

Catholic Biblical Federation

No. 32

3 / 1994

Bulletin

*Sei
verbum*

**Holy Scripture
in the Life of
the Churches in Europe
now and
in the time ahead**

**The biblical pastoral meeting
of European Bishops
in Freising near Munich
February 1994**

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

Bulletin DEI VERBUM

No. 3 / 1994

July - September

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

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Subscription rates for 1993:

- Ordinary subscription: US \$17
- Supporting subscription: US \$30
- Third World countries: US \$10
- Students: US \$10

(US \$ 3 must be added
if the 4 issues are to be sent air mail.)

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

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

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

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

Please send your subscription fee to the General Secretariat of the Federation c/o Bulletin Dei Verbum Dept. (address opposite).

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

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Editorial

In the last months two events, one of world-wide compass and the other European, have drawn attention to the importance of the Bible in the life of the Church. Last November the Pontifical Biblical Commission published, after a long period of production, an illuminating document entitled *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. Three months later bishops and collaborators from twenty European countries assembled in Freising (Germany), convoked by the Council of the Episcopal Conferences of Europe, to reflect upon the theme, „The Bible in the life of the Church in Europe today and tomorrow“, and to support a petition formulated by Cardinal Martini that a universal synod be held on the theme of the Bible in the Church. These events have a very special significance in the life of our Federation, since they serve to confirm a way in which Christian communities have been moving for some years, a way in which the Federation is playing a modest but significant part.

In this issue we present a large part of the documentation from the meeting in Freising: preparatory consultations, papers, experiences of reading the Bible in groups. The final document, which has been sent to all the European Episcopal Conferences, gathers together the results of the conversations and discussions of the meeting, and points up three priorities: 1) to give to the Bible the place to which it corresponds in the life of the Church; 2) to put forward a simple way for Christian reading of the Bible; 3) to improve the formation of servants of the Word. Certainly it is very difficult to pass on, in these few pages, the spirit that animated the meeting both in the preparation and in the actual meeting. Space has imposed limits and the reports have had to be reduced to what is essential. Nor is it easy to convey the joyful experience of reading the Word of God together, which was the source of our fellowship and our reflections during those days.

Nevertheless, we are convinced that it is worthwhile sharing the anxieties and the new horizon that this meeting has opened up for biblical animation in the churches of Europe. We do so with humble desire to share our experience and with the secret hope that in other places they can learn from initiatives of this kind in which bishops also participate, who are principally responsible for the Word of God being correctly read and interpreted for the faithful (DV 25).

Ludger Feldkämper
Santiago Guijarro
Daniel Kosch

THE MEETING

Holy Scripture in the Life of the Churches in Europe now and in the time ahead

Preparation

It all began way back in 1984 in Bangalore, India. The III Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation (then still called: World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate <WCFBA>) formulated as recommendation 3.1.1: "Establishing of liaison with the continental or regional federation of Bishops' Conferences such as SECAM, CELAM, FABC."

The Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) is not mentioned - maybe because it is not as well known as the others - but it is certainly not excluded either.

For some time now, the Catholic Biblical Federation has established and fostered links with SECAM, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, with CELAM, the Council of Episcopal Conferences of Latin America, and of FABC, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, though the nature of this kind of relationship varies from continent to continent.

Both the CCEE and the CBF are fruits of the II Vatican Council: On November 18, 1965, the Constitution *DEI VERBUM*, the Magna Charta, so to say, of the Catholic Biblical Federation, was promulgated. On the same day, the Presidents of thirteen European Bishops' Conferences discussed, for the first time, their collaboration after the Council. In spite of this historical coincidence and common background, and in spite of the fact that its President, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini of Milan, Italy, a biblical scholar himself, was very much involved in the biblical-pastoral ministry, particularly through promoting *lectio divina*, no official contacts had been established between the CCEE and CBF before 1991.

1. From the Suggestion to the Decision: October 1991 - October 1992

In October 1991, the representatives of the Federation's Full Members in the subregion of "Latin Europe" gathered in Milan for their annual meeting. On October 19, 1991, Cardinal Martini joined the group for a meal. On that occasion, the General Secretary, having the aforementioned recommendation of Bangalore in mind, asked Cardinal Martini about the structure and activities of the CCEE.

The Cardinal answered that the CCEE does not have a structure like similar organizations in other continents. However, he said, it organizes meetings of various kinds and for different purposes: for newly appointed bishops, on issues like catechesis, etc. On the question as to whether or not he would favor a CCEE meeting on the biblical-pastoral ministry, the Cardinal immediately recalled that he had always been in favor of a Bishops' Synod on the Constitution on Divine Revelation (*DEI VERBUM*), and that, consequently, he would endorse such a meeting at the European level.

Asked about the procedure of organizing such a meeting, he pointed out, that as CCEE President he could hardly take the initiative, but that he would have to act, if, for example, three Bishops' Conferences should request such a meeting.

The General Secretary of the CBF took this hint as indirect encouragement. At the beginning of March 1992, he sent out a letter to all Full Member representatives of the Federation in Europe, requesting them to suggest to the Bishop responsible for the biblical-pastoral ministry in their Conference, to write to the CCEE President, to call for a CCEE Meeting on the Bible and the biblical-pastoral ministry in Europe. When several of them had done so, Cardinal Martini advised

Dr. Ivo Fűrér, the CCEE General Secretary, to put this item on the agenda of the next CCEE Plenary Assembly in October 1992. On June 16, 1992, at the invitation of Msgr. Fűrér, Fr. Feldkämper went to the CCEE General Secretariat in St. Gallen for a preliminary discussion of the subject. It was agreed at that meeting that Fr. Feldkämper would prepare for the Plenary Assembly of the CCEE (October 1-4, 1992) a written statement, explaining the purpose and opportuneness of the theme and the dynamics of such a biblical-pastoral meeting. By the end of June 1992, the first draft of this four-page paper was sent to the CCEE General Secretariat; the corrected and final version was then sent, in French and German, to all Presidents of European Bishops' Conferences.

The Plenary Assembly of the CCEE then decided that such a Meeting should be held on a date to be set by the Presidency, and after due preparation, by a committee for that purpose.

2. Preparation of and on the Part of the Members of the CBF in Europe: October 1992 - February 1993

In a letter of July 22, 1992, the CBF General Secretary suggested that all Federation members in Europe use the subregional meetings (for Latin Europe on the island of Malta on Oct. 2-4, 1992 and for Central Europe on October 5-7, 1992 in Vienna) for some brainstorming on the purpose of such a meeting and the Federation's contribution to it. This was done at both meetings.

Both groups decided on a questionnaire on the implementation of *DEI VERBUM*, chapter VI. For the Central European group, it was prepared by Dr. Daniel Kosch, director of the Swiss Bibel-pastorale Arbeitsstelle in Zurich, and for the Latin European group by Don Santiago Guijarro, director of the Casa de la Biblia of Madrid and coordinator of the Latin European CBF subregion. In addition, the Latin European group, entrusted Dr. Thomas Osborne, of Service Biblique Diocésain of Luxembourg, with the task of compiling the discussions of the Latin European group into an article whose ultimate title turned out to be: "Perspectives of the Biblical-Pastoral Ministry at the End of the 20th Century".

Two follow-up meetings of a smaller group from each of the subregions - in Stuttgart on January 21, 1993, and in Luxembourg on February 7-10, 1993 - discussed the questionnaires of their respective groups.

The team that met at Luxembourg also helped Thomas Osborne in the final shaping up of the "Perspectives" after the members of the subregion had sent in their reactions to the first draft. The article was published in BDV No. 28. The summaries of the questionnaires were made available to all participants at the Freising Meeting and are included in this issue of the BDV.

3. Work of the Preparatory Committees: March - December 1993

The Preparatory Committee, set up, after consultation with the CBF General Secretariat, by the CCEE General Secretariat, consisted of Archbishop Henryk Muszynski of Gniezno, Poland; Bishop Wilhelm Egger of Bozen-Brixen, Italy; Dr. Ivo Fürer and Dr. Helmut Steindl of the CCEE General Secretariat; and, on the part of the Catholic Biblical Federation, Fr. Feldkämper and Mr. Osborne. The complete group met only once (May 24-25, 1993 in St. Gallen). In addition to deciding upon the time and venue of the Meeting, it dealt almost exclusively with its theme and dynamics. A first follow-up meeting - likewise on the theme and dynamics - was held in Innsbruck on October 11, 1993 with Bishop Egger, Dr. Steindl and Fr. Feldkämper participating; for a second one, on December 1, 1993 in Freising, dealing more with organizational and technical aspects, Dr. Steindl was joined by three members of the CBF General Secretariat.

4. Work of the Secretariats

As it turned out, the initiative for the Freising Meeting had come from the CBF; the CCEE, after its President and Plenary Assembly had accepted the plan, became the official convener. Throughout the process of preparation and the actual running of the Meeting, the two organizations and their Secretariats were in constant contact with each other and worked closely together. The CCEE General Secretariat took care of all

communications with the members of the CCEE, the Bishops' Conferences, and with the Preparatory Committee; the CBF General Secretariat, on the other hand, with the Federation members.

The time consuming personnel intensive secretarial work (like collecting, translating and copying the entire documentation - both before and during the Meeting) was handled by the CBF General Secretariat of Stuttgart.

Dr. Fürer, after many years of organizing such meetings, found this experience both untypical and uplifting. For the Stuttgart office of the CBF, the adventure and joy of having contributed to a - humanly speaking - successful meeting in line with the Federation's purpose, is more than satisfactory.

Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, SVD
CBF General Secretary

The Meeting itself

On the 16th February, at the bishops' meeting in Freising near Munich, in a lecture on *The Word of God in the City*, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini of Milan opened up the question of biblical pastoral ministry and in so doing designated a decisive key concept for this task: To reflect on the Bible and its meaning in the life of the Church in such a way that the concrete context in which the Bible is read is not forgotten. In many parts of (Western) Europe this is related to the process of „urbanization“, with all its consequences for the life of the individual as well as for society and the Church: the splitting up of life into various areas, the breaking up of the structures of communal life, inner strife, individualization, privatization of religion as well as the absence of God in the public domain and daily life. The challenge with which the Milanese Cardinal confronted the symposium was to find an answer to this influence of the city, which is by no means limited only to the cities themselves.

A second key concept, which for the context of biblical pastoral ministry in Europe is just as central, especially so for

the Church in Middle and Eastern Europe, was subsequently introduced directly by the president of the Council of European Bishops' Conference (CCEE), Archbishop Miloslav Vlk, viz. the failure of communism. The freedom this opened up was, it must be admitted, by no means without danger but was threatened by humanity's setting up of itself as absolute. The Word of God could indeed be an answer to this, but not if it was „merely preached down“ to the people.

Organization and Dynamics of the Meeting

With these two opening votes, approximately 50 people were addressed (including 20 bishops from the whole of Europe), who had been invited to Freising by the CCEE from February 16-19, 1994. The aim was for representation of every European country by a representative of the Bishops' Conference and by one person responsible for biblical pastoral ministry: an aim which was just about achieved. The meeting was organized by the secretariat of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF). It was moderated by Bishops Wilhelm Egger (Bozen-Brixen) and Henryk Muszynski (Gniezno) in German and Italian.

