

BDV digital

Bulletin Dei Verbum
English Edition
2012, n. 2-3

Contents

Editorial

<i>Thomas P. Osborne and Gérard Billon</i>	2
New Evangelization and New Beginning	

Forum

<i>Archbishop Pierre-Marie Carré</i>	3
Bible Reading and New Evangelization	
<i>Prof. Cesare Bissoli sdb</i>	6
"The Bible as a Compass that Indicates the Way to Follow" (Benedict XVI): Sacred Scripture for the New Evangelization	
<i>Prof. Giuseppe De Virgilio</i>	15
Reflections on the Word of God, Holy Scripture and New Evangelization	
<i>Dr. Fio Mascarenhas sj</i>	23
The New Evangelization and Preaching the Kerygma	
<i>Prof. Thomas P. Osborne</i>	25
"Ignorantia Scripturae ignorantia Christi est" (St. Jerome) Reflections on the Knowledge of Scripture and the New Evangelization	

Projects and Experiences

Windows on God's Word and the New Evangelisation (Br. Mike Chalmers)	29
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Federation News

The Final Message of the Executive Committee Meeting (Rome, March 9-10, 2012)	33
The CBF welcomes three new associate member associations!	35
The New CBF Administrative Board Members	36
Three New CBF Subregional Coordinators	37
CBF President, Bishop Vincenzo Paglia, Appointed President of the Pontifical Council for the Family	38
Upcoming Events	39

Biblical Pastoral Publications

40

*BDV digital is an electronic publication of the Catholic Biblical Federation,
General Secretariat, D-86941 Sankt Ottilien, gensec@c-b-f.org, www.c-b-f.org.*

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Editorial

New Evangelization and New Beginning

The publication of this new issue of BDV^{digital} is accompanied not only by news of the preparation of the upcoming bishops' synod and by echoes of the Catholic Biblical Federation's "new beginning", but also by disquieting narratives of religious intolerance and violence coming from various countries around the world. Let us be particularly mindful of our brothers and sisters whose biblical pastoral website in Lebanon was the object of disfiguration by hackers or of those Christians in Nigeria whose right to practice their religion has been trampled to the extent that many have paid the supreme price of their lives. Let us entrust them to God's merciful compassion and appeal to all men and women of good will to put an end to such forms of intolerant violence. At the same time, may God help us in persisting in sharing his Gospel of peace, a blessing for all nations, with all human beings of this planet, even in the face of severe obstacles.

The challenge of announcing the Gospel in the context of the 21st century, marked by the secularization of its cultural, social and economical components, on the one hand, and the rise of fundamentalist intolerance, on the other hand, has been chosen by the Holy Father as the focus of the upcoming Bishops' Synod on "the New Evangelization and the Transmission of the Christian Faith" (October 7-28). The CBF Executive Committee decided to prepare a "position paper" concerning the not only important, but also essential role of the reading of Scripture within the efforts of "evangelization", both "new" and "initial". The examination of the recently published "instrumentum laboris" has once again convinced us of the necessity of this initiative. Several persons have been asked to contribute to this process of reflection and discernment. A first series of the more substantial contributions form the "Forum" of this BDV^{digital} issue. We are particularly happy to welcome the reflections of Archbishop Pierre-Carré, bishop of Montpellier and special secretary of the Synod. The CBF mes-

sage to the Synod is now in elaboration and shall be communicated to the Synod Fathers and to all CBF member associations upon completion. Sincere thanks go to all of those who have taken an active part in this reflection and whose ideas shall be integrated in the final synthesis.

The many positive responses that the General Secretariat in Sankt Ottilien has received concerning the digital Bulletin Dei Verbum have led the Executive Committee to decide the continuation of this publication and to make it widely available in the four CBF languages. We should like to progressively constitute an "editorial board" responsible for the conception and realization of the review. It would also be helpful if a group of subregional correspondents, in collaboration with the coordinators, could ensure the collection of information (concerning events, meetings, publications, experiences and reflections on the biblical pastoral ministry ...) that might then be communicated to all CBF members and friends by means of the review or the CBF website. Please do not hesitate to contact the General Secretariat if you are interested in collaborating on this project.

The CBF contribution to the Synod and the success of the BDV^{digital} are just a few tangible signs of the renewed momentum that the Federation has gained in the accomplishment of its mission. The commitment of the new Administrative Board and its resolute will to succeed in the "new beginning" of the CBF, renewed contact with the funding agencies, the reinforcement of the CBF presence in North America, the appointment by the Holy Father of Bishop Paglia, CBF President, to the office of President of the Pontifical Council for the Family and his decision to set a strong biblical pastoral accent in this new responsibility ... allow us to hope that the Federation shall be able to respond constructively and effectively to the challenges with which biblical pastoral ministry shall be confronted in the upcoming years.

