



# DEIVERBUM

**Catholic Biblical Federation**

THE  
BIBLE  
BULLETIN

**Word of God - Source of Life and  
Hope for the New Millennium**

**The Bible at the Centre of the Life  
of our Churches**

**The Ministry of the Word: a Few  
Thoughts**



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## EDITORIAL

## Dear Readers,

After a somewhat longer pause than usual, the Bulletin is once again in your hands. In the interim we have not been idle: rather, we have striven to clothe the *Bulletin Dei Verbum* in a new garb, smoothing out the creases and decking it in a more up-to-date manner. We hope that the result is to your taste.

A special occasion calls for a new format and such an occasion presents itself in this, the fiftieth edition of the Bulletin. The first edition of the Catholic Biblical Federation's quarterly journal appeared at the beginning of 1971 under the title *Mundo Dei Verbum*; a year later it was renamed *The Biblical Apostolate*. From 1979 it was called *Word Event* and at the same time there was a change in its external appearance. With the sixty-fifth number towards the end of 1986, readers bade farewell to *Word Event* which was then replaced with a simpler bulletin. In its final edition, the general secretary, Fr. Ludger Feldkämper wrote as follows: "*Word Event* will now appear simultaneously in four languages and will give more consideration to the diversity within the Federation". The first number of *Bulletin Dei Verbum* was published in November 1986: here now is the fiftieth. If you count the predecessors of the Bulletin then we are on the 115<sup>th</sup> edition of the Catholic Biblical Federation's quarterly.

Several times in the past, our publication has changed both name and appearance; the particular emphasis of the contents has also varied. But the basic accent has remained the same: *Bulletin Dei Verbum* seeks to be a forum for the exchange of information, experience and points of view among the members of the Federation. Through a selection of contributions coming primarily from the area of the biblical pastoral ministry, it builds up an image of the trends, developments and questions arising in that field, in all regions and subregions of the Federation, presenting a world-wide view. Thus the princi-

ple formulated by the general secretary in the final edition of *Word Event* remains valid.

A second important date occurs this year, giving another reason for marking an occasion: in 1969 the Catholic Biblical Federation was founded. It was then known as the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate. In 1999 we celebrate its thirtieth anniversary. Bulletin 3/1999 will consider this event in detail.

The two main contributions to the present edition are linked by a single conviction: that the word of God should play a central role not only in our churches, but also in our communities. Pablo Richard writes against the background of worldwide globalization and its attendant problem of values; he argues that the word of God must be a life-giving force in the midst of an increasing culture of death. With so much in our world today that is deadly and that despises what it really means to be human, the subject of spirit/spiritlessness, death/life, community values/oppressive methods, gains relevance and urgency. Santiago Guijarro's article, *The Bible at the Centre of the Pastoral Work and the Life of our Churches*, starts from the present situation of the biblical pastoral ministry and offers important suggestions for strengthening further the place of the Bible in the Church's life. One Word – Many words: Bishop Wilderlink's piece, *The Ministry of the Word: a Few Thoughts*, presents a meditation on essence and action in the biblical pastoral ministry. Finally, a selection of examples and news about what our members are doing takes us from theory to practice.

We hope that the new format will set a suitable tone and reveal a stimulating mixture of topics. Thank you very much for your interest, your collaboration and for the assistance you give us.

Alexander M. Schweitzer



## Word of God - Source of Life and Hope for the New Millennium

"And indeed everything that was written long ago in the scriptures was meant to teach us something about hope from the examples scripture gives of how people who did not give up were helped by God." (Rom 15,4)

PABLO RICHARD

*Many of our communities, suffering under a "spiritlessness" that hampers real life, are permeated by a culture of death. The Word of God, proclaimed and established in such a context, can bring life and break the vicious circle of death. The author Pablo Richard sees in the following four main areas an insistent challenge to Christians, to those who serve the life-giving Word:*

- where physical life is threatened
- where the equality of the sexes is ignored
- where a cultural and Christian eurocentrism becomes oppressive and life-impeding
- where our human living-space destroys the natural environment

*The struggle is not against systems and individuals: it is rather a matter of making the Holy Spirit present where there is no spirit, of establishing the Word of God where there is no word, so that a logic of life and of love may spring from one of death.*

*Alongside its traditional, hermeneutical context in the academic and liturgical-institutional world, the Word of God unfolds its transforming and life-giving power, often in a more creative way, in the context of community life.*

### God's Word at the Crossroads of Life and Death

#### The spirit of idolatry in neo-liberal globalization

We are in the midst of an incredible process of globalization, of surprising advances in communications and of an economic, technical and scientific progress heretofore unachieved. But at the same time we realize that those invited to take part in the feast of modernity are a mere minority, and that this progress is not in tune with nature and the cosmos. There is the growing problem of the destruction of the environment which is radically opposed to progress and to human civilization itself. Nevertheless, the problem is neither the process of globalization in itself nor the advances in science and technology, but it is one of the *spirit* within that process, its rational basis, logic, ethic, ideology, culture and spirituality which is contrary to human universalism and to harmony with nature. This spirit of the system is generally known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, as an *ideology*, hides the reality of death which is on the increase in the process of globalization and lends it its justification as the best and only system possible. In theological terms, *neoliberalism* is that kind of *idolatry* which permits the system to destroy and kill without limits and without any qualms of conscience.

#### The role of God's Word in resisting the spirit of the system

If the fundamental problem is not the *system* itself but its *spirit*, Christians have to provide the cultural, ethical



and spiritual resistance against the very heart of globalization. This resistance is neither theoretical nor ideological, but is identified with the struggle for human life and the integrity of creation, with the struggle to reconstruct civil society and the state, with the struggle for a culture and an ethic of life contrary to the ideology of death inherent in neoliberalism. This resistance and struggle allows us to think out and offer alternatives to the present system of neoliberal globalization.

The movement brought about by Jesus, in Christianity's earliest years, was confronted by a situation similar to ours. The Roman empire seemed to be the best system for that time, and Christians then had no possibility to think out and construct an alternative system. The problem was not the system itself but its spirit of idolatry. The Christians then did not confront the system directly. They offered a cultural, ethical and spiritual resistance which in the course of time destroyed the legitimacy of the existing system. The Christians lived *in* the Roman empire, but were not of it. The whole apocalyptic tradition breathes this same attitude: the problem was not with the recognized authorities (whom Paul defended in Rom 13) but the spiritual and idolatrous system which was behind the system and sustained it: the beast and the false prophet (Rev 13).

Two biblical texts, of apocalyptic character and going back to the end of the first century, can help us define the resistance which the Christians showed against a totally perverted system. The first one is: "Finally, grow strong in the Lord, with the strength of his power. Put God's armour on so as to be able to resist the devil's tactics. For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but

against the Sovereignities and the Powers who originate the darkness in this world, the spiritual army of evil in the heavens. (Eph 6,10-12). This text recommends further the use of the weapons needed for this combat: truth, justice, peace, faith, prayer, constant vigilance and particularly the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (cf. Eph 6,13-20).

The second text is from 2 Thes 2,1-12. Here Paul speaks of the *apostasy*, the *diabolic power*, and the mystery of *iniquity*. At the same time, he points out "*that which now holds back the impious one*." The idolatry of the market is today's mystery of iniquity which is at work in the world. Confronted with this iniquity one can either seek *refuge* in *apostasy* or in the practice of truth. That which prevents the total apostasy of humanity is the

cultural, ethical and spiritual resistance against the very soul of the system of neoliberal globalization. It is the Christian community which resists the idolatry of the market,

which believes in the God of life and which works out a theology critical of the iniquity of the system. It is the force of the Spirit, of the Word and of solidarity.

