

Catholic Biblical Federation

No. 33

4/1994

Bulletin

*Sei
verbum*

Silver Jubilee Celebrations *

*** * Testimonies * * ***

**From Bogotá to Hong Kong,
via Emmaus * * * "With
all boldness and without
hindrance" * * * Life of
the Federation: Meetings,
Experiences, News, Courses**

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English Edition

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

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

Furthermore, it is the intention of the CBF to promote biblical studies, support the production of pedagogical aids for a better understanding of biblical texts, and assist in the formation of ministers of the Word (such as biblical animators, lectors and catechists), suggesting ways to form Bible groups and recommending the use of both mass and group media to facilitate their encounter with the Word.

The Federation also wishes to promote a dialogue with people who believe only in human values, as well as to encourage an encounter with the sacred writings of other religions. Through such encounters, the revealed Word of God can offer a more profound understanding of God and of human life.

The Federation appeals to everyone to add their personal and community support to these great tasks.

+ Alberto Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno
President of the CBF

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

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Editorial

As we already gave notice in BDV 30, on the 9th of April there took place in Stuttgart a commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the birth of the Catholic Biblical Federation. So that everyone and all our readers may be participants, we want to record some of the words and experiences that were shared there, so that they may serve as congratulations and encouragement to all. To this end we have collected together the interventions of Cardinal Willebrands, of bishops Ablondi, Esua and Kasper, of Ms Cecilia Chui and of Sister Rosana Pulga.

We gave ourselves time to record and celebrate its history, and from this memory we drew new energy for the present and the future. This is what we are presenting in our section: *From Bogotá to Hong Kong*. In 1990 we embarked upon a journey in Bogotá that will take us to Hong Kong in 1996. From a concrete context, a region of Asia, but with this as a backdrop, Geoffrey King, Moderator of the Executive Committee, describes the actual situation of the journey embarked upon and opens up future courses of action. The theme of the next Assembly: The Word of God as Source of Life: "The Word was made flesh... that they may have life in all its fullness." (Jn 1,14; 10,10), provokes numerous reflections in many places. An example of this is the report by Felipe Huáipar Farfán and the religious sisters of La Sagrada Biblia, from Trujillo (Peru).

Lectio divina endeavours to help and promote formation. In this number, the bishop of Bolzano-Brixen, Wilhelm Egger, presents an exercise of Lectio Divina which is novel with regard to the others which are being published in this Bulletin. It utilises the medieval four senses of Scripture instead of the three steps that are now „traditional“ in this form of prayerful reading.

The whole of daily life is like a breath of fresh air that sustains all the members of the Federation, as is demonstrated in the regional, subregional and zonal meetings, in its publications, in its courses, and in its diverse contacts. We want to take account of all this in the article *Life of the Federation*.

Sometimes it becomes necessary to single out the occasional proper name. Today it is Florencio Galindo who has carried out important work for the Federation in Stuttgart. As of now he will continue that work in his own country of Colombia. We thank him for his dedication and send him our affectionate greetings.

For my part, and to end the presentation of this number, I send you a first cordial greeting, together with an invitation for your collaboration, of which I am already sure. May every word be of service to life, life in abundance for all of you.

Pilar de Miguel

SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

Taking advantage of the Executive Committee and Coordinators' Meeting here in Stuttgart, Silver Jubilee Celebrations were held on Saturday and Sunday, April 9 and 10, 1994. On Saturday afternoon at 16:00 hours, about 100 specially invited guests gathered at the Christkönigsheim of the Pallotine Fathers, the venue of our meeting. Among our guests of honor, we welcomed Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, who had presided over the meeting on April 16, 1969 that led to the foundation of the Federation; the local Bishop and famed theologian, Msgr. Walter Kasper; the Lord Mayor of Stuttgart, Dr. Manfred Rommel; Dom Bernard Orchard, OSB; Fr. John van der Valk, SDB, and Fr. Arnold Jurgens, Mhm, former General Secretaries of the Federation; Dr. Siegfried Meurer, Chairman of the United Bible Societies' (UBS) Executive Committee, and Dr. Ulrich Fick, the former UBS General Secretary.

After the guests had been welcomed by Dr. Ort Kemper, Director of Katholisches Bibelwerk, the German Full Member of the Federation, and by Lord Mayor Rommel, a passage of the Bible about the beginnings of the biblical-pastoral ministry (Acts 8,26-40) was read in four languages. It was followed by the contribution of Cardinal Willebrands who reminisced about the beginnings of the Catholic Biblical Federation. Four testimonies about the biblical-pastoral ministry in various parts of the world were given by EC members Sr. Rosana Pulga (Brazil) and Bishop Cornelius Esua (Cameroon) and by coordinators Ms. Cecilia Chui (Hong Kong) and Fr. Santiago Guijarro (Spain). Bishop Kasper as well as the representatives of the UBS and of the funding agencies spoke words of solidarity; our President, Bishop Ablondi, rounded up everything with his charm and words of thanks.

On the occasion of the jubilee, we had received many messages of congratulations. Among them was a letter of Cardinal König, the first President of the Federation, and of Pope John Paul II.

During our concelebration we prayed, of course, for the entire Federation. But at the same time, our thoughts turned to the Hong Kong Plenary Assembly.

Reasons for Celebration

In his interventions (discourse and homily), the Cardinal reflected on the history of the Federation, from the perspective of its foundation and the objectives for which it was founded. He recalled that fundamental to these goals was the necessity of securing for all the people of God access to Sacred Scripture, and the insistence on every kind of formation in a variety of fields from a pastoral point of view.

There was then, and evidently still is, among the tasks of the Federation, another element of the organisational kind, which, in the Cardinal's judgment deserves to be especially remembered: „to encourage and promote the creation of authorised institutions by the episcopal conferences, since the Council document entrusted the bishops with this task of caring for the faithful with reference to Sacred Scripture“. He recalled, in fact, the words of Paul VI, taken from no. 26 of Dei Verbum: „And as the life of the Church develops through regular participation in the Eucharistic Mystery, so it is to be hoped

that it will receive a new impulse of life from a redoubled devotion to the Word of God, which 'endures forever' (Is.40:8; 1 Peter 1:23-25)."

He emphasised, citing again Dei Verbum (no.21), the importance that the Church has always given to the Scriptures, declaring them to be inspired by God, and so they are above any other document: „The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerated the body of the Lord, since she has never ceased to take and share the bread of life which the table of the Word offers“.

+ Cardinal Willebrands
Rome

Words of Gratitude

Bishop Ablondi's discourse was full of gratitude to all who had contributed and continue to contribute to the life of the Federation. He described the present moment of the Federation in the words of Psalm 78: „The things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us, we shall not hide from their children: the glorious deeds of the Lord and his

might“ (v.47f). He pointed out as a challenge and objective for biblical pastoral ministry in the future: „to pass on from reading the Bible to being read by it“ or „to go beyond the Bible to the Word of God and to commit one's life to this Word, as Peter says in John 6: „You have the words of eternal life“.

The President of the Catholic Biblical Federation ended his discourse with the following task for the Federation: „Taking account of what has been said before, the Catholic Biblical Federation should be like a mistress, that is to say, it should teach the People of God to listen to the voice of God in order to be able to understand humanity, and to be, at the same time, attentive to persons' needs, in order to be able to understand the Word of God in all its profundity (audiens), and to proclaim the Word of salvation (proclamans). Just as the Federation entitles its 25th anniversary publication, *Audiens et Proclamans*, so it should, itself, listen and proclaim.“

+ Bishop Ablondi, Livorno
President of the CBF

Words of Solidarity

The anniversary message of Walter Kasper was cordial and friendly. The bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart expressed his joy that so many institutions met in Stuttgart, the city of the Bible. The famous German theologian paid tribute to all who had contributed to the development of the CBF during the 25 years of its existence. He made special mention of Professor Knoch who had urged the Federation into the area of biblical pastoral ministry.

The bishop paid special tribute to the members of the Federation who, throughout the world, and in difficult circumstances, proclaim the Word of God in all cultures. As President of the Commission „The Universal Church“ of the German Episcopal Conference he has had to travel much. What he has seen has left him with the conviction that the discovery of the Bible and its being read in groups is contributing much to the renewal of the faith and to a new impetus in the Church, including Europe. He also sees in it an ecumenical sign.

For the bishop of Rottenburg, the fruits brought to the biblical pastoral ministry throughout the world are the result of good collaboration between the members of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

+ Walter Kasper
Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart

TESTIMONIES

Experiences in the Biblical Apostolate

I would like to state first of all that my study and work for the Bible began from a very personal experience with the Bible and how I found the 'Word of God' in it.

That happened in 1966 when my father contracted cancer of the vocal chords. I was then at the very beginning of my life as a religious. My family had to fight in order to keep seven children fed. I prayed unceasingly to God that he would show me what he really wanted of me. Should my father die, I could not remain in the order as my family would need me. God showed himself in all his power. In our congregation, the Paulinas, the Bible was always left open beside the tabernacle as our spirituality is based on it and on the Eucharist.

I spent the whole night in prayer, and it happened that I heard quite clearly someone saying in me; 'Take the Bible, then I will speak to you'. I took it after a struggle and opened it without noticing where, for it was he who wished to speak to me. I looked and saw that it was the passage in Isaiah chapter 38 which records the illness of King Hezekiah, the announcement of his impending death and the prophet's prayer. God heard this prayer and restored the king's health. It was so similar to my father case; he was still alive. Then I prayed to God: 'Lord I believe, help my unbelief'. And the answer was: 'If you believe these words; they are not words of the past, they hold just as true today'. The result: to the doctor's amazement my father's condition improved, and after a few days he was able to work again at home.

This experience made my faith come alive and increased my dedication to God and his people. I was about to study philosophy and theology. Thus I learnt gradually to understand the Bible better and discovered when it is just a Bible (just a book) and when it is the Word of God. In 1982, I finished my studies and my order freed me for Bible work among the people.

I took over as leader of the group preparing the texts for the month of the Bible which is observed in all Brazil every September.