The structure of *lectio divina* with its three steps, listening (*lectio*) - deepening (*meditatio*) - response (*contemplatio*), was very important for the dynamics of the meeting. These three steps were not only taken seriously with regard to biblical texts in various forms of *lectio divina*, „Bible sharing“ or „Bible study“, but also with regards to thematic work: listening to the Bible time and again was seen to be very important and was made easier by the fact that each speaker was brief. So again and again there was space for deepening and exchange, not least in the often intense group discussions. And last but not least here was the response: in the form of divine worship and communal prayer time, but also in the form of practical consideration about how the Bible might come to the fore more in pastoral situations.

One originally unplanned result of the meeting was a joint parting letter to all Bishops' Conferences and Bishops and to all those responsible for biblical pastoral ministry.

The letter highlights the saving, unifying and purifying strength of the gospel and stresses the necessity of varied approaches to Holy Scripture. Especially mentioned were the direct encounter with the Word of God in *lectio divina* and the significance of the Bible in the liturgy. Next were named the criteria for aptitude for the ministry of the Word and finally it emphatically stressed the importance of special institutions for scripture-apostolate and of rooting of the whole of pastoral planning and practice in the biblical message. It was suggested that, on the level of the universal Church, a Synod of Bishops be called in the foreseeable future, to address the question of the scriptural animation of pastoral care.

Lectio Divina

As already indicated, the term *lectio divina* was central for the meeting. Almost every lecture, one after the other, took up this key concept and asked about the presuppositions, the methods and the implications of this approach to the Bible. Just as important was the fact that the gathering took time each day for a communal *lectio divina*.

Personal experience and reflection made it clear that there are various forms and understandings of *lectio divina*. It is very clear that among these is to be included a faithful and life-engaging encounter with the biblical texts, which is rooted in the community. The ways this is carried out in practice are anything but uniform.

Among the various questions discussed were for example: How important are exchange and discussion in groups as they „share Scripture“, for example? Is the biblical text always the starting point or can you begin with „life questions“, as for example with the „Latin American inspired“ forms of reading the Bible? What role is played by information about the historical, theological and literary contexts in which the texts came into being, which for example characterizes Bible work in adult formation? In the face of such important questions, the advice of one participant is surely justified, that *lectio divina* should not become a slogan by which each person can understand whatever he wants.

Why exactly *lectio divina* is so important for the life of the Church was already

well elaborated by Cardinal Martini in this first vote: the answer to the problems of faith (already outlined) in a disrupted world in which people expend their energies in the various disconnected areas of life, must be to find inner unity, deeper conviction, a more total determination and correspondence between faith and life. The reading of the Bible regularly, continually, praying to incorporate into it one's own existence and that of the world is a most suitable means to this end.

Given his own experiences in the diocese of Milan, the cardinal made it clear that as well as being right for young people and also for adults actively committed in parishes, this way (in a slightly different form) was also right for the non-believer and those distant from the Church. *Lectio divina* enables resistance to the expulsion of God from the life of the individual as well as of the community. Cardinal Martini also made it clear that he does not understand it as a universal panacea, as he stressed that there was no competition with other forms of dealing with the Bible (courses, preaching...).

Ministers of the Word

It can hardly be by chance that both the speakers from the countries of the „reform“, Archbishop Vlk of Prague and Archbishop Muszynski of Gniezno (Poland) laid great stress in their statements on the people who preach and witness to the Word of God and thereby accentuate the existential dimension of the biblical pastoral ministry. Based on his own experience of being forbidden to exercise his vocation under communist rule, Archbishop Vlk stressed the importance of self-evangelization which is decisive for the credibility of preaching. Neither mere preaching of the Word of God nor publicity and propaganda lead into freedom; only its incarnation in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit does this.

And based on the statements in the letters of Paul, Archbishop Muszynski demonstrated that service of the Word presupposes personal commitment, although it is not a private activity but has an ecclesial character. Accordingly, service of the Word and the biblical pastoral ministry are not individual activities but irreplaceable for the Church's mission of salvation.

The existential dimension of the ministry of the Word was tangible and vivid in the various pieces of evidence of lived faith which the participants from the post-communist countries had brought along and which were displayed in a small exhibition.

Handwritten pieces of the Bible, whose possession was punishable, judicial decrees against religious for illegal preaching activity, chalices, patens, stoles and other articles necessary for eucharistic celebrations, packed into a shoe box as inconspicuously as possible; these and other documents showed what personal commitment to the Word of God in times of persecution can mean in practice.

Structures of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry

The second part of the small exhibition for the conference documented how important and helpful are institutions which are concerned with the biblical animation of pastoral ministry.

Bible groups and their publishers make available special Bible editions for German speaking areas but also in Latin-European countries (partly in collaboration with Bible Societies); moreover, they also make available papers, aids for adult education, for work with children and youth in catechesis, for scripture work in the preparation of divine services, for the further development of „multipliers“ etc. Fortunately in the last few years it has also been possible in the „reform-countries“ to take charge of the publication of such aids, partly in the form of translations, partly in the form of personal writings and documents.

Accordingly, the director of the „Casa de la Biblia“ in Madrid, Don Santiago Guijarro Oporto, pointed out in his speech on *Approaches to Holy Scripture* that the problem will not be solved simply if a Bible edition is available and the text is submitted and read. Special initiatives are needed in order to achieve a biblical animation of the whole of the pastoral ministry. The formation of animators for Bible groups is of special significance to this end: it should encompass a pedagogical as well as a biblical-pastoral dimension. Moreover, the biblical-pastoral institutes have the task of advancing theological and methodological reflection

on simple ways, accessible to all the faithful, of absorbing the Bible.

The suggestions of Don Cesare Bissoli, Rome, point to the same direction: The difficulties in communicating the Bible, the variety of models, the importance of group dynamics, hermeneutical questions and above all the required fidelity to the biblical text demand that the encounter with the Bible in community be accompanied by animators with an adequate spiritual formation and the necessary technical competence. It is, therefore, desirable that each Bishops' Conference and every diocese dispose of a biblical pastoral association at the service of parishes and groups. Such institutions are also needed to make the biblical message available to the mass media.

Finally, the general secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation, Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, went on to the task and goal of a church-wide collaboration of Bible groups and other institutions in service of the proclamation of the Word and used the opportunity to introduce the work of the Federation. Concerning a necessary strengthening of the biblical apostolate on all levels, he called to mind the recommendations of the final statement of Bogota (1990). He also quoted the recommendation: „to dedicate the next synod of bishops to the biblical-pastoral ministry so that the relative neglect of the conciliar document *Dei Verbum* can be made up for“.

Perspectives for the Future

In connection with the demands of the conciliar constitution *Dei Verbum* and with a view to development in post-conciliar times Prof. Thomas P. Osborne, in the last lecture of the conference, indicated some perspectives which are important for the future of biblical pastoral ministry:

- In view of the place in which the Bible is read, it is right to progress „from biblical proclamation in the liturgy to the sharing of the Bible and of life in Christian groups“.

- With regard to the objective of Bible reading, the way forward is „from the content of faith and moral norms to an aid to living“.

- And relative to the subject reading the Bible he called for a shift „from the responsibility of the clerics to the responsibility of the whole Christian community.“

The analysis of the meeting showed that the biblical apostolate is of great importance for the future of the Church in Europe. Forms of communal, faithful and informed reading of the Bible, which are drawn on life experience (*lectio divina*); the biblical, spiritual and methodological formation of women and men who can accompany groups in their encounter with the Bible; as well as the building up and development of institutions for the biblical pastoral ministry which can provide encouragement and places of support in the form of materials and formation work, all these must be promoted through the raising of consciousness in Church leadership as well as among the whole People of God, through the provisions of financial resources and personnel and also through a strengthened consideration of the Bible in overall pastoral planning.

The meeting was encouraging, very open and proceeded in great readiness to discuss and to learn; it doubtlessly promoted the sense of trust which arose among the bishops who were present and the people with responsibility for the biblical pastoral ministry. This trust can encourage tackling the outstanding tasks

with the necessary vigour: beginning with the work with individual scripture groups, on through work on the Bible on a diocesan and national level, as far as the idea of a synod of bishops on the biblical pastoral ministry.

The new document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission was mentioned several times during the meeting as an important aid. In the preamble to the „biblical-pastoral“ chapter, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church*, it states:

„For the Church the Bible is not simply a collection of historical documents from its origins. She receives the biblical message as the Word of God, which here and now is directed to her and to the whole world. The consequence of this conviction of faith is that the inspired texts become actualized and inculturated and are active in the life of the Church: in the liturgy, in personal *lectio divina*, in pastoral care and in ecumenical encounter.“

The European meeting of bishops on the biblical pastoral ministry has given important suggestions as to how the actualization and inculturation of the Bible can be advanced in a Europe which is affected by increasing urbanization and, after the collapse of the communist regime, also by political upheaval.

Daniel Kosch
Bibelpastorale Arbeitsstelle
Zürich

Message

**To all Bishops' Conferences and Bishops,
To all who have responsibility for the pastoral application of Scripture**

Dear Brother Bishops,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in the ministry of proclaiming the Word of God,

Between 16-19 February 1994 representatives from most of the European countries met, under the aegis of CCEE, in Freising to reflect on the pastoral application of the Word of God in the life of the Church. The starting points and constant reference points for those deliberations were: a) the passages in the Acts of the Apostles which narrate the

story of the first evangelization of Europe and b) the guiding principles of Vatican II, especially chapter 6 of *Dei Verbum*. We wish to share with you the fruits of our deliberations:

1. The power of the gospel

1.1 Given the present reality of deep divisions, of resurgent nationalism and of violent conflict within its borders, Europe urgently needs to experience again the *saving power* of God's Word.

1.2 In a world growing ever more fragmented the *unifying power* of God's Word is needed, a power that can reach across religious, social and other boundaries to build the unity of God's people.

1.3 At a time of cultural change when many searching people are beset by insecurity and when many are drawn into religious sects and similar groups, there is a great need for the *clarifying power* and wisdom of God's Word.

2. The treasures of Scripture can be discovered in different ways.

The words of Vatican II spoke to us powerfully, „Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful“ (DV 22). It is important that people be provided with an initiation to the Scriptures that dovetails with and complements their initiation to the Sacraments. This initiation can be provided at different levels and in a variety of pastoral contexts, e.g. in catechesis, in liturgy.

2.1 Without in any way devaluing other lines of approach, two ways of approach seem particularly helpful:

a) Different ways of reading the Bible which lead to a *direct encounter with God's Word*. Here, the practice of *Lectio Divina* suggests a useful way of proceeding, namely, that of allowing the Word of God to respond in a living way to the different hopes and aspirations of people. This direct encounter with the Word of God can take place at three levels:

> in the parish or in large groups (e.g. Bible Sundays, - Weeks, - Months, - Years)

> in discussions about the Bible and its message in *small groups* (e.g. Bible reading in the family, Bible circles, courses on the Bible).