In the reconstruction of the life, of the spirit and of hope, Christianity holds in its hands all the historical power of God's Word, a power which he revealed in the Exodus and in the historical and prophetic traditions of Israel, in the tradition of liberation contained in the books of Wisdom, in the power of prayer and mysticism contained in the psalms. Finally, the power of the Word was revealed to us in a definitive form in Jesus, in the movement he called to life, and in all the inspired works which stem from it. If the Church were only able to reconstruct the identity of its origins and regain the power which the Word had over the first communities, the Word

of God today would *become life and hope* for the majority of people who are rejected and without hope, as well as for the cosmos which is groaning under the burden of human progress.

### The historical challenges of God's Word in our present situation

Four realities of life and death within the system of globalization present a serious "hermeneutic" challenge to God's Word as *Word of life and hope*, particularly to the rejected and the poor.

Human Life: The basic threat is that to the life of the poor and the rejected. Human life is not only an economic, political, anthropological and psychological reality, but it is also a cultural, ethical and spiritual reality. Life itself, the world we live in, health constitute ethical, spiritual and "hermeneutic" imperatives for the interpretation of the Bible. Paraphrasing Irenaeus we can say: "Verbum Dei, vivens pauper, gloria autem pauperis Verbum Dei" (The Word of God is the poor man who is alive, the glory of the poor man is the Word of God).<sup>1</sup>

The equality of man- and woman-kind (gender equality): The dimension of gender equality is another hermeneutic category which we cannot avoid if we do not wish to put the very credibility of our interpretation of the Bible at risk. It is necessary to break down the patriarchal interpretation given to the Bible through the centuries. The male centered (androcentric) interpretation of the Bible has become so systematic and profound as to deform and to twist the very texts themselves and their translations and interpretations. The patriarchal form of hermeneutics has destroyed woman and made her invisible in the Bible. At the same time, man has been blown up with a nature which is both alien to him and alienating to others. Human liberation, just as the liberation of man and woman, belong to the context of our interpretation of God's Word.

The problem is neither the process of globalization in itself nor the advances in science and technology, but it is one of the spirit within that process



Culture and Religion. The Bible had its beginnings first in a Semitic cultural context and later in a Hellenistic one. Very soon it took over the Latin-Roman culture, representing a break with the cultures of the East. Through twenty centuries, the Bible's interpretation had to confront many cultures, particularly in the fulfilment of its universal mission. Christianity reached the shores of Asia, Africa and Latin America in the wake of the European cultural expansion. It is necessary to overcome the Euro-centrism of culture and religion which had imprisoned the Bible, in order to begin to dialog with the cultures and religions of the Third World.

Nature and The Cosmos: Hermeneutics had always relegated nature to the sidelines, as if it had not taken part in the history of salvation. The "cry of the earth" which is now threatened by neoliberal globalization must provide orientation to our interpretation of the Bible. God's Word must likewise be life and hope for the cosmos which is groaning for the new creation.

### God's Word as Life and Hope for the Church

#### The One and Triune God of Life is alive in the People of God

Three forces are in motion today within the Church: The force of the *Word* (in the biblical movement) the force of the *Spirit* (in the movements of spirituality) and the force of *solidarity* (in the preferential option for the poor). They are the manifestations of the same one and triune God: Jesus, the Word made flesh (*Logos*), the Holy Spirit (*Pneuma*) and the Father who is Love (*Agape*). The three forces are as dependent on each other as the three divine persons. The Word is efficacious in the spirit and in solidarity. Spirituality and solidarity cannot prescind from the Word; it is the Word which gives direction to spirituality and solidarity.

These three forces (Word-Spirit-Solidarity) are in the hands of all baptized and in all communities whose communion is constitutive of the Church as the People of God. The structures and ecclesial ministries are at the service of these divine forces. The Bible is the canon and the grammar of the faith, it defines and clarifies the identity of the Church. The Magisterium and exegesis are at the service of God's Word, which is the highest authority in the Church (Dei Verbum 10).

#### The Word: a letter which kills or a Spirit which gives life?

The Word of God stands between life and death. If the Word is submitted to the *law*, to the institution and to the power, it becomes a letter governed by the flesh and leading us to death. Law is only useful if it is at the service of life. If, on the other hand, the Word is interpreted in *faith*, it obeys to the Spirit, gives us *life and hope* and sets us free from sin and from death. (cf. Gal 5, 2 Cor 3,4-18, Rom 8,1-13).

#### Setting the Word of God Free so that it Becomes Word of Life and Hope

##### A novel hermeneutic space for God's Word

Hermeneutic space is that institutional *place* where a specific interpretive *subject* gets its identity, proper to that place and different from any other subject. This space makes a certain *interpretation* of the Bible proper to that place and different from those other interpretations made in other hermeneutic *places*. Our interpretation of the Bible depends on the place where we find ourselves.

There are two traditionally accepted hermeneutic spaces which are thor-

oughly legitimate and always useful and necessary. The first is the *academic space*. These are the faculties of theology, the seminaries, and centers for studies. The Bible is interpreted here scientifically, according to the canons of the methods of historical-criticism, of classical literary methods, and of the new methods of human sciences. In this space, the subject of the Bible's interpretation is the expert, the exegete, the biblical professor, the graduate of biblical sciences and other related sciences. The academic interpretation of the Bible finds its legitimacy in the correct use of the scientific methods and in the authority of the authors cited.

The second traditional hermeneutic space is that of the *institution of the liturgy* of the Church. In it the Bible is read and interpreted in the context of the liturgy and in the context of the ordinary teaching and magisterial function of the Church. This space is bolstered up by the work of the "academics" which is now transformed according to the rules of the liturgy and of the teaching of the faith in the Church. In this liturgical space, the celebration of the Word is done within the community, but this community follows the hermeneutic logic dictated by liturgical prescriptions, with its calendar, its rules and liturgical norms. In this hermeneutic space the subject is the ordained minister or the layman authorized to exercise his function.

The reading of the Bible in community is beginning to provide a third new and just as legitimate and necessary space for the experience of and the correct interpretation of God's Word. We would like to provisionally call this the *community space*. In it the Bible is read and interpreted in community, whether they be in the basic ecclesial communi-

The realities of life and death present a serious hermeneutic challenge to God's Word as *Word of life and hope*



ties or in other ecclesial community institutions and movements. The interpretation of the Bible performed in community possesses characteristics which are different from the academic or liturgical-institutional interpretations. The community, in the first place, is a space where those who normally cannot share in society (the poor, the rejected, the youth, women, indigenous natives) can participate. It assumes

its importance in places where large institutions do not hold sway. It is also a place where solidarity and spirituality, commitment to freedom and gospel inspired mission are found. The

community, inasmuch as it is a direct and representative expression of the Church as the People of God, is the space par excellence for spiritual, mystical, prophetic and apocalyptic creativity. It is a space where a form of ecumenism is found, where one can build more easily a communion with other religious and ecclesial traditions. In this space *the subject* of the interpretation of the Bible is neither the exegete nor the ordained minister but the community itself. This community is active as the interpreting subject of a subject which is greater than the People of God.

The community hermeneutic space is a privileged place where the poor and the rejected can creatively share in the interpretation of the Bible. This creativity can hardly be found in the academic and the liturgical-institutional space. "Many 'basic Christian communities' focus their gatherings upon the Bible and set themselves a threefold objective: to know the Bible, to create community and to serve the people. Here also exegetes can render useful assistance in avoiding actualizations of the biblical message

that are not well grounded in the text. But there is reason to rejoice in seeing the Bible in the hands of people of lowly condition and of the poor; they can bring to its interpretation and to its actualization a light more penetrating, from the spiritual and existential point of view, that that which comes from a learning that relies upon its own resources alone (cf. Mt 11,25)."<sup>12</sup> "The entire biblical tradition

The poor have a capacity for hearing and interpreting the Word of God which should be taken into account by the whole Church; it demands a response on the social level as well

and, in a particular way, the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels indicates as privileged hearers of the Word of God those whom the world considers people of lowly status... (They)... have a capacity for hearing and interpreting the Word of

God which should be taken into account by the whole Church; it demands a response on the social level as well."<sup>13</sup> This space is necessary to set free the Word of God as the *Word of Life and Hope* for the whole Church and all mankind.

