

Catholic Biblical Federation

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Bulletin

*Sei
verbum*

**An "Intimate Reading"
of the Bible** (pg. 4-6)

**Spiritual Scripture
Reading and Interior
Prayer: Under the Pa-
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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).

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1993

One hundred years ago, Pope Leo XIII published the first pontifical document consecrated to the Bible, *Providentissimus Deus*.

Fifty years ago, Pope Pius XII gave new impulse to Catholic exegesis by the encyclical letter, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

Editorial

There are various ways to receive nourishment from the Word of God. Two proposals which are very different from each other are provided in this issue. The first is an article from France that favors an "intimate reading of the Bible". It begins with some simple directives and receives its inspiration from the *lectio divina* (pg 4-6). The second is an article from Germany that introduces spiritual reading of the Bible and appeals to the arrangement of the "Jesus-Prayer" (pg 7-8, 13). We would sincerely appreciate your comments on these papers. The sharing and evaluating of experiences within biblical animation is a service that the Federation members may render with the help of the Bulletin.

We thank you for your responses to the questionnaire which was sent by the Federation's General Secretary in Stuttgart on "the Bible and Laity". Fr. Florencio Galindo, member of the editorial team, has started to compile these responses and offers in this issue a synopsis on "The Americas" (pg 10-12). He will continue this work, and we will provide the same in subsequent issues on the other regions of the Federation.

Don't forget our appeal in the last issue of the Bulletin concerning the 25th anniversary of the Federation. We would like to receive your suggestions very soon in order to make this celebration an occasion that will help strengthen the biblical pastoral ministry in the Church.

When you receive BULLETIN 25, the year 1993 has already opened its door. The entire team of the General Secretary wishes you a prosperous and inspirational biblical year. For 1993, we offer you the following short parable from Africa:

*On a steep and rocky path
I encountered a small girl
who carried on her back, her little brother.*



*"My child", I said to her,
"you carry a heavy burden."*

*She looked at me and said:
"I carry not a heavy burden.
I carry my brother!"*

*I remained speechless.
The words of this child
sank deep into my heart.*

*When people's troubles seem to weigh me down
to a point that I nearly lose heart,
the words of the child come back to me:
"I carry not a heavy burden,
I carry my brother!"*

Marc SEVIN

An "Intimate Reading" of the Bible

Christians cannot keep their faith alive without nourishing it at the table of the Body of Christ and of the Word; therefore, Bible reading is vital for the Church and for the faithful who make up the Church. The liturgy, especially the Sunday liturgy, is one of the privileged places in the Church for Bible reading; however, there exist other places and moments for Bible reading which should not be neglected, for example Scripture reading takes place in numerous movements and assemblies, in the family, and in different Bible groups. According to an ancient tradition which has found new vitality today, the Church asks the faithful to read the Scriptures both on a personal and regular basis.

Focusing on the latter perspective, here is extended an invitation to partake in a satisfying and "intimate reading" of the Bible within a climate of prayer. It is not a question here of studying the Bible which is something that is accomplished elsewhere. It is a question of suggesting directions which favor a personal and regular reading of the Bible. For the catechist, this practice, even if it does not produce direct results, is an excellent means for preparing for his work of education in the faith and at the same time allows him to strengthen his own faith.

Practical guidelines for "Intimate Reading"

The following is a simple proposal which may be discussed, adapted, revised, or enriched.

1. Where to begin in the Bible? Which texts to read first?

There are many possibilities. It is each person's prerogative to choose from the following suggestions in accordance with personal taste, need, and situation.

- Take the books of the Bible in sequence and read every day (or twice or three times a week) three consecutive chapters beginning with the book of Genesis. If preferred read one or two consecutive chapters at a time instead of three.
- Begin the daily reading with the New Testament, and then proceed with the Old Testament.
- Read every day one (or two) chapters of the Old Testament and one (or two) chapters of the New. It is not necessary to follow absolutely the sequence of the Bible (i.e. starting with the Pentateuch, then proceeding with the Historical Books and so on). One may begin with the first book of the Pentateuch, then proceed with the first book of The Prophets, then the first book from the Wisdom Books, then a gospel, then a letter of Paul, then return to the next book of the Pentateuch and so on.

- Use the liturgical texts for each day (using a magazine e.g. "God's Word Today").

- Begin by choosing books that appear to be easier and leave the more difficult books like Leviticus, Numbers, Daniel, Revelation for later.

- Focus for one year on the prophets and occasionally review throughout the year the books you have already covered during that same year.

2. Which Bible to use?

You can use the one that you already own; however, the New Jerusalem version is one of the better editions for studying. Nevertheless, all Catholic and interconfessional Bibles will serve the same purpose. As regards the liturgical texts, the translation used in the liturgy is preferable.

During the "intimate reading", one should strive to ignore the titles, subtitles, and commentary notes in the Bible and focus exclusively on the biblical text. Only refer to these notes at a later time if deemed necessary.

3. How much time to spend on this "intimate reading"?

There are no rules in this matter. The ideal is to maintain a regular and consistent time, for example 15 to 30 minutes every day; however, the time is flexible and should fit each person's life style.

4. How to perform this "intimate reading"

Here again, there are no fixed rules or patterns for this "intimate reading"; however, here is a suggestion:

- A short time for prayer

Begin the "intimate reading" with a short prayer of petition and praise to signify clearly that this undertaking will be done in faith and that the testimony of faith that the text proclaims will be heard.

- The reading

Read the chosen text slowly and audibly (not silently in your head). Reading the text out loud is precious because it brings another dimension to the reading.

The reading should be done without interruption. Read up to the very end of the text before asking questions.

- A short meditation

Start the meditation by asking yourself the following questions:

- * What has struck me most in this passage? Which word or expression?

- * In my opinion, What firm belief(s) is (are) expressed in the passage?

- A rereading of the passage

Read the text once more, then ask yourself:

- * How is the text in line with any of the fundamental convictions stated in the Bible as a whole? (see below)
- * Are there words, images, and personalities in the text that can help me to express my own convictions of faith, that which is the Good News for me?
- * When applying a text from the Old Testament, ask: how could Jesus have prayed with this text? How is the text linked or not linked with the preaching of Jesus?
- * When applying a text of the New Testament, ask: how does the text express faith in Christ the Lord?

- Conclude with prayer

Conclude with a short prayer and use the words, images, and expressions from the text that have particularly attracted your attention.

Be careful that the reading does not become a chore. Throughout the course of time, it should become "satisfying". This proposed guide should be followed with flexibility or, in other words, do not become enslaved by it. The beginning may appear to be a painful practice similar to a beginner who learns to play the piano, but through practice the beginner soon succeeds in performing small pieces with pleasure. The same concept applies here. The first daily readings are difficult, but again through practice you will begin to perform the reading with pleasure. Your experiences in reading the text will allow you to improve, and perhaps simplify the process of "intimate reading" of the Bible.

Convictions to keep in mind

To avoid speculation, one has to hold some convictions and keep them in mind during the "intimate reading".

Those who have worked with computers know that a "system" is needed in order for the machine to function properly. Once the "system" has been installed, i.e. the letter types, the texts, the tables, the designs, the computer can be operated. Although the system does not appear on the screen, it is definitely inside the machine, and without it nothing works.

Reading the Bible works in a similar way. The Bible has a kind of "system" which is also definitely present, even though it does not appear in the reading. If the "system" is ignored then the Bible reading becomes most often insignificant. What is this "system"? It is a network of fundamental convictions that the entire Bible is based on. Here is a list (though not an exhaustive one) of these convictions:

- * **God is unique. He is the Totally-Other.** There is no other god besides God. He has taken the initiative to make himself known to a people, for the good of all nations.
- * **God wants happiness of all men and women.** This is what the most important themes of the Bible signify, themes like alliance, salvation, and liberation.
- * **God offers universal salvation.** For us it is difficult to live out this universality, even though everything is measured in comparison to it.

* **The love of God cannot be separated from the love of the brothers and sisters.**

* **Jesus Christ makes God known to us.** He is the Word of God.

* **The Lord God calls us to faith.**

This "system" gives every passage its significance; therefore, every passage of the Bible is linked with it. It is not possible that a text can contradict this "system". If it seems to do so, then the text must be correctly interpreted by other texts.

Advice to follow

Before attempting the venture of "intimate reading", here are two brief words of advice that must be followed:

* *Enter into the faith of the Church.*

The Bible has been edited and handed on within the communities of believers. Each Christian has received the Bible from the community, from the Church. This fact must never be forgotten.

Because of this fact, each Christian enters into the faith of the Church when he/she carries out this "intimate reading". For the moment one leaves behind personal difficulties of faith and is concerned only with the faith of the Church.

"Intimate reading" supposes that one goes beyond one's personal difficulties of faith, which are legitimate. One makes an act of confidence in those communities of believers, of both the Old and the New Testament, who have forged and passed on these sacred texts. Why not think also of those believers in the centuries to come to whom we, in our turn, pass on the the Holy Scriptures?

* *Search first for the testimony of faith of those who have written and handed on the Bible.*

The Bible is a testimony of faith, written by the faithful for the faithful. It is not a book of anecdotes about the past. It is "salvation history" which instructs us about salvation and history, that is to say about faith. The first question to ask from the Bible is "What is the testimony of faith?"; therefore, our first reaction to the reading should be to search for the testimony of faith which shines through in the biblical texts. "Intimate reading" of the Bible cannot be carried out without first searching for the testimony of faith.

It is a question, therefore, of arousing spiritual curiosity and not cultural curiosity. The latter is legitimate; however, it must not encumber the mind during "intimate reading".

Traps to avoid

There are many traps to fall into during an "intimate reading" of the Bible. Be aware of the following and avoid them if possible.

* *Making the Bible a book of moral formulas or "recipes"*

The most common trap is to search in the Bible for precise directions on how to conduct daily life. To fall into this trap is not really so serious if it happens within the spirit of the Church especially if these formulas are in harmony with the gospel.