Later the parishes and dioceses began inviting me to run courses for them. This field is very wide and enriching. I would like to give a few examples of how the participants expressed themselves at the end of a course:

People really made great sacrifices in order to participate in these courses. They traveled many kilometers on foot. Mothers left their children with neighbors. Sometimes they were so poor that they could not pay for the journey. On one course, 130 people took part of whom only six were able to read. I had to communicate the text to them by means of gestures so that they might come to know the stories in the Bible. One man in his sixties, the leader of a community, had learnt to read, read some of the text and took on the role of Abraham. When I put questions to him about Abraham, he answered by referring to his own life and experiences and said: 'Just like Abraham'. He compared himself with Abraham and his eyes shone with joy.

A woman who couldn't read came to buy a Bible. I was curious and asked her: 'Dona Maria, how will you read the Bible seeing that you're not able to read at all?' She answered 'Every morning I take the Bible and open it place my hand upon it and say: „My God and Father, I know that everything that is printed here under my hand is your Word. Help me to live according to your will". Then I close the Bible and keep it near.

In this way I try to discover just where the will of God expresses itself on this day for instance, I help my neighbor who has a lot of children; I wash the clothes for another who is sick. I am good to my husband when he comes in tired from the field. These and other things. In the evening before going to bed I open the Bible again, place my hand on it and say: "My God and Father, I thank you that you have helped me today to do your will which is written down in this book". But my children have already torn the pages out of it for they want to see the book that their mother reads although she can't read at all. That's why I'm buying a new Bible.' Dona Maria was a simple woman from the country and very poor.

In Paraguay I gave a course for priests and religious sisters, there were only two lay people there. The course lasted two weeks. The priests felt it hard to accommodate themselves to the methods of communication. They were only interested in putting across the contents and just wanted to profit from the lectures of Fr Valmor da Silva and myself. It was very hard to bring them to reflect in groups upon the texts and to pray based on the texts.

Later I gave a three day course for 60 farm workers. I was alone on this except for two Jesuit seminarians who spoke Guarani. So we decided that I would speak in Spanish and they would translate into Guarani. Then the participants could speak to the seminarians in Guarani, and they would translate it into Spanish for me.

On the following day a genuine comradeship had grown between the workers and myself. They spoke Guarani and I understood it without needing an interpreter. I didn't know the words, but I grasped quite clearly the meaning of the questions and indeed details of their lives that they told me, and which I could equate with happenings in the Acts of the Apostles. At the end of the course, Silvero said: 'For the first time we were able to speak our own language in a church course. That for us was very important'. That was such a lively and dramatic experience that I have never forgotten it.

At the end of a course on the Book of Revelation (the Apocalypse) a man came to me and said: 'Do you know, I'm a priest and last year I did a special course in the Biblical Institute in Rome on the Apocalypse. But I can say that it's only now that I understand somewhat what the Apocalypse really is'. The course had not been just theory, analyzing dry texts in theoretical Bible study. Rather it had asked the text what it intended to say to the people of that time and to us today. We studied together in small groups, and in the evening we shared what we had worked out.

At the end of a Bible sharing session in a poverty stricken quarter (favela) the group of eight people resolved to visit a widow with seven children who lived in a so-called barrack without any electric light. Each of the eight brought a candle and some food along for the woman's support. They themselves were poor and lived in this poor quarter. When they came to Dona Sebastiana's shack they couldn't do any Bible reflections for she had gone off to look for food. So they left the

candles and the food they had brought. Dona Sebastiana was very grateful and asked them to come again. That night there was no light in that whole quarter, but the full moon shone so brightly that the group on its way home was able to reflect on a Bible text. It was the story of the multiplication of the loaves. One of them, nine-year old Valentina said: 'Today we have multiplied light so that it can shine for days in Dona Sebastiana's shack. Her children needn't be afraid of the dark'. This was an experience that moved the whole group profoundly.

Sister Rosana Pulga FSP
Belo Horizonte, Brazil

The Chinese Catholic Community

*„The Word became flesh
and lived among us“ (Jn 1:14)*

Beginnings of the Biblical Apostolate

The biblical apostolate in the Chinese Catholic community began with the concrete need to make God's Word available in Chinese language. To accomplish this great task of translating the Bible into Chinese, the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (SBF) was founded by Fr. Gabriele Maria Allegra, ofm, in Beijing in 1945.

Due to the communist take-over in China, the SBF moved to Hong Kong in 1948. After more than twenty years of hard work, the Chinese Bible was published on 8 December 1968. This was the most precious gift to the Chinese people because Chinese had become the language of the eucharistic celebration and also in the biblical formation of seminaries, theological faculties and pastoral catechetical centers.

From the production and distribution of the Chinese Bible emerged the need to help people understand God's message contained in sacred Scripture. In 1973, the Hong Kong Catholic Biblical Association was founded to encourage regular Bible study and to promote the biblical apostolate.

In the early years, the biblical apostolate moved very slowly in Hong Kong. The Bible was seen very much as the book for

priests and theologians. Apart from listening to the readings during Sunday mass, most of the faithful were not familiar with the Bible. The involvement of lay people in promoting the Word was minimal.

A new Stage of Development

In 1984, the Hong Kong Diocese initiated a Renewal Movement for future development. As a contribution to the programme, the Biblical Association was invited to give Bible talks and introduce Bible sharing/study methods for promoting biblical renewal and lay ministries.

Since then, responding to the growing need for self-evangelization, the Biblical Association has been systematically organizing Bible courses, seminars, camps and other functions on parochial and diocesan level. Bible Month celebration is an annual event designed to raise awareness of the importance of God's Word. Through these activities, many lay people experience the power of God's Word and learn to take the Bible as their daily prayer book and guidebook of life.

Now, most parishes have formed regular Bible sharing and study groups. Many pious associations read and listen to the Word before proceeding with meetings. Bible enthronement is becoming a common celebration for some communities. More young people, including students, are joining as members of the biblical association to share the work of the biblical apostolate.

Putting special emphasis on the centrality of God's Word in the life of the Church, the Biblical Association published a booklet entitled, „A Brief History of the Translation of the Chinese Bible“ to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Hong Kong Church in 1991.

Apart from being instrumental in promoting the biblical apostolate in Hong Kong, the Biblical Association and the SBF also work with other institutions with common concerns in Asia within the network of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF).

To unify and coordinate biblical pastoral activities among Chinese communities worldwide, the Hong Kong Biblical Association co-founded the United

Chinese Catholic Biblical Association (UCCBA) in 1990. The next UCCBA meeting, scheduled for 1995 in Macau, will focus on promoting dialogue between God's Word and the Chinese people.

Hunger for God's Word in China

Since 1968, around 347,000 copies of the Studium Biblicum Version (SBV) Bible were printed in Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, the Catholics in China were not as privileged as the Hong Kong people who could afford to have a personal Bible. The people, including priests and nuns, in China took turns to copy the texts from the limited quantity of SBV Bibles sent abroad.

This situation started to change in 1992 when approval was given by the China Church to print 200,000 copies of SBV Bible in simplified Chinese in Beijing. When the first 50,000 copies were available in 1993, they were all sold (RMB 22.00 per copy) within one month. In the preface of this newly printed Bible, the Chinese Catholic Religious Affairs Commission stated, „The Bible is a holy book written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God is the source of life for the Church and all the Christian faithful ... May the clergy and laity, following the teachings of the Church, read, reflect and listen to God's Word faithfully so as to advance in the way of love and sanctification and to bear witness to Christ.“

This is a very timely gift for China 25 years after the birth of the Chinese (SBV) Bible, coinciding with the approval given by the local authorities to use the Chinese language for the liturgical celebration. The Bible printing project, supported by CBF financially, is scheduled for completion in mid-1994.

With the provision of more Chinese Bibles, Fr. Marcus Chen of SBF continued to lay the ground work for the Bible movement in China through giving intensive Bible classes to over 100 seminarians from 18 provinces. Some methods have been tried and Bible sharing groups are now formed in different dioceses. The seminarians have reported that so far the sharing methods are very well received by lay people.

To acquire deeper knowledge of the Bible, many people in China feel that they need additional reference books. Making a concrete step to provide related materials SBF has asked for permission to produce 10.000 copies of its Bible Lexicon in Beijing. Printing is now in progress.

In addition, consent was given to the Biblicum to provide 240 copies of „Commentary on Gospels“ free for all the major seminaries in China. The Chinese Doctrinal Commission has further requested to reproduce articles in „Biblical Bi-Monthly“, published by the SBF. Permission is favourably granted to the Commission.

Looking towards the Future

Our Chinese biblical animators see that the Church of Hong Kong today and 1997 has a „period of grace“. There is no historical record of a people being told by a communist government in advance to prepare for the smooth transfer of authority in administration of their territory or country. The notice given beforehand is a privilege to the Hong Kong Chinese people to prepare themselves for the changes that will come.

To prepare for the challenge of spreading the Good News in China when the time arises, large numbers of lay people are now taking courses in the Hong Kong Catholic Biblical Institute under the Holy Spirit Seminary College. Members of the Biblical Association see their future role as agents of evangelization. Their trend of development in the coming years is to help promote faith communities based on the Word. They look forward to organizing biblical activities for the Mainland Catholics and having Bible sharing with them. SBF has made plans to continue to train seminarians in China to become Bible teachers on the national level.

At this crucial time in the spreading of the Word, our Chinese biblical promoters see that the next plenary assembly of CBF to be held in Hong Kong in 1996 will serve as a special contribution to the national growth and development of the biblical apostolate in China.

