does the activity fit into the perspective of the Church as a sign revealing the salvation mystery of the Triune God for all humanity?

- In what meaning and how does the practice fit into the functions of the Church mission:

a) *prophetic function*: proclamation, evangelization, catechesis

b) *priestly function*: prayer, sacraments, liturgy

c) *royal function*: gathering of the community, formation, liberation, service, and humanization of the world.

## 4. Formulate pastoral criteria

Starting from the analysis of the biblical pastoral practice, you may formulate 4 or 5 pastoral criteria.

(This questionnaire for an analysis has been adapted from: «La praxéologie pastorale - Orientations et parcours, Tome I et II, Cahiers d'études pastorales 4 et 5, Fides, Montréal, Canada, 1987»)

***"We recommend that members of the Federation develop and strengthen the use of the Bible in the life of the Church. Through contextual reading in groups in order to interpret the texts with a relevance to the life of the people, new methods are to be developed so as to make this Bible reading more effective."***

Final Statement of Bogotá, 8.3.4 and 8.3.4.1

## THE BISHOPS' SYNOD FOR EUROPE

*From 28 November to 14 December 1991, the Bishops' Synod for Europe met in Rome. The agenda involved taking-stock of the present-day situation as it has developed in Europe during the past few years. The delegates wanted to listen to, "What the Spirit has to tell the Churches of Europe" and to search for ways to commence a New Evangelization of this continent.*

*Fr. Feldkämper was invited to participate in this Synod as auditor. The following is a brief summary of Fr. Feldkämper's report in which he renders his observations and impressions of the Synod. The view point is deliberately limited since it focuses primarily on the importance of the Bible in the interventions and the final document of the Synod.*

- 1 -

### "The Bible and the New Evangelization" in the interventions during the plenary sessions of the Synod

At the end of the first week, after nearly 120 interventions by the official delegates and about 30 of them by the representatives from other Churches and invited guests, an Italian bishop complained about the "total negligence of the Bible" by the Synod. However, interventions, in which the Bible was mentioned, were not lacking. Some bishops have tried to interpret the present-day situation in the light of the Bible. For example, upon looking back on the events of 1989 in his country, Bishop Vlk, the Archbishop of Prague, quoted Psalm 126,1, "When the Lord brought the captive home, at first it seemed like a dream; then our mouths filled with laughter and our lips with song."

Other bishops emphasized that one has to read the Bible in order to enable a comprehensive understanding of one's own history.

The participants were also reminded that the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 16,6-10) report about the first steps of the evangelization of Europe. Today like yesterday, we should not fear heavy storms but continue with great courage the task of evangelization (Acts 27,14-26).

Several bishops reported, that recently, numerous faithful from the Eastern European countries asked for Bibles and for Bible introductions.

The Bible has essentially formed the culture of the European countries. Therefore, hopes were expressed that the European Parliament in Strassbourg would introduce the Bible as an official school book in all European schools.

Some interventions stated that the modern methods of evangelization must be inspired by the Bible, especially by the New Testament. The Acts of the Apostles could be drawn upon for establishing a model of evangelization.

The shaping of new Europe must be permeated by the light of the Gospel. Inculturation of the Good News is necessary to achieve this. The Church must first be evangelized in order to proclaim the Gospel credibly to the present. She must understand the Word of God much deeper, namely as a personal path to God. Up until the 15th century, the Bible was approached through the ancient form of the *lectio divina*.

It is noteworthy that many of the bishops present had never heard of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

- 2 -

### "The Bible and Evangelization" in the work of small groups

After the interventions of the first days, the Synod was presented a summary document which was to be discussed in small groups.

The Bible seemed to be short changed in this document. Some participants felt that a meditation on history in the biblical sense was lacking.

Also, it was not underlined sufficiently that the Bible - common for Jews and Christians alike - belongs to the often referred to roots of Europe and that the new evangelization of Europe cannot succeed from its own endeavors, but through the power of the Word of God (Rom 1,16; *DEI VERBUM* 26).