> in a *personal reading of the Word of God in faith*.

b) Making contact with the Scriptures through the liturgy of the Church. Particular attention needs to be given to the ministry of readers and to the formation of preachers. These ministries of reading and preaching are carried out most effectively when those involved first enter into an open and genuine

dialogue with the biblical text. There is an urgent need both for the training of such ministers and for their enrichment of one another through meeting to reflect on the Word of God together.

2.2 In order that the Word of God may reach the widest possible audience it is appropriate to make use of different media and channels of communication to spread the Good News. In the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe there exists at this time a pressing need to make the Bible available in annotated editions and at reasonable prices.

2.3 We have gratefully taken notice of the most recent document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) which in view of the spreading fundamentalism adheres to the necessity of the historical-critical method, but has also recognized the importance of other methods and approaches to make sacred scripture as Word of God accessible to people today.

3. Competence in the service of God's Word.

A great service is provided when „As many ministers of the divine Word as possible are able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God“ (DV 23).

3.1 It is our belief that the most effective *ministers of God's Word* are those who have been transformed themselves by that Word (personal witness), who are willing and capable of contributing to the upbuilding of the Church (Ecclesial Witness), who are able to handle biblical texts in a responsible and fruitful way (Know the Bible and its culture).

3.2 For this reason it is important to foster *dialogue with Scripture* at personal and community level. We have experienced for ourselves the benefits of listening to the Word together and of relating its message to the issues of our times.

4. The need for all pastoral activity to be inspired by the Word of God.

We noted again how, „Like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture“ (DV 21).

4.1 In many places *institutions catering for the biblical apostolate* exist: there are regional, diocesan and national publishing companies. There are international institutions such as the Catholic Biblical Federation which is located in Stuttgart. These institutions are very valuable and deserving of support. Each makes a contribution towards ensuring that the Bible is given the place it merits in the life of the Church. It gives us particular joy to record that in the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe institutions which publish biblical material have already been established or are about to be established. One of the most important tasks of these institutions is, with financial support from abroad, to train and provide ongoing formation for those who are involved in the biblical apostolate.

4.2 The biblical apostolate should not be simply one particular activity alongside other pastoral activities. Rather, it ought to promote a situation where *all pastoral strategy and praxis* is drawing its inspiration and values from the Word of God. To this end, there is an ongoing need to assess pastoral planning and activity at all levels of the Church's life to see whether or not it is rooted in the values of the gospel.

4.3 To strengthen the Church's consciousness of the need to anchor Christian life ever more firmly in the Word of God we are proposing that in the foreseeable future a synod of Bishops be devoted to this topic of the Word of God and discuss in depth the ways in which Scripture can find fruitful pastoral application in the life of the Church.

Our shared concern that the Bible be given its due place in the Church throughout Europe now and in the time ahead binds us in a unity that transcends borders and boundaries. It is our hope that this European meeting will be a positive step towards ensuring that all pastoral activity in the countries of Europe „is healthily nourished and yields fruits of holiness through the Word of Scripture“ (DV 24).

Freising, 19.02.1994

On behalf of the participants

+ Henryk Muszynski
Archbishop of Gniezno

+ Wilhelm Egger
Bishop of Bozen-Brixen

THE PASTORAL USE OF THE BIBLE IN EUROPE

Survey

The documentation included in this Bulletin is the fruit of work carried out within the European region of the Catholic Biblical Federation since October 1992 as a preparation for the meeting in Freising. There are two syntheses of questionnaires sent to different countries presented here with the wish that they faithfully reflect the different conception of these questionnaires as the source of the replies.

* The questionnaire for the *subregion of Central and Eastern Europe* was sent to the directors of biblical associations (Bibelwerke) and they reflect the vision of those responsible at national level for the animation of the biblical pastoral ministry have concerning the more urgent problems at the present time in their respective countries.

* The questionnaire for the *subregion of Latin Europe* was sent via those responsible at national level to persons working directly in the biblical pastoral ministry. The task of those responsible for biblical animation in each country was to distribute the questionnaires and to make a synthesis of the replies which served as a basis for the synthesis which we present here.

To make adequate use of the results of these questionnaires it will be useful to take into account the following aspects, which were common to both:

* The starting point of both questionnaires was Chapter 6 of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*. This has the advantage of concentrating our attention on how the directions of the Council had been received, but at the same time it leaves aside some aspects that have acquired great importance in recent years, like for example the role of the Bible in the new evangelization, the theme of the last Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

* Those who replied to the questionnaires are people who are directly involved in the animation of the biblical pastoral ministry: those in charge of national biblical associations, priests, bishops, biblicists, animators of bible groups, directors of centres of biblical formation, etc. Again, this fact has a twofold implication: on the one hand its vision is very important, but on the other hand reality has made one aware of achievements and concrete necessities. However, this point of view is perhaps less sensitive to the presence of the Bible outside church circles, a fact which appeared repeatedly in the surveys, but which has not been sufficiently studied as yet.

Latin Europe

Country	Number of questionnaires	Synthesis
Belgium	2 individuals + 2 groups	yes
Catalonia	8 individuals + 1 group	yes
Spain	10 individuals + 6 groups	yes
France	20 individuals	yes
England	6 individuals + 3 groups	yes
Italy		-
Luxembourg	1 individual + 3 groups	yes
Malta	11 individuals + 1 group	yes
Portugal	0 individuals + 1 group	-
Switzerland	28 individuals	yes

I. The Bible in the life of the Church

From among the three options of replies offered, the majority of those who answered inclined to the opinion that the Bible is one element among others in the life of the Church which still does not have the position it ought to hold.

This reply reflects a growing awareness of the central role that the Word of God should have in the life of the Church, but at the same time reveals that there is still a long way to go.

The proposals pointed in three directions.

In the first place it is necessary to move from the concept of „biblical pastoral ministry“ more as an activity to the approach of a „biblical animation of the whole of pastoral ministry“, since the Bible has to form the whole life of the Church.

The second group of proposals insists on the important role of pastors (bishops, priests, pastoral agents) in this task. It is suggested that they pay attention to biblical formation so that afterwards they can carry through this change of perspective.

As instruments it is suggested that biblical services be created at diocesan level and that the Bible be included as a central element in pastoral plans at various levels.

II. Access to the Word of God

In this survey three progressive levels were distinguished: material access (editions of the biblical text), access to the meaning of the text in its context (explanation), and access to the message of the text for us today (interpretation). The general impression is that there has been a great advance at the first level, sufficient at the second, and that we are beginning to see the importance of the third.

1. Material access

No serious problems were detected in this area. In general there are good editions of the Bible in that value is placed upon the quality of the notes and introductions as well as on a good translation.

2. Access to the meaning of the text in its context

At this second level the survey asked three questions:

- a) in what sense has information about the Bible been improved?
- b) what ways have contributed to this?
- c) what spread of biblical studies has taken place?

a) Information about the Bible has increased above all with reference to the historical context of biblical texts. This is a much valued aspect displaying a growing desire to get to know things about the Bible.

b) The means most influential in this increase have been books and biblical commentaries as well as formation groups.

c) Biblical studies, in the opinion of the majority of those questioned, have spread little, due above all to the language used which is difficult for those unfamiliar with it.

Suggestions to facilitate access to the meaning of the text in context insist above all on the language which should be used in passing on biblical information. Books, pamphlets and other tools in new language forms (e.g. audiovisual) are necessary, but they ought to be presented in language that is clear and accessible to those for whom they are intended.

3. Access to the message of the text for us today

At this third level three questions were also asked:

- a) what progress has been made in understanding the message of the Bible for today?

- b) how is the Bible read?

- c) what role does the community perform in the process of Bible reading?

a) The most important discovery has been that the message of the Word of God must touch our lives. This response was unanimous in all the questionnaires and implies a new sensitivity that is being born.

b) Two fundamental elements are distinguished in the process for reading the Bible: to understand the text, and to discover the message of this text for us today, starting a dialogue with the experience that lies behind the text. A third element is the climate of prayer in which the reading is done.

c) The majority of those questioned do not consider the community as an essential mediation in this reading process, but they affirm that in some cases the community or the group helps them greatly to read the Bible adequately.

The suggestions in this area point in three directions.

In the first place there is much insistence on forming animators who can assist and accompany Bible groups. Also the suggestion is repeated that the formation of priests and other pastoral agents be intensified.

Secondly, the suggestion is made to promote the creation of groups for Bible reading, and those who can provide adequate materials and processes.

Finally, as a problem as yet unresolved, there was highlighted the necessity of offering a method of Bible reading that would be simple (i.e. familiar/popular) that would be within reach of all believers and would help them discover the relation between the Word of God and their own lives.

III. The Bible in different areas of the Church

1. The Bible in the liturgy

Two questions were asked in this section:

- a) what place does the Bible occupy in the celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments?

- b) how is the Word of God read in public proclamation?

a) The replies seem to indicate that the Word of God occupies every time a most important place in liturgical celebrations.

b) The majority of the replies insist on the importance of the homily for understanding the readings. Nevertheless, the proclamation of the Word is, in general, routine and informs neither the readers nor the listeners.

The principal suggestion in this section is that readers be adequately trained so that they can proclaim the Word of God in a lively and intelligible way, since this seems to be an area of negligence.

As regards the homily a twofold fidelity is urged: fidelity to the text and fidelity to the situation in which the community lives. There was also a proposal for the setting up of liturgy teams.

2. The Bible in catechesis

The replies referring directly to catechesis are unanimous and significant enough:

all think that catechesis based on the Bible would be strengthened. However, catechists read and know the Bible only little, and in catechesis one is not taught to read it.

Consistently the principal suggestion, given the various styles, prevails in the biblical formation of catechists (initial and on-going). Such a formation should combine knowledge (explanation) with a faith-based reading (interpretation), in such a way that catechists can transmit by their example and their words this nearness of the Word of God. There is also an insistence that the biblical text should be used directly in catechesis.

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Central Europe

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0. Remarks

0.1 Looking at the preparatory work of the Bishops' Meeting of the CCEE on the theme of the biblical-pastoral ministry, the AMB decided to administer a small questionnaire among the relevant biblical groups (cf. the project of the „Latin Europe“ subregion). The results of the questionnaire were discussed by the AMB in the course of their meeting in Vienna on September 8-10, 1993. As a result it was decided to draw up this brief summary.

0.2 The Bible groups of the following countries participated in the questionnaire:

Austria
Belgium
Croatia
Germany
Hungary
Netherlands
Switzerland

0.3 Basically, it is stressed that the pastoral situation in general is still heavily influenced by the former division of Europe into East and West, not only as far as the financial and infrastructural situation of the Church is concerned, but also with regards to the mentality and level of information of Christians.

0.4 It is also tentatively pointed out that the German speaking countries/ areas (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) are in a special situation in that they serve small but firmly institutionalized biblical groups/ places of work for the biblical pastoral ministry. In other countries, biblical/pastoral groups are linked by personnel or by institution to a faculty, a publishing house, or the like and depend extensively on the unsalaried efforts of the people who manage and coordinate biblical pastoral services.