Cecilia Chui
Hong Kong

The Biblical Apostolate in Africa

An appraisal of the development and fruits of the biblical apostolate since the foundation of the Federation

I. The Situation before Vatican II

In an address presented during the 1978 Plenary Assembly of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate, his Eminence, Paul Cardinal Zoungana, then President of the Federation, said in reference to the biblical apostolate and the Church in Africa:

„Our young churches at the time of their foundation were deeply marked by the catechetical concepts and the pastoral practices of the older churches by whom the gospel was transmitted to them ... catechesis was essentially done with the catechism. It was, so to speak, the golden age of the catechism.“

He went on to say that although this method produced Christians who were well instructed and convinced, and the lives of the first generation of African Christians were a witness to the value of this method, „it presented Christian life as a doctrine to be believed and a morality to be put into practice, forgetting that Christian life is also a permanent appeal of the Spirit, heard in the Word of God, read in the signs of the times.“

Many an African Christian has died without having seen or touched the whole Bible or even some part of it! Moreover, translations of the Bible into local languages were few. But thanks to the Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, particularly its directives on making the Word of God accessible to the faithful, this situation is gradually changing for the better.

II. The Work and Fruits of the Biblical Apostolate

a) Personal Experience

It is about 20 years that I first heard about the biblical apostolate and came in contact with the Federation. Since then I have become more involved in the apostolate and with the Federation on the local and

international levels. I have been very much enriched by it. My approach to Sacred Scripture as a Christian, as a teacher and as a pastor has changed, or rather, is slowly changing. I am beginning to understand more and more that the Bible is not just a book to be studied and preached to other people but that it is the Word of God for me; God speaking to me as the shepherd of his people.

This change from the intellectual knowledge of Sacred Scripture and its theological application to a personal encounter with the Word of God addressed to me, as my spiritual nourishment just as I consider the Eucharist, has been a slow and difficult process especially for one who has been initiated into the analytical method of biblical studies. It has equally not been very easy to give it the same respect and reverence I do to the Holy Eucharist as *Dei Verbum* 21 demands.

As a pastor I am equally discovering what power the Word of God has and what marvels it can work not only in my own life but also in our young churches when it is made available to the people of God through translations into the local languages and the biblical apostolate in general. Most, if not all, of our Christian communities have been founded and kept alive by catechists and ordinary and simple faithful, many of whom are illiterate but who have listened to this Word, inflamed by it, accepted it wholeheartedly and transmitted it to others. I am often ashamed of myself when I listen to the beautiful and inspiring homilies which our catechists who can hardly read and write can give and how wonderfully they apply the Scriptures to the concrete situations of life. For them the Bible is indeed the Word of God, the word of life.

b) Experiences on the Level of the Local Churches

In Africa there is a great interest in the Bible, an eagerness to know it, an openness to hear about it, and to draw from it solutions to felt needs. That is why fundamentalist churches and sects which are Bible-centred and which use the Bible as a source of fellowship and community are attractive to many people in Africa. This challenge is being met in various ways. In the first place there is an

increasing number of projects for the translation and production of the Bible into the local languages, very often in collaboration with the other Christian churches. In some places, like the Diocese of Kumbo such interconfessional projects have offered the first opportunities of ecumenical contact. There is an increasing demand of Scripture texts. For example, in the Diocese of Kumbo, the coordinator of the biblical apostolate, who is a lay person, has launched the „Operation Buy Your Own Bible“. This thirst for the Scriptures is met by the United Bible Societies and by specifically Catholic publishing houses like the Verbum Bible in Kinshasa, Zaire, which produce Scriptures at affordable prices.

The growing thirst for the knowledge of the Word of God is particularly being met by the organisation of Bible Sharing or Study Groups, which are multiplying in various local churches and Christian communities. In many countries in the continent, especially in Eastern and Southern Africa, Small Christian Communities are becoming a pastoral model.

There is an effort to establish a close link between the Small Christian Community set-up and the biblical apostolate. Regular reflection on the Word of God through Bible Sharing or Study Groups is becoming an integral aspect of the programme of the Small Christian Communities in order that the Word of God may provide the inspiration for their daily life and activity. The LUMKO Missiological Institute in South Africa has of late produced an excellent handbook of Bible Sharing Methods for this purpose. In this way the Word of God is put at the basis of all Christian and leadership formation.

c) Experiences on Continental Level

Notwithstanding its slow development because of the lack of material and human resources as well as because of the numerous limitations and constraints the Church in Africa is confronted with, the Federation has been carrying on a number of activities on the continental level.

There was the first Biblical Spirituality Workshop for Anglophone Africa in the Benedictine Monastery, Dzobegan, Togo, in August 1981 which came out with a 10-step Bible Study Method adapted to the African situation. In January 1990,

there took place in Nairobi the first Pan-African Biblical Apostolate Seminar on „The Bible in the New Evangelisation“ in preparation for the 4th Plenary Assembly of the Federation. It was a wonderful opportunity to share the experience of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry from all over Africa since the beginning of the Federation. There have been as well a number of seminars, workshops and sessions on the subregional, national, diocesan and grassroot levels, to inform and form people on the biblical apostolate.

Worthy of mention in this context is the Pan-African Association of Catholic Exegetes (PACE) which was started in 1978 in Kinshasa, Zaire, as „Journées Bibliques Africaines“ through the praiseworthy initiative of Mgr. Laurent Monsengwo. The aims of the Association are to promote biblical research of high scientific level in an African perspective, and to be at the service of the biblical apostolate in Africa. It organises its congresses every two years. The choice of the themes of the last two congresses has been dictated by their desire to make a biblical contribution to the preparation of the African Synod. During the most recent one, which was held in Accra, Ghana, in July 1993, the Association issued a statement in which it appealed to the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar, among others, to introduce at all levels of the Church in the region the biblical pastoral ministry according to the directives of *Dei Verbum* as the first step of evangelisation, and to organise a symposium on the Bible.

III. Future Role of the Biblical Apostolate

That the African Bishops consider the biblical apostolate of great importance in the evangelisation of Africa is evident from the place that is attributed to it in the preparatory documents of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops which started in Rome on Sunday 10th April 1994.

It is hoped that this Special Assembly for Africa will re-emphasise the crucial importance of the biblical pastoral ministry as an indispensable means of the new evangelisation of Africa and come out with concrete directives on how to make this ministry a reality in the

respective local churches of the continent. The first evangelisation of Africa which started about 150 years ago was done with the so-called „Penny Catechism“. This, as we mentioned earlier, has so far borne good fruits - a young and flourishing African Church. How much more fruitful would it be if it were done with the Bible?

Africa, to a great extent, is still to be evangelised. If this evangelisation has to bear more and lasting fruits, it has to be based and deeply rooted in the Bible in all its various aspects. The newness of the evangelisation of Africa will therefore have to consist in the use of the Bible as the first catechism, and as the starting and reference point of all other catechisms and pastoral action.

In a pastoral situation like that which prevails in Africa where there is poverty and misery caused by the forces of nature, where sickness and death are attributed to the malignant forces of evil and to witchcraft, where there is strong belief in witchcraft and in the spirit world, where traditional beliefs and cultures are deeply rooted in and control the psyche and life of the people, where there is great interaction with the world of the living dead, where there is great respect for the sacredness of life and all activity is geared towards the preservation of life as the summum bonum, there is need to present a true biblical image of God, who is the God of life, of love, of compassion, of mercy; a God who knows everything, who is all-powerful, who is omnipresent and who cares. This can be appropriately done only through the biblical apostolate in all its aspects as presented by *Dei Verbum*.

The biblical apostolate therefore promises a great future for the young churches in Africa. It is through it that the Word of God can truly touch and transform the life of individuals, liberate them from all the forces of evil, social and spiritual, transform their mentalities and cultures, demolish all the structures of sin, social injustice and division, fulfil their spiritual aspirations, elevate and ennoble their cultural and spiritual values, and constitute them into the new people of God, into a Church that is truly African and truly Christian.

+ Cornelius F. Esua
Bishop of Kumbo, Cameroon

FROM BOGOTÁ TO HONG KONG

From Bogotá to Hong Kong, via Emmaus

Although this reflection may seem very local and particular (how we see things here), it contributes a number of important ideas (both for the way of approaching questions and for the content), towards the description of the theme of the next Plenary Assembly in Hong Kong, which may be useful in other contexts.

We assemble here in Nagoya, two-thirds of the way along the road from Bogotá to Hong Kong. That is to say, two-thirds of the way in time. In space of course we are much nearer, being already in Asia, indeed in north-east Asia. In this paper I will take account of both the time and the space. I will recall some of the insights of Bogotá, and I hope to show how they can be developed in Hong Kong, and maybe more importantly how they might be developed in OUR preparation for Hong Kong. I will also argue that the teachings of the Asian bishops can help us in that task of development.

„No text without context; no context without the text“ - thus Bishop Ablondi summarized the statement of Bogotá in his message to our previous north-east Asian workshop. This interplay of the text and context was illustrated by Bogotá in its memorable reflection on the Emmaus story.

For the disciples on the road to Emmaus the text was of course the Hebrew Scriptures, the „law and the prophets“. The context was their experience of Jesus, and especially the devastating experience of his arrest and execution. As they walked with Jesus, text and context began to illuminate one another. It happened as Jesus and they walked with one another (a strong echo of the Latin American *caminando*) and listened to one another. The disciples began to see new meaning in the familiar texts, and those texts showed them the deeper meaning of Jesus' life, that the Christ had to suffer and so enter into his glory. This was no mere intellectual understanding: their hearts were burning within them. But still their eyes were not fully

opened; that came in the act of sharing, the breaking of the bread. (5.7-5.15)

The result of this encounter, at once a personal encounter and an encounter between text and context, was new life. A recognition of course that Jesus is alive. And „they themselves are risen and are reborn. The cross, a sign of death, becomes a sign of life and hope.“ And so, instead of fear, courage; instead of fleeing, return to Jerusalem; instead of dispersion, community; instead of fatalism, a critical conscience; instead of unbelief and despair, faith and hope. (5.16)

Let us note the elements here:

- encounter between text and context
- occurring in partnership and through patient listening
- giving new meaning to both text and context
- touching the heart
- perfected through sharing and community
- leading to new life.

We will see a little further on how these same elements have been central to the teachings of the bishops of Asia, and how they lead to the theme of our Hong Kong Assembly. But first let us remind ourselves of some other aspects of the Bogotá Statement.