The inter-action of all three hermeneutical spaces is all important. The communitarian space needs the support of the academic space (that of biblical science) and that of the liturgical-institutional space (that of the magisterium). Scientific and liturgical interpretation need the support of the community, where Word and Life, Word and Culture, Word and the Subjectivity of every member living in that community meet. These three hermeneutic spaces are found in the *interior* of the Church where the three spaces can perhaps be physically identified, either totally or partially. In any case, they should not be placed in *opposition* to each other, as if they were purely physical spaces. It is necessary to *distinguish* them as hermeneutic spaces.

In the spaces we mentioned, but particularly in the community space,

we have to discover in depth the existence of personal and subjective space. In the scientific, liturgical and community spaces it is finally the person, with his whole subjectivity and spirituality as well as mystical depth, which receives, interprets, meditates and contemplates the Word. This process of interiorization is obtained through the practice of the *lectio divina*, or the prayerful reading of the Bible.

In the so-called community space, it is necessary to *multiply the subjects* which accept the ministry of God's Word. The community space, with the help of biblical science and of the Church magisterium, will grow and become strong as the number and quality of its own ministers of the Word grows. It is important that these ministers act with authority, legitimacy, security, efficiency and with a certain kind of autonomy. This will be achieved with the measure of their wisdom and spiritual capacity to interpret and proclaim God's Word. The autonomy of the minister does not mean independence from the magisterium nor from the Church. It means an "autonomy to take off", an autonomy which gives him the spiritual capacity to listen and to remain faithful to the Word. The community hermeneutic space must acknowledge, respect and develop this spiritual capacity of the ministers of the Word, particularly when they are poor or rejected.

### Setting the spiritual sense of God's Word free

Just how important the role of the Holy Spirit is in hermeneutics can be seen from the words of Patriarch Athenagoras as he expresses his eastern point of view thus:

"Without the Holy Spirit, God is far away, Christ remains a figure of the past, the Gospel a dead letter, the Church a mere organization, authority a means to exercise power, mission a propaganda machine, worship



becomes out of date and morality the action of slaves."<sup>4</sup>

St. Paul refers to the Spirit in terms of life and death:

"All our qualifications come from God. He is the one who has given us the qualifications to be the administrators of this new covenant, which is not a covenant of written letters but of the Spirit: the written letters bring death, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Cor 3,5-6)

Scriptural science has produced many excellent and useful works during the last century. Many exegetes, both men and women, have been authentic prophets and teachers of the faith. But the spirit which has thus far dominated exegesis has been that of rationalism, liberalism, individualism and existentialism. People in the Third World have no problems with exegetical *methods* but with the spirit with which these methods are used. They may be useful and effective, but still their *spirit* continues to be that which exudes the ethnocentricity, patriarchalism and authoritarianism of the West, both ancient and modern.

Because of this, *hermeneutics* must always be one imbued with *the Spirit*. It is not just any kind of spirit. It must be the Spirit of the God of life which reveals itself in the poor and the oppressed, in the cultural and religious traditions of peoples, in women and in nature. It is the same Spirit with which the Bible has been written. The Constitution Dei Verbum expresses this idea beautifully: "Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written." (DV 12) This *convergence of exegesis and Spirit* has become a reality in the midst of the community.

We are all aware of the classical distinction between the three meanings of the biblical text: its literal meaning: that of the text as text; its *historical meaning*: that of the text interpreted in its historical context; and its *spiritual meaning*: that which the text ac-

quires when it is read as God's Word revealed in history. The biblical text reveals not only God's Word to us, but also the place and the manner with which God reveals himself to us. When the text brings about this clear distinction, there arises a spiritual meaning which is radically opposed to biblical fundamentalism which reduces God's Word to its purely literal meaning, and to biblical historicism, which reduces its meaning to pure history.

St. Augustine aptly describes the spiritual meaning of the Bible when he writes: "The Bible, which is God's second book, was written to help us understand the world, to restore to us our eyes of faith and contemplation, and to transform all reality into the one great revelation of God."<sup>5</sup>

#### **Set God's Word free, not abrogate nor suffocate it**

In many places and in many ways we kill and suffocate God's Word or we simply substitute it with our human traditions. Jesus could just as well blame us as he did the Pharisees and the scribes: "...You have made God's word null and void by means of your tradition. Hypocrites! It was you Isaiah meant when he so rightly prophesied: This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. The worship they offer me is worthless; the doctrines they teach are only human regulations" (Mt 15,6-9). Or when he reproves the Saducees in Jerusalem: "You are wrong, because you understand neither the scriptures nor the power of God" (Mt 22,29).

There are three ways of abrogating God's Word. First, through canonical authoritarianism, by reducing the canon of the Bible as the one and only absolute criterion. In our days, exegesis has succeeded in rescuing

**Both science and magisterium are *at the service* of God's Word and do not stand above it**

the plurality of the *canon of the Bible*. Among the Jews and during the beginning of the Christian era, there was a plurality of theologies and religious movements, just as there was a variety of historical and cultural contexts. When

the canon of the Bible was institutionalized, this historical plurality was legitimized, and the Bible itself extended its original pluriformity with the help of new theological and ecclesial trends.<sup>6</sup> The existence of plural forms was original and orthodox. Heresies came about when one interpretation was absolutized over the rest. A very common way of destroying this plurality of tradition and of the biblical text was the creation of a canon within the canon. One takes a biblical text, one gives it an absolute meaning, and one reduces the whole Bible to this single criterion. For example: 1 Tim 2,9-15 is transformed into a single absolute criterion, and the Bible is then interpreted in the light of this text. The text is without doubt male centered (androcentric) and patriarchal. But we are not allowed to transform it into a canon within a canon, into one single and absolute criterion to be able to make a male-centered (androcentric) and patriarchal interpretation of the whole Bible. One cannot deny that the text we cited exists, but on the other hand, existing together with it, are many other texts which proclaim the liberation of women. We have to put the text in the complex and multiform context of biblical tradition. We are to reconstruct critically the diverse theological trends in order to rescue the canon of the Bible in all its complexity and multiformity. We are not allowed to absolutize singly cited verses, as if they were over and above the whole of revelation.

Secondly, we abrogate God's Word through the *fundamentalism of the letter*, when we kill the spiritual mean-



ing of the text by harking only to its literal sense. There is no doubt that the literal meaning of the text is not to be negated and of greatest importance. This does not prevent us from reading the text as God's Word or from reading it in our present history in the light of the text. The opposite would be just as harmful, namely to disregard the literal meaning of the text and to fall into a spiritualism which is alien to the Spirit with which the Bible has been written. Theological fundamentalism prevents us above all, from discovering, in the light of the biblical text, God's Word in the book of life.

Thirdly, we can abrogate the text through the *authoritarianism of science and the magisterium*. It is evident that biblical science and the magisterium of the Church are undeniable aids to interpreting the Bible. But from the view point of methodology and hermeneutics, from the standpoint of faith and the ecclesial sense of the interpretation of the Bible, it is basic that both science and magisterium are *at the service* of God's Word and not stand above it. Dei Verbum 10 says: "The teaching office is not above the Word of God, but serves it." There are certain closed academic circles which are dominated by an exaggerated scientific biblicism which only succeeds in drowning God's Word. In the same way, there are certain ecclesial circles

where the magisterium is presented in an absolute and authoritarian manner, where God's Word becomes subordinated and is suffocated.