1. The Church-wide Consciousness of the Meaning of the Bible and the Reception of *DEI VERBUM*

The assessments of the basic biblical orientation of Church life (in the sense of *DEI VERBUM*) are very varied. In some regions the concrete realization of *DEI VERBUM* seems to be a task which has scarcely been begun, in other places positive changes have taken place and finally, there are already certain signs of fatigue, which are linked with a certain surfeit (above all, with written materials and with more and more new additions and methods).

2. Availability and Usefulness of Bible Editions

2.1 While in some places in the post-communist countries out of date translations still have to be used and the distribution of cheap and good quality Bible editions is problematic, there is no such need in this respect in the western countries. The CBF Central Europe subregion is actively involved in the coordination of Bible translation and distribution in the post-communist countries and is also striving to reach a meaningful, just and pastorally fruitful agreement with the United Bible Societies (UBS). To this end, even further resources - both financial and in terms of personnel - will have to be made available.

2.2 Bible editions for special interest groups are a special question in all the countries of the AMB: above all for children and youth, but also for senior citizens, the visually impaired or interested adults who should have at their disposal a „working bible“ which stimulates profound discussion and offers help.

2.3 In German speaking areas further enquiries were raised on various sides about the *Common Translation* (Einheitsübersetzung): it is in parts too inexact and was unable to take into account the concerns for a non-sexist language, which have become important in recent years. A revision is desirable.

3. Provision of Biblical Knowledge to Theology Students, Pastors and Interested Laity

3.1 The level and theological orientation of exegetical formation in the faculties, as well as in centers of formation for catechists and teachers of religious instruction, was generally judged positively. With regards to the necessary aids (commentaries, concordances, text books...), there is still a backlog of demand in some eastern european countries.

3.2 However, the formation of theologians and future priests in general does not have enough of a practical, biblical-pastoral orientation. The reconciliation of biblical studies with pastoral practice (school, formation work, preaching, parish animation...) encounters difficulties. Methods of the biblical-pastoral ministry were not adopted by the faculties.

3.3 Adult formation in the biblical field has made great progress in many places; in part the great post-conciliar interest is already on the wane and has reached saturation point. In some countries biblical course work is an established part of specific programs (eg. the Basic Bible Course [Germany], the Lay Theology Course and the Faith Course [Switzerland], Biblical Correspondence Course [Austria]). Other places stand in greater need of coordination and organization.

3.4 The reviews produced by Bible groups are a well-trying aid for biblical-pastoral work and for the furthering of biblical knowledge; they reach a wide, interested audience. They give the present state of knowledge as well as new methods and ways of operating for practical Bible work.

This is an aid for those who completed their formation long time ago or who need new impetus to their thinking. Fortunately, besides the widespread journals in the German speaking areas (*Bible Today*, *Bible and Church*, *Bible and Liturgy*) there is also, for example, a publication of the St. Jerome Bible Union in Hungary.

4. "The Table of the Word"**- Bible and Liturgy**

4.1 The reform of the liturgy and especially the renewal of the lectionary have richly covered the table of the Word, which is most welcome. To be sure various questions and difficulties arise: the readings from the Old Testament, with its own meaning for the Christian faith does not come to the fore enough. The choice of the texts of the readings and the gospel has not been elevated above all doubt. The wealth of the text conceals within itself the danger of „word-inflation“.

4.2 There are many efforts and attempts to organize the proclamation of the Word of God in a more strongly dialogical fashion. Fundamental is the experience that monologue communication, which is directed only from the preacher to the faithful, does not take seriously enough the fact that in his Word, God enters into a conversation, a dialogue with his children. Important attempts in this direction are:

- preliminary Bible conversations which take as their basis one of the Sunday readings;
- group preparation of services, especially in the situation of services with no priests (cf in this connection especially the Swiss project „That they might have life. Bible work in the preparation of services“);
- dialogue homilies subsequent to services;
- attempts (especially in groups) to construct a Bible conversation in the service.

4.3 Quite decisive for the success of the proclamation of Scripture is to connect the message of the Bible to the day to day experience of the faithful, without degenerating into fundamentalism or moralizing. The exegetical reconditioning of the biblical readings is a necessary, though not a sufficient step.

4.4 The practice which has been introduced in some places of an annual Bible Sunday or Bible Week offers a good linking of Bible, the organization of services and the incorporation of daily life.

5. Lectio Divina**- Bible Work in Group**

5.1 Besides the reevaluation of the Bible in theology, proclamation and catechesis/formation work, the need for a personal and communal spiritual reading of the Bible has become clearer in recent years. Precisely in the western information society, the desire for a more personal and more binding religious experience has become stronger.

5.2 Bible groups/work-places for the biblical-pastoral ministry are looking for possibilities to take this need into account, to form and accompany groups, to train animators and to provide various aids. To be sure, even in rich Churches, like those in Switzerland, Germany or Austria, as far as prioritization of pastoral budgeting is concerned, the financial means and the personnel available are limited.

5.3 The forms of communal Bible reading practiced in the groups are very varied: sections of the Bible, Bible reading inspired by Latin American life-experiences, bibliodrama, meditative approaches... (cf the overview in: Anneliese Hecht, Approaches to the Bible, Methods for Groups. Schnupperkurs, Stuttgart, 1993)

5.4 In Catholic areas with a strong folk-piety it has been possible to use biblical elements to enrich and renew traditional forms such as the Rosary or the 'house church' in Advent/Lent.

5.5 Worth special mention is the fact that women participate in this kind of Bible work more frequently than men. Committed feminist Christians often read the Bible together with great commitment and thereby enrich not only Bible reading but also Church life.

6. Challenges

6.1 The Bible itself, its liberating message, but also its reading and concretization in the life of groups and communities, are of decisive significance for the future capability of the Church.

6.2 In view of strong challenges from sectarian and fundamentalist appropriation of the Bible, a healthy, matter of fact way of dealing with the Bible is important. This can produce tolerance, breadth and ecumenical openness.

6.3 In a time of a far-reaching loss of orientation and insecurity, a faithful and faith-strengthening encounter with the Bible is to be encouraged.

6.4 The great social, economic and ecological challenges of our time should not be faded out, but must flow into an engagement with the Bible. We should take care here that the Bible - like the whole of the Church's preaching - does not reach only a certain stratum but really is open to everybody - especially the people of the edge of society and Church.

6.5 The formation and employment of animators, instructors and coordinators of biblical-pastoral work in parishes, dioceses, on a national and supranational level must be encouraged in future and supported more strongly with finances and personnel.

This is especially true for the immense work of construction which has just been able to be begun in the post-communist countries; however, it is also true for the western countries where on the various levels mentioned, there is often nobody available with responsibility for the Bible, or else those who are far too few in number.

6.6 The Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation in Bogotá (1990) contains many important initiatives for biblical work and for the practical implementation of *Dei Verbum*.

The Bible groups do not want merely to seek to make this document the basis of their own work but also to bring it into the life of the eastern Churches.

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EXEGESIS AND EXPERIENCE



Minister of the Word of God according to Paul, the Apostle

„The priest is above all the minister of the Word of God, he is consecrated and sent to all to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God, by calling every person to the obedience of faith and leading the faithful to an ever deeper knowledge of and communion with the mystery of God, which has been revealed and imparted to us in Christ.“ (PDV, 26)

The importance of the ministry of the Word of God for the Church's mission of salvation in all times moves us to examine the biblical content of his ministry more closely.

1. The Biblical Vocabulary

The ministers of the Word are mostly described as: *diakonoi tou logou* (Acts 6:4; 20:24; 2 Tim 4:11) or, *tou euaggeliou* (Eph 3:7; Col 1:23), hence as „minister in the true sense *hyperetai tou logou* (Lk 1:2; Acts 26:16) - „helper“, or even as *synergoi* - „co-workers“. At the same time, descriptions such as *oikonomos* - „stewards“ (1 Cor 4:1.2), *doulos* - „slave“ (Rom 1:1) as well as *desmios* - „prisoner“ (Eph 3:1; Phm 1:3) also appear. All these terms point to dependence on the person of Christ or his gospel respectively and they refer not only to the apostle Paul himself but also to his closest co-workers in the service of the Gospel.

The ministry of the Word of God is distinguished from cultic ministry (cf Acts 24:14) and also from ministry to the poor. The former is reserved to apostles, the latter on the other hand is entrusted to the deacons (cf Acts 6:4).

2. Origins and Meaning

In the biblical tradition two sources of the ministry of the Word can be clearly recognized, viz. the prophetic tradition of the OT and the appearance of Christ to the apostle Paul near Damascus.

The apostles as the *servants of the Word of God* (Acts 4:29) are clearly understood as the heirs and successors of the Old Testament *servants of God* and *servant-prophets*. To them God has revealed his decree (Amos 3:7) and has called them so that the whole of the people of God can „listen to the voice of God“ and serve him faithfully according to his statutes (Deut 13:4).

According to the evidence in Acts, it is the risen Lord himself who entrusted to Paul the preaching of his Gospel. Paul testifies that he „received this ministry from the Lord Jesus“ and that his special task is to „witness to the gospel of the grace of God“ (Acts 20:24). The risen Christ announced before the Damascus gates: *I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and witness of what you have seen and of what I will show you* (Acts 26:16).

On the strength of this revelation the risen Lord remains forever the absolute center of the Pauline ministry of the Word of God.

3. The theological Content of the Ministry of God's Word

The biblical evidence for „ministry“ and „to minister“ is expressed in diverse and partly contradictory statements ranging from slavery to the „ministry of the Spirit“ (2 Cor 3:8).

3.1 Paul as Minister and Servant of the Word of God

The term *doulos Christou* in connection with *tou euaggeliou* is a firmly established Pauline title, which not infrequently is linked with the designation of the office of *apostolos* (cf Rom 1:1). At the heart of the ministry is the revelation of the mystery of the calling of the gentiles as coheirs of the gospel of Jesus Christ whose minister Paul has been made „according to the gift of

grace which was given me by the working of his power“ (Eph 3:7).

The divine *energeia* which revealed itself most clearly in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, also dwells in the Word of his Gospel: the Gospel „is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek“ (Rom 1:16).

The ministry of the gospel is no human enterprise but a special grace of God. Christ alone is the true object and subject of the gospel. The servant of the Word and the slave of Jesus Christ remains in a relationship of complete dependence on his Lord. The single task of the slave is to make the Lord known through his witness and preaching (Gal 1:16). This ministry comprises complete fidelity to the Word of the gospel and an unqualified devotion to this ministry (Col 1:25). The divine *energeia* enables the servant to be faithful to the point of being chained up for the gospel (Eph 3:1; Ph 1:3).