Thomas P. Osborne and Gérard Billon
Editorial Board

Forum

Bible Reading and New Evangelization

† Pierre-Marie Carré

Archbishop of Montpellier

*Special secretary of the synod on the new evangelization**Translated from the French by Leonard Maluf, S.S.L., S.T.D*

“Scripture should be the soul of pastoral ministry”. This simple sentence could serve as a broad summary of the exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2010). Here the Holy Father frequently underscores the essential place held by Holy Scripture in the life and mission of the Church.

But where does the New Evangelization come in? It is helpful to consult section 122 of the exhortation: “Our own time, then, must be increasingly marked by a new hearing of God’s word and a new evangelization. Recovering the centrality of the divine word in the Christian life leads us to appreciate anew the deepest meaning of the forceful appeal of Pope John Paul II: to pursue the *missio ad gentes* and vigorously to embark upon the *new evangelization*”. This section of the exhortation underlines the relationship that exists between hearing the word and proclaiming the Gospel.

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

One needs first to specify what is covered by the expression *new evangelization*. The preparatory texts for the next synod of bishops to be held in October of 2012 offer a number of definitions. Here is one of them: “it is the capacity, on the part of the Church, to live in a renewed way its own communal faith experience and faith proclamation in the new cultural contexts that have recently become established”. Such a definition well reveals that it is not a question of conjuring up some quasi-magical means that can guarantee moving the souls of the people to whom the Gospel is being offered! The path to be undertaken is laborious because it can only take place through a profound conversion of all of the Church’s members.

The ways of approaching Scripture can be varied and multiple. It is imperative, however, to read Scripture in a faith perspective so that it can produce the fruits that nourish not only knowledge and understanding, but also the spiritual life, that is to say, the way we live as believers in the presence of God and in the presence of others.

Such a reading takes place in the line of *Dei Verbum* n. 12: “But since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith”. According to this explanation and that of *Verbum Domini* n. 34, the proper reading of scripture requires that the Bible is perceived to be both a divine work and a human work. When dealing with the Bible we should both be seeking what is useful for our salvation and also employing suitable methods for the study of the text, without neglecting the totality of Scripture (canonical reading).

When reading the Bible, one finds particularly important insights into the new evangelization in its most profound roots. Serious missiological studies have dealt with the images and the different representations of mission, in both the Old and New Testaments. These studies need to be re-read, of course, but also perhaps re-written, taking into account some new factors which are apparent today. If Jesus Christ is ever the same, if the inspired texts have not changed, we demand of them that they help us to perceive what might be meant by what

John Paul II spoke of as an evangelization “new in its fervor, in its methods and in its expression”.

The Scriptures show us that the Bible is in the first place a divine work before being a human work. It is indispensable to keep stressing this point so that human co-operation with the word of God may appear clearly from the very beginning. The detailed analysis of a text like that of the founding of the Church at Antioch (Acts 11:19-26) is one example of this among many others. A similar work dealing with Thessalonica or Corinth would be very useful. It is of course true that Scripture does not present to us in an immediate way the tasks we need to perform in the 21st century in our own country! But Scripture will allow us to supply divine grounding for the undertakings we deem necessary. It will put us on guard against ever-renewed temptations: that of believing there is a single model for evangelization, which can be simply applied according to a foolproof formula, as well as the tendency to attribute successes to our own efforts. Jesus himself did not hide from his disciples that they would face opposition that could even end in persecution.

It should perhaps be stressed that it is important to seek to have a broad reading of the biblical texts that speak of the Gospel proclamation. It is very easy to make a selection of texts with the goal of reinforcing the reader's own preconceived ideas.

The Spirit of God is capable of touching hearts in very different ways. However, in the context of the journey that leads to the faith confession in the Church and to the sacraments of Christian initiation, the reading of the Word of God holds an essential place.

People can sometimes be touched by a Gospel story that sheds light on their search and their journey and that reveals to them the profound sense of what inspires them. To others, Scripture will serve as a support for their knowledge of Jesus, both intellectual and spiritual. No has control over these discoveries, which are the fruit of God's action in the circumstances of a human life. But it is important that these individuals can have people around them who are able to pose again the question of Philip to the eunuch: “do you understand what you are

reading” (Acts 8:30) and who can listen to the responses given, while at the same time being able to explain their own experience as believers. Each individual can assess here what this demands in terms of formation work, both intellectual and spiritual.