Nonetheless it would be truly a shame to reduce the Bible to nothing else but a recipe book. Furthermore, one point to bear in mind is that the Bible was composed already two thousand years ago or more and there is a lot of uncertainty as to whether or not the Bible provides formulas adaptable for today's life and applicable to each member of the faithful! The Bible is not a manual for good conduct, but a record of the Good News from God for men and women alike.

It's useless during the "intimate reading" to ask, How can I apply the biblical text to my everyday life? It is more useful to search for the faith which is expressed in the text and which can inspire the faith of the Church today.

** Taking one passage of the Bible as "Gospel Word"*

The entire Bible reveals the Good News that God wants to communicate to us, his Word. The Good News of God is not locked up in any one biblical word, passage, or book of the Bible. The Good News reveals itself progressively to the faithful through reading and meditating upon the entire Bible.

Each passage must be enlightened or even correctly defined by other passages and, in the end, by the entire Bible.

The Bible itself is comprised of different books as if to tell us not to stay always with the same books, the same passages, the same sentences.

** "Placing limits on the Word of God"*

This trap is often slipped into during the reading, and it cannot be escaped from easily. The Bible is indeed the Word of God, and it remains necessary to reflect on what this exactly means. The Bible is not a Word-of-God as a self-existing entity that one can cut up with a knife! The Word of God escapes us always. It is not a slave that is submissive to our demands. So one must be prudent when using expressions like: "God speaks to me in the passage...", "Let's listen to what the Spirit has to say to us...". These expressions are true but at the same time false.

God is close and at the same time totally other. These truths are paradoxical, but it is crucial to hold on to both of them. If God speaks to us through the Bible, which we know to be true, one must add straight away that his Word surpasses us infinitely. The Word of God is not "fossilized". This Word always remains mysterious and does not reveal itself solely through reading the Bible. It is discovered also through our response, our way of life, and our relationship with others. It plays a mysterious role; therefore, discovering the true Word of God is never ending.

Let us not be taken in by our words and our prayers when we say that God speaks to us or that the Spirit tells us this or that. Our formulas are always floundering. God will never be at our disposal.

There is a certain risk of idolatry in wanting to harness or capture the Word of God!

** Believing that the biblical texts revive the events they relate*

This is the classic snare which demands from the Bible what it cannot give. The Bible has never been conceived

nor was it intended as the work of a historian who would attempt to revive the past. What the Bible tells us has little regard to the past centuries and everything that happened in the small section of the Near East where the Israelites lived. The biblical writings offer no more than minute traces of the past. Let us leave it to the historians to reconstruct this ancient past.

The texts of the Bible, above all, transmit the convictions of those who have recorded the accounts. They are the testimony of those whose convictions have been the link with the past, those who have modified them, and finally those who have officially settled the "canon" of the Scriptures, or in other words the last editors of the Bible.

Let us not read the Bible as historians, but as believers.

** Wandering outside the Text*

Another common trap is that the text makes one think of something else so that one forgets the text itself. To do this is really not so bad if you realize that you're doing it; however, during the "intimate reading" it's better to curb your imagination and make yourself a very faithful servant of the text itself.

The story about the calling of Abraham (Genesis 12) offers a classical example in this regard. Many readers firmly believe that the story portrays a lesson about Abraham's faith although the text does not whisper one single word about it! The text speaks of the promise of a land and posterity and likewise about the blessing promised by God from which everybody is to profit: "... All the tribes of the earth shall bless themselves by you." (Gn 12:3) It is true that this escape from the text is excusable since it is customary in the Christian tradition which follows in this the Jewish tradition and the author of the epistle to the Hebrews 11,8!

In any case, at first it is better to keep as close as possible to the text. This is not easy. It's a question of will power and asceticism, two qualities essential for "intimate reading".

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*I shall not blot their names
out of the book of life (Rv 3:5)*

† **Fr. Jerko Marijan Fucák**

The members of the Catholic Biblical Federation lament the death of Fr. Jerko Marijan Fucák, OFM, Zagreb, Croatia. He died on November 2, 1992 at the age of 60 and during the 35th year of his priesthood. After studying in Jerusalem and Rome, he became a professor of New Testament studies at the Theological Faculty of Zagreb and was involved for many years in the biblical-pastoral ministry in Croatia. In 1990, during the 4th Plenary Assembly of the Federation in Bogotá, Colombia he was elected to represent Europe on the Executive Committee. We came to know him as a very amiable person with a deep love for the Word of God and a great zeal to make the Scriptures easily accessible to the people in post-communist Europe.

May the Lord himself be his eternal reward.

Spiritual Scripture Reading and Interior Prayer

Under the Patronage of the Jesus Prayer

A Practical Introduction

by Heinz Schürmann

The following preliminary *Introduction* presents three meditative reflections that support the practical method I have sketched out.

First of all, WORD OF GOD is primarily and truly the person of Jesus, the eternal WORD of the Father, "born of the virgin Mary...who was crucified, died and was buried...who rose from the dead...and is seated at the right hand of the Father." In this eternal WORD, God expresses himself throughout history (Vat.II, DV 2-4).

This eternal and historical WORD of God verbalizes itself in the word of "Scripture" - a collection of 72 writings in the Old and New Testament. Thus, Sacred Scripture is Word of God in a secondary and derived sense (Vat. II, DV 24).

Sacred Scripture becomes the present "living word" (*viva vox*) of God because it is through Scripture and in the Holy Spirit that the risen Lord is being proclaimed and made present as THE WORD OF GOD; therefore, the Word of God addresses us not only when Scripture is read publicly in the liturgical community, but also whenever, that which has been "already heard" is heard again in a community or private "spiritual Scripture reading".

Secondly, "spiritual Scripture reading" is necessarily prayerful reading; spiritual reading combined with interior prayer. Sacred Scripture is truly understood only in the Holy Spirit, where there is an encounter with Christ who is THE WORD, or, in other words, a fellowship with him through the proclaimed word of Scripture. Such an encounter is dialogue, a prayer process of word and response. As Jesus is Word of the Father and at the same time response to the Father, "spiritual Scripture reading" or prayerful reading is likewise a oneness of word and response. In its historical origin, "spiritual reading" and "interior prayer" were treated as an undivided process. The desert Fathers of the ancient Church and the monasteries always devoted, and continue to devote, much time every day to such prayerful reading (*lectio divina*), precisely treating the process as one and intending that all work of the day be the work of unceasing "(Jesus)Prayer": *Ora (laborans) et labora (orans)*!

In modern times, spiritual life has also entered ever more - thank God! - the everyday life of both religious communities and individual Christians. However, Christians who have professional lives necessarily have

to divide the time they devote to daily prayerful reading; "spiritual reading" usually in the morning and "interior prayer" in the evening (or vice versa). It would seem more beneficial to move the "exercises" closer together similar to the practice before.

Thirdly, "spiritual life" is simply a friendship with Jesus in which God comes near to us. According to the experiences particularly of the Eastern Churches, the *Jesus Prayer* can be a great help in our everyday life to continue and deepen our personal encounters with Jesus during the liturgy and the sacraments of the Church. As the person Jesus is for us THE WORD of God, the name JESUS is likewise the "sacrament" of his presence. In the Jesus Prayer, Jesus THE WORD addresses us and comes near to us; and we, in addressing him by his name "Jesus", approach him as "thou". The name Jesus comprises in spiritual profoundness every word of Scripture, but also in entirety our response as thou-word. Thus the Jesus prayer offers itself as eminent help both for "spiritual reading" and "interior prayer". The Jesus prayer sustains and recapitulates the prayerful reading of Scripture.

Now, I would like to propose the promised "*practical method*" that applies prayerful Scripture reading to the Jesus Prayer.

1. In the past, we have often made the suggestion to catechumens and converts to follow closely for a whole year the liturgy of the Church, which would truly make the year the "year of the Lord" during which the event of Christ would be unfolded and we would be introduced to the mystery of Christ. As a result every Christian would seem to gain something from such an "encounter" with the Lord sometime during their life; however, every baptized person still needs to become a believer (cf. Mk 16,16a) and to repent (Acts 2,38) in order to become a Christian. Something similar to the "year of the Lord" is being offered to the novices, candidates for the priesthood who undergo an "introductory course". This is not only meant to help them in their studies (Vat. II, *Optatam Totius* 14), but what is suggested to these "beginners" (Vat. II, *Optatam Totius* 16 on "daily Scripture reading and Scripture meditation of students of theology") is to devote themselves to "spiritual reading" every day and to dedicate a fixed time to "interior prayer", which would result in their serving every striving Christian in good stead (Vat. II, *Dei Verbum* 25; cf. also *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 13.18; *Perfectae Caritatis* 6).

In its "lectionary for the weekdays of the year", the Church presents, in our annual cycle, a daily gospel reading. During the liturgical seasons the daily gospel reading is taken mainly from the gospel according to John. During the 34 weeks of "ordinary time" - the time after the Christmas season and the Easter season - the readings are taken, as a rule, from the gospels according to Mark, Matthew, and Luke (wherein occasional repetitions and the synoptic parallels can only be beneficial for the praying reader). I would like to propose to

students of theology, particularly to novices, and to all Christian faithful who want to live and exercise "a year of encounter with Jesus" to take into their daily lives for a whole year the gospel readings of the lectionary as "words of life" (Jn 6,68b).

2. It is advisable to those who devote time for prayer in the morning to prepare for prayer the evening before with a short "spiritual reading". Experience has taught us that a "spiritual reading" carried over into sleep can greatly inspire "interior prayer" in the morning.

To prepare for interior prayer with an evening spiritual reading, the following method has proven to be worthy.⁽¹⁾

Begin by opening the Gospel of the day (as found in the daily missal or indicated in many liturgical calendars), placing a notebook and a pen next to the text, and looking up to the risen Lord who is also, according to Teilhard de Chardin, our "exalted I" and let his light shine upon you: "In the beginning was the Word...the true light, that enlightens everyone..." (Jn 1,1.9) While looking up to him, pray the Jesus Prayer,

"Lord Jesus Christ (Son of God)
have mercy on me"

until the light has become an "interior light" in your own heart. In this light you will be able to see "...the glory (of God) on the face of Christ." (2 Co 4,6).