First, how did Bogotá see OUR context? It spoke in fact of eight contexts (6.1-6.8):

1.) cultural pluralism - the Church's identity based in Christ must be constantly rediscovered in her relationship with the peoples and cultures

2.) the socio-political and economic situation - widening gap between north and south, rich and poor; patriarchal and sexist systems; violation of human rights; racial discrimination

3.) ecological imbalances - the use of creation guided by human greed rather than human need

4.) multi-religious situations - despite the problems caused by aggressive fundamentalisms, „our openness to these religions should enable us to discover our own common basis as believers in the same God, journeying towards the same destiny.“

5.) people emerging from totalitarian systems in both Eastern Europe and Latin America

6.) new awakening of marginalized groups - groups marginalized for ethnic, linguistic, economic, social, sexist or political reasons

7.) ecumenism - towards building up communities that are based on Christian love and communion

8.) Christian communities - the Bible must become more and more the book of the Christian community; the laity in a special way must have a greater access to it.

Hence, Bogotá spoke of a new way of reading the Bible which should give a new thrust to our biblical apostolate (7.5):

1. from the book to the Word - the Word is bigger than the book; the Word is found in both text and context, and in the meeting between the two; we hope to make the Word alive in the hearts of all our brothers and sisters.

2. from institutional structure to creative presence

3. from clergy to laity - all are partners in discovering and communicating the Word, as we walk together and listen to each other

4. from private reading to transforming presence - our contexts so often summon us to work for liberation and transformation, to make all things new, to bring life where there is death

5. from Church to Reign of God - again a recognition that God's Word transcends human boundaries, that we are called to work in partnership for the fulfilment of God's loving design for the world.

As I argued at greater length in my paper to last year's Asian regional workshop,

many of these concerns of Bogotá have also been the concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. In their programmatic statement in Taipei in 1974 they spoke of the threefold dialogue - with cultures, with religions, with the poor. (Taipei 9-24).

Here we have an immediate recognition of CONTEXT. Obvious in our Asian context is the great wealth of cultures, the presence of the world's great religions, and yet massive poverty in many places (and this remains true despite the remarkable economic growth of recent years - especially since the economic benefits have been so unevenly distributed). Implicit in this is the recognition that the Word can be illuminated, can have new facets revealed, by encounter with this context. We can learn from the cultures, the religions, the poor. Otherwise, why speak of dialogue.

Perhaps a better word than dialogue is „partnership“, since dialogue can too easily suggest merely an exchange of spoken or written words. Whereas the bishops deliberately spoke of a „dialogue of life“. In the context of poverty this dialogue means:

... a genuine experience and understanding of this poverty, deprivation and oppression of so many of our peoples. It demands working, not for them merely (in a paternalistic sense), their real needs and aspirations, as they are enabled to identify and articulate these, and to strive for their fulfilment, by transforming those structures and situations which keep them in that deprivation and powerlessness. (Taipei 20)

Once again, we see the pattern of the Emmaus story - walking with, listening, despair turning to hope, new life. And of course part of what we bring to this dialogue is the Word of God, embodied in part in the biblical text, embodied in part, we hope, in our lives.

Very much in continuity with Taipei, the bishops assembled in Bandung in 1990 described our mission in these words:

...mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a being with the people, as was Jesus:

„The Word became flesh and dwelt among us“ (Jn1:14). Therefore, mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. (Bandung 3.1.2)

Notice the inclusive formula - presence, solidarity, sharing and word.

The insights of Bandung were further developed by the Bishops' Institute on Interreligious Affairs, meeting in Thailand in 1991. They spoke of God's dream for the world:

(Jesus) spoke of the dream through the image of God's Reign and described it in parables often of life and growth or of reconciliation. We may describe the dream as one of people and communities fully alive. That fullness of life is ultimately communion of life among individuals, among communities and with God. (BIRA IV12,9)

Let me then focus on some of the points that have emerged from our discussion so far, in particular:

1) the Word comes to life always in a context, or to use other words, the Word must become flesh in order to dwell among us. This enfleshment (incarnation) comes about through dialogue of life (sharing in life) with cultures, religions, with the poor.

2) this Word that comes to life is a life-giving Word - a Word of hope, a Word that is a transforming presence in the death-dealing situations of this world, a Word that gathers living communities.

3) implied in both the above points is the importance of partnership (through dialogue, through the formation of communities). Partnership involves unity in diversity. Hence, it can be a powerful witness and force for overcoming the divisions (sometimes murderous divisions) which plague our world.

Precisely these three points constitute our theme for the Hong Kong Assembly

of 1996 - The Word of God at the service of life: Toward unity in diversity - and its accompanying texts - „The Word became flesh ..., that they might have life and have it to the full“ (Jn1:14, 10:10).

This theme can be made more concrete for us, if we reflect both on our own situation and on what the biblical tradition has to say about life. We can begin by asking ourselves, for instance, what does fullness of life mean in our context. What in our culture constitutes the „good life“ (in the deepest sense of that term, not in the superficial way in which it is sometimes used). Do we have some cultural symbols or images that „capture“ the meaning of the „good life“? How do other religious traditions in our country understand „fullness of life“? What are the threats to life in our context?

We can then try to explore what the biblical tradition has to say about fullness of life, recognizing that it may enrich or qualify or correct the socio-cultural understanding. The metaphor of life is perhaps most prominent in the Johannine writings, as indicated in the double quotation that we have chosen to accompany our theme for Hong Kong.

In the synoptic gospels, the metaphor of the Reign of God functions in a way parallel to that of „life“ in the fourth gospel. The central features of the Reign of God are familiar but well worth pondering again. „The blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.“ (Lk. 7:22) No one is excluded; everyone is invited.

Indeed, those excluded by society are especially invited and enabled to be included. The Reign is „described“ in parables which point to God's being able to be found in everyday reality - we live in a sacramental universe.

The great symbol (in the fullest sense) of the Reign of God is the shared meal, table fellowship. Jesus takes up and expands the Old Testament symbol of the banquet, through the various meals that are recorded as part of his ministry, leading up to the Last Supper.

A further dimension of „life“ is present in the „bread of life“ discourse of John 6. „Whoever believes has eternal life. I am bread of life... the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.“

Of course, there is the further, and literally scandalous, element. If we try to hold on to life, we lose it. Only by losing life can we find it. The grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die if it is to produce a harvest.

We should also go to the Hebrew Scriptures to learn of the fullness of life. It is perhaps best encapsulated in the term *shalom*, which as we know is a more all-embracing word than the English word „peace“. Leviticus 26:3-13 gives a good indication of the range of meaning - rain in season, good harvest, security, no one to make people afraid, peace, no dangerous animals, protection from enemies, God maintaining the covenant, „and I will walk among you, and be your God, and you shall be my people.“

The Law is an articulation of the meaning and especially the social implications of this „life“. Keeping the law is not a way of earning God's favour. Rather, it is a way of life lived in response to the fact that God has already shown favour, has brought this people out of the slavery of Egypt, has indeed made them a people with their own land, their own identity. Antony Campbell has expressed it very well:

In the Pentateuch, it can be argued that law has as its aim the preservation and furthering of life. The action of God in calling Abraham and in leading Israel out of the bondage of Egypt has given Israel the gift of life in freedom and independence. The further gift of Law is portrayed as guidance for the full living of that life.

We can see this in the content of the laws. Of the ten commandments, for example, no other gods, no images, not taking the name of God in vain, and observing the sabbath are all ways of keeping alive, in the reality of day-to-day living, the life-giving relationship with God. Honour your father and your mother protects the relationship between

generations; it is pointed specifically toward life - „that your day may be long in the land“ (Exod 20:12). You shall not kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet are all protective of social living in community, protecting life, family, property, and the fabric of society. (*)

This understanding is found in the famous passage near the end of Deuteronomy (Deut 30:19-20):

Therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

And so we are left with the obvious question - how do we minister to life in this deep and broad sense? How in particular can biblical/pastoral ministry be a ministry to life, a service of life?

Without trying to provide an immediate answer to that question, let me touch on that other part of our theme - unity in diversity.

We recognize that the forms of life are very diverse, that imposed uniformity finally removes vitality, produces deadness. We recognize too that, in the face of the many threats to life in today's world, a great diversity of talents is needed in order to work for life.

Beyond this, it is clear that in order to work for life people must be willing to put aside their (comparatively minor) differences in order to find energy in the unity that they share.

The New Testament itself is in fact a great testimony to unity in diversity. It embodies a wide range of theologies and of church orders, some developments of one another, some in (at least potential) competition with one another. As has been remarked, half-seriously, half-jokingly, the need for ecumenism began

as soon as Jesus called the second disciple. We can read between the lines of the New Testament that the search for unity involved great struggle, and that the result of that struggle seemed by no means assured.

Perhaps the most eloquent and explicit treatment of the unity in diversity theme comes in Corinthians 12. Diversity of gifts, but one spirit. Diversity of services, but always to the same Lord. And always remembering that the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are the indispensable ones (v.22).

Let me then conclude by suggesting some questions for reflection, which may serve also as preparation for Hong Kong:

1.) In your context, what does „fullness of life“ mean? What is most needed in your context for building „a world at once more human and more divine“?

2.) In what way does the biblical tradition enrich, qualify or correct this concept of „fullness of life“?

3.) In what ways have you found biblical/pastoral ministry to be life-giving? For yourself? for others? Please try to remember specific and concrete experiences.

4.) What is your experience of unity in diversity? Within the Church? With other believers or people of good will outside the Church? Can you think of a particular experience in which diversity of gifts was enriching to the group? In what ways has the biblical text inspired/enriched this experience of unity in diversity? Have the gifts of clergy and laity, men and women, complemented one another?

5.) Have you had an experience parallel to that of the Emmaus disciples in which text and context have illuminated and enriched one another, in which the Word has taken new flesh through dialogue/partnership with aspects of your culture, with members of other faiths, with people suffering from poverty, oppression, marginalization?

(*) Antony F. Campbell, *The Study Companion to Old Testament Literature: An Approach to the Writings of Pre-Exilic and Exilic Israel*, Wilmington: Glazier, 1989

The Meaning of Life

For the purpose of determining the significance of the theme chosen for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the CBF in Hong Kong, we wanted to use various examples, taking into account that we are in the „International Year of the Family“.