In the letter written in January of 2001 to mark the entry into the new millennium, John Paul II reformulated the program offered to the Church for this new stage of its life. He characterized it through the use of a number of verbs that reflect a careful reading of Scripture: “The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte* n. 29). We have in these few lines a veritable program laid out in logical order. That which is most difficult remains to be done! Such substantive content should be able to profoundly inspire the courses of initiation to the Faith, for children and young people as well as for adults.

The new evangelization relies on persons of conviction who perceive its importance and are prepared to engage their every capacity in it. But I am convinced that the new evangelization will not reach its full dimension until it has become central to the pastoral perspectives of dioceses, parishes, movements and services, each with its own special emphases and characteristics.

THE READING OF THE BIBLE

Does Bible reading have a place here? The response is evident, especially if one goes back to the strong statements of *Verbum Domini* which very clearly picks up a statement of the Synod. “The Synod called for a particular pastoral commitment to emphasizing the centrality of the word of God in the Church's life, and recommended a greater “biblical apostolate”, not alongside other forms of pastoral work, but as a means of letting the Bible inspire all pastoral work”. The Holy Father adds a little further on: “one must make sure that in the ordinary activities of Christian communities (...) the focus remains on fostering a per-

sonal encounter with Christ, who gives himself to us in his word" (n. 73).

"The return to the Scriptures is never the return to the time of the Scriptures; it is rather the present form of our encounters", wrote Emile Poulat. Bible reading cannot be reduced to a mere knowledge or to an intellectual reflection. We are summoned to engage this practice in a spirit of prayer so that the Word of God may act and effect in us, little by little, the likeness to God. But we know well that in our Western countries, the first obstacle to overcome – and it is the most difficult – consists in communicating the urge to read the Bible and to read it in a fruitful way. There is, in my opinion, no infallible way to achieve this. I think of people who are able at once to tell others what the reading and meditation on passages of Scripture have touched and transformed in their own lives and to offer them a simple and practical method of implementation. Many are afraid of the Bible, imagining that one must be a patented exegete to derive fruit from Bible reading. Some think of the Bible as a book of the past. Still others do not know how to begin. Missionary action is rooted in Scripture and finds there its principles of action and of discernment.

Why not start a kind of forum of exchange of experiences? For my part, for example, I have seen young people practice what they refer to as "bibliodrama". The exercise involves allowing those who are listening to a biblical story to choose to identify with one of the characters in the story, to enter into the role and express aloud in the presence of the others what the character is thinking, feeling. This way of doing biblical reading draws on what Saint Ignatius of Loyola suggests the retreatant do in personal prayer in the course of the exercises. This could be a very modest, but fruitful introduction to the reading of the Bible!

So, if one begins to read the Scriptures starting with its most accessible pages, a familiarity with the Bible gradually comes into being which forms the believer. The person is then able to experience in a personal way what happens when "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" (*Dei Verbum* n. 2). Is this not the path followed in every act of evangelization?



Jesus sends the disciples to announce the Gospel (Zillis, Saint Martin's Church)

“The Bible as a Compass that Indicates the Way to Follow” (Benedict XVI) Sacred Scripture for the New Evangelization

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A. Sacred Scripture, Indispensable Point of Reference for the New Evangelization

1. *The New Evangelization, in virtue of its very name, necessarily sends us back to the source of the Word of God, to the very place where God and humanity encountered each other for the first time, in an authentic, paradigmatic and normative way, giving us as it were the alphabet of every communication between us and God. Of this phenomenon the first and irreplaceable witness is Sacred Scripture, or the Bible, and at its center the experience of the Gospel (and of the New Testament), because the encounter between Word of God and humanity takes place at its fullest in the very person of Jesus, the person who became “gospel”, the embodiment of the good/ beautiful news itself (cf. Mk 1:1).*

But why call this activity of evangelization, which is after all as old as the Church, “new”?

It cannot be so because of any radical infidelity, any betrayal of the Church in times past, because this could not have happened theologically and in fact, historically, no such radical betrayal has ever occurred.

Rather we are being asked to reflect on two other reasons that require a new evangelization, reasons that mark the preparation for the next Synod and motivate its curriculum. One is of the pastoral order, that is, the weakening, to the point of oblivion, of the faith proclamation, which has lost truth and credibility, till it has faded from sight in the consciousness of many Christians, a high percentage of whom reside in the European continent. A second factor is of the cultural order, that is, such a change of values and of perceptions of being is taking place that the Gospel itself and the vision

of reality which it proposes, appear culturally inadequate, insignificant and irrelevant.