After this preliminary exercise of prayer, slowly read the gospel of the day. Do this with a great desire to become acquainted with him, to see his face as the glory of God, to encounter him as THE WORD of the Father *in, under, and behind* his deeds and words, gestures and attitudes as narrated in the text. Do this always while looking up to him as he who is, *above* the text, as the Lord exalted in the glory and the love of God who becomes light for you and who wants to address you here and now in a living manner as THE WORD.

Whatever in-sight and lucid understanding you receive from the text, should become a response of adoration. For that purpose, your response could be formulated as a clause in the Jesus Prayer - either expressing adoration (by extending the first line) or petition (by taking up the second line), and added as a third invocation to the Jesus Prayer. For example, depending on the reading for the day:

Lord Jesus Christ (Son of God),
have mercy on me.
Born of the virgin Mary,
have mercy on me.

Lord Jesus Christ,
have mercy on me.
You call us into the kingdom of the Father,
have mercy on me.

Lord Jesus Christ,
have mercy on me.
Obedient unto death on the cross,
have mercy on me.

(1) I have often introduced this method to students of theology and Sisters, especially novices. Many of them gave me a copy of their collection of the five meditation clauses which had helped them unlock the gospel of the day for prayer. These copies have been published in a book which may provide modes to help others achieve the same.

Lord Jesus Christ,
have mercy on me.
You are risen from the dead,
have mercy on me.

Lord Jesus Christ,
have mercy on me.
You send us the Spirit of truth,
have mercy on me.

After practicing this exercise for a few evenings (and after writing a few drafts), it will take little effort to polish the final drafts and start a personal collection of five meditation clauses per pericope -either of adoration or petition whichever the case may be.⁽²⁾ (It is not absolutely necessary that the prayer clauses follow the sequence of the Scripture text; often it is more beneficial to focus on the main point of the pericope and surround it with prayer.) This "exercise" with pen and paper is indeed a searching meditation process.

At the end of our spiritual reading and our seeking and finding we should ask ourselves: What five clauses or petitions have affected me the most? Which ones are the most important to me? Now, you can insert each clause or petition in the Jesus prayer and embrace these invocations while you sleep. Here(with), they will cleanse the interior of your soul, the depths and the heights of the soul and will be on your lips when you awake.

3. The most suitable time for "interior prayer" is during the early hours of the morning, unless your daily schedule requires another time.

The masters of the spiritual life suggest the following before the hour of prayer: to recall the most important points from the evening before and determine which ones have lingered on in the soul. During this time, stay with the same material as read the evening before and do not change to a new "subject" for prayer; for it is not to "know many things but to taste them lovingly which satisfies the soul." ⁽³⁾

The carrying out of "interior prayer" has a sequence (however, your "interior master" may change the sequence spontaneously). It has been advised to begin interior prayer with a second reading of the text from the daily gospel and allow yourself to be addressed by the text (lectio = reading), or rather allow yourself to be addressed by him who meets you in the text as the WORD OF GOD. The evening before, the act of reading the Scripture was combined with the act of *meditating* the scene of the story or *pondering* the words of Jesus (meditatio = meditation) and, now we can quickly recall what struck us as being important because we jotted down our reflections. The Holy Spirit left an "impression" and filled us with "light" and "consolation". We should stay with this in loving prayer for as long as it takes for the soul to find "light" and "consolation". Perhaps the "impressions" which we formulated as prayer clauses, make

(cont. on pg. 13)

(2) A "prayer diary" can serve many purposes: above all for personal prayer on the same liturgical day in another year; for pastoral use during meditation after the proclamation of the Gospel (instead of a weekday homily); for thanksgiving after communion (read slowly with pauses); for prayer when closing a bible group session.

(3) A much quoted sentence of St. Ignatius, cf. *Spiritual Exercises, Introductory observations 2* (Ed. J. Puhl S.J.).

Follow-up to the Bogotá Assembly

The Second Vatican Council recognizes that the laity plays an active part in the three-fold mission of Christ: to instruct, to sanctify, and to administer. The laity's contribution to the proclamation of the Word of God is so necessary that without it the pastors often become ineffective. In the Acts of the Apostles, 18:18-26 personalities from among the laity are mentioned such as Aquila and Priscilla. During Paul's absence, Aquila and Priscilla who were entrusted with the gospel gave direction to a shepherd who was ill-prepared for his ministry. The "rehabilitation" of the laity by the Council obliges the Federation "to promote the biblical training of lay leaders" (Final Statement of Bangalore 3.3.7), and recognizes that "Lay people should be given a privileged place in this formation (for the biblical apostolate)... This formation should place great emphasis on both the content and the process." (Final Statement of Bogotá 8.3.3.2). After the revaluation of Sacred Scripture in view of the New Evangelization, the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá insisted that the laity in a special way must have greater access to Sacred Scripture (cf Final Statement of Bogotá 6.8). How does the Federation promote the implementation of this recommendation? In February, 1992 the General Secretary of the Federation sent a questionnaire to all the Federation members regarding this issue. We now present a synthesis of the responses the Federation received from "The Americas" which is preceded by the following article that addresses the instructional function of lay people in the Church.

THE PARTICIPATION OF THE LAITY IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

According to the 1917 Code Canon Law (CIC), functions that entail the care of souls could not be exercised validly without priestly ordination, (CIC 1917, Can. 145 par. 1). This meant that the laity were excluded.

But now we owe thanks to the Second Vatican Council for promoting the dignity of the laity because of their baptism and for promoting the role which is proper to them. This increased awareness of the responsibilities the baptized have for the mission of the Church has opened up a number of church positions and responsibilities to lay persons. Again the church authority recognizes that among the gifts of God, some are found in abundance in the laity. But the Church still teaches that all power in the Church is sacred and comes from Christ {Lumen Gentium (LG) n 18}, and the understood channel through which Christ transmits this power is the sacrament of orders. It is through priestly ordination that the person is so configured to Christ and starts acting in the person of Christ in matters of teaching, sanctifying, and governing (Can. 1008) because the Holy Spirit given during ordination grants him the right to participate in the functions of Christ, the Supreme Pastor. Lay persons

may participate in these ecclesiastical functions in accordance with the norm of the law (Can. 228 par. 1), except for certain specific duties that strictly require the ordained priest to perform, such as, the consecration of the Eucharist, absolution of sins, the anointing of the sick, and the exercise of jurisdictional magisterium. As a whole, the participation of the laity in the ecclesiastical functions is conformable with conciliar teaching (LG nn. 32, 33, 37). Now the question is: What functions may be entrusted to lay persons? A comprehensive list is not possible to give because many offices are left at the discretion of the diocesan bishop. Some are related to diocesan curia (Can. 496), parish ministry (Can. 516, par 2; 517, par 2), and various teaching functions. The most common teaching functions of the laity are the following:

1. Preaching during Liturgical Celebrations

It is greatly emphasized that those who share the sacrament of orders with the bishops, namely, presbyters and deacons have the faculty of preaching anywhere in the world in virtue of their sacramental ordination unless prohibited by the competent ordinary (Can. 764). In addition, they can call the lay members to cooperate in the exercise of the ministry of the Word in virtue of their reception of the sacraments of initiation and of commitment (LG n. 35, Can. 759). This practice does not make any distinction between men and women.

In special cases, lay persons can be permitted to exercise the ministry of the Word (Can. 766).

When the necessity of the Church warrants it and when ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can perform certain duties of these offices, namely, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion in accordance with the prescriptions of law (Can. 230 par 3).

The following conditions should be met to justify the laity's participation in the teaching function: circumstances must demand the intervention of the lay persons, that is, in case of necessity; the ordinary minister must be unavailable for example because of a shortage of priests, the priests are prevented from performing the function due to persecution, or the mission has already been entrusted to the lay person. Again the lay person must gain permission, or the consent of competent authority must be presumed. If these conditions are not verified, the lay person who offers such services acts unlawfully if not invalidly.

In addition, the expression 'can... exercise the ministry of the Word' must be elaborated. Beyond doubt, it refers to the preaching of the laity at least in this context, but it does not refer merely to the catechetical instructions given during the liturgical celebration which is legitimately assigned to the sacred ministers. It requires that

a person must be well-trained in the Scriptures and theology and also be skilled in communication which are all indispensable for successful preaching. Under these circumstances the Christian education and theological formation become a right to the laymen so that they can be well equipped for the ministry (Can. 229 par. 1). The permission of the lay persons to preach during the liturgical functions is seen as a great change from the 1917 Code which had forbidden it (CIC 1917, Can. 1342 par. 2). But the restriction is still in fact present although very mildly because the laymen cannot preach without permission or presumed consent of the competent authority.

2. Lay Ministries and Teaching

Paul VI addresses the teaching office of the layman in his *Motu Proprio* 'Ministeria Quaedam' (cf *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS) 64, 1972, 532). First it is important to note that lay ministries are not limited to the lector and the acolyte. *Ministeria Quaedam* permits the Bishops' Conference to request that the laity be installed in other ministries if the local situation deems it necessary, such as, the offices of exorcist, of catechist, and the like (AAS 64, 1972, 531). Secondly, three categories have been developed within the lay ministries (Can. 230. par 1-3): the permanent lay ministers who are liturgically and officially installed; the temporal or delegated lay ministers who include lay persons exercising these ministries in a stable manner but without being formally installed. (For instance, we have lay persons who do the reading in liturgical celebrations and others serve at the altar.); and the lay ministers who perform certain liturgical services when the ordinary ministers are unable to do so; however, the local ecclesiastical authority must determine when services can be rendered.