The ministry of the Word of God also has clear ecclesial characteristics. The *diakonos tou euaggeliou* is also at the same time *diakonos tes ekklesias*. The readiness to place one's own life in the service of the gospel is synonymous with service of one's fellow human beings and indeed, of the whole Church. Paul is the *prisoner for Jesus Christ for the sake of the gentiles* (Eph 3:2). Through his own sufferings, the apostle completes not only *what is still lacking in the sufferings of Christ but also fulfills the Word of God which has been entrusted to him* (Col 1:24-25). To fulfill the gospel means faithfully to fulfill the truth of the gospel in one's own life and to bear witness to it to the faithful (Acts 20:24; Col 1:23). Paul neither sought out the ministry of the gospel himself nor qualified himself for it. It was imposed on him by the Lord as a binding redemptive task. Consequently, „*what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake*“ (2 Cor 4:5). Paul's real task as „*servant and apostle of Jesus Christ is to bring those whom God has chosen to faith and to the knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness*“ (Tit 1:1).

3.2 The Helpers and Co-Workers of the Apostle as Ministers of the Gospel

Although the election of Paul as a minister and witness to the gospel was based on his personal calling, several of his helpers and co-workers in the ministry of the gospel are described as *synergoi* (Rom 16:3; 9; 21; etc), *diakonoi en Kyriou* (Eph 6:21; Col 1:7) and *hyperetai tou logou* (Lk 1:2). Some of them are actually designated by name, among them Mark (2 Tim 4:11), Timothy (1 Thess 3:2; Rom 16:12), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3; 9; 21), Epaphras (Col 1:7), Tychicus (Col 4:7), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25) and Justus (Col 4:11). The activity of the apostle's „helpers“ and „co-workers“ was in no way limited to cooperation with his apostolic ministry for at the same time they are also *synergoi tou Theou* (1 Cor 3:9) or *synergoi eis ten basileian tou Theou* (Col 4:11). Perhaps the „assistants“ and „God's handymen“ in the establishment of God's kingdom. Thus they form an important theological rather than a sociological category.

Through cooperating in the proclamation of the gospel (1 Thess 3:2), the apostle's co-workers are partly associated with Paul but also partly understood as an independent group. Obviously there is no intention of making the co-workers equal to Paul's apostolic office, for each one serves the same undertaking according to the gifts *he has been given by the Lord*: Paul's are different from Apollos', though both are *servants through whom you became believers* (1 Cor 3:5), servants in the same divine undertaking, which is portrayed in the images of God's field and God's building (1 Cor 3:9). The growth of the divine edifice is ultimately the work of God: „*neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth*“ (1 Cor 3:7). The human cooperation in the divine work of growth, or the diakonia of the Word (1 Cor 5:9) consists in the fact that „God's fellow-worker“ uses all his strength and abilities for this ministry, is prepared to suffer for it, even give his own life for it, and will also receive his wages (1 Cor 3:8). Fidelity to the ministry of the Word is the only quality

which God requires of the servant (1 Cor 4:1-2). All these qualities are brought together in the last instructions which Paul gives to „his co-worker in the gospel“ (1 Thess 3:2): „*But you, be steady at all times, put up with suffering, preach the gospel, faithfully fulfill your ministry as an evangelist*“ (2 Tim 4:5).

Following the example of the apostle, Timothy, as a faithful evangelist, must also be ready to endure all kinds of hostility and persecution for the sake of the gospel. Complete fidelity comprises most of all an unqualified and lived out faithful obedience to the Word of God, as well as using all one's strength „*to hand over not only the Good News but our whole lives as well*“ (Jerusalem Bible).

Pauline ministry of the Word of the gospel also finds a clear echo in Luke's gospel. By recording in writing everything „*Jesus did and taught until the day when he was taken up (into heaven)*“ (Acts 1:1-2), Luke relies on the tradition (*paradosis*) of the eyewitnesses (*autoptai*) and of the ministers (*hyperetai*) of the Word (Lk 1:1-2). The eyewitnesses and the ministers of the Word and the message committed to writing. In this way Luke wants to make his gospel credible in the face of false doctrine. The witness of the ministers of the Word of God includes three stages: the earthly life of Jesus, the experience of the Risen One and the attestation of this experience in the early Church.

The Word whose ministers they have become is the Word of God, pure and simple, that is, the divine revelation which has been fulfilled in Christ. The „ministry of the Word“ includes the interpretation of the OT scriptures concerning Christ as well as the post-Easter preaching and interpretation of the mystery of Christ. It arose based on the same scriptures but also as a continuation of the pre-Easter preaching on the Kingdom of God. The text of Luke 1:2 clearly shows that the ministry of the Word cannot only be assigned to the post-Easter period but followed on from the mission of Jesus and thus can be understood as a continuation of his preaching activity.

3.3 Some practical Conclusions for the Ministry of the Word in the Church

From what has been shown here, the following practical comments can be given for the preaching of the Word in today's Church: The preacher of the Word of God must be the first believer in the Word, in the full realization that the words of his ministry are not his but are the words of the one who sent him. He is not the master of this Word, he is its servant (PDV 26) and that means that he should submit his plans, thoughts, intentions, indeed his whole life to the message of the Word of God without reservation. Everything should serve the development of this Word.

The ministry of the Word of God is one of the greatest gifts of grace which have been entrusted to the Church and which serve to build it up. As with every grace, this gift too must be accepted with an open heart, after the example of St. Paul. The faithful acceptance of this Word as God's gift of grace opens the way into the divine *energeia* and *dynamis* which is characteristic of the Word of the gospel (Rom 1:16). This strengthens the minister and enables him, in spite of human weaknesses, to proclaim the message faithfully and if necessary, even to suffer for it.

Through participating in the salvific power of God, the minister becomes God's „co-worker“ and a living „tool“ in the realization of his plan of salvation. As servant, indeed, as slave he must not control the Word, for the Lord alone is the actual preacher of the Word. As the envoy and messenger of God, the minister should make this message credible through his willingness, devotion and faithful witness.

This inner existential link between the minister and the gospel requires a personal love and loving communion with the risen Christ. „*For what we preach is not ourselves*, Paul testifies, *but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake*“ (2 Cor 4:5).

The proclamation of the risen Lord does not just form the heart of the Pauline gospel but to a certain extent is

its only object. Perfect obedience to the Lord also inseparably requires an unqualified commitment to the people to whom the gospel is preached. The radicality of this obedience is the same as slavery (Eph 6:5) although it is a free service, because it is assumed out of love, after the example of Christ.

The minister of the Word is a debtor twice over: to the Word of God and to the People of God at the same time. Christ as the head of the body, the Church, and its members form an organic unity: therefore, to serve Christ, his Word and the Church means at the same time to become also the servant and minister of the people to whom the Word is addressed (2 Cor 4:5).

Preaching the Word does not have a private quality but by virtue of its task is carried out in and through the Church. Thus the servant of Christ and of the Church (2 Cor 4:5) has his share in the prophetic authority of both Christ and the Church. The love of Christ and of God's Word also entails an obligation *to a special sensitivity, love and openness to the living tradition of the Church and its teaching office* (PDV, 26).

The fulfillment of all these tasks requires a new reflection on the Word of God: *„Therefore the priest himself must above all develop a great personal familiarity with the Word of God: For him it is not enough to know its linguistic or exegetical aspects, though this is certainly necessary; he must draw closer to the Word of God with an open and praying heart, so that it can enter into his thoughts and feelings and produce a new way of thinking in him - the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16) - so that his words, decisions, views and attitudes increasingly show a transparency, a proclamation of and a witness to the gospel“* (PDV, 26).

„New evangelization“ adopts this outlook and refines it at the same time. If it is absent, then „new evangelization“ remains just another empty phrase.

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The Word of God as Companion into Freedom

The human person experiences his life as limited and incomplete; he absolutely wants to be happy, but this eludes him. This longing, impressed deep in the heart, is essential to life. If it is not fulfilled, his life breaks down. The human person must live on the hope which is offered him by the deep certainty that his happiness can be realized in the future.

In the Middle Ages people relied on the truth. It was a signpost into the future to the longed for happiness. It was the revealed truth, the firm foundation of life, of hope, of future happiness.

In the modern era, especially in the Enlightenment, freedom increasingly came into competition with authority. Unlimited freedom, which was not anchored in truth, caused the horrors of history and continues to cause them.

The title of this paper is: „The Word of God as Companion into the Future“. It deals with the question of how the gospel became for us the signpost on the way from unfreedom to freedom.

Nowadays people are looking for ways into the future and have experienced the fact that ideologies will lead us no further. Especially with communism, humanity had to experience in a terrible way how purely human projects, systems devised without God, destroy the human person and his freedom. We have experienced this in our own lives.

Worldwide, as a rule, decisions are made today without reference to God. Now as before, there is the danger of humanity making itself the creator of systems which will lead society into slavery. People all over the world were very glad that communism collapsed. Yet humanity is going unwaveringly in the same direction along the same path, which will lead to a similar future.

I do not want to be a pessimist, as by nature I actually tend towards optimism. For me, the gospel, the Word of God, is the only way to freedom, to a future in which human freedom is not threatened.

There may be two arguments against this:

1) The Church has already been preaching the gospel for two thousand years and still the world has got into the present situation.

2) The world, the people of today, have no interest in hearing the gospel and feel less interest in modelling their lives on the gospel. They imagine that it will limit their freedom too much.

We must humbly admit that for a long time we have preached the gospel simply by handing it down. And we are still doing it today.

Although the world of today is quite different, the methods of our evangelization have remained just the same. The Word of God is only being preached. But if we look quite simply to the gospel, we learn what needs to be done today to make the path to freedom easier for the world.

The first thing is to believe in the power of the gospel, to evangelize oneself. Sometimes the gospel is not present enough in the practical, concrete life of the Christian. We read it, we preach it, but we no longer live it. Or put another way: we do not doubt it, but it is not the Word of life for us, for our way of living. We do indeed speak in our preaching about the gospel, but our life is not affected by it. The first condition of evangelization therefore is self-evangelization, as asked for in the declaration of the Synod on the 'New Evangelization' of Europe (cf art. 4).

Self-evangelization clearly means opening oneself up to the Spirit of Christ. Jesus clearly said to his disciples: „However, when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth.“ (John 16:13). And when the time of his leaving came he sent them out: „You are witnesses to this“, he said to them quite emphatically: „Stay in the city, until you are filled with the power from on high.“ (Lk 24:48,49).

The completion of this promise, its consequences and fruits are for example, described in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Saint Paul even evangelized in this way. He writes to the Corinthians: „My message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.“ (1 Cor 2:4-5).

In the past, Christians, preachers, teachers have sometimes relied more on their own power and „wisdom“. Today it is time to do our evangelization differently.

Pope Paul VI once expressed it in the following way: „People today listen much more to the witnesses who convey a message with their deeds than to the teachers who explain it with words. They listen to the teachers only if they were once witnesses.“

The strength and power of evangelization is the Holy Spirit. This power is „the love of God (which) has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us“. (Rom 5:5).

In evangelizing, we must live by this power. In the time after the incarnation (which happened through the Holy Spirit), this is the way in which God is active. Love must be incarnated, must be „seen, touched“ (cf. 1 John 1:1).