The work of interpretation can be profoundly liberating only when God's Word confronts us and sets us free. It can be most liberating when the interpretative process (hermeneutics) sets the very Word of God free from all authoritarian and fundamentalistic oppression. God's Word is surely alive and efficacious (Heb 4, 12-13). It allows us to pursue the process of a liberating and spiritual hermeneutics in the Church.

#### **Pastoral Guidelines at the Service of God's Word**

All of what has been said before would just remain on the level of discussion and theory, if we, as a Church, do not develop an organized and efficient biblical pastoral program. We would like to enumerate and discuss briefly some aspects of such a biblical pastoral program:

*To orient academic biblical work* towards the liturgico-institutional as well as towards the basic communitarian space, we have to define exegesis and spirituality better and to orient exegetical methods towards pastoral and ecclesial reflection. We are to review the methods used in the biblical formation of priests, religious and pastoral lay workers. We are to provide greater space to God's Word in the institutional Church. Often, canon law and catechetics have more elbow room and authority in the Church than the Bible itself. Both canon law and catechetics are *certainly* necessary and useful, but they have to be *at the service* of

God's Word; if not, they run the risk of losing the Spirit and being transformed into letters which kill.

*To hand over the Bible to the People of God* in the hermeneutic communitarian space together with the necessary support of biblical science and of the magisterium. For this purpose we have to train ministers of the Word by means of workshops and biblical retreats. It is necessary to create a communitarian biblical movement in the midst of the People of God for the renewal of the Church and its structures. We have to seek to transform the Church spiritually and on the long term, not by confronting the institutions but by confronting God's Word.

*To reconstruct the kerygmatic dimension of the Church.* This should start with a global interpretation of the history of salvation and of the origins of Christianity. We are to set up a new school promoting new ways of preaching, based on the Bible and tradition. We are to renew academic exegetical studies from the kerygmatic and pastoral point of view, which is not less scientific by being at the service of announcing God's Word and of the building up of the Church.

*To reform catechetics* so that it will be deeply biblical in its spirit, structure and method. Catechesis must provide living and direct contact with God's Word and lead the faithful on the ways of the history of salvation and the history of the Church.

*To foster a spirituality and mysticism* inspired by the Bible, and to transform the Bible into a spirituality and mysticism through the prayerful reading of the Bible.

*To revise dogmatic theology*, beginning from the Bible and tradition, as well as the teaching methods used in theology, beginning from exegetical methods and biblical science. We are to restore the primacy of God's Word and of his Spirit in theological studies.

#### **Pablo Richard**

Born in Chile (1939), a priest of the archdiocese of San José, Costa Rica. Licentiate in Theology at the Catholic University of Chile, Licentiate in Sacred Scriptures at the Pont. Biblical Institute, Rome. Biblical Archeological Studies at the Biblical School of Jerusalem, Doctorate in Sociology of Religion at the Sorbonne, Paris. Professor of Exegesis at the National University of Costa Rica and at the Latin American Biblical University; Director of the Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones (DEI) for the permanent formation of pastoral lay workers in Latin America.



*To revitalize Christian ethics, beginning from the spiritual sense of the Bible. It ought not to be an ethics based on law but one based on life,*

*where law is at the service of life, and not life at the service of law. To re-establish the biblical roots for the social program of the Church by unit-*

*ing the pastoral program for solidarity with the dimension of the Spirit and the Word.*



(Transl.: Vicente Castro)

<sup>1</sup> The original phrase is: Gloria Dei, vivens homo; gloria autem hominis vita Dei. Irenaeus of Lyon, century II.

<sup>2</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission: The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,

Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993, p. 130

<sup>3</sup> idem, p. 103-104

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from Valerio Mannucci: La Biblia como Palabra de Dios. Bilbao (Desclée), 1988, p. 318

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Carlos Mesters: Flor sin Defensa (Ediciones CLAR No. 16) Bogotá 1984, p. 28

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Raymond E. Brown: Las Iglesias que los apóstoles nos dejaron. Bilbao (Desclée) 1986





# The Bible at the Centre of the Pastoral Work and the Life of our Churches

SANTIAGO GUIJARRO OPORTO

*The second Vatican Council placed the word of God afresh at the centre of the Church's life. The pastoral recommendations in chapter 6 of the constitution Dei Verbum stirred up and brought about a renewal. Nevertheless, the process initiated by the Council must be taken further so that new Church and community situations may be addressed. Through real dialogue an approach to pastoral life and work, rooted in the Bible, must find answers to new challenges.*

*In this venture there are three fundamental pastoral principles:*

- *the Bible as the basis of all pastoral activity*
- *the individual and community reading of the Bible in a spirit of real faith*
- *an excellent formation for those who serve the Word*

*These principles will be developed in Santiago Guijarro's contribution. They are fundamental to a biblical pastoral ministry which will develop as the Church and the community themselves do; thus, the word of God will become the source and point of renewal of faith and pastoral activity, and will thoroughly permeate the life of the Church.*

## A famine ... of hearing words of the Lord (Am 8:11, RSV)

The point of reference for understanding the place of the Bible in the pastoral work and in the life of our churches is, without doubt, the Constitution *Dei Verbum*. The key concept of this conciliar document is that of revelation, understood as dialogue, and it is eloquently expressed as follows: "Through this revelation ... the invisible God out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself" (DV 2). The image of dialogue or conversation recurs throughout the document and implies a new understanding of divine revelation, which is portrayed as a process in which the human person plays an important role. In the dynamism of revelation it is not enough that God should make himself known: it is necessary also that the revelation be received in faith, thus giving rise to a true dialogue.

This intimate and deep dialogue between God and human beings is where the former reveals the fullness of the divine being and his plan of love, and it is the framework within which we must place our pastoral reflection. In fact it is also the theological context in which *Dei Verbum* sites the pastoral recommendations of chapter 6 which is entitled "Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church". There it speaks about how to respond to the revelation of God in Sacred Scripture.

The central affirmation of chapter 6 from which the concrete recommen-



dations derive is that "like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture" (DV 21). The chapter begins and ends by linking Scripture with the

Eucharist in which the Church "unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body" (DV 21). It is this double feast, offered to the faithful at Mass, that nourishes and gives life to the Church (DV 26). Both the central affirmation of the chapter and the importance of the table of the Word in the context of the Eucharist place Sacred Scripture at the centre of the Church's life.

The practical recommendations of the rest of the chapter follow from this affirmation. Nevertheless, while they are important, we must go beyond them. The affirmation itself is the key, because it leads to implications that the Council in its time was not able to develop. These can and must be realized in the concrete, in response to new situations that arise. This is the challenge that faces us today: not merely to implement the Council's recommendations, but to develop what follows from its basic insight into the Bible's place in both the life of the Church and in the dynamic of revelation as God's communication and humanity's response.

Nearly 35 years have passed since the promulgation of *Dei Verbum* and we cannot deny the enormous influence the document has had on the pastoral work and on the life of our churches. The growing desire of Christians to be better acquainted with the Bible as the Word of God is a phenomenon not restricted to any geographical area or culture: it has appeared virtually simultaneously,

though independently, throughout the world. Reading and meditating on

the Bible has become a source of Christian renewal and of pastoral inspiration in Asia, Africa, Europe and, above all, in Latin America.

Never before in the history of the Church has there been such a widespread interest in the Bible on the part of God's people. We can apply the words of the prophet Amos to this post-conciliar period more than to any other time: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Am 8:11, RSV).