The Church rightly feels anxiety, but not fear or discouragement. It is aware that the Spirit, as at the beginning, is driving it to help people to hear the good news: that the Lord has not forgotten, let alone cursed, the world in which He himself lived, which he loved, for which he prayed, in which he died and rose.

And as at the beginning the Christian community feels itself driven by the Spirit of Jesus to walk the streets of humanity, putting to flight the fears of men and women with the promise of the Master: “Behold I am with you all days to the end of the world” (Matt 28:20).

2. *Here – as we mentioned above – Sacred Scripture is right to demand space.* The Bible is like a family diary where we can learn the many modalities of the encounter of humanity with God in Jesus Christ, wherein stands the substance of Evangelization. This takes place by meditating on the divine Word within the biblical story, and then in the time of the Church, offering it with the novelty required by the conditions of men and women today. Translated into pedagogical terms this means that a renewed inculturation of the message is what is required.

This is a magnificent task to which the Catholic Biblical Federation would like to make its specific contribution, taking advantage of an experience that is as vast as is the Church in the world.

Concretely we would like here to express a few characteristic traits that guarantee such a process by offering those suggestions from biblical experience that best meet your needs. It will be a kind of herme-

neutical discernment, valid for every Christian, with particular attention to the world of the youth.

We will articulate this immense field in terms of a few essential elements: the Bible as “compass” for a right path (Benedict XVI): a chasm to overcome between the man of today and the Bible; what the Bible has to offer to the life of a believer; concrete procedures to follow.

B. “Like a Compass”

3. “Dear young people, I exhort you to acquire a familiarity with the Bible, to hold it close to hand, so that it can become for you a compass indicating the path to be followed”. The exhortation is addressed to the youth (and this should be noted), but it applies as well to every member of the people of God.

The statement is the practical conclusion of the Message of Benedict XVI on the occasion of the World Youth Day of 2006. It confirms the presentation made at Cologne on the World Youth Day of the previous year (2005) and the point receives further development in another one of the Pope’s interventions, that of April 6, 2006, in Saint Peter’s Square, responding to a direct question of a young person on the meaning of the Bible in the life of a believer.

The statement is a triptych of ideas which, if read on the solid foundation of the *Dei Verbum*, manifests a clear conviction of the Pope: in the Sacred Book duly encountered, the faith (of young people) finds an indispensable orientation (*compass*), care being taken however not to think of the encounter with the Bible as a kind of *deus ex machina*, an archive of magical prescriptions, but to locate this encounter within a much broader project of evangelization, conceived, as French-speaking catechists like to say, in the strong terms of generativity. For this reason one should take care not to reduce the recourse to the Bible, which is enjoying a certain revival today among the people of God, to a practice of devotion; it is rather one that amounts to a generative event, in our case an event of re-generation, of beginning to be Christians all over again¹.

¹ *Une nouvelle chance pour l’Évangile. Vers une pastorale d’engendrement*, Lumen Vitae-Novalis, Buxelles 2004.

4. *I am not about to describe the difficulties – below we will give an informed reason for these – that come to mind, and which I would summarize here as actually two: one must have the (young) persons to communicate the Bible to, and the young people we do have must accept the idea of developing a genuine interest in a book as “strange” as the Bible.*

In my personal encounters with pastoral animators I not only take notice of, but I myself solicit an account of the many difficulties that must be dealt with, so that they can be recognized objectively, rationally assessed and resolved, in particular in order to prevent any form of fundamentalist and selective reading (where the biblical experience is assigned to a restricted and closed group), to insure instead the dynamic proper to the Word of God, which is that of prophetic incarnation and of Jesus of Nazareth, in service to the whole people of God, in particular to the poor and oppressed, and to those whom the Lord will call (Cf. Acts 15:13-18)

And on the other hand the Pope’s words clearly indicate *a possibility, indeed a pastoral opportunity (kairos)*, which I would translate in my own way as follows: *these persons, whether young or not so young, will perhaps be completely blind in matters pertaining to the Bible, will even attempt to flee from it as from something quite foreign to their concerns; and nevertheless, the Bible is a word, an act of truth and of love, which God wants them to have*, precisely in their condition as created beings who wish to live their lives with dignity and joy.

Herein lies the *challenge of the biblical pastoral (youth) ministry*: to lay out the certainty of a Word of the Lord that reaches every person like a letter written with the biblical alphabet, with the real difficulties of not knowing for sure to whom and how to send it, and so devising a pedagogical medium, indeed a generative process, that can bring every subject to become aware of the process itself, to acknowledge the gift and to make of it a faith experience.