The lector is the one who is mainly associated with the teaching function. A few of his functions are: to read the Word of God in the liturgical assembly, to prepare the faithful who are temporarily appointed to read the Scriptures in liturgical celebrations (cf AAS 64, 1972, 532), to educate children and adults in the true faith, and to announce the message of salvation to those who are ignorant of it. It is a pity to see that the Church recognizes only the lector and acolyte as liturgically installed lay ministers, and that it does not make any mention of the liturgical installation for catechists in spite of the appreciation of their genuinely ministerial role in the Christian community (Ad Gentes n. 17).

3. The Catechists

Catechists are Christian persons trained for and dedicated to the task of explaining and expounding the Word of God. Their task is distinguished from a simple lay task because of the stability of its particular service to the Church and of the reception of the Church's mandate through the Bishop to fulfill a specific service, namely, catechesis. They collaborate with the priests in the ministry of the Word and help bring the Good News to all the faithful in every part of the parish. Furthermore, they organize liturgical celebrations and works of charity.

Because of the nature of their tasks, they are encouraged to receive formation in Bible, liturgy, catechetical method, and pastoral practice. They are required to set a good example to others by being outstanding in their Christian life style.

There is now a tendency to replace catechists with school teachers for teaching religion; however, it is still necessary that the catechists be trained. This training is easily accessible because many diocesan catechetical centers are underutilized. We are living in a questioning and challenging world. We cannot leave these school teachers to face these challenges alone. We still need many catechists with full knowledge, self-confidence, conviction, availability, and creativity who will be able to bring development into religion. We must make the best of our diocesan centers.

Fr. David Mubirigi, Sri Lanka

Origin of responses

- National Biblical Associations in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay (8)
- Diocesan or interdiocesan centers in Quilmes, Argentina; Sao Paulo, Brazil; Medellin, Colombia; Mexico; and Trinidad, West Indies (5)
- Religious congregations in Editorial Guadalupe, Buenos Aires and Obra de Cooperadores Parroquiales, Rosario, Argentina; Hermanas Bethlemitas, Centro Bíblico "La Palabra", and Centro Mariano Monfortiano in Bogotá, Colombia; Hogar Bíblico, Popayan, Columbia; Difusora Bíblica of the Capuchin Friars in Mexico; and Centro Bíblico Verbo Divino in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Mexico (11)
- Institutes and Major Seminaries i.e. Major Seminary, Cúcuta, Columbia; Instituto de Sagrada Escritura, Mexico; Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, USA; Catholic Bible Institute, Trinidad, West Indies (4)
- Foundations i.e. "Palabra de Vida", Buenos Aires, Argentina and the Adult Biblical Interdependent Learning, Tucson, Arizona, USA (2)

Summary of the Responses

The responses offer information about the biblical apostolate activities that lay people are involved in, their motivations, the difficulties they are confronted with the most, and the fruits from their accomplishments all of which deserve mention.

1. Activities

New Consciousness among the Trained Laity

The responses clearly reveal a new trend in the Church of Latin America: the growing conviction that every Christian is co-responsible for the proclamation of the gospel. The clergy should not be the only ones who are conscious of the need to become knowledgeable of the Bible, which is the primary source for proclamation, but the laypeople or in other words the "basis" of the Church should also be. This revaluation of the laity and the concern for their biblical formation are the fruits of the

new concept of the Church which has guided the majority of the Council Fathers; however, in Latin America, steps had already been taken in this direction before the Council made its recommendation. Mgr. John Straubinger, a German priest, played a special role in this direction. He was born in the diocese of Cologne in 1883 and founded the Catholic Biblical Association in Germany as well as the Keppler publishing house in Stuttgart for the purpose of distributing Bibles and biblical materials. Because of the Nazi regime, he had to flee to Latin America. In the northern part of Argentina, he was accepted by a bishop of the Divine Word Missionaries, and in 1938, he founded Latin America's first biblical movement and biblical magazine. Convinced that Sacred Scripture was the strength of God which saves everybody who believes (Rom 1,16), he made it his primary goal to help lay people, religious education teachers, and the responsible leaders of the Catholic Action to become more familiar with the Word of God.

Other initiatives in Latin America intending to make lay people more familiar with the Bible resulted from a similar idealism and stemmed from a concern to make lay people active participants of evangelization. For example, biblical seminars and programs are offered, even at university level and biblical journeys, publications, Bible centers, and institutes are also available above all in the southern part of Latin America as well as Colombia, Mexico, Canada, and the United States. This "intellectual" access to the Bible never loses its importance because it is recognized as the basis for the entire biblical apostolate by everyone involved.

Basic Community Bible reading

Another way for lay people to come into contact with the Bible is through community Bible reading. This practice originated in basic Christian communities which were formed among the poor and uneducated population through the initiatives of bishops, priests, and religious. Because the communities depend on the reflection and action of laypeople, they occupy a privileged place within each community and in some cases hold responsible leadership positions. This is the new way to understand and live the Church. This "rediscovery" of the Bible has earmarked the renewal movement that has characterized the Church in Latin America since the 1960's.

It may be stated without exaggeration that in Latin America the laity's contact with the Bible has grown primarily due to this type of environment. Wherever basic communities have flourished, the Bible is the principal means of evangelization. The people join together to read it, absorb it, share it, and then pray with it. They discuss their daily problems in the light of the Bible and find courage to forgive their enemies which allows them to look into the future with hope.

A new kind of ecumenical cooperation has also resulted from these basic communities, and its criterion is the solidarity with the poor according to the example of Christ. The formation of seminarians is changing in the dioceses where this concept of Church is prevalent e.g. theological training is based on the study of Scripture,

the seminarians are introduced to the theory and practice of the biblical pastoral ministry, and the lectures are even available to lay people. Exegesis prepares both seminarians and lay people for the pastoral ministry. The Bible has become the foundation of spirituality and pastoral work, and this fact has contributed to the "rehabilitation" of the laity.

Practically all the responses to the questionnaires stressed this new motivation for the biblical apostolate and provided a list of activities that foster the popular Bible reading which in many cases is also ecumenical (e.g. ways and means to simplify the acquisition of a Bible and to introduce and deepen a relationship with the Bible which could be shaped into a Bible week or Bible month). The responses affirmed that nourishment for spirituality is drawn from the Bible. Because the basic communities have overcome a certain naivete extant which in some cases existed in the beginning of this approach to the Bible, today different methods are discussed that always insist on fidelity to the text, but at the same time, relativity of expression of God's Word in the Bible. Special themes are intensified through dialogue and are shown through the different dimensions of the entire Scripture as a "testimony". The aims of biblical reflection are to give the people in Latin America something new and useful to master daily life.

The educated learn from the uneducated

This kind of Bible work is not only an initiative of the basic communities, but the commissions of episcopal conferences also accept this criterion for orientation. In many cases it can be said that these commissions are even prepared to learn from simple Christians who have participated in Bible circles and Bible groups and have gained great experience in the basic Christian communities. This "consciousness" which begins at the base and moves to the top has contributed to the fact that the invitation of the Pope and the bishops for the new evangelization recognizes the central place of the Bible more than ever before. During the first 500 years of evangelization, above all since the reformation, the Bible was not relevant whereas now during the new era of evangelization the Catholics' critical approach to the Bible has become the norm in all pastoral work, and this is already the case in many places in Latin America.

Conclusion

In spite of the previously described progress, the Latin American people are, without a doubt, conscious that the biblical pastoral ministry is a long process consisting of in-depth reflections, experiences, misunderstandings, evaluations, and corrections; therefore, they try time and time again to evaluate the past in order to set the stage for the future. Some of the responses pointed out that the Final Statement of Bogotá plays a leading role in the orientation of this process.

2. Difficulties

a. from the laity themselves (group members, animators, volunteer collaborators).

1) The weight of a religious paternalism and individualism and not enough critical formation has left the laity

with a clerical mentality or tendency to expect everything from the clergy. This is why laypeople don't see the importance of the Scriptures.

2) There are prejudices about the use of the Bible which is considered a "Protestant" book and one that is difficult to comprehend, and tendencies to remain under the influence of fundamentalistic sects.

3) Laypeople have in common with many priests and bishops a certain resistance to relate Bible reading with reality which often results in simplified talk about politicization and manipulation of the Bible.

4) Laypeople generally have little time to educate themselves and poverty is a hindrance for them to acquire the Bible, religious documents, and study materials. Because the documents use technical language alien to the general public, the people tend not to deal thoroughly with the theological part of these materials and are content with practical directives.

5) The committed laypeople who are always called for pastoral work become exhausted and abandon the function.

b. from the hierarchy (bishops, priests, religious)

1) Generally, the interest for the biblical pastoral ministry is accentuated by the directives of the Church; therefore, the priests and religious organize biblical courses and workshops upon their own initiative. In spite of the written directives, a large majority of the hierarchy has not yet overcome the lack of confidence in respect to the Bible. This idea has spread since the Council of Trent. A sense of self-sufficiency and traditional clerical tendency mark the relations between the pastors and the laity and condemn the latter to passivity. Because of this, the biblical pastoral ministry has suffered.

2) As we have said in respect to the laypeople, there also remains a general resistance in the clergy to relate Bible reading with reality. There is also even a resistance to relate Bible reading with the historical, social, economical, and political circumstances from which the Bible itself was written. Many fear a historical-social reading of the Bible which could in many cases result in an obstructed approach to the Bible.

3) The function of the biblical pastoral ministry within the diocesan pastoral service remains to be a foreign element. Many priests ask themselves the reasons why and the objectives for such a pastoral ministry and consider the Sunday homily and the preparation of the sacraments sufficient. Even in countries where Bible month is favored, only a few bishops show explicit interest for the biblical pastoral ministry. Some episcopal conferences have not even published a single document that could give an impulse to the biblical pastoral ministry.