We have not, however, arrived at our destination. There is further to go, and, in this regard, the question posed to all Catholics by the Pope in the apostolic exhortation *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* is relevant: "To what extent has the Word of God become more fully the soul of theology and the inspiration of the whole of Christian living, as *Dei Verbum* sought?" (TMA 36)

The European bishops were already seeking an answer to this question five years ago, at a meeting, sponsored by the European Council of Bishops' Conferences in collaboration with the Catholic Biblical Federation, which took place in Freising, Germany, in 1994. The theme of the meeting was "Sacred Scripture in the life of the churches of Europe today and tomorrow", and the conclusions put forward in its final statement included three recommendations which identified three questions important from the pastoral point of view:

How can the Bible be made the basis for all pastoral activity?

How should we read the Bible with faith, and teach others to do the same?

How should the various ministers of the Word be formed?

These three questions which arose at the Freising meeting were not systematically explored there.<sup>1</sup> I would like now to attempt to expound them more explicitly, and to propose various ways of reflecting on them.

### The Bible as the Basis for Pastoral Action

In the re-evaluation of Sacred Scripture that has taken place in recent years we have followed a path on which it has been possible to distinguish three levels of understanding the place of the Bible in the life of the Church: firstly, the biblical movement, secondly, pastoral work directly related to the Bible and thirdly, the biblical inspiration that should underlie all pastoral work. In the years before the Council the biblical movement encouraged the popularization of scriptural texts and saw the organization of biblical courses and weeks with the aim of swiftly remedying the centuries-long lack of biblical knowledge. After the Council there was a transition from the biblical movement to pastoral work directly related to the Bible. The Catholic sense that the biblical text needed the accompaniment of commentary gave rise to numerous popularizing initiatives of a pastoral tenor. Nevertheless, this pastoral work directly related to the Bible was seen as an addition to other pastoral approaches, rather than as a fundamental element of all pastoral activity. The general practical recognition that the Bible must occupy the central place in all pastoral activity as well as in the life of the Church, is of relatively recent origin. Passing from the second to the third, that is, to "the biblical inspiration that should underlie all pastoral work", we see that the



Bible is no longer the object of a specific pastoral approach, but that it must, as the Council affirms, inspire the Church's life as a whole.

Parallel to this development, we see the increasing presence of Scripture in the principal areas of the life of our churches, especially in the liturgy and in catechesis. Deriving from the same insistence of the Council (DV 21, 25, 26), the liturgy of the word ceased to be merely a step towards the liturgy of the Eucharist, but acquired its own identity. We have witnessed also a profound renewal of catechesis, moving from catechisms turning on dogmatic formulations to an approach based on the experience of faith as reflected in the biblical texts. These are signs which reveal the action of the Spirit in re-establishing the scriptural Word of God at the centre of the life and pastoral work of our churches.

In the area of liturgy it is clear that the physical proclamation of the Word of God is not sufficient to enkindle the dialogue between God and human beings described by *Dei Verbum*. In some cases this is due to the lack of sufficient care and preparation in the actual way of proclaiming. Perhaps there are too many readings and it is difficult for the faithful to remember what they have heard. There is the strong suspicion that the homily doesn't always succeed in making the Word of God relevant to us today (DV 24; SC 35:2, 52). But without doubt the most important factor is the lack of a biblical formation on the part of the great majority of the faithful. Without such a basic formation it is practically impossible for the hearers at our liturgical celebrations to know what they are listening to, or

to find in the readings a message that touches their lives. It is interesting that

To what extent has the Word of God become more fully the soul of theology and the inspiration of the whole of Christian living, as *Dei Verbum* sought?

one of the first things one notices among groups that have begun to read the Bible is that they also begin to appreciate and enter more fully into the liturgy of the Word.

With regard to catechesis, the second area specifically mentioned by the

Council (DV 24), a survey was held four years ago in the countries of southern Europe. In the majority of them the catechisms were based on the Bible; the catechists, however, neither knew it well nor read it much, and did not teach the reading of it to others.<sup>2</sup> Have we given our catechists knowledge of the Bible, without teaching them to read it and without stirring in them the desire to meditate attentively on Sacred Scripture? We shall consider this point in detail later when we deal with the formation of ministers of the Word.

Despite great efforts, liturgy and catechesis have not been able to facilitate the dialogue between God and human beings which is the very heart of Christian Bible reading. Once again we see the necessity for a formation in Bible reading which does not consist merely in the transmission of knowledge, but includes a true initiation into the mystery (a mystagogy), through which we learn to embrace Scripture as God's Word spoken to us. What we have said here about the place of the Bible in the liturgy and in catechesis can be equally applied to other initiatives of biblical dissemination. The step that we have to take if the Bible is to be truly at the centre of the life and pastoral work of our churches is as follows: it must be placed at the heart of every believer. To that end it is necessary

to form the believer in how to read the Bible with faith.

### Reading the Bible with Faith

In these years we have acquired much knowledge of the Bible without learning how to read with faith. This is a most important problem and it greatly influences the place that the Bible occupies in the life and pastoral work of our churches. Maybe the reason we have not yet learnt how to read with faith is that the criteria which should guide such a reading are not yet clear. We are dealing with a hermeneutical problem which gives rise to a number of questions: How can we discover a message for today in texts that are so ancient? Who is responsible for the interpretation of the Bible? Is it acceptable to allow a variety of interpretations so that in different contexts the same texts may be read in different ways? Might not a reading in faith distort the genuine sense of the texts?

The answers to these hermeneutical questions can be found today in three different but complementary areas: 1) in that of pastoral practice, where different ways of approaching the Bible arise in different places; 2) in that of reflection, through individuals and institutions dedicated to biblical formation;<sup>3</sup> 3) lastly, through the Pontifical Biblical Commission which has recently faced the basic question and has provided a series of keys and criteria for reading the Bible in faith.<sup>4</sup>

A common element in all these responses is the rediscovery of *Lectio Divina*, the way of reading the Bible used by the Fathers of the Church and later by the monks. The aforementioned document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission defines *Lectio Divina* as "the individual or community reading of a longer or shorter passage of Scripture, embraced as the Word of God, which is "unpacked" under the impetus of the Holy Spirit



in meditation, prayer and contemplation" (p. 114, Spanish edition). This is a condensed definition: it speaks of different modes (individual or in a group), of the object (a passage of Scripture), of the fundamental assumption ("embraced as the Word of God ... under the impetus of the Holy Spirit"), and of the steps in the process (reading, pondering, praying, contemplating). It is not possible here to offer a detailed reflection on all these elements: I shall, however, indicate a few basic keys that begin to unlock the criteria that should inspire our reading of the Bible. My starting point will be the numerous suggestions made by the Pontifical Biblical Commission.<sup>5</sup>

#### **First Key: to read the texts with real respect**

The principal concern guiding our reading of the Bible has to be a real respect towards the faith-experience of our predecessors, which generated these writings. The Bible arose in a culture different from ours and at a remote period in the past. We must certainly avoid subjective manipulation of the text, whether by individuals or by groups. To that end it is necessary to take account, at various levels, of the methods and approaches developed by the exegesis of recent years. Reading in this spirit of respect requires us to opt for the methods of exegesis which help us to understand better the faith-experience underlying the text. What the believer seeks above all in the Bible is the experience of faith encapsulated in its books. The truth contained there is neither scientific nor even historical: it is rather the reality of a concrete

experience that the Church has recognized as the exemplar and motive force of the faith. She has therefore accepted these books as canonical Scripture.

#### **Second Key: out of life and for life**

The believer does not read the Bible so as to know a lot about it: the purpose is rather to understand and direct his or her life. For this reason, the Christian reading of the Bible must arise from that individual life. This establishes the basis for the dialogue between the experience reflected in the biblical texts and the experience of the modern reader. The early Christians' re-reading of the Old Testament included an important principle: "The Scriptures unveil the meaning of events; events reveal the meaning of Scriptures" (IBC p. 82 Spanish edition). When we affirm that the Word of God is a living word, we are declaring that the faith-experiences of the past

In these years we have acquired much knowledge of the Bible – often without learning how to read with faith

have a special purpose: to illuminate the faith-experiences of all generations with their multifarious personal and social contexts. Thus we may legitimately speak of a plurality of interpretations that arise from reading the Bible in different contexts (IBC p. 85 Spanish edition). This plurality reveals the unsearchable richness of the Word of God which is new in every generation.