5. *A few statements can be deduced from the above for consideration:*

A thousand doubts regarding the coherency of acceptance of the Bible on the

part of (young) persons of today do not amount to a contrary certainty, implying absolute resistance or total and permanent rejection.

The grace of the Word of God when it takes hold of the life of a subject does not intend to offer a ready-made sense, a pre-fabricated meaning; its aim is rather to cause a subject to mature within a formative process in which the biblical texts are building blocks of a habitable house, according to a creative plan of evangelization which respects the journey of each individual person. With truth, resolve and patience.

The Bible is not everything in the process of faith, and to let it in we are called to a pedagogy of approach: not to the book as such, nor even to a library of books taken in isolation, but to the personages that inhabit it, within an historical journey to which one must assign first place; its high doctrinal profile has to be derived from the life and story of a people, as a culture belonging to other times, and it should therefore receive an energetic inculturation for our own.

But it is true that the journey of faith can never dispense with the Bible, precisely as a compass. The deep friendship with Jesus and the relationship we have with him need to be deciphered and narrated in the testimonies of the first persons who encountered him. Today as yesterday, young people are able to access the Bible, because today as yesterday the Master invites: "Come and see" (Jn 1:39). Experience is confirming this in its own way. In Italy in these years we have experienced a phenomenon that perhaps amounts to a miracle, but that is hardly a flash in the pan. It is the experience of Cardinal Martini in Milan, with reference to whom Pope Benedict XVI himself, in the above-mentioned meeting with the youth in Saint Peter's Square, made a point of telling the young people that they should look to him as to a "true master".

Here we will pursue the theme in greater depth, above all by exploring the question as to what kind of effective relationship can exist between persons (young persons especially) and Bible and what might be the underlying motivations for such a relationship; our focus will then move to the question of what contribution

the Bible offers to the proposed journey of faith of a young person; this will then enable us to sketch in broad strokes a number of practical directives.

C. A Chasm to Overcome between Individuals and the Sacred Book

Intuitively, the condition of many people's faith – which is weak, somnolent, almost non-existent – could be thought to make the Bible quite marginal to their own existential interests. But this is not altogether the case; it is as though a potential opening to rediscovery always remains.

6. *Taken in isolation, the Bible is unable to garner particular attraction or affection in the eyes of the average person, and still less so of the young. So a substantive indifference is observed for a faith communicated through Sacred Scripture, as opposed, for example, to the witness of a believing person, an indifference that is accompanied, as both cause and effect, by a notable degree of ignorance and above all by how difficult it is to appreciate the Bible's value for life.* The Bible does not appear to be populated by significant persons, if one excepts perhaps the person of Jesus. In sum, for people who allow themselves to be immersed in a "virtual" world, who are under the spell of material interests, who yearn for a time of freedom which they would like to be intense and satisfying, who are drawn to expressive language where neither the written form and still less historical memory is a prevailing concern – well, to such people as these the Bible comes across all the more so as a bothersome channel of communication, out of sync with their interests – their verdict is: "not for, nor against, but not applicable". Moreover, in the biblical world itself the contents which the Scriptures convey appear to be adult materials that reach the younger generation only through an inter-generational relationship, marked by the vital stream of a living tradition, kept in place by living persons (cf. Exod 12:8; 12:36; 2 Tim 3:14).

7. There is a substantial reason, which determines this attitude of indifference: it is *the profound mixing of all received values*, even religious ones, which the (young) person experiences as a garment that does not

fit. It follows that his saying “no” to the phenomenon of religion can really mean “I want these things in another way”; he is not rejecting the journey, but wishes to have another path. This applies likewise to the encounter with the sacred Book – the typical reaction to which is not a “no” to something perceived as a negative, but to something that appears insignificant, set within a world of religion and of values that have little or no appeal and that do not carry conviction. But indifference, especially among the young, can also be a mark of waiting, a sign of expectation.

8. And there is in fact a third attitude: in many individuals a *remarkable openness* toward the Bible is observed, though one must acknowledge that such openness is encountered, at least initially, less in virtue of the authority of a biblical page, even one referred to as Word of God, and more because of adults whom they meet as educators and patient witnesses of the greatest personage of all, which is the figure of Jesus, in other words because of persons who, when they speak of the Word of God, exhibit it in their lives. This is precisely what constitutes a demonstration to the younger generations: the personal credibility of these adults complements the need for orientation and certainty among the young people.