Also, it was striking that in this summary document the term "Reign of God", a summary of the genuine content and heart of the Good News as proclaimed by Jesus, was not at all discussed. The proposal to insert the expression "Reign of God" into one of the headlines in the revised text was declined even in one of the working groups. Some feared that "Reign of God" could be easily misunderstood in some countries. The final document does not contain direct hint at "Reign of God"!

## - 3 -

**"The Bible and the New Evangelization"  
in the Final Document of the Synod**

Since the judgment of the small working groups about the summary document was overwhelmingly negative, no less than 500 amendments were proposed. Thereupon, the redaction committee thoroughly revised the text for the final document. With satisfaction, one can state that the Bible is indeed more present in the final document's last edition than in the previous contributions and discussions.

Here are some excerpts:

- Revelation, Gospel, Word of God - the basis of the new evangelization: „*The new evangelization is not a program for the so-called "restoration" of a Europe of former times, but helps to uncover its Christian roots and to build a more profound civilization, clearly more Christian and therefore, more richly human. This "new evangelization" finds life in the inexhaustible treasury of revelation accomplished once and for all in Jesus Christ. It is not a matter of a "new Gospel". It is called a new evangelization precisely because the Holy Spirit is always bringing forth the newness of the Word of God and continually stirs men and women spiritually (1 Jn, 3,2). Moreover, this evangelization is new because it is not finally linked to any particular civilization, since the Gospel of Jesus Christ can shine forth in all cultures.*" (§ 3).

- Once again in § 5 („Evangelizers and the various ways of new evangelization“), the Word of God is declared the basis and center of the new evangelization: *"In order to become real apostles, we need continual evangelization, through assiduous prayer and meditation on the Word of God, practice of which, under the singular example given to us by the Blessed Virgin Mary, will lead to a personal encounter with the living God. A continual conversion and transformation will come about in us only through the nourishment of the Word of God and the Eucharistic Bread, as well as frequent use of the sacrament of reconciliation; this will enable us to overcome the widespread phenomenon of that subjective reduction of faith, which accepts the word of Christ and of the Church only insofar as it responds to particular needs and expectations of men and women."* (§ 5)

- An important aspect of the new evangelization is inculturation, talked about in chapter 3 ("The meaning of re-evangelizing Europe"): *"The renewal of Europe should start from dialogue with the Gospel. This dialogue, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, must not*

*undermine the clarity of positions held, and at the same time is to be conducted with mutual respect between the disciples of Christ and their sisters and brothers who hold other views. Thus, it will be possible to arrive at a "real encounter between the Word of life and the cultures of Europe". For evangelization has to reach out not only to individuals, but also to cultures. Indeed the evangelization of cultures involves "inculturation". The task of inculturation of the Gospel in the cultural milieu of the new Europe, marked not only by modernity but also by so-called postmodernity, implies a challenge to which we must give a strong response: to achieve it we need the contribution from cultured men and women, as well as from theologians who sincerely think with the Church."* (§ 3)

- Twice the final document speaks explicitly about Sacred Scripture. In the section number 8 ("The special relationship with the Jewish people"), it states: *"The Church certainly esteems the roots which Christianity and the Hebrew people share: Jesus himself founded his Church in the context of the religion of Israel. Mindful of the spiritual heritage, above all Sacred Scripture, which links it with Judaism, the Church in the current European situation intends to work for the blossoming of a new spring in its mutual relationship."* (§ 8)

And in the previous section number 7 ("Close cooperation with other Churches and ecclesial communities"), we read: *"A significant means for fostering ecumenism is the biblical apostolate, given our shared reverence for Sacred Scripture. The same is true of care for people and society, particularly those in need, and specifically in our time the common effort which needs to be made to construct a true community of the peoples of Europe."* (§ 7)

- The document makes very clear statements in section 10 ("The Church's task of constructing a new Europe") and in section 11 ("A Europe open to universal solidarity"). Here the document's address is particularly to the laity, and it reminds us of the most recent Social Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*.