4) The responses revealed the following reasons for the hierarchy's attitude: a) the lack of an adequate formation in the major seminaries and of continuing formation during their ministry. In this domain some religious seem to be in a better position than the diocesan clergy; however, at least one report taunted the religious that they were not integrated enough in the diocesan pastoral ministry. b) self-sufficiency and fear to relate the Bible to the concrete problems of the people. c) the lack of time

the pastors have to study the documents and pastoral directives which results in their acting solely in accordance with their own intuition. d) in many cases the insignificance of the laity does not come from the clergy, but comes from the laypeople themselves who have an elitist mentality and refuse to accept pastoral directives coming from other laypeople.

c. from the organization itself:

The greatest difficulty is the lack of financial resources and personnel who are specialized in the biblical pastoral ministry. The latter deficiency stems from the fact that even today people are not conscious of the central place of the Scriptures in the life of the Church. This is something that needs time to develop. One hopes that the biblical pastoral planning of each diocese is established to the extent that it will be also possible to awaken a consciousness and a responsibility of laypeople in regards to this aspect of pastoral ministry. One also hopes that it will overcome a certain fundamentalistic tendency which still dominates many Catholics, laypeople as well as clergy. Furthermore, the responses also indicate a certain isolation of the biblical pastoral commissions in relation to other pastoral organizations in the dioceses.

3. Positive and Encouraging Aspects

There are not only difficulties. Now turn your attention to the following positive and encouraging aspects drawn from the responses:

a. A general hunger for the Word of God exists among the faithful.

b. Laypeople show great interest in assuming the ministry of biblical promotor and animator in the community, and they participate with great joy in the formation activities. Once the laypeople are trained, they work with great dedication.

c. Everyone experiences the confirmed power of the Word. It gives courage to announce the Reign of God and to renounce evil; it leads us to a greater acceptance of laypeople within the Church; it awakens a new missionary spirit in the communities.

d. The Federation which is recognized as a helpful organization and the *La Palabra Hoy* (The Word Today) as a useful review are both means of learning about new experiences and sharing them with others. There remains to be a great desire to receive more information and to hear about new methods.

e. Formation courses and the diffusion of biblical instruments are always received with much interest. For example, the weekend courses in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, where the participants even if they are very poor pay their own expenses and accept conditions such as sleeping on the floor. Some parishes are willing to provide financial support with the intention that the participant will organize the biblical pastoral ministry in their own community. For this reason, the biblical schools that train animators for the parishes have great success.

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(cont. from pag. 8)

our soul light and put it on wings (4) so that from such an "affective" prayer, an I-thou "dialogue" with the Lord is possible (locutio = speaking with God). This *dialogue* becomes evermore simple and reduces itself to a silent saying "Thou". After all of this, one impression perhaps may linger on so strongly that it binds the loving, contemplative soul in a simple gaze (contemplatio = loving contemplation). Now is the time to abide lovingly with whatever presents, offers, and gives itself.

Everyone should pray in the manner that their "interior master" leads: meditation, (affective) dialogue, loving-contemplation.

4. Sometimes, as soon as the "interior prayer" becomes deeper and better, it becomes dry, empty, and dark. If this happens, the following suggestions, used either independently or collectively, may be helpful: take the rosary into your hand, insert five formulated or given clauses or petitions into the Jesus prayer, and pray them each ten times like the five decades of the rosary; formulate just one of the clauses or petitions, insert it into the Jesus prayer, and repeat it fifty or more times; perhaps at the end, recite only the Jesus prayer and embrace the formulated or given clause in your heart. Perhaps the rosary glides out of your hand, and it is at this moment that you realize that the ever repeated name of "Jesus" in your heart is sufficient. Now, the Jesus prayer has become the unceasing prayer of the heart. The person who prays thus has discovered the truth: the name "Jesus" comprises in spiritual profoundness the entire event and mystery of Christ.

The "rosary of love" with its three times five decades (according to Jn 21:15-19) presents a model of how each gospel (or Scripture) text can be made part of the Jesus prayer and thus it can become existentially appropriated. It can be prayed in the following manner:

Introduction (holding the crucifix of the rosary - instead of reciting the creed):

Breathe on me, breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love the things you love,
And do what you would do.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with you I have one will,
To live and to endure.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
My soul with grace refine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with your fire divine.

After this, pray as usual, the Our Father and the three Hail Mary's with the petition for an increase of faith, hope, and charity.

Before each of the 15 decades pray the following (instead of the Our Father):

My Lord and my God,
Take everything from me,
That separates me from thee.

(4) The "meditatio" builds a bridge from reading to prayer, but does not quite reach prayer as in "speaking with God" or as in the "lifting of the soul to God".

My Lord and my God,
Give everything to me,
That draws me close to thee.

My Lord and my God
Take myself from me,
And give myself entirely to thee.

Then pray the Jesus prayer with the inserted prayer clause (instead of 10 Hail Mary's) repeating the last line 10 times:

Lord Jesus Christ (Son of God),
Have mercy on me (us).
Lord, I know, that you love me (us),
Have mercy on me (us). (10 times)

At the end of the decade pray as usual, Glory to the Father...

1. Lord, I know, that you love me...
2. Lord, I know, that you love me notwithstanding...
3. Lord, I know, that you love me still...
4. Lord, I know, that you love me without cause...
5. Lord, I know, that you love me to the end...
1. Lord, you know, that I love you...
2. Lord, you know, that I love you notwithstanding...
3. Lord, you know, that I love you still...
4. Lord, you know, that I love you again...
5. Lord, you know, that I want to love you to the end...
1. Lord, I know, you are love...
2. Lord, I know, your love binds me...
3. Lord, I know, your love guides me...
4. Lord, I want to follow you with love...
5. Lord, keep me in your love....

In *closing*, the Jesus prayer is not only the key to "spiritual" Scripture reading, but likewise the key to understand Scripture competently, even if it is guided by the demands of scientific, historical, and linguistic research. Also in this context, THE WORD should remain in the background as a regulating idea; a guiding light, even if it can be determined as a "prejudgment" of the work of critical research but not in a constitutive way. If Jesus interpreted and continues to interpret THE-WORD-of-God-in-person as he "...who is nearest to the Father's heart..." (Jn 1:18), and if Scripture is the Word of God only in a derived sense (cf. above introduction), then the hermeneutical consequences of this have to be heeded. The WORD OF GOD is the interpreter of the word of Scripture as God's word.

"... I hope that the biblical movement may continue to offer its beneficial contribution in Latin America and that Sacred Scripture may increasingly nourish the life of the faithful; for this to happen, it is necessary for pastoral workers to become ever more deeply imbued with the word of God, living it and handing it on to others in fidelity, which means that 'no less attention must be devoted to the content and the unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith.'" (DEI VERBUM 12)

Inaugural address by Pope John Paul II at the Fourth General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Santo Domingo, 12 October 1992

Life of the Federation

AFRICA

Since 1991, Fr. Laurent Naré has been in charge of the Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM). This Catholic biblical center, located in Nairobi, Kenya, was founded in 1981 by the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM).

According to the constitution, BICAM serves the Episcopal member Conferences of SECAM, as well as dioceses and institutions of the Church. The center provides them with information about the biblical apostolate and secures for them the services of experts for the purpose of diffusing ideas and realizing biblical-pastoral projects such as those which are defined by the bishops.

Even though SECAM holds the sole responsibility, BICAM holds the competence in the fields of translation, production, and distribution of Sacred Scripture in Africa, Madagascar, and the isles.

BICAM also works in liaison with the Catholic Biblical Federation and functions as the regional center for Africa.

During the first ten years of its existence, BICAM has extended its activity to a large portion of the African English speaking countries and only to a small portion of the French and Portuguese speaking countries.

The Federation and BICAM, on their own levels, wish to see the structures for the biblical apostolate develop in the local Churches; however, the following question is often asked: "Wouldn't it perhaps be better to work with the already existing structures and develop a more fruitful collaboration between them than to develop new ones?" BICAM's intention is to work in regions where no specific structures for the biblical apostolate exist, but collaborate with other apostolate structures like the Pontifical Mission Societies. These societies carry the biblical apostolate to the different regions and help strengthen the regions' goals of conveying Christian formation. Fr. Naré initiated an appeal to the Pontifical Mission Societies' representatives which has started a working relationship in view of materializing projects and studying strategies and using the results as means to spread the Good News on the African continent and the adjacent islands.

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ASIA / OCEANIA

Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand are the zones that form the Catholic Biblical Federation subregion South-East Asia. Sr. Mary Clara Antoni, ij, the subregional coordinator, resides in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Her report provides you with a picture of the

subregion's biblical-pastoral ministry two years after the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá.

Indonesia

Indonesia sets an example how a minority Church can become a dynamism thanks to the biblical-pastoral ministry. The manifold activities are offered throughout the entire country and are mainly carried out by laypeople and basic communities. The number of basic communities has increased tremendously since 1975. The activities include the reunion of the Teachers' Association of Atma Jaya University, Bible Sunday which has been celebrated since 1973 with cooperation from the Indonesian Bible Society, and an annual Bible month which is now a national program. Also, a strong emphasis is placed on the training of lectors and animators throughout the country. The "Pukat" (Catholic businessmen's association) organizes weekly "Emmaus Bible study sessions" in Jakarta.

A six month Bible course (two sessions per week from 5 to 8 hours in the evening) organized by the Catholic Biblical Association of Indonesia (Lembaga Biblika Indonesia, (LBI)) and held in Jakarta since 1989 deserves special recognition. This course is geared towards all persons who wish to prepare for "answering to the needs of the Church", without distinguishing between sex, age, or living conditions. Its scope is threefold: Bible study (introduction and interpretation), spirituality (growth of spiritual life), and communication (qualification/aptitude for preaching and animating biblical study courses).

A detailed report about the biblical apostolate that covers the past years in Indonesia can be found in "Indonesian Gospel", published by LBI. The LBI is the principle motor of all the group initiatives and also publishes in coordination with the pastoral center in Ende (Flores) study materials for these groups. The majority of Indonesian Catholics come into contact with the Bible through the Sunday Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations but also through the publication of biblical commentaries and other materials that help the LBI and pastoral centers of Jakarta and of Flores perform their tasks.