Let us note too that a good stimulus to this openness is produced in a special way by two circuits: through quality, such as faith journeys at opportune times (e.g. in the context of summer camps) and in the forms of association; through quantity of presence, the teaching of the Catholic religion has a potential primacy. For a certain number of young people the journey of Confirmation, if it has not already been received in childhood, can be the only working biblical channel.

As for the Eucharist, the center par excellence of the Word of God, the rather significant absence of the youth element is a cause for sadness, but we can still hope!

In this juncture of external distance, of profound human and religious upheaval and of openness to hearing in response to compelling witnesses, one can speak of a resurgence of Scripture as an appealing voice, capable of meaning, and open to unique

journeys in the story of Christian spirituality.

D. The Quality of the Faith at the Source: What The Bible Can Offer for The New Evangelization

9. Within a generative logic

We mentioned above that to evangelize is to generate, or give birth. Here we would add that indeed it is this generative quality that makes this evangelization new, moving it from cerebral and abstract mediation to vital and experiential mediation, with the family as its substantial point of reference. Now even in Scripture itself the logic of generation appears as the decisive factor of faith:

“Things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us

We will not hide them from their children: we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children;

that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments” (Ps 78:3-7).

This means:

* In the faith of the Mother Church it is the Word of God that has primacy in terms of the generative act (it is the basic seed or primary proclamation)

* This Word has a definitive countenance, that of Jesus Christ, Word of God incarnate and spread out through his body, which is the community of the brothers and sisters

* As in the Gospels, to people who encounter him, or rather to people whom he encounters, Jesus tends to say not “pick up the Bible” (a book), but “follow me”, come and be with me (he says precisely to a young man in Matt 19:21)

* Language (the words, the deeds and all the signs necessary for the communication of the faith) has its own precise and permanent set of rules, which comes from the source, the Bible or Sacred

Scripture, recognized even from a lay perspective as the “great code” for the abundant fruits that have sprung from it.

There is nothing surprising here: the only Jesus who exists is the Jesus of history, and his memory therefore determines the parameters of right information regarding his and our present and future, which makes the Gospels (and more generally the Bible) as it were a canon of a secure and eloquent witness.

In the quick drafting of these four points we recognize the thread of our biblical-pastoral service which we will now develop a bit further so as to bring out the contribution for faith that is inherent in the encounter with the Bible.

Meanwhile we note that if the adult, as educator – friend (at this point we cannot fail to bring out the generative task which Mother Church entrusts to these teachers) succeeds in gaining entrance to the heart of the young person, then Scripture will present itself as a gift that brings with it all the qualities of the Word of God according to the biblical codification, with a particular characterization with regard to youthful soul.

10. *The formative potential of the Bible*

This applies to any user of the Sacred Book. The “potential of Bible for education in the Faith” can be summarized as follows:

(1) *Acceptance of the faith “contents” at its source, in the founding experience of Jesus Christ and of the early Christian community (which in turn stands within the essential framework of the people of God of the OT).*

This favors formation to the sense of Christianity at its roots, to a sense of discernment, the ability to perceive the hierarchy of the truths of the Faith.

(2) *Acknowledgment of memory as the constitutive dimension of Christian existence*

At the same time this has a decisive influence on

- the awareness of the distancing and the non-possession on our part of the Word, and hence of the gratuitous and transcendent character of its self-bestowal. This is the foundation for the spirit of poverty and of listening.

- From this follows also the perception of the permanently prophetic character of

the Word of God and its promise character as well, through the experience of faith: a Word that has a future and that creates a future!

(3) *Learning of the language proper to the faith of Christians (such as symbolism, witness, appeal, doxology, narration, etc.).*

This is one of the peculiar aspects of the biblical contribution to faith education: to learn what is its content through the modality of the communication, as a form of mediation that is not accidental to it but constitutive of the message itself. So we learn not only what must be believed but also the mode of expressing this faith-content to oneself and to others. The Bible not only is a form of “God-talk”, but also tells us “how to do God-talk”.

(4) *Awareness of the role of foundation document which belongs to the Bible in the Hebrew-Christian religion*

This means that anyone who wishes to grow in the Faith is given the right/duty of objective documentation, of direct and personal encounter with the original texts, of sifting through the history of the effects of the Bible in time, and thus being able to plumb the biblical depth of so many post-biblical phenomena, whether Christian or lay (in the fields of art, literature, law, mass-media), in particular in one’s own life sphere.