#### **Third Key: an ecclesial reading**

The community dimension of the Christian reading of the Bible raises the question of the interpreter: Who is responsible for the interpretation: the experts, the magisterium, the simple to whom God reveals his myster-

ies...? The true interpreter of the Scriptures is the Spirit who works in the community through the various charisms. Thus, in its search for the sense of the text today, the community must go to the exegetes who assist in the process of reading with respect; to the simple people, who grasp rather its relevance to life; and to the living magisterium of the Church, that has been entrusted with the task of authentically interpreting the Word of God (IBC, pp. 91-94, 118 - Spanish edition; see also DV 10). In this context, the personal reading recommended by the Council (DV 25) should precede the community reading as a preparation for it, and should continue after it by means of meditation, prayer and commitment.

#### **Fourth Key: a reading inspired and enlightened by faith**

This perspective is essential for a Christian reading. Only through an encounter with the risen Lord can the deepest sense of the Scriptures be understood (Lk 24:32, 45). Those who have met him find in themselves an ability to read Scripture with certainty, discovering there the deeper meaning. Possessed of a new and penetrating light they are led towards an understanding of the underlying mystery. We must recognize, however, that this type of reading is subject to certain conditions: when we see Jesus as the key and the interpreter of Scripture, our reading of the Christian scriptures must still remain consistent with their self-understanding. Approaching the Bible from this practical position, we can read it in the Spirit in which it was written; we remain faithful to the intentions of the authors whose principal concern was to strengthen and encourage the faith of the communities to whom the writings were directed (see Lk 1:4, Jn 20:30-31).



## The Formation of Ministers of the Word

The third basic issue raised by the bishops at the Freising meeting is the formation of ministers of the Word. In practice, the main effort has been directed at the education of priests and catechists. These initiatives have contributed greatly to a better knowledge of the Bible, to a deeper appreciation of its importance in the life of the Church, and to a rediscovery of the richness it contains. Nevertheless, the programmes used in this formation concentrate principally on content; they are less concerned with the ability to read the Bible in faith and with the motivation required to read and ponder the Word of God with real commitment.

If we are seeking to form ministers of the Word who can help to place the Bible at the centre of the life and pastoral work of our churches, we must take account of three requirements on which I will offer some reflections:

### Firstly: basic biblical formation

This consists essentially in the transmission of knowledge of the Bible: of

the historical and social context from which it arose, of the literary forms it uses, of how its message was understood by those for whom it was first written. This is the area most emphasized in present programmes of formation; nevertheless, other aspects must be dealt with. On the level of content, there is the perennial challenge of how to include in the formation of priests and catechists the constant advances being made in the field of biblical studies. There is also, however, a lack of reflection and discussion on how to construct a programme that is more uniform and better thought-out. The task of improving the biblical formation of catechists, readers and other lay ministers calls for a standardizing of the various programmes. It requires also the establishment of a realistic, core-syllabus, indispensable to approaching the Bible with respect.

### Secondly: formation in reading the Bible as a believer

Here the concern is not with content but with method: how do we read the Bible as *believers*? In answer to this question, I refer back to the hermeneutical keys already mentioned; essentially, we must teach the ministers to take practical steps towards a way of reading that engenders a genuine dialogue with God. In the proc-

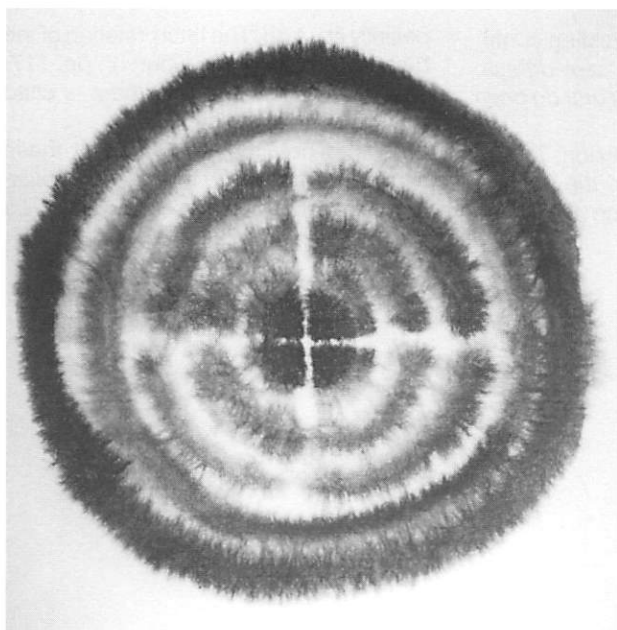
ess of learning there is great value in knowing how the Fathers of the Church, the monks and the spiritual masters read the Bible. The initiation should not be merely theoretical, but the theory should be complemented by practice; and the "students" should be accompanied in this practice, especially in the early stages. Only in this way will they be able to make a true beginning in reading the Bible as believers.

### Thirdly: reading and pondering Scripture with real commitment

We have now established a basis for understanding the Bible with respect (basic biblical formation) and for reading it as a believer; we must now consider how ministers of the Word, by reading and meditating on the Scriptures with real commitment, may find there nourishment for their personal lives. In the on-going formation of the various ministers, methods can be found for facilitating this committed reading and meditation. For example, to set aside a time during priests' meetings for reading the Bible together could enkindle the desire to read it individually later. Catechists are often grateful for the occasional opportunity to spend one of their meetings reading and meditating together on a Scriptural passage, instead of dealing with the practical questions that take up most of the time. Initiatives of this kind help ministers of the Word to remain faithful to their reading and meditation.

### Conclusion

The Council's exhortation, "like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished



Drawings in this issue by Sr. Regina Bong-Ja Choi, SOLPH (Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help are an associate member of the CBF in South Korea)



and regulated by Sacred Scripture" (DV 21), was prophetic: the "hunger for the Word of God" (Am 8:11) that the Holy Spirit has stirred up in the Church since then is a proof of this. We have begun the process of situating the Word of God at the centre of the life and pastoral work of our

churches; much remains to be done, however. The challenge of giving the Bible the place it deserves urges us to rediscover *Lectio Divina* and to reflect on the criteria that should inspire and guide reading the Bible with faith. Furthermore, we must redouble our efforts to bring about a real initiation

into reading the Bible as part of our catechesis and in other pastoral areas. Finally, that this may be possible, the ministers of the Word themselves must be formed in a way that leads them, both in theory and in practice, to this type of reading.



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<sup>1</sup> The documentation of the meeting (order of events, communications, inputs and closing message) may be found in *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 32 (1994).

<sup>2</sup> The results of this investigation are in *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 32 (1994), pp. 9f; see especially p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the interesting contribution of C. Mesters, *Flor sem defesa. Uma explicação da Bíblia a partir do povo* (Petrópolis, Brazil, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Rome 1993, English edition 1994), es-

pecially ch. 4 on "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church", pp. 117-132. Henceforth this document is cited with the abbreviation IBC.

<sup>5</sup> A more detailed exposition of these same criteria may be found in S. Guijarro, "La lectura Cristiana de la Biblia", *La Palabra Hoy* 19 (1994), pp. 43-63.