While we intended to reflect on the designated theme there appeared in the newspaper „La Industria“, which has the greatest circulation in the city of Trujillo, the following reports which can throw some light upon the theme.

In order to explain the importance of the theme we cite what „La Industria“ published on the 20th September 1994 under the title: „They went to deactivate a bomb and found a newborn baby in a cardboard box“. The police, from the Explosives Deactivation Unit, after receiving a telephone call, went to the place where a neighbour reported that there was a carton containing explosives.

When they were preparing to deactivate the suspect package they heard a baby's cry. In the box they found a naked baby with traces of blood and the umbilical cord tied with white thread. Immediately a policeman covered it with his coat and took it to the police station. From there the baby girl was taken to the emergency unit of the General Hospital, where she received immediate attention.

The right to life is primary among human rights. At the present moment the Peruvian Government is continuing its policy of pacification until terrorism is completely overthrown. In order to secure economic stability, the price has been excessive, and has been paid principally by the poorest, among them the new poor who were born from recession.

How does one understand „life“ and „lack of life“? To understand this problem we have recourse to another example published in the Trujillo daily „La Industria“ on the 22nd September 1994, under the title: „Mother and foetus found dead right in the centre of the City“. A mother was found dead alongside a six-month old foetus inside a building. This horrendous crime was reported by an inhabitant of the place. Unofficially it is known that

the unfortunate mother, identified as Gertrude D. G. (37yrs) was the victim of an abortion which brought about her death and that of the baby. Police investigating also found Rosa S. Z. (30yrs) the obstetrician in charge at the clinic. She is helping police with their enquiries.

Faced with these problems faith obliges us, once again, to confess that the Word of God became the Bible in order to be at the service of humanity in every epoch. Life would have lost its true meaning if it had lacked this marvellous light of the Word of God.

The same Trujillo daily „La Industria“, on 20th September 1994, published that, in Mar del Plata, Argentina, thousands of leaders of organizations for the defence of women's rights in Latin America and the Caribbean began four days of debate to agree on a proposal for the forthcoming Sixth Regional Conference on Women.

Latin American and Caribbean women „carry the greatest burden of economic adjustment and poverty“ in the region, said Virginia Vargas of Peru, the representative of Non Governmental Organizations at the United Nations.

Vargas also emphasised that, „different from their European and North American counterparts, Latin American women still have little capacity to decide upon their lives, the number of children they are going to have and their frequency“. „In Latin America and in the Caribbean poverty has the face of a woman“, the Peruvian representative added emphatically.

They stated also that they intended to break down the difference between men and woman based on biology and understand it, instead, from the whole psychosocial point of view.

In Peru, a country where the majority of people are Catholic, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, „Poverty has the face of a woman“.

Political violence and terrorism in Peru began in the 1980s; its consequences have been extremely disastrous in the incalculable destruction of material goods and principally in the lamentable loss of

human life. Many innocent people have died by way of assassination, the most outrageous crimes and torture. The number of dead is approaching 30,000. Also the effects of political violence are mass migrations from the countryside to the cities or to other countries, which has an effect on people's lives by disintegrating their social life.

Peru has 22,128,466 inhabitants. A third of the population is under 15 years old. The multiracial richness is expressed by the particular peculiarities of the Quecha and Aymara peoples on the Sierra, the various ethnic groups in the Selva (the jungle) and the Afroamericans on the coast. Forty-eight ethnic groups exist in the country, of which the Asháninkas are the most numerous, making up 26.8% of the whole indigenous population, amounting to 190,295 in the Selva zone.

Quecha is a language that has resisted rejection and oblivion. In Peru there are nearly five million quecha speakers.

Various religious fundamentalist groups also exist which question our faith and the pastoral work of the Church.

Without ignoring the good elements of our native culture, it must be said that human culture is marked by sin. And the process of modernisation and increasing secularisation of society is having a serious effect on the life of our cultures since it inverts the scale of fundamental values of the human person and introduces styles of life that are opposed to faith and cultures.

Our peoples cultivate common values like collective work, a festive sense of life, respect for life; they express their cultural richness and celebrate life through song and dance, meals and flowers, „minka and ayni“, that break down modern individualism.

The inculturation of the gospel is still a slow and difficult process, taking into account the roots of our cultures and the multicultural complexity of Latin America.

It is necessary to live the gospel implanted in the heart itself of our cultures and also in a true attitude of commitment for living the vicissitudes of our native cultures.

Hnas. Misioneras de la Sagrada Biblia
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LECTIO DIVINA

„With all boldness and without hindrance“

Lectio Divina on Acts 28: 16-31

The following exercise in Lectio divina is new in that it is not in keeping with the traditional four steps: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation (cf. BDV 22, p. 8.13-15 and BDV 23, p. 4-8), but resumes the medieval view of the four senses of Scripture: literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical.

At the end of this conference in which we were commended to God and to the message of his grace (cf. Acts 20:32), we would like to look back over this conference and look forward in the light of this extract from the Acts of the Apostles. It is God's Word on evangelisation and new evangelisation.

We begin our conversation with God.

Let us pray:

We ask you, Lord, be with us. Open our eyes to understand Scripture. We are reflecting on your plan of salvation; look on our situations which are very diverse and give rise to hope and anxiety. Send us your Spirit, that we might hear and understand, see and recognise, so that we might be healed. In this way, with your strength, we will preach the gospel.

In the following, the reading of Scripture should be carried out in the manner of the medieval fourfold sense. The fourfold sense is about grasping the richness of the meaning of Scripture. A medieval distich runs:

*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia:*

The letter teaches the events;
allegory (better: the eye of faith),
what you have to believe;
morality (better: life instruction),
what you have to do;
anagogy (leading upwards),
that to which you should be striving.

The following can be understood as a comment on how the statements in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #115-119 can be carried out in practice. For each of these four steps in considering the text, a keyword from the biblical text

itself emerged both as a summary of the respective reflections and as a title, which develop the theme of new evangelisation.

1. Littera („Letter“): *Good News and Doctrine go beyond the limits.*

The first step is attention to the „letter“ or the literal sense. At every hearing of Scripture it is necessary to note the original meaning of Scriptures. Scientifically, this happens through historico-critical and other methods. In practice, this attention to the original meaning can be perceived above all through a careful reading of the text, by seeking an answer to some simple questions:

- Who is involved?
- What places and times does the text deal with?
- What is happening?
- What changes occur?
- What reasons for the action are evident?

The reading begins with a stock-taking of factors in terms of content and meaning, and we note which words and synonyms the author uses, since through them he gives us pointers as to what he wants to say. This is also called the construction of a semantic inventory, that is, the grouping together of words and expressions of related meaning.

In such 'lines of meaning' (that is, elements and opposites which belong together in terms of meaning) we find: *the people who are involved, descriptions of place, descriptions of time, words for „assembling-separating“, words for „salvation“, the word-group „proclaim“.*

It would be possible to base one's consideration on each of these key words.

I thought I would like to direct attention especially to a few pairs of opposites (antitheses) in the text.

Antithesis:

„Hearing“ versus „Not-Hearing“ (Hearer)

The first antithesis is concerned with the hearers of the Word. Paul's preaching meets a twofold reaction: hearing and not-hearing. The framework of the text, in terms of content and meaning, is however determined above all by the following elements: The word „hear“ is mentioned five times: verses 22, 26, 27a, 27b, 28. In this way, what is depicted is the fact that what follows the preaching is a hearing and a not-hearing, that is, open-mindedness or taciturnity.

Instead of a symphony there arises an a-symphony („asynphonoï“), as some believe, others do not believe.

Antithesis:

„Imprisoned“ versus „without hindrance“ (Paul)

The expressions „imprisoned“ and „unhindered“ (verses 16, 18, 19, 20 and then verse 30), „wanted to release“ (18), „forced“ (to appeal to the emperor, 19) then form a line which goes through the whole text. Finally the prisoner, guarded by soldiers, preaches without hindrance. A whole series of statements speak about Paul being imprisoned; he comes to Rome; indeed he receives permission to live in rented accommodation, though he is guarded. He is indeed innocent, though in chains; he is forced to appeal to the emperor and at the conclusion he is preaching as a prisoner in his rented accommodation. And so we find the antithesis: the prisoner preaches the gospel, and that „without hindrance“.

Antithesis:

„restricted“ versus „unrestricted“ (God's action)

Along with the antitheses taciturnity - open-mindedness, hindrance and unhindered, there is another antithesis: God's plan for humanity is unfolded. What formerly was intended for Israel, the Gentiles now also have a share in.

The theme of taciturnity/open-mindedness comes to light also in the antithesis that the message of salvation comes first to

the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Paul explains this taciturnity and open-mindedness with the help of Scripture. His concluding remark is almost a kind of judgement: the Gentiles will listen to the Word. In this way the Gentiles have an unrestricted share in God's salvation.

In this first reflection we have paid careful attention to some elements in the text, especially these antitheses. One could also do likewise with other elements. A few moments of silence now follow in which we can make our own the message of the „letters“; there are doors which close and doors which open. Good News and doctrine go beyond all limits. They go beyond even the limits of the heart. I now invite you simply to allow the text to work on you, with an eye to „closing“ and „opening“ for the Good News and doctrine.

2. Allegoria („The Eye of Faith“): *Offer of Salvation and Decision*

The Eye of Faith - Allegoria:
Discovering the mystery of God and of Christ.

The second step is the so-called allegoria, or it could also be called the eye of faith. This step demands faith and assent from us, as the Word tells us. It is about the offer of salvation and decision.

In the so-called allegoria, a passage is read in the context of the content and unity of the whole of Scripture and of faith, with due regard to the living tradition of the Church and to the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of revelation (CCC 112-113). It is also about grasping the major lines of God's action. It is about ascertaining the enduring sense of the text, to find again in this individual story or in the text the history of salvation, the continuous lines of God's redemptive action.