(5) *Finally – and this is the highest aim – the encounter with the Bible allows one to enter into communion with God, because the Bible not only contains, but is in very truth Word of God, first approach to his love experience.*

This is the “pneumatic” dimension of the book, its encoded and permanent inspiration. The specific values are well described by Dei Verbum: “the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life (n. 21). It is evident that one here obtains a contribution and not only to the correct awareness of the Bible, but also to the spiritual formation of the consumer, to that faith mentality which is at once the presupposition and the aim of effective Gospel proclamation.

In sum, *to go to the Bible is to go to the roots* from whence the sap of faith arises; it is to rediscover the grammar for an authentic orthodoxy and orthopraxis; it is to rediscover the system of signs that indicate the marching direction of Christian existence in time and the effects that follow; it is to enter into dialogue with God, because “in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them” (DV 21); it is to go to meet Jesus of Nazareth, the Risen Lord.

But this is where the aspect that characterizes the Bible for the (young) person of today, and indeed for people of all times, comes in.

11. *The great offering: Jesus Christ*

We regard the idea of focusing the vast biblical panorama on the person of Jesus of Nazareth as the specific characteristic of the new evangelization. He gathers up in himself, as it were, all the other themes of the Old and New Testaments.

But this offer is articulated around three focal points:

(1) *Discovery of Jesus Christ in his “journey of the soul”*

This is how the Gospel in its fourfold form was conceived and intended by the early church: not as an arsenal of truths, but as the life experience of a great common Friend; and the world of the Bible is at once his homeland and his story. For this reason all of the Bible will be understood in a Christocentric perspective, such that the mystery of Jesus (his historical and transcendent identity) functions as a guide to the discovery of himself and of Scripture as a whole. This is the principle of the personalization of the contents of the Bible, which is at once the essential theological and methodological criterion for approaching the Bible as source. Within this statement of principle one must then unravel the reading of the Gospel as discovery and encounter with a person in his bodily, spiritual, affective, religious dimensions, highlighting the numerous questions that other persons raise about him and that Jesus himself poses to others. We have referred to this as his “journey of the soul”.

(2) *Thanks to the discovery of Jesus and of his world of relationships, we have to bring into*

focus the necessary and in any case inevitable discovery that the person, especially the young person, is beginning to make of himself and of his relationships; in sum, reading between the lines of the Gospel, to discover an invitation and indeed a suggestive outline for one’s own “journey of the soul”.

We know that it is proper to the human condition, and to that of young people in particular, to inquire into one’s own identity and to look for appropriate forms of relationship with the other.

Now through the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word humanity enters into full harmony and synergy with the divine truth, through which Christ “by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear” (GS, 22).

In the offer of faith it will not be possible to neglect to read “Jesus according to the reader” and “the reader according to Jesus”, respecting the otherness as well as the nearness, in a tapestry of two revelations, that of Jesus to the person and of the person to himself, in the light of Jesus.



Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (Zillis)

(3) *A discovery of Jesus and of oneself within a community*

The Bible has a vital place of re-reading in the community. By transmitting the memory of Jesus this community has in fact also fixed the person’s own journey of the soul: the Gospels, and more generally the Bible, are in an inseparable way the voice of Christ and of the church (of the

people of God), transmitted as a heritage for the generations of the future. So we find fixed in Scripture the world of a community of persons who are called to find themselves at home as in a family. This third dimension is important for a correct relationship between the Bible and the world of persons. Exclusive concentration on these two poles (the Bible and the individual), without social involvement (the third pole, or the community of persons, and more generally the world around us which is to such a great extent the world of the poor) runs the risk of exploiting the Word, locking it into a ghetto, such that it is unable to bring the individual to full maturity.

So, discovery of Jesus, discovery of oneself, discovery of the community: these are three resources of the Bible which – through the Gospels – are offered to stimulate a new, decisive faith option and life motivation. That which is not of the order of life is not of man, but that which is not of the order of life is not in tune with the Bible either².

E. “Open the Bible with Confidence, It Will Take You beyond Yourself” (Cardinal C. M. Martini). A Journey to Be Made Wisely and Decisively

It is not that – at the practical level – everything is clear and easy in this relationship between Bible and (young) person, whether because of the intrinsic difficulties of the Bible’s contents, or because the individual experiments that have been made up to this point appear too immature to be universalized, or because of the objective hurdle of getting people to come together in general and speaking to them of the Bible. So, the task of educating to the Bible in a faith perspective cannot be a matter of discussion. Here I take the liberty to express a few of my own convictions born of experience.