From April 12 to 19, 1992 Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, Secretary General of the Federation joined the subregional coordinator Sr. Mary Clara in Indonesia to coordinate with LBI. This visit was especially important because Fr. Feldkämper gave new impulse to the biblical apostolate in this region. He also participated in the South-East Indonesia delegates' meeting in Flores which was the highlight of his visit. There was fruitful sharing among the priests, religious and laity, and the delegates went through the program of a Nemi-style course and remodeled it for the regional course scheduled for July 1993 in Maumere (Ledalero). Approximately 40 participants have already registered for the course.

Malaysia

The "Regional Biblical Commission" in Malaysia exists under the Bishops' conference of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. Archbishop Peter Chung is the president and Fr. John Ha is the secretary. The members are priests who represent each diocese of the confer-

ence. In January 1992, the Commission held its second meeting, and the following points were drawn from that encounter:

1. Because the programs for 1992 were already underway, Bible Sunday and Bible week will be officially introduced by the Bishops' conference in July 1993 (the second Sunday and the following week). In 1993, on-going formation will be offered to priests and lay animators in three phases: instructing, studying, and sharing. It will conclude with a Bible congress of delegates from all the parishes.

One of the programs for 1992 was Bible Year which was launched by the archdiocese of Kuching on the eve of Pentecost 1992, and it will continue until Trinity Sunday 1993. The theme is: "Renew us by your Word" and it will follow the gospel according to Mark. Every Catholic family was invited to receive one of the many Bible editions now available including Iban, Biataha Bidayuh, Mandarin, Bahasa Malaysia, and Bahasa Indonesia and enthrone it in their home. During this event, numerous encounters centered around the Bible and were organized for the benefit of the faithful. The archbishop, during the opening ceremony, expressed his hope that the Bible year would bring personal renewal as well as renewal of the whole archdiocese.

2. For the Bible Sunday celebration, Scripture lecturers of the regional seminaries will collaborate in accordance with their specific field of competence.

3. There is a need to make a simple basic Bible study course available. There exists already an advanced course "The Journey", originating from Canada, and an intermediary correspondence course by Fr. J. Wijngaards.

4. The constitution *DEI VERBUM* will be distributed in a simple format with diagrams in color together with the Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá which is considered essential for the local Church to reflect upon current regional problems.

5. In Malaysia, Bible sharing has not been well accepted by Catholics. Archbishop Chung pointed out that it "could be due to the Malaysian character or, for that matter, the overall Asian character of being generally reluctant to share their inner thoughts and experiences with others."

6. The Regional Biblical Commission offers biblical aids to bishops and priests that they can use themselves or to provide guidance for the faithful. It was agreed that each diocese should adopt the aims and objectives and adapt them accordingly.

7. The conference must search for subsidies to facilitate Catholic Bible translation beginning with the New Testament in the most common language, Bahasa Malaysia. An order has been placed with the Studium Franciscanum in Hong Kong for the Chinese edition of the Bible.

8. The precise relationship between the Regional Biblical Commission and the coordination of the Federation in the subregion was brought to light. The coordinator explained the nature of the Federation and function of the coordination and presented some activities which could be materialized at the regional level.

9. The meeting of scripture professors from the major seminaries took place on August 12, 1992 in Singapore in preparation for the third Regional Biblical Commission meeting.

Philippines

The biblical centers in the Philippines, John Paul I, St. Jerome, Mater Dei, Institute for Lay Spirituality, Living the Word, Paul VI, Verbum Dei, and the National Catholic Association are involved in a variety of formation programs in the biblical apostolate at diocesan, regional, national, and international levels oriented towards making the Word of God - the Bible - a book of life, the norm of life for all. The coordinator has received the following information on the work of two main centers:

* John Paul I Biblical Center in Vigan

At diocesan and regional levels, the John Paul I Biblical Center (JPIBC) emphasizes through meetings, planning, evaluations, workshops, and weekly seminars the implementation of the Federation's goals. The Center also plans the annual national workshop for the biblical apostolate. Priority is given to the development of the youth biblical apostolate. For this purpose, conferences and seminars on a national level have been set up for the neighboring dioceses and migrant workers in Hong Kong. The JPIBC also gives special importance to the formation of laity who continue to meet great obstacles due to traditional clericalism; however, their spontaneous cooperation in the parishes, in spite of all the difficulties provides great reason for hope. Additionally, the quarterly newsletter "Word Alive" carries information about biblical apostolate and continues to enhance the formation programs.

* The Institute for Lay Spirituality in Cebu

Directed by a team of three laypeople and one priest, the Institute offers Basic Bible Seminars (BBS), trainer's training seminars, Bible Facilitators' Seminars (BFS), awareness workshops, and retreats in Cebu and in other dioceses in the country. It thus reaches more than 120 parishes and collaborates with numerous laypeople as well as some priests. The Institute's basic conviction is that Bible distribution is meaningless unless it is accompanied by proper training on how to read, study, pray, and live the Bible. The BBS and BFS help facilitators to promote Bible sharing and sustain Christian communities. Bishops and priests are invited to diocesan and regional workshops and receive an introduction on the seminar content and motivation to lead and work with the lay workers in the biblical apostolate. These workshops enable them to see for themselves how the laity respond to the Word of God and at the same time to learn how to listen to the laity's problems and difficulties.

Not only does the Institute lack qualified personnel who are sufficiently trained to answer the numerous requests received, but it also lacks the economic support and the interest of the bishops and priests. It should also be mentioned that the Institute experiences difficulty of some priests' willingness to work as a team with the laity. Overall, the Institute admires the people's creativity in celebrating Bible Sunday and Bible week and appreciates their generous financial contributions in sustaining the biblical apostolate.

Thailand

The great impulse for the biblical apostolate comes from the biblical-pastoral course of Lumko which last

year attracted 46 participants from nine Asian countries. They all discovered a new meaning of the Church and appreciated above all the methods of Bible sharing.

Sr. Clara Antoni is confident to affirm that in the entire sub-region of South-East Asia the laypeople are becoming increasingly active members of the prophetic Church. The information above underlines above all the urgent need, expressed by all concerned, for the Church to be more oriented towards its laypeople and less clerical in its mentality. Information: Sr. Mary Clara Antoni, ij, Jalan Bukit Nanas - 50250, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

India

A Bible Weekend in Secunderabad

In a country as large as India, the biblical pastoral ministry cannot develop without private initiative. The Sisters of St. Paul in Bombay, members of the Federation, have organized in a small village, which was founded two years ago, a biblical weekend in collaboration with the village laypeople. A week prior, the Sisters warmly befriended and invited the families living in and around the colony to the encounter of spiritual renewal. Friday evening, as the sun went down, the weekend began with a procession to the church, the song "Walking with the Lord", and then the enthronement of the Bible. A sister welcomed the people and invited them to participate for the entire weekend. The priest presiding over the Eucharist presented the Bible as the "story of God's love for mankind", God's love-letter that he hoped would be read.

The celebrations and discussions of the second day centered around the Bible as the living Word of God, valid for all times, presenting the life, temptations, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus in relation to our everyday lives. The sisters displayed a variety of Bibles and books adapted for various age groups to provide spiritual food for thought. During the Sunday Eucharist, the priest preached with deep conviction of the "power of the written Word of God which ought to become part and parcel of one's life", for when we read the Bible daily, a personal communication with God himself will take place, allowing the Word to transform our lives in and through the Holy Spirit. In the concluding ceremony, the sisters thanked the participants for the generosity and collaboration. Convinced of the significant importance of the Word of God during this decade of evangelization, they invited each one to continue reading the Word of God and thus experience the transforming power of his love.

Information: Information Bulletin (April 1992) of the Sisters of St. Paul, Bombay, India

Indonesia

The National Consultation of Diocesan Delegates for the biblical-pastoral ministry in Indonesia ended with the meeting on July 25, 1992 in Yogyakarta. Delegates from Irian Jaya and Sumatra were also present. The theme of the consultation was "The New Evangelization and the Biblical Apostolate" which followed the theme for the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá. Even though concrete results were not reached, there was great insistence that catechesis must in fact have the Bible as its basis and the social situation of the population must also be taken into

account. Consequently the social analysis is considered a great influence in the actual work of Bible groups. Without doubt, the Bible does not provide the answers to all social problems, but it does give inspiration, direction, depth, and resilience to deepen the vision of the actual reality in the light of the Word of God.

The sharing among the groups permitted the finding of "seven signs of hope" which everybody has recognized as the stimuli for the New Evangelization born from the biblical apostolate. These signs may be shared in a modern perspective for the New Evangelization as suggested by the Pope.

new fervor

1. The sense of community and equality experienced in Bible sharing gives birth to a new model of the Church;
2. Bible sharing gives rise to a new level of spirituality;
3. In Bible sharing, social problems are viewed in the light of the Bible thus God is experienced anew as **Abba**, source of life, **Dhabar**, companion in the struggle, and **Ruah**, new spirit of life.

new method

4. Bible sharing among victims of the actual situation develops both a new personal and social awareness of the situation;
5. Bible sharing involves life as a whole and not simply the "religious aspect".

new expression

6. Each and every expression of the Word is renewed when the Bible, rather than the catechism etc., becomes the basis of the Church's proclamation.
7. A new meaning is given to proclamation when "ordinary layfolk" become apostles of the Bible, rather than reserving proclamation for the clergy and religious orders.

Information: St. Paul's Seminary, Ledalero, Maumere 86152, Flores, NTT, Indonesia

National Biblical Meeting and Bible Month 1992

The Lembaga Biblica Indonesia (LBI) focused on two projects in 1992: the national encounter of the diocesan delegates for the biblical apostolate with exegetes was held in July, and a Bible month celebration was held in September. The national encounter's objective was to take stock of the biblical apostolate on a national level and from an ecumenical view point.