The following questions are helpful:

- How is this event or word connected with the larger perspective of God's redemptive action?
- How does the event fit into the history of salvation?

- Which similar events are to be found in Sacred Scripture and in the life of the Church?

Here above all the theme of God's offer of salvation should be elaborated. In „Kerygma and Didache“ people are offered salvation. The „message“ of God's lordship and the „doctrine“ about Jesus Christ are broadcast.

In the light of this offer people are invited to believe: some accept salvation, others refuse it. As this is the conclusion to the Acts of the Apostles, the text also has exemplary meaning: this is how God's history with humanity proceeds. This sequence in the action: offer of salvation - acceptance/refusal - is to be found in many pages of Sacred Scripture.

An especially clear text on the offer of salvation and decision is Jesus' programmatic speech through which the people are placed before a decision (Luke 4:14-31). This text deals with the question of whether Nazareth can be made into a place of salvation and the sabbath into a „today“ of grace and the beginning of the Lord's year of favour. This is not the case; and so now salvation will be offered to those who belong to the outsiders, like the widow of Zarephath and the Syrian (Egger, Methodenlehre, 104).

Not just in this last passage but again and again the Acts of the Apostles has accounts with a similar structure: Paul preaches first of all to the Jews, there is uproar and then he preaches the message of salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 13: 14-52; 14: 1-7; 17: 1-17).

Jesus himself also explains this in the parable of the great feast (Lk 14: 15-24). There is the invitation, which is issued to the first group, but which is refused. And then the servant goes to the highways and hedges and invites people. Actually there are always the same basic structures to the offer of salvation or to the calling and the answer to this calling. And Paul tells us: that also corresponds now to God's plan of salvation. First of all the gospel should be preached to the Jews and then it moves on to the Gentiles.

Thus Acts 28 deals with the question of whether Rome is becoming the place of

preaching and salvation. Here, not just Rome the place is meant but Rome in the sense found in the Acts of the Apostles as the centre of the world.

The decisive question is whether Rome, and with it the world, is becoming the place of salvation and of preaching. It also deals with the question: is the time of salvation for the world to begin now or will we just see obduracy?

Look at this verse in the light of this second reflection: the eye of faith, which invites us to faith. And therefore now is also a time of reflection and of prayer, where we once more face up to this offer of salvation by God and also renew our decision for the message of God's kingdom and for the doctrine about Jesus Christ.

3. Sensus moralis („Life Instruction“ and „Life Assistance“): *„with all boldness“*

Lectio divina is a path with stopping places, that is, a path on which we occupy ourselves from time to time with the text in a special way and where we personally break our journey and pause and sharpen our hearing or even renew our faith. Now we have made two breaks on our journey: attention to the text, the eye of faith, with the acts of hearing and believing. The next break on this path of lectio divina is the so-called sensus moralis. Today this could be translated by „life instruction“; this would be in the Old Testament sense of 'life instruction'; that is, not a command but an instruction so that the human person can live, and thus also as 'life direction' in the sense of 'life assistance'. In this third stopping place it is a question of us also seeing the text as a mirror for ourselves, of understanding better our own existence through comparison with what Scripture is saying to us.

As regards this point, life direction - life assistance, we are of course children of our time and question according to the world in which we live, perhaps also together with the theme of evangelisation. Why is there actually to some extent, such resistance to the gospel? Resistance in general, but also in ourselves: even within ourselves there is

resistance to the gospel. Sometimes too the human heart seems surrounded as by armour which completely prevents the deep questions from being able to break through, outwards and upwards. And it is obviously difficult to give an answer to questions which are not clearly framed.

In this stage the biblical text can also be a mirror for our life in which we can understand daily life and events better. It is a question of examination of conscience:

Where do I stand?

What is my life and my service like?

One can also practice a kind of psychological interpretation of Scripture:

Which of the characters mentioned do I resemble? Is something similar to Paul's meeting in Rome with the Jews happening in my heart?

As we see our lives in the mirror of the text, some perspectives may be proposed here.

Preacher

In the figure of Paul we can read off a picture of the preacher for our time: Paul is the preacher of the message of salvation, he is the teacher, then he is the witness and finally also the one who explains Scripture (in fact he explains the meaning of Scripture). Thus the text can become a mirror of the vocation and task of the preacher in our time.

Parresia/Boldness

Confidence is a distinctive feature in times of difficulty: 1 Thess 2:2; Phil 1:2. Paul preaches with all boldness. That is exactly what Paul himself says in his letters, for instance in the first letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:2). He had much to suffer: „Nevertheless we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel, in spite of great opposition, boldly and fearlessly.“ Thus, confidence in persecution.

A similar situation is depicted in the letter to the Philippians. This confidence is above all confidence and trust in God. To be sure, openness belongs to this boldness, to this confidence; Paul received everyone who came to him. Confidence brings Paul to the point where he welcomes all who come to

him. In spite of persecution Paul does not lock himself away in fear but welcomes everyone.

Now is time once again for a short reflection.

4. Anagoria: „Without hindrance“

Creating hope

The biblical text can also give pointers to the completion of history and of life. In this case, the text is examined against the background of contemporary questions about meaning and the future.

The question is: what hope are we entitled to, given the situation of a lack of interest and the difficulties in preaching?

Obduracy

The text also gives the early Christians' answer to the question of why people refuse to have anything to do with faith. It is part of God's plan of salvation, as expressed in Isaiah 6:9f.

This text in Acts gives the answer to the question of Israel's unbelief. Actually the early Christian community had no explanation for Israel's unbelief, except that according to this piece of Scripture it is in God's plan of salvation and that the solution to this question also lies in God's plan of salvation. This is the only solution which the early Christian community had found. Therefore it is also one of the most important texts in the whole New Testament, which again and again explains first Israel's obduracy and then humanity's obduracy.

The text in Acts 28 offers reasons for hope. The last word in Acts is precisely „unhindered“. Luke is telling his readers and us that God's last word is the free preaching of the gospel: „Rome will give the Church what Jerusalem denied her, that is, room for free development and the possibility of unhindered preaching of the gospel“ (Roloff, Acts, 371).

Paul was indeed imprisoned, but the gospel is preached „without hindrance“. The reader of the Acts of the Apostles knows: Now the mission programme of

the Acts of the Apostles has reached its highpoint: „You are to be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.“

It is true of course that we wonder why Luke reports nothing of Paul's martyrdom and death. Luke is practising the art of omission: „What caused him to use this art (of omission) was the actual theme of the book: the spread of the witnesses from Jerusalem to Rome (1:8)“ (Pesch, Acts, II, 313). Belief in the working of the Spirit entitles him to such omission.

Lucan Paul is acquainted with the workings of God and now he has come to Rome, to the centre of the world. And that is the most important thing, so we do not need other things to be explained. That too is the art of omission, as we have already heard in Acts 16; something is told, doors close, others are opened.

The whole of the Acts of the Apostles shows the working of God's Spirit, who leads along new ways and opens doors. Given the questions which are asked of us today in relation to new evangelisation, we would like now to reflect in silence: there are doors which God closes; he will have his reasons for that. We should not charge against doors which God has bolted but should see the doors which God is opening. Even the hearts of people in Europe have such doors.

In view of the doors which God opens, the doors which are bolted are not longer referred to. Acts' viewpoint is: God's Spirit guides us through history and entitles us to hope.

I now invite you to meditate on this text for a few moments; we are called to hope, precisely because the last word of this early Christian story and mission is the word: „unhindered/unimpeded“.

+ Wilhelm Egger
Bishop of Bozen-Brixen

Sacred Scripture in the Life of the European Church, Today and Tomorrow

Meeting of Bishops responsible for the Biblical Pastoral Ministry and Specialists of the European Bishops' Conferences.

Freising, 16-19 Feb. 1994

LIFE OF THE FEDERATION

Meetings

Americas

Brazil: The Song of Songs

The annual meeting of SAB/CNBB took place in Belo Horizonte from 28th April to 1st May. At this meeting material for the Month of the Bible was presented, which this year is devoted to *The Song of Songs*. Emphasis was placed on the importance of the body as the presence of the human person and as the source of relationships within the family, in society, in school, in politics and in the economy. Reflection focused especially on women and the exploration of their sexuality, and the awareness of the value of women.

Reference was made to the necessity of analysing the structures that oblige them to prostitute themselves in order to survive. It is necessary to combat the double standard of morality which exploits women. The meeting addressed the importance of overcoming male chauvinism in the Church. We can end by saying that this text, to judge by the themes it suggested (and we mention only some of them), is prophetic from the feminine perspective.

Reading it also provoked reflection from the perspective of ecology, reporting as it does, in different ways, rural and urban circumstances. Likewise, it can stimulate reflection on other texts and biblical figures: Mary Magdalene, Ruth, Martha and Mary. Emphasized amidst an immense thematic richness was the appropriateness of poetic language for speaking about God.

Other matters of importance for the region were studied, among which we concentrated on a study of the theme proposed for 1995: the person of Jesus.

The meeting ended with a positive evaluation of the different aspects and a sending forth of the participants to their respective places of life and work.

Trinidad: Meeting of the Executive Committee of FEBIC-LA

The meeting of the executive committee of FEBIC-LA (Catholic Biblical Federation of Latin America) took place in Trinidad 12th-14th November, 1994. We highlight from a full agenda, the continuation of the 1993 meeting in Quito (Ecuador) [A report of this meeting can be read in numbers 71/72 of *Palabra Hoy*, published by FEBIC-LA] relating it to the preparation for Hong Kong in 1996.