This challenge of Scripture is confirmed by the „signs of the times“ (cf. Mt 16:3). If you want to offer something to the people today, then you must organize various ‘displays’. The people must see, touch.

We cannot „display“ words alone, even if they are God’s words. They must be words which have passed through our own experience, which have been „made flesh“ in our lives. Words without this „completion“ sound too spiritualized, too empty. And „empty“ words are viewed in today’s world as just ideology.

Everything I have said so far may indeed sound convincing but surely a little theoretical. Therefore, I would like to

support these words with a couple of personal experiences.

The communist state held our Church prisoner, completely in its power. The Church bureaux conducted its policies in the way the communist party wanted, with the intention of destroying the Church as quickly as possible.

Some Christians, even priests, sought a way of rescuing the Church by reaching a compromise with these anti-Church „bureaux“. In this way, they hoped to be able to continue to practice their Christianity or their priestly activities. Most of them certainly were well intentioned. They had hoped for greater latitude. Some however, and I was one of them, said: „We must obey God rather than men“ (Acts 5:29) and so we trusted more in God, in God’s Word, than in our own human cleverness.

So I lost my state authorization to be active as a priest and cleaned windows in Prague for almost ten years. But for me this time was no punishment, as the regime had intended, but a time of grace. I could not preach the Word of God publicly; I should and must first live it, together with a group of like-minded Christians. Above all, we tried to allow ourselves to be led by mutual love. At that time, I had a great opportunity to

live the Word of God, but only limited possibilities of preaching it. As I performed the lowly work of the window cleaner, people sometimes asked me what my actual profession was. When I told them my approach was to rely more on God, they often grew to trust me greatly and occasionally told me the story of their lives. God opened up hearts.

They were indeed long years, but years full of grace. The fruit of these years was the experience and the certainty that God’s Word really is effective.

So, projects undertaken by human hands and human wisdom alone will not lead us to freedom, neither will merely preaching the Word of God, nor publicity nor propaganda. The incarnation of the Word of God is the way, its incarnation in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If people consciously live the Word of the gospel day by day, they can meet the living God. Only he, the risen, living Christ, can thus accompany us into freedom and free us from the dangers to which we expose ourselves.

+ Miloslav Vlk
Archbishop of Prague
CCEE President

Reflections and Suggestions

Places and Forms of the Biblical Apostolate

We acknowledge today the existence of a „submerged experience“ of the Bible, which God alone knows, formed through contacts that men and women come to have with Sacred Scripture (personal reading, scholastic learning, etc.).

What value can we put on all this?

Promotion of a visible, intentional contact with the Bible is becoming indispensable, and one to which all the faithful are invited (DV, 21). In fact, today there are various ways of access

to the Bible. ⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ The document published by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1993 entitled, „The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church“, gives the following indications on the use of the Bible: 1. In the liturgy, 2. Lectio Divina, 3. In the pastoral ministry: catechesis, the homily, biblical apostolate (translations of the Bible and dissemination of the translations, the formation of Bible groups, conferences on the Bible, Bible weeks, publication of reviews and books, etc.). The relevance of ecclesial movements, basic church communities. The importance and requirements of the mass media.

1. Indirect or mediate ways

These are ones in which the encounter with the Bible has aims and contents not directly and exclusively biblical:

- liturgical celebration, with three principal actions: proclamation of the readings, the homily, Bible services. This can be called the main way of encountering the Bible for the Christian people. Around liturgical feasts there were born and, here and there, still exist, popular sacred images inspired by the mysteries of Christ.

- religious teaching in school: the Bible is approached as a scholastic task, with the aim predominantly cultural; the Bible is used as a didactic tool rich in verbal and non-verbal resources.

- catechetical teaching in national catechisms and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: the Bible is in a conceptual framework derived from the tradition of the faith of the Church, constantly interlaced with doctrinal data.

These are, therefore, the ways more accessible to the mass of the people of God and for most of them the only ones. They can be made useful as excellent biblical aids. These indirect ways, however, cannot be a substitute for direct biblical contact.

2. Direct ways

These are the ones in which immediate contact with the Sacred Books takes place:

- *Lectio Divina*, which is defined as a personal (individual and communal) continuous exercise in listening to the Word of God through the three stages of reading, meditation, contemplation.

Lectio Divina is the most complete way to the Bible, in so far as it is more suited to the mystery of the Word, and accessible to the people as such.

Primary requirements: to encourage the broad dissemination of *Lectio Divina*

in parish communities and in various Christian lay groups; to train capable animators; to form the people in *Lectio Divina* and overcome the risk of them being merely passengers in the exercise.

- An analogous way is that of the *Bible or Gospel group* (biblical liturgical groups, Bible circles, centers of listening to the Word). These kinds are very varied.

- Here we must also speak of *biblical initiation*. This is represented in biblical courses, conferences, didactic pastoral workshops where learning about the Bible is central.

- What may be called *extraordinary forms* are the more intensive encounters with the Sacred Books, and, therefore, less frequent: A year of the Bible (in German speaking countries), a month of the Bible or a week of the Bible (in Latin America), Bible camps (in summer or winter), visits to the Holy Land.

It is worth while remembering also representations of the Bible through films or TV, whose influence are debatable, but they can have an impression on the masses, being a source of biblical memories for many.

3. The principal structural elements

The most simple and easiest structure is the group because it guarantees an effective interaction; community reading prevails here; the approach is more spiritual; the identity of the biblical encounter is often influenced by the peculiar charisms of religious institutions (associations, movements, prayer centers); aids, mostly well prepared, are abundant.

Oberservations

1. Access to Scripture is not yet sufficiently „broad“, according to the formula of DV 22; it would be interesting to attempt a serious religious enquiry on the link between the Bible and the people of God, at least in one's own country, diocese, parish.

In every case it seems established that among adults the desire to approach the Bible precedes the call to catechism. How are we to welcome these signs of growth that the Spirit stirs up?

2. A second problem concerns the same identity of the direct encounter with the Bible, in its mysterious existence of the Word of God.

Lectio Divina remains, in the tradition of the Church, the great regal way as a profound, intelligent and loving synthesis between text, person and God encountered in the bosom of the Church.

But to reach this one needs to confront some important theological and pastoral knots which surface continually among the faithful; for example:

- What does it mean to encounter the Bible as the Word of God in human language?

- What connection is there between the statements of the Bible and doctrinal statements of the Church?

- How should one understand the multiplicity of actual biblical readings?

- How does one read the Bible in a contemplative way and not only in a functional way (to gain knowledge, to find a reply)?

- How does one establish a genuine correlation between faith and life?

- How does the Word of God touch upon current problems and illuminate and determine practical action?

- How does one read the Bible open to ecumenism, to mission, to those far away?

- How does one maintain one's allegiance to a particular group while safeguarding participation in the ecclesial community?

3. A third problem concerns the correct utilization of the biblical dimension within the ways that we have

called indirect, especially in the catechesis. A concomitant introduction to the Bible is necessary, nor should there be lacking learning and the periodic exercise of *Lectio Divina* on significant texts proposed by the catechetical itinerary.

4. A fourth problem area concerns the figure of the guide upon whom depends the promotion of the biblical experience. The delicacy of the problems cited, the variety of models, the implications of group dynamics which are very influential (up to the point of being manipulative), the requirements of the hermeneutical circle, and still more, fidelity to the sacred text demand that every communitarian biblical encounter be guided by animators (cleric, religious or lay) and that the animators have a suitable spiritual formation and, secondly, the necessary competence.

Within this framework of service there is everything that is auspicious on hand for the episcopal conference, and in every diocese there could be a biblical office or service to help parishes or groups. Also it would be greatly advantageous for every parish to be able to hold annually a Bible week, or at least a Bible Sunday.

5. One may also reflect on the mass-media in connection with the Bible. The PBC, in the document already cited, writes: „Given their capacity to influence a vast public require(s) a particular training in their use. This will help to avoid paltry improvisations, along with striking effects that are actually in poor taste“ (IV,C,3).

Finally, I mention an approach to the Bible that we should have at heart (in the wake of a clear tradition). I refer to those forms of biblical activity congenial to our Christian culture which are expressed in so many ways in the past: figurative art, literary, musical, theatrical forms, in particular by means of popular sacred images.

What is possible for us today?

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Access to Sacred Scripture

One of the most pressing invitations of the Second Vatican Council in which it refers to the recovery of the Bible into the life of the Church is contained in the phrase, which the Catholic Biblical Federation has adopted as its motto: „Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful“ (DV 22). The reflections I am putting forward take the form of an evaluation about how the Catholic faithful gain access to Sacred Scripture in Europe today.

In what does access to Sacred Scripture consist?

When the Council speaks of access to Sacred Scripture it is not referring only to material access, but includes two other levels, without which the encounter between the faithful and the Word of God would be incomplete: in the first place, access to the literal sense of Scripture which refers us to the privileged experience of a God who manifests himself to his people amidst the vicissitudes of history; secondly, access to the meaning of the text for us today, which makes the Bible a living and efficacious word in our history.

Material access comes through external contact with the Bible, be it through the distribution of the biblical text, or through personal reading, or through public proclamation.

Access to the literal sense of the text supposes a knowledge of the „precise meaning of the texts as and how they were produced by their authors“ (IBC, 72-74), of the historical circumstances, the literary genre, etc., which helps to grasp the message that the text held for its original audience, and the faith experience that it reflects. To seek the literal sense is primarily the task of exegesis.

Finally, access to the meaning of the text for us involves a process which

continues the dialogue begun at the preceding level. The faith experience contained in the text appears in this process as the words addressed by a God who enters into dialogue with men and women of every generation (IBC, 70).

This hermeneutical process is achieved above all in the liturgy, but it also occurs when a group of believers, gather in the presence of the Word of God in order to discover his will, or also in individual reading when it is done with a heart open to allow oneself to be spoken to by it. To this kind of faith reading some traditional ways, like *Lectio Divina* and others, contribute much.

These three levels should be present in the various forms of access to the Bible, since it is not enough to furnish material access without giving a minimal understanding of the texts, and in turn this understanding of the texts is still not a faith reading if there is not a dialogue with one's own faith experience, which is capable of recognizing in Scripture a Word of God for us, a living word which invites us to respond through prayer (DV 25) and commitment in life.

Ways of access to Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church

The ways whereby the faithful can gain access to Sacred Scripture are very varied. I shall refer only to those which seem to me more important and more common: translations, the liturgy, catechesis, other community forms of access to the Bible, and individual reading.

Abbreviations:

DV = Dei Verbum

SC = Sacrosanctum Concilium

IBC = Pontifical Biblical Commission

*The Interpretation of the Bible in
the Church*, Rome, 1993

1. Translations

The use of translations is an unavoidable way for the great majority of the faithful given ignorance of the original languages. For this reason the Council emphasized in various places their importance and required, following the example of the ancient versions, that there be exact and adequate translations in various languages made from the original texts (DV 22), mindful that it is the task of bishops to see to it that the faithful are instructed in the right use of the sacred books by using translations provided with commentaries that really explain them (DV 26).