A reference to number 4 of the Second Vatican Council's decree on the laity as well as to number 70 of Pope Paul's VI Apostolic Exhortation *On Evangelization in the Modern World* could have underlined that this genuine task of the apostolate of the laity is solidly rooted in the Word of God and in the use of Sacred Scripture .

Now, it would be very interesting to compare the different statements of the final document of the European Synod with those of the final statement of our Federation in Bogotá!

## FROM THE LIFE OF THE FEDERATION

### Calendar for 1992

- **May 1-2:** Congress of the French Biblical Association "Évangile et Vie"
- **May 14-18:** Annual meeting for the Asia-Oceania subregional coordinators held in Bangkok
- **July 21-31:** Meeting for the Indonesian Biblical Association (Lembaga Biblica Indonesia)
- **Aug 16 - Dec 16:** 6th biblical pastoral course in the Dei Verbum Centre, Nemi (Rome)
- **Oct 2-4:** Meeting for the subregion Southern Europe in Malta
- **Oct 5-7 :** Meeting for the subregion Central Europe in Vienna
- **Oct 23-27:** Meeting for the zonal coordinators of the Federation for Latin America in Quito, Ecuador
- **Nov 8-17:** Biblical pastoral seminar for the region Pacific/Oceania in Samoa
- **Nov 20-26:** 3rd meeting for the Chinese speaking Catholic Biblical Associations in Singapore

### AFRICA

#### Zaire, Lemba: The Life of a Parish Bible Group, a Testimony

Our main concern is to procure the laypeople in our parishes with an easy access to Sacred Scripture, i. e. to get to know the Bible, to live it, and to share it with others according to our Catholic tradition. For this reason the "Bible Circle of Lemba" (BCL) was founded in St. Augustine's parish, Lemba .

#### History

In May 1985, a Bible seminar took place in the St. Augustine community. The community's assistant parish priest and a committed layperson launched this venture. For almost a week, approximately 40 Christian laypeople learned to read and interpret biblical texts.

At the end of the seminar, all participants wished to stay together in order to satisfy their desire to gain a more profound knowledge of the Bible. Thus, the BCL came into being.

According to the example of the first Christians (Acts 2,42-47; 4,32-37), the brothers and sisters also wanted to form a group

and their goals were to foster peace and practice love, further brotherly-sisterly relations, and revive the sharing with others; therefore, making the ideas a normal part of their lives.

In search for a better way to reach their goals, they agreed to meet every Saturday for a two hour Bible study, Bible sharing, or common prayer.

#### Goals

- Bible study, i. e. to read and comprehend the Bible in such a way as to find a purpose to life.
- To interpret the Bible within the community and meditate it in order to find spiritual nourishment therein.
- To help those who do not have the opportunity of belonging to a Catholic Bible study group to find access to fruitful Bible reading.

#### Structure

The BCL is not an organization regulated by any kind of statute. It functions as a service within the parish. The members essentially are Catholic laypeople (married couples and singles; workers, students, etc).

To guarantee a better sequence of these programs, the BCL is directed by a coordinator, and brothers and sisters assist him with secretarial work, documentation, liturgy, and bookkeeping. The coordinator is elected for a two year renewable mandate.

Two Bible specialists are also involved with the BCL and offer their expertise when needed. Additionally, the group also invites specialists from outside to give lectures on several themes desired by the members.

The core group of BCL comprises nine persons.

#### Realization

Among the subjects treated within the group, the following themes establish a confident climate within the Church:

- How to read the Bible as a group?
- How to read the Bible individually?
- The Church doctrine; the Blessed Trinity.
- Youth and the Gospel; the Gospel and my life.
- The divinity of Christ; the devotion of Mary.
- True and false prophets; the Christian Baptism.