Reflecting on the past biblical apostolate and on its present difficulties, the diocesan delegates tried to find ways to prepare the march towards the third millennium. Exegetes from various denominations were called upon to deepen the biblical foundation of our mission today. Conscious that the mission consists in transforming one's own life, together with the community, to become attractive signs of God's love for the people and thus to render a service to the country, the exegetes must give direction as to which paths should be taken.

"The message of Paul" or more specifically the life in the Spirit according to the letter to the Galatians was the theme for Bible month 1992. A five week program was organized as follows:

- First week: Christian life between faith and law (custom), (Ga 1:6-10 and 2, 11-21, in the context of Ga 1:1 -2,21);

- Second week: Building the Christian faith in Christ (Ga 3:1-14 or 3,15-29, in the context of Ga 3:1-5,26);
- Third week: Life as children of God (Ga 4:1-11);
- Fourth week: Freedom of the children of God (Ga 5:16-26);
- Fifth week: The new creation (Ga 6:1-18).

One of the exegetes prepared a short commentary on Galatians for the benefit of this Bible month. LBI was solely responsible for the overall organization of Bible month, but the seminary of Yogyakarta specifically took care of the youth's needs and another institute took care of the basic communities' needs. All of this was preceeded by intensive work by different groups, especially by seminarians, to enable them to be involved in the life of the biblical apostolate as soon as possible.

Information: Fr. St. Sarwamong, LBI, Jalan Kramat Raya 134, Jakarta 10430, Indonesia.

Diocese of Atambua: Biblical Festival

Diocese of Atambua has distinguished itself during the last years by its dynamic participation in the Bible month, and this year the festival marked a record high in the biblical apostolate. Thirteen parishes participated, and each one sent approximately 50 delegates (adults, youth, and children). The reunion and the liturgies took place in a large tent constructed through common efforts using indigenous materials. The local pastoral center adapted the themes proposed by LBI, and the celebration ended with the traditional three day biblical festival.

In the forenoon of the first day, the participants traveled in trucks and buses to the designated place. Upon their arrival, the bishop and the parish priests officially and solemnly welcomed the delegates with dancers and drummers. One of the local elders gave a formal welcome and declared the proceedings open. The entire community felt honored to receive so many guests. In the festival tent, there was a short address that officially began the celebration. The Eucharistic celebration which included elements of inculturation like dances, music, chants, and decorations was presided over by the bishop. In the homily, the bishop referred to the Bible as the source of life, Jesus Christ; and he asked that these days should be used to strengthen the faith and to promote Bible reading. The mayor and the district president likewise in their addresses expressed joy about the gathering of so many parish communities for the sake of invigorating and encouraging each other in the faith and learning from one another.

In the evening, the program continued with biblical performances such as biblical drama, songs, dances, etc. In preparation for these performances, each parish received a portion of the Letter to the Romans 12 months before the event and were asked to prepare their performances accordingly. The performances lasted till midnight, and it was most interesting to see how the biblical themes could be portrayed in so many different ways.

The following two days began with adoration in the early morning and were dedicated to conferences, lectures with subsequent discussions, and other informative activities for different groups. The Bible quiz was especially lively, a deanary cup was awarded to the

winning group. On the last day additional guests arrived for the solemn closing. The host parish for next year's festival was disclosed by handing a large Bible to the respective parish priest. The lasting impression was that the love for the Word of God has grown and likewise the influence of the biblical pastoral ministry in the life of each parish.

Information: Sr. Paulana Deeken, SSps, Susteran Atambua 85711, Timor NTT, Indonesia

Pakistan

Biblical Apostolate despite Low Literacy

Pakistan together with India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh form the Federation's subregion, South-Asia, and the Pakistan Bishops' Conference has been a member of the Federation since 1975. Bible Sunday, celebrated a week before Lent, has become a national event in the life of the Catholic Church.

Eighty five percent (85%) of the Catholic Christians - most of whom are illiterate - live in villages. Cardinal Joseph Cordeiro, archbishop of Karachi, has demanded that the biblical apostolate be strengthened and gave a reminder that the Word of God is a living word, that it is Good News and that the Good News is not to be kept to oneself but to be believed and shared with others, including those who cannot read. To reach the faithful in the rural areas, a basic Bible course was organized by the catechetical center in Karachi to train leaders in the biblical pastoral ministry for this purpose and to be held February 1992. The Cardinal appealed to parents and teachers alike to expose their children to the Bible and study and live it with them every day. Bible Sunday has helped the people discover the principal place of the Bible in Christian life, and thus to find a source of renewal and recommitment to the Lord. The biblical pastoral ministry has become one of the strongest dynamisms for the Church in Pakistan.

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Samoa

Program of a Biblical Course

The pastoral center of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) in Samoa offers a formation course for parish teams who want to commit themselves to the biblical-pastoral ministry. This unique experience deserves recognition for it can very well inspire a similar awareness in other countries where the biblical apostolate encounters laboring difficulties. The following is a reproduction of a leaflet that presents this course.

1. Title of the Course: A Pastoral Biblical Course
2. Nature: This pastoral biblical course consists of short Bible courses or modules. They are intended to establish and form a parish biblical core team. These modules have been proven effective for pastoral ministry of the Word. We begin with the very basic modules (e.g. Basic Bible Seminar) and gradually progress to tackle the more complicated ones. They have been designed to use the activities-centered or participative approach.
3. Aims and Objectives
 - to establish parish biblical core teams for a more effective ministry of the Word.

- to provide an atmosphere for a change of heart based on God's Word (biblical spirituality)
- to provide the core team with skills for animating or facilitating Bible sharing and study groups.
- to form good Christian families/small communities based on the Word of God.

4. The Pastoral Bible Courses (Modules)

- Basic Bible Seminar (BBS) - (one weekend)

An introductory course to the entire Bible

- Bible Facilitators Seminar (BFS) - (one weekend)

A course on how to animate or facilitate a Bible group.

- Bible sharing methods in accordance with the methods of Lumko Institute (several evenings)

- Amos Program (several evenings)

A course designed to address vital issues of today in a prophetic way; designed for a task-oriented group.

- Lectio Divina (one weekend): How to use the Bible as a prayer book and guide for daily living.

- The joy of discovery in Bible study (3 weekends)

A Bible study using the discovery method and eventually when mastered, it trains one to a "do-it-yourself" exegesis by joyful discovery.

- Bible Sunday (2-3 hour session): How to celebrate Bible Sunday annually.

- A study of key church documents (one day) e.g. DEI VERBUM, 1965 (Second Vatican Council) or Bogotá Final Statement (Catholic Biblical Federation)

- Pastoral biblical planning (one day): To incorporate any of the programs above.

5. Qualifications of Participants

To insure that the participants benefit from the course, here are a few suggested requirements. They must:

- show interest in God's Word and be willing to commit themselves after the course to the Bible ministry.
- have proficiency in the English language (the medium used during the course), but have the ability to conduct later the same courses in the local language.
- have leadership qualities. This course is only to train potential Bible leaders and ministers.
- be good and accepted Christian witnesses

Note: The course should also include married couples because Bible ministry (e.g. sharing/studying) should begin in the home.

6. Duration: Each module has its own duration or time allotment; however, the following are a few of our suggestions to choose from:

- Model 1 (from Friday night to Sunday afternoon)
- Model 2 (from Saturday morning to Sunday evening)
- Evening sessions Model (e.g. 7:00 - 9:30)

We also welcome your own model based on your own situation.

7. Parish Team Composition

- at least five members in a Parish Core Team
- good mixture between men and women, couples and singles
- one member with musical talent, vocal or instrumental, for the music ministry
- ability to work as a team

8. Number of Participants

At a given Course, a minimum of five participants (one Core Team) or a maximum of 25 (five Core Teams) are

within the right number of participants,

9. The Parish Priest is encouraged to:

- attend the course
- give moral and spiritual support and approve the composition of his core team if unable to attend and when needed financial assistance.

- accept and promote the ministry as a parish activity

10. Formation of the Core Team

- The participants are trained how to conduct their first Bible seminar, if they have not yet conducted one.

- A planning session is also a part of the course to draw up a master-plan for the parish Bible ministry.

Information: Divine Word Missionaries, Fatuoaiga
Pastoral and Cultural Center, P.O. Box 3710 Pago Pago,
American Samoa 96799

EUROPE / MIDDLE EAST

Germany

The Work of the Catholic Biblical Association of Germany

For many Christians, the Bible is a book with seven seals, ancient and unintelligible. Above all, many have difficulties finding an approach to the Old Testament. The Bible can be and is in fact a fascinating book if the reader has learned the correct approach. It is a book that can manifoldly give orientation and direction in life, but it can also be an admonishment.

The Catholic Biblical Association was founded in 1933, and its primary purpose was and continues to be to help provide easier access to the Bible which in other terms could be referred to as a "library". The Association's history has been full of change and events just like the political course of time. Today the Association tries to safeguard its tasks above all in two areas. The first area entails promoting a better understanding of Sacred Scripture. The Association publishes two quarterlies, *Bibel und Kirche* (Bible and the Church) and *Bible heute* (Bible Today) which have been a great help to Christians and others alike to gain a personal encounter with the message of the Bible. These magazines address Sacred Scripture unlike any other magazine you will find in the German speaking countries.

* *Bibel und Kirche* tries to convey the results of modern biblical science to a theologically interested circle of readers. It is read by many parish priests, pastoral assistants, and religious education teachers who, after the completion of their studies, want to keep abreast of the latest developments. Additionally, many theologically interested persons in the parishes also like to read this magazine because it provides solid information. Every issue concentrates on one crucial theme. Some examples from the latest issues are: "Modern approaches to the Bible", "Peace-justice-creation", "Qohelet", "Church - community in conflict", and "Mystery cults". Topics of coming issues are: "New evangelization", "Concepts of an Enemy", and "The Pastoral Letters". It is quite obvious that the magazine covers a broad spectrum of topics which often touch our daily lives directly.