In broad outline it may be said that these recommendations of the Council have been implemented satisfactorily in southern and central Europe, since in recent years there have appeared numerous translations from the original texts with explanatory notes and introductions. These latter offer the reader basic information about the sense of the text in its context and even start the dialogue with the faith experience of the person of today. However, in the countries of eastern Europe the situation is very different. Taking into account this analysis, it seems to me that there are important challenges in this area:

- The creation of a team of consultants made up of catholic specialists who have worked on translation projects. This team could collaborate in different ways in the production of new translations or in revising old ones.
- To put at the service of the churches recent biblical notes and introductions, so that they could be used and adapted without having to start from scratch where there are no specialists to do this.
- To encourage solidarity between the various churches, collecting funds where possible to subsidize projects for translating and distributing the Bible.

2. The Liturgy

The liturgy is also a privileged means through which the faithful have access to Sacred Scripture (IBC, 112). As the

Council pointed out that the Church „never fails, more especially in the sacred liturgy, to receive the bread of life, whether this comes from the table of the Word of God or from that of Christ's Body, and so to offer it to the faithful“ (DV 21), since the liturgy is the privileged area for making known to the faithful the vast riches of God's Word (DV 25).

Guided by this conviction, the Council fathers proposed that the readings of Sacred Scripture be more abundant, more varied, and more appropriate (SC 31 and 51), and that its proclamation be accompanied by the homily (SC 52).

The reform of the liturgy has contributed enormously to the faithful's having easier access to Sacred Scripture. The proclamation of the reading in vernacular languages has made Christians more familiar with the Word of God. In the same way, the homily has been a fundamental instrument for facilitating access to Scripture as the Word of God for us today. Nevertheless there are still some tasks outstanding:

- A revision of the lectionary would be desirable, in a way that would make access to the Word of God easier for the faithful. The selection and the number of readings should be revised, perhaps extensively, so that they could be retained and discussed.
- The proclamation of the readings should be improved. The formation of readers, not only in the techniques of reading but also in a way that gets the content across, would be a great contribution in this area.
- The importance of the homily is fundamental since, thanks to it, listening to the Word culminates in a personal dialogue with the one who speaks to us through it (IBC, 116-17). There should be an insistence on the importance of its preparation, in so far as through it the Word becomes alive for the faithful.

3. Catechesis

Within the ministry of the Word, catechesis is a privileged means of access to the Word of God, not only

because in it Scripture is read within the heart of the Church, but because in it catechumens ought to learn to read the Bible as the Word of God. The Council reminds us that catechesis receives the salutary food of the Word of God, and that catechists should read and study Scripture assiduously (DV 24).

In the years since the Council Catechesis has experienced a spectacular growth and has contributed much whereby children and young people become familiar with some texts, acquire knowledge within their reach to understand better and begin a dialogue with the faith experience contained within them. Despite all this, important tasks still remain in this area that cannot be neglected:

- Without doubt the most important is the biblical formation of catechists. Despite efforts already carried out, there has still not been achieved a series of basic information and, above all, they have not been taught to read the Bible as the Word of God.
- It is also important to recover in catechesis a global vision of the history of salvation in order to situate in this frame the events narrated in the Bible, and to be able to discover that our history forms part of this same process of salvation.
- Another important task is the recovery of adult catechesis. The access to Sacred Scripture that catechesis can provide is much fuller in adult life, when people already have the basic experiences of life and these can be contrasted with the experience of God which we encounter in the Bible.

4. Other community forms of access to Sacred Scripture

Recently there has arisen in the Church other community forms of access to Sacred Scripture, which express the hunger for the Word of God that the faithful feel. These initiatives can be grouped into two large blocks:

- a) In the first place are the so-called „new movements“ (charismatic renewal, neocatechumenate, focolari, etc.).

In many of these ecclesial groups Sacred Scripture occupies a privileged position. It is read and interpreted as the Word of God for the faithful today. These groups have been a privileged means of access to the Word of God for many of the faithful who would have known no other way.

However, in some cases it would be appropriate to improve the way of reading the Bible since often, given a legitimate desire to discover the will of God in their lives, they overlook the question of the message of the text in its context (what does the text say?) and pose the question directly about the message of the text for themselves (what does the text say to me/us?).

b) Another group of initiatives is usually designated by the generic name „biblical apostolate“. It comprises activities specifically biblical which may be in the area of awareness (Bible days or weeks), of formation (Bible schools, biblical correspondence courses, etc.), or of faith reading of the Bible (Bible groups or circles).

These kinds of activities have extended all over in recent years and have encountered inestimable support in the Catholic Biblical Federation. In my opinion, the most important tasks in this area in Europe at this moment are:

- that we take advantage of the potential of these initiatives and go beyond the „biblical apostolate“ in the traditional sense of one pastoral activity among others to „the biblical animation of the whole pastoral ministry“, whose objective is to make the Bible the inspiration of the life of the Church in all its ambits.

- the formation of animators of Bible reading groups, which ought to include biblical and pedagogical training, and ecclesial recognition.

- to continue reflection on ways for faith reading of the Bible (*Lectio Divina* and others), of the manner whereby the faithful can be offered a simple way to get access to Sacred Scripture in all its richness.

- to offer materials (courses, ways of reading, etc.) that exist in the countries of southern and central Europe to those in eastern Europe.

5. Individual reading of Scripture

Mindful that the community dimension is most important in the access of the faithful to Sacred Scripture, the Church recommends frequent reading of the Word of God by all the faithful (DV 25). This individual reading produces much fruit not only in those who practise it but also in the community to which these people belong.

For this individual reading to be profitable it ought to be preceded by a basic biblical formation which should be done in the process of Christian initiation, or subsequently through initiation groups for reading the Bible.

Likewise, it is important that the faithful have available good tools for directing

this reading and preventing too subjective a reading.

Finally it is appropriate to offer a way of faith reading that facilitates a dialogue between the faith experience reflected in the text and that of the one who is reading it, in a way that the reading reveals the actuality of the Word of God for person in every age.

Conclusion

At the end of this journey through the various ways of the access of the faithful to Sacred Scripture it is interesting to pose a couple of questions:

How can we make access to the richness of the Word of God easy for the faithful? What initiatives would have to be taken for Sacred Scripture to be truly the foundation of the life of the Church, of each local church and of all the faithful?

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Developments in Bible reading since *Dei Verbum*

All the Church's preaching, therefore, like the Christian religion itself, must be nourished and directed by Scripture (DV 21).

Starting from this understanding of Scripture as the „nourishment“ of preaching and religion, even of Christian life itself, the Second Vatican Council proposed certain positive directives:

Already in the Constitution on the Liturgy it laid stress on a great opening up of the Scriptures to the people in the setting of the „table of God's Word“ (SC 51) as well as on the importance of the homily (SC 52).

In particular, those who are engaged in the service of the Word are called to consecrate themselves in a permanent manner to the reading and study of Scripture (DV 25).

In a wider sense, all the faithful are urged to have a direct contact with scriptural texts (DV 25).

But the Council has awakened a spirit which is not satisfied with a literal implementation of its texts. One can discern three ways of deepening or of development.

1. From preaching in the liturgy, to sharing of Scripture, and of life in Christian groups

A first development concerns the point of contact with the Bible. Above all, the Council spoke of the liturgy as the preferred place to hear biblical texts. It was immediately obvious that the interest awakened by this contact with the Bible could not be satisfied by the

liturgy alone. Because of the purpose of the liturgy, the shortage of time, and even the number of readings, the faithful were often left hungry for more. It is true that the organisation of Bible courses bore much fruit in helping believers to understand better the founding scriptures of their faith. However, in order that one could live by these words, another meeting place was needed, not only for the exchange of information on the origins of the text and its interpretation throughout the history of the Church, but also for the sharing of life.

In many countries of the world, there are small groups of Christians, basic communities or specially constituted ones, who share their life and the biblical word in order that the Word of God will be made manifest to them. In *Evangelii nuntiandi* (58) Paul VI described these basic church communities as „a place of evangelisation, for the benefit of larger communities“ and „a hope for the universal church, insofar as they find their sustenance in the Word of God“.

In *Christifideles laici* (26), John Paul II asked those in authority to „foster... small basic or so-called „living“ communities, where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another“.

So it is not solely in the liturgy that the Bible is read and explained. The reading of the Bible takes place also in Christian groups, in the midst of everyday life, where one can express freely the diversity of human experience and relate it to the Word of God, using words, symbols and gestures which find little place in current liturgical forms.

2. From the content of faith and moral standards as a support for life

The Council made clear that Scripture forms an important source for becoming familiar with the mysteries of faith and the principles of religion and of

Christian life (SC 52). Already in the council documents themselves one can see a certain evolution of the terminology. SC 52 speaks of „sacro fidei mysteria et normae vitae christianae“, in DV 21 we read „As the supreme principle of faith (supremam fidei suae regulam), she (the Church) always had and has still the Scriptures together with Holy Tradition...“ The two verbs „nutriatur et regatur“, which are used a little further on, are far less legalistic terms.

So we observe a significant movement: the Bible is not to be interpreted solely in a legalistic or moral way, but it can also permeate the lives of men and women from within.

Just recently, we have seen to what extent the Universal Catechism is concerned to integrate reference to biblical texts in its systemisation of faith and morals. One could discuss at length the way in which the Catechism makes use of Scripture. In this respect, the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the interpretation of the Bible gives us food for thought:

As long as the Word of God is put into writing, the Bible has a richness of significance which cannot be completely contained or imprisoned in any systematic theology. One of the main functions of the Bible is to make serious challenges to theological systems and continually to recall the existence of important aspects of divine revelation and of human reality which are at times forgotten or neglected in the pressures of systematic reflection.

A critical and profound reading of Scripture shows us how the Word of God comes into dynamic contact with social and economic, communal and religious aspects of the life of Jews and Christians of the period reflected in the Bible. Under the impetus given by the Council and with communal reading of the Bible, we take part in a real coming together of the biblical Word and the life of people of today.

This rapprochement is not exhausted in doctrinal formulae and oral prescrip-

tions, but it also provides considerable assistance for everyday life.

If we pay careful attention to the questions of men and women of the 20th century, if we are cognisant of their aspirations, their hopes and their disappointments, and if we consciously share their lot, we cannot avoid being challenged by their demands for a life linked to human dignity, in some cases even of survival, in its simplest expression. Many people are searching for a meaning to life in a world which seems compartmentalised, scattered and breaking up, arbitrary and without direction. Faced with this complex situation, as long as one is a Christian one can take refuge in a logic and an impervious religious language which does not permit disruption.

In the gospels, Jesus acts differently: he goes in search of men and women in distress, he hears their cries, he enters into dialogue with them in sharing their language, and, even more radically, their life, he intervenes to cure their illnesses, to free them from the structures of possession, in short he helps them to find a direction in their life, and makes them into people capable of taking their place in the world, capable of opening themselves also to the coming of the Kingdom of God.

In this sense, the Bible puts forward texts of a symbolic and psychological depth which reflect human life in all its complexity, which provide a sense of direction, an advance towards an honest life in a highly complex world.