In contrast to the conviction of sectarians, the members of BCL have understood that the Catholic Church practices are genuine; the Catholic rites, the instructions, and traditions are solidly founded on the Bible.

The sessions of sharing and praying also creates a spirit of openness among the members.

Bible sharing helps the members shape their everyday life in accordance with the Bible and with their goal to build up a Christian community. This sacred book occupies a privileged place.

The BCL is not tied up with itself. It organizes a day of recollection for their own parish, but also for Catholics of other parishes.

A Divine Word Missionary conducted a *Basic Bible Seminar*. The participants of this seminar joined the BCL.

#### *Difficulties encountered*

The BCL has encountered several difficulties during its growth, notably after the departure of the original animators; the group then felt abandoned. They saw the number of members diminish to 14 and later 10. Some members felt they were satisfied with what they had learned and decided to retire and others preferred to join a prayer group.

In addition to this, the BCL has faced financial problems. The monthly membership fee, which is the only financial support, did not allow the group to fulfill any of its needs (to build up a good documentation, to organize days of retreat, etc).

#### *Perspectives*

In spite of the difficulties due to the growth of the BCL, it has confidence and looks to the future. Its desire is to be an instrument of service for the Christians in the Catholic Church. It also relies on the sharing of experiences from other parishes where Christians manifest the eagerness to gather themselves in Bible groups. Close collaboration and spontaneity are always guaranteed without the need to impose rules of conduct. The group wants to publish, on a regular basis, leaflets which would include prayers, instructions, and testimonies.

In view of a much broader perspective, the BCL proposes to exchange their experiences with other Catholic Bible circles in Zaire and elsewhere.

"Let the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other, and advise each other, in all wisdom" (Col 3,16).

Polydor Tomadia, Bible Circle Lemba

## ASIA / OCEANIA

The government of the People's Republic of China has given permission to the Studium Franciscanum from Hong Kong to print the complete Bible edition in mainland China. Two Chinese priests from that country will participate in a biblical pastoral training course to be held at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila. The course is modeled according to the biblical pastoral course of Nemi (Rome).

## EUROPE

• Bishop Ablondi, President of the Federation, is also one of the vice-presidents of the United Bible Societies. In this capacity, he made a journey to Moscow (Russia), Riga (Latvia), Vilnius (Lithuania), and Llov and Kiew (Ukraine) this year.

• In March 1992, the delegates of the Central European Biblical Associations (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mitteleuropäischer Bibelwerke /AMB/) met in Innsbruck, Austria to revise their constitutions and redefine their goals in view of the changed situation in the Eastern European countries. One of the main goals of the AMB is to answer the needs of the biblical pastoral domain in these countries.

• Germany and Austria: Celebrated "The Year with the Bible 1992".

• Spain: After several years of work, the Catholic Biblical Association *Casa de la Biblia* has published a completely revised edition of the Bible in Spanish. Fifty people participated in the first national biblical pastoral congress.

## BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE THROUGH BIBLE PUBLISHING

*The biblical apostolate begins with providing "suitable and correct translations" (DV 22) of the sacred texts. The Constitution DEI VERBUM holds the bishops first and foremost responsible for this ministry of the Word to the faithful. Such suitable and correct translations should additionally provide the faithful with necessary and fully adequate explanations so that they can profitably read the holy books to enable the Word to penetrate their spirit. (DV 25)*

*Preparing Bible translations, which are up-to-date, easy to read, profitable to the spirit, and at the same time attractive, is an enormous enterprise which not every institution is able to achieve. Those who render this service to different regions of the same language deserve the greatest recognition. Three versions recently published by members of the Federation are briefly presented in the following:*

• **The Catholic Study Bible, New American Bible.** Oxford University Press, New York, 1990

The Catholic Study Bible, published by the Catholic Theological Union's (CTU) Biblical Department in Chicago, under the direction of Fr. Donald Senior, combines a modern, easily understood text with annotations made by some of the best known biblical scholars from the United States. The text, notes, and introductions were taken from *The New American Bible* which is the result of many years of intensive work directed by Fr. Stephan Hartdegen, OFM. The Federation owes immense gratitude to him.