## The Ministry of the Word: a Few Thoughts

VITAL J. G. WILDERINK

The one word - or many words.  
*We must distinguish.*

The word spoken seeks a word of reply.  
*We can go to meet the word, welcome it and respond to it.*

Serving the word spoken is serving the word of reply.  
*The word does not smooth things down: it lays bare and forces decision. We must discern and decide.*

*The author, Bishop Vidal Wilderink, former bishop of Itaguaí, Brazil, was from 1996 till 1998 delegate of the American full members in the executive committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation. Today he lives in Brazil as a Carmelite hermit.*

**T**he world is flooded with an excess of words. Most of them evoke unrealistic dreams, desires and needs. Words are everywhere. They flow freely as though from a giant water-faucet that cannot be turned off. They strive for dominance in the political and economic spheres. They are on sale in newspapers, they appear on posters and bill-boards, on bottles and plastic bags, they are even found on dollar bills: "In God we trust."

All these words seem to have lost their durability and their reliability. For

them to function in this system, this would have to be the case. No-one lives in them. The words that lure us are the same as those that disappoint us. And mere words can never serve as a guarantee for other words. The blessings of these words can best be told by the poor and the outcasts.

The two disciples, who were on their way to Emmaus, were talking to one another (Lk 24:13-35): "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" And the two of them sadly replied: "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the

things that have happened there in these days?...We had hoped..." The Word comes like a stranger, from outside the system. Only thus can it be truly creative, can it function as call.

A word can only be heard when it is transformed into response, when it is received and accepted as call. "God said: 'Let there be light' and there was light... Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." This passage has given me better insight into something a friend of mine once wrote on a post-card: "We will never be able to be anything other than what we fundamentally are. The difficulty lies in discovering who we fundamentally are, and to live accordingly." The Word that comes to us from outside helps us to discover the word of God that lives in us.

The biblical apostolate receives its role and its meaning through the agency of the Church from the Word that creates, that makes new, that liberates. This Word yearns to be shared, because it became flesh and dwelt among us, so that our human words might have it living in them, so that we might all be response. "Did not our hearts burn within us..." This fire in the heart was necessary so that the eyes of the disciples might be opened and they might recognize Jesus, as he took the bread, broke it and gave it to them. And they set off and proclaimed the risen Jesus. The Word alone is incapable of opening our eyes. It requires a preliminary questioning of reality, it requires a burning heart, and it requires a community, in which the word can become celebration.

The minister of the Word proclaims that man belongs to another. He offers no "extra" to human life, no supplements. As "visitor" his voice is a counter-voice. I am thinking here not so much of a voice like that of Pavarotti. I am thinking rather of a woman I once knew, who has now passed



away, and who used to sing a song to Our Lady at home every time the pain in her leg became unbearable.

She sang, because she believed in a better world. The ministry of the Word means ministry of a counter-word, because it communicates a critical view of things. This is no cosmetic view, that the Word could once again conceal. It is more like a child's drawing in crayon that simply reproduces the way the child sees the things of life.

The biblical apostolate gathers people around the Word and invites them to share the Word, life, their material goods. The Word is the root of the Church, the Ecclesia. The biblical apostolate has as its goal not so much to interpret the Bible itself, but rather the life experience of today. There is a fundamental truth that the Bible intends to communicate: God with us. The most important thing is that the reading of the Bible helps people, helps communities to write the Gospel on the pages of their lives. The Word, in which the Spirit lives,

can triumph over many words. It even enables us to recognize and to correct the limitations of the structure that was erected in the name of the Bible. Where this writing of the Gospel in human hearts does not occur, even biblical songs lose their sound and easily get drowned out by words from television and other media messages. Even if they speak of hope, they no longer give access to the living source of hope.

The ministry of the Word helps us to pray, enables us to hear the Word attentively, inspires us to celebrate the Word. The distance between hearing the Word and celebrating the Word must become ever smaller: hearing means responding. A response that comes from the midst of life. Even the minister of the Word nourishes his strong commitment from the daily reading of the Bible. He will make an effort to cultivate this reading, in order to hear the presence of the living word with his ears, to see it with his eyes, to reflect on it with his mind, and to feel it with his hands (cf. 1 John 1:1; Heb 4:12).

In the variety of places, of times, individuals and groups every Christian hears the Word in his or her own way and responds to it; but the Word itself is ever the same and ever new, like fresh water bubbling up from a spring. The biblical apostolate is committed to the world, the *oekumene*, just as the Word itself is ecumenical — sharper than a two-edged sword that directs the impulses and thoughts of the heart (cf. Heb 4:12).

The Word is preached today, in a time that is apparently incapable of any discrimination. With a variety of means, in accordance with necessity, the biblical apostolate will endeavor to illuminate the paths that lead to Holy Scripture. We must insure that people discover in the Bible the most important moments of their lives and of the ambient society. In the Word of God lies the answer for man, who is full of the will to live, but whose life is also full of suffering and complaint.



(Transl.: Leonard Maluf)



## Bishops and Bible: BIBA II

On March 1-5, the Second Bishops' Institute for the Biblical Apostolate (BIBA II) was held at the Majodi Centre, Johor Malaysia. Ten Asian countries sent delegates. Aside from the host country (Malaysia), the Philippines had the biggest number of participants. There was a total of 35 participants, including 4 guests from the Catholic Biblical Federation. Of these only 17 were bishops. The rest were 14 priests, one religious brother, one religious sister and two lay women. This mixture of church people who are concerned with the urgency of proclaiming the Word of God to the peoples of Asia turned out to be very fruitful and inspiring.

BIBA II was held under the auspices of the Office of Evangelization of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, taking up the call of the Special Synod of Bishops of Asia (1998) on the need for intense and integral biblical pastoral formation of the various members of the Church. The theme, "Bishops As Servants for the Word for the Life of the World", made reference to the theme of the forthcoming Tenth Ordinary General As-

sembly of the Synod of Bishops, "The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ For the Hope of the World". Bishop Crisostomo Yalung, the ECBA chairman and one of the organizers of the Institute, said in his introductory talk that BIBA II is held in relation to this Synod, which will be celebrated during Great Jubilee Year 2000 in Rome. Bishop John Ha, Auxiliary Bishop of Kuching, delivered a paper on church documents and biblical apostolate formation in the seminary, which gave the participants a deep insight regarding the centrality of the Word of God in the life of the Church, making all of us understand that the biblical apostolate is an integral part of evangelization, not merely a "luxurious extra" that would be good to engage in, if time permits. Bishop Wilhelm Egger, the President of the Catholic Biblical Federation, gave an introduction to the method of the four-fold sense of the Scriptures. There were two panel discussions: Seminary Formation and the Biblical Apostolate, and Formation of Lay-workers in the Biblical Apostolate. Among the many areas for intensive renewal

and formation, the final Statement and Propositions of BIBA II focus on two key areas: the formation of seminarians (candidates for the priesthood) and the formation of lay animators in the biblical apostolate.

During BIBA II an interesting proposal was made: to establish a Biblical Institute for Asia, which will be authorized to grant academic degrees in *Re Biblica*. The programme of studies of this institute should comprise prevalent scientific methods of biblical exegesis, Asian approaches in interpreting the Bible, and actualization and inculturation of the Bible in the Asian context.

The Bishop of Romblon, Philippines, Arturo Bastes, in the last Letter of the diocese expresses his hope that this dream of founding a Biblical Institute for Asia will be realized soon through the concerted efforts of all the Asian Episcopal Conferences. He suggests the Philippines as the only predominantly Catholic and Christian nation in Asia, to be a fitting venue of this institute.





#### IV Biblical Pastoral Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean

85 representatives of member organizations of the CBF in 23 Latin-American and Caribbean countries met in Los Teques, Venezuela, from 19-24 April 1999 for their fourth biblical pastoral meeting. Their theme was "The Word of God, source of life and hope for the new millennium."