The final document of the Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation held at Bogota in 1990 specifies some directions for „new methods of reading and proclaiming the Word, in the context of the true tradition of the Church“ (7.1- 7.3):

* “We should start with the reality in which we actually find ourselves today, and we should allow the Word of God to throw light on this reality. This would entail on our part attentive listening to God who speaks through the Scriptures, through his Church and through the

human situation. Such a reading would reveal to us the true face of God - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose face is turned in loving compassion and concern for all those who suffer in every age and are struggling to find meaning in their lives.

* The Bible should provoke the people of God to conversion and commitment in the service of the brothers and sisters. When it is read in the community of believers, it can give us the strength to be faithful to our vocation of service in the world“.

3. From the responsibility of the single cleric to the responsibility of the Christian community as a whole

In the context of this method of reading the Bible, which brings to the encounter with the Word the totality of human experience, and finds justification for commitments in this life one must indicate a third development of conciliar vision. The Council recommended that Christians should read the Bible together.

In many countries the laity have been quick to respond to this appeal. So much so that „those who practise the reading, actualisation and appropriateness of the biblical message - that is to say the „servants of the Word“ are no longer exclusively members of the clergy, but the body of believers, above all when they are gathered together in a community.“

One could speak here of a responsibility of all Christians for the Word of God. One can outline certain consequences which arise from this communal responsibility:

* “The entire Christian community and each of its members are beneficiaries and bearers of this Word, although not, however, its proprietors. Without denying the importance of a personal spirituality, one must place biblical pastoral ministry in the first

place in the community or ecclesial setting, at the local church level, as well as at that of the universal church.

* The church community is responsible for this Word at the heart of the community, in its fundamental expression of witness in words and deeds, of service between brothers and sisters, of liturgical celebration. At each level the Christian community and the body of its members exercise their responsibility in respect of the hearing the biblical Word and of the concrete situation of their fellow men and women, in respect of the discovery of the Word of God in this situation, and of its appropriateness in a personal or communal context, in respect of the embodiment or of the fulfilment of this Word in the world of today.

Biblical pastoral ministry would be directed towards the building of these Christian communities in which each person can take part according to his gifts, the mutual respect of the brothers and sisters of Jesus.

* These local Catholic Christian communities should keep in contact with their sister Catholic communities, but also and more and more strongly with Christians of other denominations.

* But the Christian community is equally responsible for this Word outside the community by commitment in the world to the building of a more just society, concerned to live in peace and to safeguard the earth for future generations.

Biblical pastoral ministry should take very seriously the mission of healing and of liberation which Jesus entrusted to his disciples letting themselves be guided by a dynamic vision of mankind.

In this respect it should respect the individuality of each human being:

- give profound respect to human liberty as it manifests itself in personal development;
- help people to find their way, their language in order to be able to express themselves with confidence;
- promote the idea that each adult

should take responsibility for himself;

- allow those marginalized by society, by religion, to return as adults to their personal, family, professional or religious commitments...“

These reflections try at the same time to follow a movement that the Council outlined years ago, to reflect the experiences of the biblical pastoral ministry in the Latin countries of Europe and to formulate certain elements of a vision of the place held by Bible reading in Christian communities. Some developments have taken place in line with the place of biblical reading, with expectations with regard to the Bible, and with responsibility for the Word in our world. The Assembly at Bogota had already expressed this vision in its own way. (7.5)

There remains much to do in the domain of work on the Bible. There are in existence groups where Christians read the Bible in the hope of finding therein help for their lives. These groups constitute a minority in our churches, and a tiny grain of sand in our society of the 20th century, or a yeast, which, in order to work, must come into contact with flour.

We find ourselves faced with enormous challenges to promote the coming together of the biblical Word and real life; the consciousness of all Christians, laity and clergy, of their common responsibility for the Word; the formation of „servants of the Word“; not only a deep knowledge of the Bible or the different ways of reading the Bible, but also the knowledge and respect of modern man, a formation on the subject of the sharing of responsibility as well as formation and experience in the animation of groups, the development and propagation of popular methods of Bible reading which allow ordinary people to read the Bible in a responsible way, starting from the complexity of contemporary life, without succumbing to the temptations of the restricting fundamentalism so prevalent in our society.

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PROSPECT

Bishops' Meeting and Synod of Bishops

1. In the Dogmatic Constitution *DEI VERBUM*, Vatican II „hearing the Word of God with reverence“, affirms in paragraph 6 that „through divine revelation God chose to show forth and communicate himself and the eternal decisions of his will regarding the salvation of men“.

In revelation the communication of God and human history are closely joined, and the summit of revelation, in so far as the the supreme communication of God and the greatest force of human life history is the Jesus *event*, his devotion, his poverty, his cross, his resurrection.

This exemplary and salvific event joins and moulds, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the history of every person into a perennially on-going history. We can say that the self-revelation of God to humanity, in Christ, is the real spiritual center of Vatican II.

The message of the Council, therefore, can be summarized thus: *the unity of all human beings in Christ according to God's plan*.

It is not by chance that chapter VI of *DEI VERBUM* plays a unifying role in the four areas that make up the life of the Church: the liturgy; ecclesiastical preaching, which „like the Christian religion itself must be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture“; theology, which „rests on the Word of God as its primary and perpetual foundation“; and finally, the daily life of the faithful, whose life of faith, hope and charity, whose lives of faith should be marked by frequent reading of Scripture and accompanying prayer (cf. nn. 21, 24, 25).

Earlier, the Council had brought to notice that, „this teaching office is not above the Word of God, but serves it by teaching only what has been handed on (cf. n. 10).

Among these formidable intuitions of *DEI VERBUM* is the exhortation, made with ardor and insistence, to all the faithful, „to learn by frequent reading of the Divine Scriptures the ‘excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:8)’“ (n. 25).

Synthesizing paragraph 25, the holy Synod teaches that:

- all the faithful should have direct access to Scripture;
- they ought to read it frequently and willingly;
- they ought to learn to pray in accompaniment of the reading of the Bible.

All this is aimed at coming to a greater knowledge of Christ, a knowledge that does not leave out of consideration the sacred text. They come to know him by conforming themselves more lovingly and profoundly to his life as Son of the Father, which is given for the salvation of humankind.

It is interesting to observe that the exhortation to the faithful to read the Bible is also present in other documents of Vatican II (*Perfectae caritatis*, n. 6, and *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 4).

Catholic Biblical Federation 25 Years

Looking back upon its 25 years of activities, the Federation has published a supplement to the *Bulletin DEI VERBUM*, under the title *Audiens et Proclamans* („Listening and Proclaiming“), paperback, 175 pages, folio size.

The book pursues a practical rather than a documentary aim: it wants to portray in its member organizations the Federation's life and, at the same time, to delineate, by means of 17 concrete biblical programs, the diversity and wealth of the biblical pastoral ministry in different parts of the world.

To safeguard their originality, the contributions are rendered in the language and style in which they have been composed, namely in one of the four languages: English, French, German, and Spanish. A brief summary is added to each article in the other three languages respectively. The concluding essay by Cardinal Martini of Milan on the role of the *lectio divina* in the biblical pastoral ministry summarizes what the direct access to Sacred Scripture can mean for the pastoral renewal.

Available at the CBF General Secretariat, Stuttgart, for a donation of US\$ 15.00.

2. After the promulgation of *DEI VERBUM* on the 8th November 1965, a promising future opened up for the biblical-pastoral ministry, which had before it a very full and decisive task as regards the progress of the Church and the people of God.

Actually, in the final document of the Synod of Bishops, held in 1985, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Vatican II, it reads: in the context of preaching the Gospel „the importance stands out of the Dogmatic Constitution *DEI VERBUM*, which has been too much neglected, but which Paul VI proposed again in a profound and topical way in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*“.

Leaving aside my pausing on the motives for such a neglect, I limit myself to underlining the seriousness with which the Holy Father, John Paul II, with heavy heart, has invited the Church in our time to undertake a *new evangelization* of Europe, that is, to feed faith (awakened and nourished by the Word of God), hope and charity, renewing them today, announcing the loving closeness of God to humanity so that the one may become next to his neighbor and all find themselves again in unity with God.

The mission of all Christians and of all Churches, in fact, and which is appropriate in a period of upheaval and bewilderment for the people of Europe, is the living and faithful testimony of God working in history. Such a testimony must be made today with greater force as the second millennium of the Christian era comes to a close.

3. For this reason I ask myself if it is not an opportune time to convoke a Universal Synod of Bishops specifically on *DEI VERBUM*, in particular on chapter VI where it reads: „... the force and power in the Word of God is so great that it remains the support

and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life“ (n. 21).

It seems to me extremely important that the Bishops of the whole world should ask themselves:

- How have we experienced and applied *DEI VERBUM*?

- What initiatives have we promoted so that the faithful might familiarize themselves little by little with Sacred Scripture?

- What significance has the Word of God for the faith and the daily life of the people of God?

- What have we done about the various other suggestions and counsels that were put forward in chapter VI of the Constitution on Divine Revelation?

- Have we really understood and carried out the project *DEI VERBUM* which springs from the contemplation of the communion with the Trinity in the listening to the Word of Life?

- And if it has been carried out, at least in part, how can we accept more faithfully today, in the face of the task of the new evangelization?

These are all questions that we cannot put off for long and which, on the other hand, must be faced by the entire Church, and not only by single regional and national episcopal conference. Such a Synod would be an excellent preparation by all the Church for the jubilee in the year 2000.

In Europe, but soon also in other continents, we live in a public context in which the mystery of God is practically absent from the external signs of life and society; we are threatened with an interior aridity which runs the risk of suffocating the conscience, suffocating Christian existence, hindering in daily experience an awareness of a taste for the living God.

Certainly there are other remedies for defending ourselves against this mentality that is practically atheistic, which is manifested, for example, in consumerism, indifferentism, permissiveness; other remedies that the Church encourages.

But any remedy at all should be founded on that living sense of faith which makes us grasp the presence of God in us and around us, a faith which is awakened and nourished by personal contact with the Word through frequent listening to it in the Bible.

Then will be overcome the dangerous dissociation that there is in Christians between faith and the lived experience of daily life; and faith will become mature, that is, personal, convinced, intimate, testified to, capable of standing up again fragmentation, attrition, and the incoherence of the present western civilization.

On the other hand, without this faith, it will be difficult for Christians to persevere on their journey and in their fidelity to the Lord.

I hope that, past neglect notwithstanding, serious reflection based on the questions I have indicated above, might throw open greater hope in the biblical-pastoral ministry, in the Church, and, through the familiarity of everyone with the sacred Books that, „the Word of the Lord may run and be glorified (2 Thess 3:1), and the treasure of revelation.... increasingly fill the hearts of men (sic)“.

From the original thrust of the first generation of Christians, who knew almost by heart Sacred Scripture and lived in all its power, „so may we hope for a new surge of spiritual vitality from intensified veneration for God's Word which 'lasts forever' (Is. 40:8; 1 Pet 1.23-25)“ (DV, 26).

+ Carlo Maria Cardinal Martini
Archbishop of Milan