The *Catholic Study Bible* includes more than 600 pages of information on the structure and significance of the different books, the history of the people of God, the key themes in biblical scholarship, the historical development of the Bible, and the reception by the Catholic Church. Furthermore, this version contains abounding suggestions for the liturgy, for individual and community Bible reading, and Bible reading by priests and laity. Thus, it meets the Council's demand "to effectively provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the People of God" (DV 23).

### • La Biblia, Casa da la Biblia, Madrid, 1991

This Spanish Bible edition was totally revised and augmented with ample notes and introductions. The new edition was prepared by the Casa de la Biblia, approved by the Spanish Bishops' Conference, and jointly published by four publishing houses.

The editors objective was to follow the recommendations of the Constitution *DEI VERBUM*, to foster more frequent Bible reading among the faithful, and to concede the importance of the Bible in the life of the Church and of every Christian. The translation strives to apply the Council recommendation to provide a "suitable and correct translation" (DV 22) by combining the progress of modern biblical scholarship with the contributions of linguistics; furthermore, to offer introductions and annotations which may prove useful for communarian as well as individual Bible reading. It is the fruit resulting from nine years of work.

The starting point for the present edition was the first edition based on the original languages and published by a team of the *Casa de la Biblia* under the direction of Evarist Martín Nieto. Santiago Guijarro and all the co-workers of the *Casa de la Biblia* deserve high recognition for this publication.

### • Sonntagsbibel (Sunday Bible), Bozen (Athesia), Innsbruck-Wien (Tyrolia), and Würzburg (Echter), 1991, 616 pages, DM 98,00

This Bible was designed especially for families and small communities who strive to revitalize the religious character of Sunday and want to dedicate some moments on this day to deepen their Christian faith. The publication of the *Sunday Bible* was prepared by a team under the leadership of Bishop Wilhelm Egger of Bolzano (Bozen-Brixen), South Tyrolia, Italy, where the Bible Centre Neustift, member of our Federation, animates the biblical pastoral ministry.

The structure of the *Sunday Bible* makes the dynamics of the *lectio divina* its own: "We listen to the Word" (reading of a Bible passage); "We meditate" (to confront one's life with what has been read); and "We pray" (prayer in response to these two realities). This *Sunday Bible* having a beautiful apparel, serves very well as a gift for family celebrations and is made up of three parts: 1. the Sunday gospels in the three cycles; 2. the other Sunday pericopies in a systematic order; and 3. *Home or Family Devotions*, dedicated for families and small communities, based on the Bible. This Bible was very well received. In fact, within a few weeks, in South Tyrolia, the first edition was sold out.

## BOOKS

### • Pierre Gibert, *Petite histoire de l'exégèse biblique* (Brief History of Biblical Exegesis), collection Lire la Bible, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1992

In a certain Catholic milieu, it is good form to tune down the efforts made in critical biblical science since the last centuries. In this small volume, Pierre Gibert serenely responds to these detractors. Retracing briefly the history of Christian Bible reading, he demonstrates that critical exegesis, initiated in the 17th century and sanctioned by the encyclical letter *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pope Pius XII, finds itself in profound conformity with the fundamental dogma of Christianity: the incarnation. It is henceforth an obliging progress which cannot be waived.

### • Robert Charles Hill, *Breaking the Bread of the Word: Principles of Teaching Scripture*. Pontifical Biblical Institut, Rome 1991

This work is destined to draw the attention to the urgency to prepare competent ministers of the Word. The author is a professor at the University of Sydney in Australia.