* *Bible heute* has been published for the last 25 years. It attracts a wide circle of readers and is richly illustrated.

Using the standard knowledge of modern biblical science, the magazine's goals are to interpret the Bible's message for present day life and help people gain a life with the Bible. The following are a few topics from previous issues: "Cain and Abel", "To make peace", "Reincarnation in the light of the Bible", and "Our Father". Topics of coming issues are: "Fundamentalism as temptation", "Jona", and "Koran and the Bible". Persons who are interested in a personal biblical-spiritual continuing education find an abundance of stimulating impulses in this magazine.

Biblical Formation

The Association's second area entails offering biblical formation courses all over Germany. The joy in the Word of God is conveyed above all through encounters with people who are willing to share their "joy in the Word". To accomplish this, we rely on those who are willing to initiate the Bible groups and parish circles and are willing to be trained for that purpose. In addition to biblical conferences, weekends, seminars, and spiritual exercises, the "Grundkurs Bibel" (Basic Bible Course) especially makes an intensive encounter with the Bible feasible.

During the past several years, the "Grundkurs Bibel" has been developing due to the collaboration between the team of the Catholic Biblical Association and the adult education department of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart. This course conveys a solid knowledge of the most important texts of the Old and New Testament. It poses high standards to its participants and the individual weekends are incredibly labor-intensive. It was surprising that the course was so very well received considering the very demanding standard. The demand for the course is enormous and most of the participants complete it which consists of eight weekends plus regional meetings in between and even private home work! In the meantime the Bibelwerk publishing house has published the first part of the Grundkurs that covered the New Testament. Additionally, the Association offers a correspondence course on the Old and the New Testament which in the course of several years covers the entire Bible.

Ecumenical and International Contacts

One of the Catholic Biblical Association's important tasks is to maintain contact with the Protestant Bible movement, the Bible Society, missionary offices, etc. The Association is almost the only Catholic correspondent for a number of Protestant biblical initiatives. Without these contacts, the Catholic backlog would be enormous! The following are some of the tasks that are shared among the different organizations: to prepare the literature for Bible Sunday and Bible week (the Bible reading plan, etc), to maintain numerous contacts with Eastern European countries and the Third World, to support theological libraries and the initiatives for the biblical apostolate in those countries, and above all to open new doors in Eastern Europe for the first time.

Membership

The Association receives the majority of its support through its members. Membership is not only advantageous to the Association but it can be very profitable for you as well. For a 40 DM membership fee you will receive *Bibel und Kirche* and *Bibel heute*, 4 times a year! Or for

a 25 DM membership fee you will receive one of the two magazines 4 times a year. We offer a reduced fee for students and apprentices. Both magazines not only provide you with inspirational articles as previously discussed, but they also will inform you about numerous Bible courses being offered. By the way, Catholic Biblical Association members also receive a 10% discount on all materials published by Bibelwerk.

Information: Katholisches Bibelwerk e. V.,
Silberburgstr. 121, D-7000 Stuttgart 1

Hungary

In 1990, right after the political turn-over that occurred in Eastern Europe, the Hungarian Biblical Association, St. Jerome's Bible Association was founded. In early 1992, the Association located a small office in Budapest that presently serves as the Association's center. Here, all the modern biblical science and methodology publications as well as manuals and auxiliary literature and aids pertinent to the biblical apostolate that have been translated into the Hungarian language are available. The center also offers monthly biblical lectures, continuing formation courses, and a biblical pastoral quarterly that contains exegetical articles, information, and other biblical aids. The St. Jerome's Association is still in its initial stages of becoming a national organization. Nonetheless, the Association still feels responsible for the Hungarian Catholic minorities living abroad (4 millions!). On September 13, 1992, the Association sponsored a benefit concert with a theme that is in harmony with Psalms 107, 19, 20 "He has sent his Word". The profits from the concert provided the financial means to purchase 8,000 New Testaments and 1,000 complete Bibles for Hungarian Catholics abroad (Slovakia, Ukraine, Kasachstan, Rumania, Serbia, and Croatia).

Information: Béla Tarjányi, Helliger Hieronymus
Bibelverein, Szív u. 51. sz., H - 1063, Budapest

Italy

In Italy, the biblical pastoral ministry's influence has grown steadily during the past several years. Today the need has been recognized for biblical pastoral ministry to become an integral part of the pastoral plan, the biblical apostolate being the "soul" of the spiritual life and of the Christian community. Forty participants (50% lay people), coming from 20 dioceses, concluded this during the National Catechetical Office's second annual meeting of the "Biblical Apostolate" held March of this year in Rome. The purpose of the meeting was to exchange experiences between each country concerning the biblical apostolate and then follow-up with a reflection on the responses. The meeting's focus was towards the needs of present-day Italy, such as, the formation of biblical animators, the production of simple biblical aids for Bible courses, and the support of pastoral initiatives like Bible Sunday or Bible week.

The participants realized the necessity for well trained animators and considered that the formation should be in connection with the local pastoral ministry and whether or not it should be held on the local or zonal level instead

of a national level. It is necessary that the formation be in collaboration with the formation structures that already exist like seminaries, pastoral institutes, centers of biblical spirituality, etc. The Nemi center with its formation courses for responsible leaders in the biblical apostolate could offer valuable consultation. Special attention should be given to the readers of the Word of God during the liturgical services. Reflection on the type of formation must be carried out before launching national initiatives.

Once a year, a Bible day or week would make the faithful more sensitive to the biblical apostolate; however, it is more effective to organize this day or week on a parish level and not on a national level, and likewise, to have a "Bible Week" instead of a Bible day. At the parish level the faithful would receive more attention, and during a Bible week, they would have more time to mature with the Word of God.

The participants suggested the following initiatives:

- review the initiatives and instruments regarding the biblical apostolate on a national level;
- update a register twice a year that contains information on books, reviews, magazines, and other initiatives concerning the biblical apostolate and have it accessible to the biblical animators.
- find ways to enhance the value of the biblical components in catechisms, the liturgy, services to the poor, pastoral ministry to the youth, to the elderly, etc.

The next meeting will be in 1993; however, the exact date has not yet been set.

Information: Don Cesar Bissoli, C.E.I.
Circonvallazione Aurelia 50, I - 00165, Rome

Portugal

The Capuchin province of Portugal was founded during the 1930's and has been distinguished through its involvement in the biblical apostolate. In 1987 the superior provincial wrote, "Since our apostolate is essentially a biblical apostolate we have to give it still greater attention ... Bible work is the main characteristic of the province within our order."

Among the biblical activities that have been arranged on account of the province, the foundation of the publishing sector deserves to be singled out for publishing biblical books (the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Psalms, and a complete Bible in 1965) and other materials like "The story of Jesus according to the gospels for each day of the year" and a Bible atlas. Since 1972, the province has secured broadcasting time on the radio for biblical lectures and a daily program entitled "The Word of God". In 1975, the provincial chapter decided to intensify the biblical work and assigned a group of priests to work full time for this purpose. They founded the magazine "Bíblia y vida" (Bible and life) and one of their tasks is to conduct formation courses and more particularly to train responsible leaders for youth activities. In 1978, the provincial stated with certain satisfaction, "Through our biblical teams we exercise an important apostolate for the renewal of the Portuguese Church that conforms with the gospels." To

achieve this, biblical courses have been offered in 19 dioceses, and a national secretariat for the Biblical Movement has been established. In addition, in 1980, the first annual national meeting for bible groups was organized, and in 1981, pastoral courses were made available to the Portuguese workers abroad, especially in Germany and France. The annual national meeting of bible groups has succeeded in bringing together more than 2000 participants.

Because of all these activities, Fr. Feldkämper, Secretary General of the Federation stated in 1984, "The work of the Capuchin Friars of Portugal is so significant that it deserves recognition in other countries." Also in 1984, the Difusora Bíblica affiliated itself with the Federation and since then has extended its activities of biblical animation to Brazil.

Information: Secretariado Nacional de Dinamização Bíblica, Franciscanos Capuchinhos, P-2495 Fatima

Switzerland

Proposal for a Community Reading on Bible Sunday

Starting from the gospel text of the healing of the blind man (Lk 18,35-43), our friends in Switzerland propose a simple outline for a community Bible reading on Bible Sunday or any other occasion. The animator has exegetical notes with commentaries in hand for the presentation and begins with -

- Initial reading of the text to the whole assembly and
 - Discussing the text in small groups
 - One half of the assembly addresses a, the other half addresses b.
 - a. "So he called out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!'"... "If you were the blind man why would you shout?"
 - b. "...but he shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me!'"... "If you were part of the crowd; why would you silence the blind man? Why would his cries bother you?"
- The leader receives the groups' reactions.
- Rearrange the small groups
 - Read the text once again and be aware of the details.
 - and ask "What does Jesus do when he hears the cries of the blind man?"
- Share the main insights from the whole assembly.
 - Which cries do we silence today?
 - What answer do we give to Jesus' questions, "What do you want me to do for you?"
 - Formulate the answers into a prayer.
- Read the formulated prayer (now or at another moment in the liturgy).

Information: Marcel Durrer, Centre Catholique Romand de Formation Permanente, 19 bd de Grancy, CH-1006 Lausanne

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Jan 31 - Feb 6..Middle East Biblical Congress, Beirut, Lebanon
- Jun 15 - 21.....Federation's EC Meeting, Nemi (Rome), Italy
- Sep 6 - 8.....Biblical-Pastoral Meeting of Central Europe, Vienna, Austria
- Sep 10.....Subregion Meeting of Ctr Europe/Middle East, Vienna, Austria
- Oct 1.....Subregional Meeting of Latin Europe, Toulouse, France
- Oct 1 - 4.....Agents of Biblical-Pastoral Ministry Meeting, Toulouse, France
- Oct 18 - 23.....3rd Latin American Biblical-Pastoral Workshop, Quito, Ecuador
- Nov 2nd wk....3rd All-Asian Workshop, Bangkok, Thailand