Things were talked about such as: „*More and more the world is becoming a global village where everyone has to live together. Paradoxically, divisions and inequalities among human groups grow greater daily: ethnic and cultural conflicts, racial and sexual discrimination...In opposition to this situation the Church feels itself to be called...We believe in the power of the Word of God which calls people together and makes for unity. And so we are working in the Catholic Biblical Federation in order that the biblical message might become a hinge and support for the mission of evangelization, that is to say, for life according to the vision of the Lord and his Gospel. A life opposed to cultural and religious intolerance. A life opposed to economic inequality. A life opposed to violation of human rights...*

Asia / Oceania

Nagoya, Japan: Final Statement of the Second Biblical-Pastoral Meeting of the North East Asia Subregion

As co-workers in the gospel (Phil 1:5), we, 51 delegates and resource persons from Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Macau, Taiwan, the Philippines and Germany, gathered at the Japan On-going Formation Center in Nagoya, from 3rd to 7th November 1994, the International Year of the Family and the year of the 25th anniversary of the Catholic Biblical

Federation (CBF). This gathering was the Second Biblical-Pastoral Meeting of the North East Asia Subregion of the CBF.

While we rejoiced in the great number of laymen and women among us, we regretted the absence of the delegates from Mainland China and Vietnam who wished to be with us. Inspired by their messages of solidarity, we kept them and their church communities as well as the silent Church of North Korea in our prayers throughout the meeting.

Under the theme, *Living God's Word today... and the Word continued to grow (Acts 6:7a)*, the meeting was intended to provide an occasion for listening to and reflecting about the Word of God, for sharing about the present situation and the dynamics of the biblical-pastoral ministry in our own countries and to mark a milestone on the Catholic Biblical Federation's journey from Bogota (1990) to Hong Kong (1996).

Through the rich variety of activities during these days - of praying together; of listening to the Word of God itself as well as to testimonies, reports and inputs; of informal fellowship and intensive dialogue among the participants themselves and with members of the various institutions of the Nagoya Church, we participated in a rich significant and encouraging event, - a Word-Event - which, we trust, will become part of our dynamic memory.

Of the deep experiences of these days, three elements merit singling out and underlining. They can be summed up in the words: Culture, Church and Word of God.

1. We are given a taste of the culture of our host country, starting with the welcoming tea ceremony, and we experienced the richness of our cultures in North East Asia in various ways:

We experienced unity in spite of cultural diversities. In fact, we experienced how we can be enriched if we are open to the treasures of other cultures. This came through especially in the meaningful celebration of the Word and of the Eucharist.

We realized not only that the seed of the Word needs the different soils of our

various cultures, that is, the context of our cultural soil for an authentic growth, but also that our cultures can help and guide us in our encounter with the Word. (Bogota Statement 6,1; 8.3.5.1)

2. We experienced in a new and meaningful way that the Church is not a teacher, but also a learner; that all of us, lay people and bishops, priests and religious as Church are the „bride of the Word and pupil of the Holy Spirit“ (DV 23), all are equally committed to listening to the Word before we can share and proclaim it effectively.

We were impressed by the fraternal and open attitude of the bishops present, we were impressed likewise by the sense of faith of the lay people in our group and in the groups we met in the Church of Nagoya, by the richness of their insights and the touching testimonies concerning their commitment to living the Word. Indeed we experienced that as Church we are companions in our ways with the Word.

It was a cause of great joy and experienced as a sign of great hope to realize how the whole Church is caught up in a worldwide movement to which the text from the Acts of the Apostles applies: „and the Word continued to grow“.

3. We experienced that the greatest treasure we have in common is the Word of God, that it is active and alive in our communities, that indeed it continues to grow everywhere.

We have listened to moving testimonies about how the study of the Bible has led people to Christ, how the prayerful and life-related sharing of God's Word in Sacred Scripture heard previously only on the catechism helped Christians to discover God's love and their trust in Christ, and how it helps families to live meaningful lives even in situations where the traditional family values are threatened in many ways.

We have become aware of the different ways and variety of initiatives and activities in making the Word become ever more alive and making it grow even more.

The event we lived through was seen by us also as a milestone on the Federation's journey from the Plenary Assembly of

Bogota in 1990 to the next one in 1996 that will take place in Hong Kong, in our own subregion. The spread and growth of the Word we experience in our days of the biblical pastoral ministry and of the Federation as its instrument have reminded us of the journeys of the Word on the road to Emmaus (that of the risen Lord and the disciples, Lk 24:13-35) and on the road to Gaza (Philip and the eunuch, Acts 8:26-40).

In continuation of our previous journey, the meetings of the Federation on global, subregional and Asian levels and in line with the Year of the Family, we have focussed our attention on the Bible and Family, recommendation 8.3.4.5 of the Bogota Assembly (1990); recommendation made by the Japanese delegates during the First North East Asia Meeting (1991); the specific goal for North East Asia Subregion formulated by the delegates of the Third Asian Biblical Pastoral Workshop in Pattaya (1993) „to promote the role of families in evangelization“.

At the same time we looked ahead to the Plenary Assembly of Hong Kong:

- the theme of our meeting „Living the Word“ is closely related to that of Hong Kong „the Word at the Service of Life“;
- we were reminded of the constant movement from life to the Word and from the Word to life;
- we started to reflect on our journey from Bogota to Hong Kong via Emmaus;
- we formulated suggestions for the agenda, the theme and dynamics of that assembly.

At the end of this meeting and as a fruit of the experienced growth of and in the Word, but aware of the concrete situations in our countries and the great challenges that still lie ahead of us, we delegates of each country committed ourselves to the following:

Hong Kong:

- to further strengthen the existing structure for effective promotion of the biblical pastoral ministry;
- to collaborate with parishes in forming Word-based communities through the formation programmes of Basic Bible Seminar and Bible Facilitators Seminar;
- to promote Bible Sunday celebration on diocesan and parochial levels.

Japan:

- to establish a network for sharing information on biblical pastoral ministry among all dioceses;
- to initiate conscientization programmes and to concretize plans to promote biblical pastoral ministry on diocesan and parochial levels;
- to foster exchange of experiences by ministers of the Word, through the Biblical Committee, within all dioceses;
- to promote reading and living of God's Word through the dynamics of „from life to Bible“ and „from Bible of life“.

Korea:

- to produce a bulletin to promote the Work of CBF and of the biblical pastoral ministry for distribution and sharing among local communities.

Macau:

- to raise awareness among Catholics to receive God's Word as the source of light and hope for the future in the period of transition between now and 1999, the year of the return of sovereignty to Mainland China;
- to concretize plans for the organization of the Fourth United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association Meeting in October 1995.

Taiwan:

- to foster communications between the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference and bishops of all dioceses to further promote the important work of the Bible Associations;
- to recommend the Chairman of the Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate to pay annual visits to the Bible Associations of each diocese to give continual support and encouragement.

In setting these goals, we are confident that the Word of God incarnates and grows in our lives. God's Word is our guiding light from which we are able to discover the will of God through the „signs of the times“. As collaborators in the biblical pastoral ministry, we commit ourselves to serve our brothers and sisters and to present the Bible as the true living Word of God today, so that „that Lord's message continue to grow and be received with honour!“ (2 Th 3:1)

Europe / Middle East

Salzburg: Central Europe Subregional Meeting

The directors of the European Biblical Associations (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mitteleuropäischer Bibelwerke - AMB) met in Salzburg on September 6-7, 1994. The CBF General Secretary informed them of the last events concerning the Federation, particularly the new editorial team of the Bulletin Dei Verbum and the preparation of the 5th Plenary Assembly which will take place on July 2-12, 1996 in Hong Kong.

The directors dealt with the theme and dynamics of their next meeting which will be held on September 5-7, 1995 in Croatia. Because of the war, the venue of the meeting is not yet decided. They are expecting about 40 participants. The scheduled themes are:

1. How to pass the message of the Bible on to non-believers?
2. Concrete realizations of Biblical Apostolate.
3. Inculturating Lectio Divina. Various forms of Bible reading in Central Europe.
4. How to prepare the next Plenary Assembly of Hong Kong?

News in brief:

Dr. Rudi Koncilija, Slovenia, was the only director of the new Biblical Associations recently created in post communist countries to be among us. He told us about the activities and plans of his Association: biblical correspondence courses, biblical programmes on the national radio, press articles. He also spoke of the attacks of the Democrat Liberal Party against the Church similar to those which took place in 1952/53. The Biblical Association in Slovenia wants to introduce Bible reading into families.

In Zagreb, Dr. Hohnjec organized his biblical apostolate into four groups. Given the war situation in the country, it is impossible to have an ambitious plan of action. He hopes to be able to improve the organisation of his biblical apostolate thanks to the appointment of a part-time secretary. All the biblicists of the country are grouped together in this Biblical Association.

Meeting of the Subregion of Latin Europe

The annual meeting of the subregion of Latin Europe took place in Barcelona from 7th-9th October, 1994.

In the tight schedule of the meeting the following themes were addressed:

An evaluation of the 1993 meeting in Toulouse; an evaluation of the repercussions of the meeting of European bishops (BDV 32); a study of two proposed methods of Bible reading: „La lecture familière de la Bible“ (the basic text of which appeared in „Les dossiers de la Bible“, n. 48, June 1993), and, „En chemin avec la Parole“, led by Marcel Durrer (a French speaking Swiss); a paper by D Rinaldo Paganalli (Italy) on „The Bible and Catechesis“ which provoked a good deal of interesting discussion. Also discussed was the possible contribution of this subregion to the next Plenary Assembly in Hong Kong in 1996.

Other subjects addressed and discussed contributed to a rich sharing among the participants. Especially interesting was that dealing with the possible motivations for reading the Bible in our time and milieu.

The program promotes parish renewal through its emphasis on lay leadership and small-group faith sharing. Its strong blend of prayer and study has made it a success in thousands of parishes around the United States and abroad.

Little Rock Scripture Study uses some of the most important ingredients of adult education: self-directed learning, small-group sharing, practical applications to life, and community building. It is solidly Catholic and facilitates the kind of conversion that can enable people to become responsible Catholic adults.

This program continues to implement the challenge offered by the bishops of the United States in 1986 when they wrote the following:

„We Catholics have excellent Bible resources and scholars of international repute. Our challenge now is to get this knowledge into the minds, hearts, and lives of all our Catholic people. ... The current trend toward smaller faith-sharing and Bible-study groups within a parish family is strongly to be encouraged.“ (NCCB, A Pastoral Statement for Catholics on Biblical Fundamentalism)

History of the Program

Little Rock Scripture Study began in 1974 through the collaboration of lay people, priests, and religious in Little Rock. In 1977, Bishop Andrew McDonald declared the program part of the diocesan adult education efforts and urged its establishment in every parish of the diocese. The program continued to grow rapidly in the diocese and in hundreds of parishes across the country.