The intention of the author is not only to stimulate consciousness of this urgency, but also to signal certain general deficits in the biblical formation of ministers, especially of priests, and to propose theoretical principles and practical orientations to change the teaching at biblical institutes which is overdue. If Scripture professors continue to comprehend their mission as being limited to only preparing their students to *comprehend* the sacred text and not to *communicate* the biblical message, their attitude is clearly against the mind and intention of the Council and will have serious negative repercussions in the entire field of the pastoral ministry; however, without a doubt, the deficit is due to the fact that the

courses of such centers of biblical education have not been renewed.

The urgency of change is rooted in the fact that the conciliar comprehension of the Church, as communion (*koinonía*), characterized by God's offer of life to men and women in the Church and in the Scriptures, today is more clearly understood as the objective of the entire pastoral ministry. This service must consist in leading the faithful to a life-giving encounter with the Word of God. "Faith comes from what is preached, and what is preached comes from the Word of Christ" (Rom 10,17). This insight should cause a renewal of the curriculum at those institutes to which the biblical education of future pastoral co-workers is entrusted (major seminaries, theological faculties, institutes of continuing formation, etc). The author, however, focuses his attention primarily on biblical institutes, given their key role in the theological education of the ministers of the Word.

Under which criteria should the study program's change be performed? The fundamental criterium is to assure that the ministers, who are to communicate the Word and to introduce others to participate in the divine life offered through the Scriptures, should not remain satisfied only with knowing the Word. They must also know the theological principles which govern their ministry as well as the practical guidelines for its execution so that the Word does not return "empty" (cf. Is 55,11).

The book is divided into two parts. The first part has five chapters and explains the general principles of the ministry: to know not only the Bible, but also the situation of those who will be receiving the message. With regard to this, one must avoid treating children as adults and vice versa. The ministry must be faithful to the biblical message but also consider the recipients' circumstances. Paul, who communicated the message to Jews and Gentiles under different forms, could serve as model of "inculturation". The ministry must also take into account the situation of the different communities and adapt the message accordingly. Therefore, it is necessary that future ministers be trained to plan their work, to

provide it with motivation, to stipulate the objectives, to elaborate the strategies, and to evaluate the results. The educators should assist them in all these areas using their experience in other fields.

The second part places the ministry of the Word into the center of the teaching activity and underlines, above all, the fact that in teaching the Scripture there exists an incontestable problem of communication. The professors often do not know how to render their knowledge to others. They overlook that it is not only a question of passing on information about the Bible but also to cause change in the audience. Consequently, one has to carefully distinguish between not only what is appropriate for adults and children, but also what is appropriate for particular groups. Using the example of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian, the author proposes communication schemes and possible programs for particular groups. He suggests utilizing existing teaching instruments and techniques for explaining the text and context or for imparting pedagogical facilities for those who are interested. The last chapter deals with the evaluation of the communication process. What should be evaluated, why, and how?

In the conclusion, to which a draft of a formation program is attached, the author admits that all change to a curriculum is difficult. He insists, nonetheless, that the key element to change must be new comprehension within the ministry of the Word based on the Second Vatican Council and its pastoral implications. The efficiency of this ministry, however, does not depend upon the techniques used. The spirituality animating such a ministry is decisive (cf. 2 Tim 3, 15-17), that is the consciousness that growth in faith is its final goal.

According to St. Chrysostome, "Reading the Scriptures means to open the heavens". The ministers of the Word must do everything possible to assure that a piece of heaven will be opened to the faithful when they come into contact with the Word!