Pablo Richard from Chile, presently a diocesan priest in Costa Rica and a professor at the Latin-American Biblical University, spoke on the subject *The power of the word of God in the present context of globalization*. His aim was to demonstrate the meaning of the word of God as a transforming, life-giving power in the context of the ubiquitous process of globalization. The Brazilians Sr Mercedes Lopes and Fr Carlos Mesters gave reflections on the theme *Word of God as source of life and hope for the new millennium*. Instead of speculating about the future, they invited the participants to consider where the seed is lying in the earth today, and seeking with all its strength to flower and bear fruit. In the context of Latin America in this regard, it is particularly the base-communities that spring to mind: from the experience of read-

ing the Bible together, fruit is already ripening in many places, which will give hope for the new millennium. There are many movements: of the disposed, of the homeless population of indigenous peoples, of Afro-Americans, of women, of the young, of those who seek to have a voice; there is concern for the environment and for human dignity and human rights. All these movements are inspired and guided by the Bible and they draw their strength from it. The Mexican Octavio Mondragón developed the theme *Biblical pastoral ministry for the new millennium* against the background of the present cultural shift, characterized by a multiplicity of opinions and views of reality. In this regard, the biblical pastoral ministry faces a challenge: it must stimulate and cultivate a new experience of God, an experience that proves that God's word can in practice generate something original and creative.

The themes of the talks and their practical implications were developed in groups, which also worked on how today's biblical pastoral ministry should permeate and inspire all pastoral activity. A new and dynamic

way of understanding work with the Bible has implications for various traditional pastoral practices such as homiletics and catechesis. In addition to these work-groups, the participants met daily to talk about various implications of the biblical pastoral ministry. Among the subjects that came up were the following:

- Bible work and lay people;
- Women as bearers of compassion and hope;
- The Word of God as the means of forming and deepening those involved in biblical pastoral ministry;
- The Bible and youth;
- The biblical message of justice and compassion;
- The Bible and ecumenism;
- Reading the Bible in the context of Afro-American culture.

Alongside these talks, discussions and work-groups there was time for individual and collective experiences of the word of God in a spirit of faith. The method of *lectio divina* - reading, meditating and responding - was used in the morning in small groups and in the evening in the celebration of word and eucharist.





## Bible courses

### Dei Verbum course at Nemi

The eleventh *Dei Verbum* course at Nemi near Rome took place last year from 12 August until 12 December. Once again most (11) of the 18 participants were from Asia. For the first time, no lay-person took part: this was partly due to organizational and financial factors. Since the start of the *Dei Verbum* courses at Nemi in 1987, fifty lay people have taken part, out of a total of 264 participants.

Missionari Verbiti  
Via dei Laghi 52  
00040 Nemi (Rome)  
Italy

### Projected Dei Verbum course in Ghana

Preparations are in hand for a forty day *Dei Verbum* course, to take place in Ghana in autumn 2000. The local province of the SVD is organizing it. Main topics for consideration include an inner and personal approach to the Bible and the broad area of communication. So far *Dei Verbum* courses have taken place twice in Africa, in Harare, Zimbabwe, and in Angola. The good experiences of these courses, and not least of the traditional course at Nemi, are serving as a basis for the planned course in Ghana.

The Ghana province of the SVD is hoping to become an associate member of the CBF.

### Bible courses in Pakistan

Bible courses enjoy a great demand in Pakistan. The Catechetical Centre in Karachi organized a month's "Basic Bible Course" in September 1998. The aim of the course was to help young people to approach the Bible and to enable them to lead Bible groups in their parishes. Twenty-three people took part.

Another Basic Bible Course was held in Rahim Jar Khan. There were 37 participants and the course was a great success.

Catechetical Centre  
Karachi  
P.O.Box 7172  
Karachi, 74400  
Pakistan



## BOOKS AND MATERIALS

### Editions of the Bible and liturgical books

#### Verbum Bible

B.P. 7463  
Kinshasa  
Democratic Republic of  
Congo  
Tel: + 243-88-43 47 9  
Fax: + 342-88-44 22 4  
E-mail:  
VerbumBible@maf.org

#### The Bible in Lingala

LILOBA LYA NZAMBE, the new edition of the Bible in Lingala, has been available since March 1999. The new version has been completely re-worked and many corrections are included. In addition it contains detailed commentaries on individual books. The Lingala Bible is based on the TOB version and on the Jerusalem Bible; the notes are drawn partly from the Bible in Kinyarwanda.

Lingala is an important Bantu common-language, widespread especially in the Congo and in Uganda. The new Bible is produced by Verbum Bible, Kinshasa.

#### The Gari Bible

The Bible Society in the  
South Pacific  
Suva, Fiji  
or

Archdiocese of Honiara  
P.O.Box 237  
Honiara  
Solomon Islands

Commissioned by the archdiocese of Honiara, the Bible Society in the South Pacific has published the complete Bible in Gari NA PAPI TABU. Gari is a language of the Solomon Islands.

The New Testament was already available in Gari in 1989. The complete version includes the deuterocanonical books, a concise glossary, an index of key concepts and diagrams in the text and on the inside cover.

#### New Sunday missal in Ewe

Verbum Bible  
(see above)

A Sunday missal in Ewe for Togo and Ghana is coming out early in 1999. Ewe is the main language and the liturgical tongue in the south of both countries. The population that speaks Ewe numbers around 3.8 million.

The missal is published by Verbum Bible, Kinshasa.



## Work-material

### Word of God in Africa n° 5: Bible-sharing methods

Number 5 in the series *Word of God in Africa* has appeared. Its title is *Sharing the Word of God – Collection of Bible/Gospel sharing methods*. Written in English, in 52 pages it sets out various methods of sharing the Bible together. Particular attention is applied to the practice of *lectio divina*.

The series "Word of God in Africa" is the biblical pastoral bulletin of the IMBISA region.

**St. Theresa's Catholic Mission**  
P.O.Box 225  
Plumtree  
Zimbabwe  
Tel./Fax: +263-(0)19 2347

### Cahiers Évangile: booklets on the Pentateuch and on the Synoptic Gospels

Booklet 106 has appeared in the francophone series 'Cahiers Évangile' of the Service Biblique Évangile et Vie. The author, Oliver Artus, teaches Old Testament at the Institut Catholique in Paris. In the usual thorough, scholarly but, at the same time, understandable way, he introduces the Pentateuch, and includes important results of exegetical research. The booklet is seen as a supplement to number 97, *Les traditions du Pentateuque*, and it proceeds by way of a "pedagogical and synthetic" development of the theme also for the non-specialist.

A helpful aid to the reading of the Synoptic Gospels is found in number 103 of the same series. Using five selected passages from the Bible, the author J. F. Baudoz, who teaches the Synoptic Gospels at the Institut Catholique in Paris, demonstrates such a reading. This practical method makes the booklet suitable both as a preparation and as a basis for work in Bible groups.

**Service Biblique Évangile et Vie**  
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Fax: +33-01-42 22 68 99



The Catholic Biblical Federation (*CBF*) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to ministry to the Word of God. At the present time, the *CBF* membership includes 91 full members and 219 associate members coming from a total of 123 countries.

The activities of these organizations include the preparation of Catholic and interconfessional Bible translations, the propagation of Bibles and in general the promotion of a deeper understanding of the Holy Scripture.

The *CBF* promotes the biblical pastoral activities of these organizations, provides a forum for the world-wide sharing of experiences in the field, searches for new ways of bringing the joy of God's Word to the faithful throughout the world. The Federation seeks collaboration with the representatives of biblical scholarship as well as with Bible Societies of various confessions.

In particular, the *CBF* works toward the promotion of the reading of the Bible within the context of concrete life situations and the training of ministers of the Word in this direction.

The ministry to the Word of God is ministry to the unity of and communication between human beings. A world which grows together with the help of modern communications and yet continues to show signs of hate and destruction needs more than ever words of peace and of fellowship with God and with each other.

**Wilhelm Egger, Bishop of Bozen-Brixen, President of the CBF**