In 1986, Little Rock Scripture Study entered into a partnership with The Liturgical Press in Collegeville, Minnesota. The diocesan office continues product development and promotion, while The Liturgical Press handles marketing and distribution.

Currently this program is the largest adult Bible study program in the United States. It is used by over 10,000 parishes and institutions in the United States, Canada, Belize, Germany, Italy, Japan, Oman, South Africa, Turkey, and West Indies.

Experiences

We receive communication from all parts of the world which speak of the benefits that group Bible reading brings. The following are the experiences we have chosen for this number: from Vigo (Spain) and Little Rock (U.S.).

Little Rock Scripture Study

Overview

Little Rock Scripture Study, a ministry of the diocese of Little Rock, is a parish-based program that leads people to a greater understanding of the Bible, an awareness of God's living presence in Sacred Scripture, and an appreciation of how the Bible can be applied to daily life.

Essential Elements

1. Daily Personal Study

Participants spend about twenty minutes each day in prayerful reading and reflection on an assigned section of the Scriptures. Questions in the Study Guide direct the reflection, while the commentary provides solid Catholic scholarship that leads to deeper understanding.

2. Small-Group Sharing

Participants gather weekly in groups of eight to twelve to pray together and share the fruits of their daily personal study. An atmosphere of openness and trust is established in which God's Word and its application to daily life can be discussed.

3. Wrap-Up Lecture

A brief lecture follows the small-group discussion to develop and clarify the themes of the lesson. These may be given by guest speakers from the local community or video/audio lectures are available.

4. Prayer

In addition to their daily personal prayer, participants use a simple, effective method of shared prayer in the small group. A source of unity, support and guidance, prayer is the key to the success of the program at every stage.

Programs

Little Rock Scripture Study currently offers twenty different study courses in both the New Testament and the Old Testament. It also offers thematic studies and a video-based introduction to the Bible. The office continues to produce new programs each year.

Little Rock Scripture Study in Spanish is currently being developed. The Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio is translating the program, including leadership training and the foundation courses.

Little Rock Scripture Study for Young Adults is a new study series for young people in high school through college age. It offers four thematic Bible studies and a study of the Gospel of Mark. It incorporates the same essential elements as the program for adults.

Little Rock Scripture Study for Children is also a new program for children in grades three through six. Children are introduced to the Bible through group activities, reading assignments, crafts, memory verses, and family Bible reading and activities.

Information: Lillian Hess, 2500 N. Tylor, P.O. Box 7565, Little Rock, AR 72217-7565, U.S.A.

The Bible Group „Israel“

We are called „Israel“. We are a Bible group belonging to the parish of the Perpetual Succour in Vigo and we meet on Wednesday mornings from 10.30 to 11.30.

The group began ten years ago under the direction of Fr. Calzada, and at that time we met in the evening at 8 o'clock; two years later we changed to our present day and time. When Fr. Calzada left Fr. Víctor took charge for a year, and after him, Fr. Hilario for two years.

Nowadays, the priest in charge of biblical studies in the parish considers that, given our state of progress, we can look after ourselves in our study of biblical themes (with the security of his help and advice if any doubts arise or we need clarification).

So, here we are. Our group is very untypical in that we have no leader, nor do we need one; we intended that one and all could lead us along and we are following that path.

Can you imagine a more democratic group than ours in which everyone has both voice and vote?

We are following a book by Fr. Cepedal (recommended by Fr. Calzada and Fr. Cipriano) entitled „Curso de Biblia“. Our method of working is that on each day that we meet one particular person presents the theme to be addressed, which is discussed in a tremendously fraternal atmosphere where no one is left out. It is impressive to see how persons who would have considered themselves incapable of speaking on or preparing a theme, when their turn comes are able to put forward their view and make it understandable for the rest. In this group we all speak, and know how to listen, and respect the views of others. We all learn from everyone.

Although we follow a text in our study, this does not mean that, when some circumstance arises where we have to leave the current order of things and address another theme (always in the light of the Bible), we do not do so. We are not rigid in our study, but consistent. We also have our moments of prayer and celebration.

If I have decided to describe in this way my experience of the group to which I belong, it is to encourage others to come together to study the Bible. It is a marvelous way to get to know the values of others and to enrich ourselves spiritually.

Mary Tere
Vigo, Spain

News

Africa

Kikwit/Zaire: To mark the 25th anniversary of the CBF, I invited 30 people, mainly pastoral workers, but also some religious and some Christians engaged in groups such as „Cana“ and „Mamans catéchistes“ etc. for a whole day, an official holiday, 30th April.

I introduced them to the translation of the *Bible for the Young* in Kikongo. We looked at the plan of the book and saw how the order of texts in certain chapters presupposed a point of view that took into account the stages of redaction and the literary genres (which were spoken of elsewhere in the introduction of the book). This was quite new for many of the participants, so much so that one mother summed it up thus:

„This Bible is not so much for adolescents who know nothing of literary analysis, it is for the young at heart who take on careful study of the plan of the book to see its complexity and to discover the youthfulness of the message which adapts itself to different generations“. J.M. Widart, Kikwit, c/o B.P. 72 45, Kinshasa

Parakou/Benin: „Audiens et Proclama-mans“ allowed us to get a more global view of the biblical apostolate which encourages us to involve ourselves in this apostolate more than before in Togo-Benin. We met recently at Bassar to speak about it and to organize ourselves

better. We want to plan a *manual on the biblical apostolate in French*. We will take as our starting point the Basic Bible Seminar (BBS) from the Philippines.

Roméo Cagatin
B.P. 302, Parakou

Europe /Middle East

Malta: The Maltese New Testament

To help children and young people experience and understand the gospel message through the Scriptures, the Malta Bible Society (MBS) is promoting the Maltese New Testament as a school textbook, and is involved in organising Bible quizzes, and Bible camps. „We want to engender interest among the younger generation who will one day be able to serve God“, said the Rev. Anthony Abela.

Spain: Revista Reseña Bíblica

This review is published by the Spanish Biblical Association and edited by Verbo Divino. Its aim is to contribute to knowledge and study of the Bible in our time.

It endeavours to offer a service from the Church to all people interested in reading and understanding the Bible, and in biblical pastoral ministry to those who wish to develop their formation in this field.

It is directed at catechists, religion teachers, priests, religious, Christian groups and communities, etc.

Themes to be covered in 1995 are: N. 5 Paul; N. 6 The Psalms; N. 7 The Apocalypse and Millennialism; N. 8 Jerusalem.

Courses of Biblical Interest

Centre for Biblical Formation - *Ecce Homo* - Jerusalem

Open to all, priests, religious and laity, who wish to deepen their knowledge of the Word of God and of the Holy Land. Three-month, six-month and year long courses. Guided visits of the Holy Land. Possibility of accommodation.

This program places the accent on up to date study of the Word of God, re-read in the context of the Land, the people and Jewish Tradition out of which it was born, in order to come to a deeper understanding of Jesus and his message.

Further information: P.O. Box 19056, Via Dolorosa, 41, 91190 Jerusalem, Israel
Tel: 972-2-27.72.93; Fax: 972-2-27.67.97

Training Ministers of the Word

The East Asian Pastoral Institute offers a four-month course (3 July - 21 October 1995) for men and women, clergy and laity, actively engaged in the biblical pastoral ministry or assigned to it in the near future.

The objectives of the program are to deepen the participants' understanding of the content and ways of interpretation of the Old and New Testament. Training in the pastoral use of the Bible:

- various methods of Bible sharing for use in basic ecclesial communities, neighbourhood gospel groups and the like;
- a systematic and disciplined method of Bible study called *Joy of Discovery in Bible Study*. Participants will be trained in teaching others this method;
- training for effective preaching of the Word;
- introduction to central themes of the Old and New Testament.

The course is developed within the context of the Catholic Church's approach to Scripture as follows:

- (a) understanding the relationship of revelation, tradition, scripture and the magisterium;
- (b) study of the 1994 Statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on Interpretation of the Bible;
- (c) study of the 1990 statement of the Bogota Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation on Bible and Evangelization.

Further information: EAPI, P.O. Box 221, 1101 U.P. Campus, Q.C. Philippines.
Telephone: (63 2) 924 0561; Telefax: (63 2) 924 4359.

Biblical Pastoral Ministry and the Phenomenon of the Sects

The seminary course *Biblical Pastoral Ministry and the Phenomenon of the Sects* forms part of the program of formation that El Instituto Teológico para América Latina (ITEPAL) will offer from 23rd October to 24th November 1995. Likewise, and in association with the Latin American subregional office of the Catholic Biblical Federation (FEBIC-LA), other courses in biblical pastoral ministry will be developed. The course is designed for priests, religious, and lay people, indeed anyone who wishes to qualify in this kind of ministry. Candidates will need to have sufficient academic qualifications to follow a course of further studies in theology and also a certain familiarity with the Bible.

Further information: Instituto Teológico para América Latina, Transversal 67 no.173-71, Barrio San José de Bavaria, Apartado Aéreo no. 253353. Telephone: (57-1) 677-6521 and 670-6416; Fax: (57-1) 671-4004, Santafé de Bogotá, D.C, Colombia.

FEBIC-LA, Calle 65 no. 7-68, Apto. 403; A.A. 51513, Bogotá, Colombia
Telephone: (57-1) 248-7853; Fax: (57-1) 210-4444

Biblical-Pastoral Center *Dei Verbum Nemi* (Rome)

The next formation course for leaders in the biblical-pastoral ministry is scheduled to be held: 18 August to 16 December 1995

Applicants for this course should write as soon as possible to:

Missionari Verbiti,
Director *Dei Verbum*
Via dei Laghi 52
I-00040 Nemi (Rome), Italy
Telephone: 0039-6-936 83 66
Fax: 0039-6-936 86 54