• **Libros al servicio de la Biblia** (Book in the service of the Bible), *Cuadernos bíblicos* 69, Verbo Divino, Estella, Spain

In the collection *Cuadernos bíblicos* (Biblical Booklets), Verbo Divino publishers offer their readers the Spanish translation of the corresponding series *Cahiers Évangile* (Booklets to the Gospel), published by the French Biblical Association *Évangile et Vie*. Parallel to no. 69 of the *Cahiers Évangile*, which lists all the French titles concerning the Bible, no. 69 of the *Cuadernos bíblicos* presents a list of biblically related books in Spanish available as either originals or translations. The list contains: Bible editions, dictionaries and encyclopedias, Bible literature, Bible introductions, introductions and commentaries to different books of the Old and New Testament, and works on biblical theology. As indicated in the Cahier presentation, this list is only a selective bibliography, not an exhaustive one. The selection criterium is useful publication for Bible studies. This publication, fruit of a long and tedious work, renders an immense service to the Spanish speaking world, particularly to seminarians, students at theological centers, and biblical animators.

• **Ronald Moñoz, The God of Christians**, Orbis Books, New York 1990, 192 pages

This volume, by the famous Chilean theologian, is the ninth volume of the series *Theology and Liberation* published by Orbis Books. According to the author, this book was written "with sweat, under tears and joy", for his goal was to attract attention to the problem of how God is portrayed in the Bible and how this concept is interpreted by people in Latin America today. The author

consequently demands a change of the image of God as Christians cherish it. In the Bible, like in Latin America, the challenge is to prevent not the temptation to atheism, as is the case in the rich/wealthy countries, but the temptation to idolatry. What people fight against in the Bible and in Latin America, is not superstition and primitive religion of the ordinary people, but the idolatry of the privileged educated groups who use God more or less intentionally to legitimize their unjustly acquired wealth, privileges, and right of predominance. This idolatry is the belief that God does not see the exploitation of the defenseless, the assassination of the innocent, and that he does not hear the cry of the oppressed. Although, in Latin America, the phenomenon of secularization is not unknown, the true crisis of faith is not the result of atheism, but above all, results from the adoration of false gods which have taken the place of the living and true God. That is why the theological discussion here must concentrate not only on the issue whether the people are believers or atheists, but above all, on the quest of which God they believe and which God they reject. In contrast to theological treatises on *De Deo Uno et Trino* (The One and Triune God) which strive to prove the existence of God from a philosophical viewpoint or to offer exact formulations about the Blessed Trinity, the author insists that modern theology, solidly based on the Scriptures, must occupy a place to dust the true features of the God of Israel (Old Testament) and the God of Christians (New Testament) in order to overcome the existing idolatry.

• **R. S. Sugirthajah (editor), Voices from the Margin. Interpreting the Bible in the Third World**. Orbis Books, 1991, 454 pages

This volume is a collection of essays from African, Asian, and Latin American theologians with twofold intention:

1. To underline the orientation of theological reflection and exegetical efforts of those who live their Christian faith at the periphery of society in contradistinction to the vision of traditional theologians and exegetes who rarely perceive the experience of hunger, sickness, and exploitation of the poor.
2. To draw the attention to the marginalization of African, Asian, Latin American, Afro-American, and other professors by the academic circles governing Europe and the United States. An illustration for this is *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London 1990) which does not register a single name of any African, Asian, or Latin American exegete and mentions only one single work of a non-European, non-American author.

This work tries to iron out the imbalance by presenting exegetical discourses "from the margins" whether they be done by academically qualified professors or by Christians without academic formation (for example the farmers of Solentiname). The role of the Bible is placed into the centre along with its use, methods, and interpretation principles.

The theme of the book is also the ambiguity implied with the concept "Third World" which came into play during the Cold War in the 50's and was applied to the countries of the Southern hemisphere with strong political connotations. Today the term signifies the nations that are deprived of the power and self-determination to devise their own future. Thus, the term today is synonymous with "oppressed", "a new theological expression which is applied to the People of God" (Aloysius Pieris, Sri Lanka). It is not only a geographical indication, but a description of any nation that falls victim to suffering and oppression. These essays are not examples demonstrating that the hermeneutics of "Third World" shows signs of maturity; but that they are finally given an opportunity to speak for themselves.