12. Encountering the Bible within the mystery of the Word of God

The perspective of encounter – particularly for the world of our time so much in need of radical renewal of understanding of one’s own faith, as if it were a matter of first-time exposure (which is the proper aim of the New Evangelization) – must go beyond perhaps relevant, but ancillary objectives, such as those that are strictly moral or cultural or merely related to prayer. The new evangelization aims not at having an increased awareness of the Christian reality, but at a process of becoming (again) and living as Christians. With clarity, even if in progressive stages, one must be able to attain an atmosphere of faith which entrusts itself to the Lord who speaks. Otherwise it is a proposal that dissolves into a collection of curiosities.

This reminds us of a theological-pastoral framework, that of the *Dei Verbum*, which we must take into account and which we must make the object of progressive maturation, through an accessible language. Let us recall here the essential components.

(1) Through the Word, God brings into being his people, children of God who are brothers of one another

(2) This takes place in the proclamation of the Gospel, which generates conversion/faith, through which the Gospel is received; and in this way one enters and participates in the ecclesial community

(3) Within an organic process of “initiation” to the Word of God, which includes proclamation, celebration, *diakonia*, missionary witness

(4) Within this dynamic and vital context, called Tradition, is located the service of the Bible, which – as a book – is not strictly identified with the Word of God, which always remains a grace event; but of which the Bible always remains the originating “sacrament”, the normative witness for all time.

13. It is important here to *clarify precisely what is meant by Word of God*, and therefore how it is expressed in the Bible, so that we

² “In the Gospels the young appear as direct interlocutors of Christ who reveals to them their “unique richness”, and at the same time makes them commit to a project of personal and communal growth that is of decisive value for the fate of society and of the Church” (Direttorio Generale per la catechesi, 182).

can approach God's word and make it become reality in our daily lives³.

* Expressions such as "*Word of God, God said*" do not imply a Word that has come down by parachute from on high, like an asteroid striking the earth. No, as the Bible attests, God has deposited his Word like a seed, whose fruit is extracted within our history, from a totality of the experiences of persons who have walked with God, before coming to us from doctrine, which has a two-thousand-year, evolving, culturally conditioned history. It is a Word in human language, weak, but not distorted by human sin.

* There is a phase of this Word which while remaining ever human, assumes the perfection of comprehensive truth: it emerges from the story of Jesus, Word of God incarnate, which thus posits itself as a decisive interpretative key.

* It is a Word of religious signification, oriented toward final causes, capable of radical responses to questions of meaning. And Jesus is the supreme witness. The penultimate, that is, what is of the order of rationality and technology, is acknowledged in its autonomy, but is also called to open itself to the ultimate truth about God, and to dialogue with it, pursuing that dialogue engaged by Karl Barth, and often cited today under the rubric "Bible and newspaper".

* Signs and attitudes of genuine encounter with the Word are the ability to listen, conversion, faithfulness in love toward God and toward neighbor, and the consolation of hope; in sum, the vital belonging to the people of God.

Helping a person to encounter the Bible means leading him or her to read "the Bible with life and life with the Bible", to discern the Word of God in history and to welcome it into one's own life as a promise of freedom and of salvation.

Methodologically, always taking care to become personally involved, I think that an alternation between the kerygmatic (the Bible to us) and the anthropological (us to

the Bible) process is the wisest way forward.

14. *To educate (young) persons to the encounter is an essential mediation to insure that this encounter be realized in an effective way*

"Education" signifies a process as illuminating and programmatic as it is creative, participative and patient.

We would suggest certain precautions derived from experience:

- To have *the courage to make the open offer* to become or to re-become Christian, to make the choice of Jesus, and in this choice to make the choice for one's own life in a dimension that goes beyond a merely human understanding.

- From within the biblical text, to receive the Word in its ongoing dynamic, sometimes dramatic, of question and response related to *existential dimensions of the person*, those in particular which are most implied by the communal experience itself (aspiration to freedom and to joy, life as project, search for security, confidence and solidarity...). It is this *meaningfulness* that points to the authenticity of truth, since God himself desires to be found and to be fully integrated into human desire.

- In this procedure only a *personalized encounter* (friendly and open to dialogue) between persons and the Bible animator is justified, because it is only this that allows the Bible to reveal itself and to actualize itself in an efficacious way as sacrament of the encounter with God, sacramental sign that unveils and effects the encounter with the text as participation in the encounter between God and his people.

Allow me to state with a bit of emphasis, but one that fully expresses my mind: it is morally impossible for a young person to accept the Word of God as a credible and positive value if the reference figure (parent, teacher, animator) lacks these qualities, since these persons are called – we say it again – to a generative relationship. To a question of mine "why is it that young people do not seem to love Jesus Christ, and still less the Bible, and why do they distrust the Church...?", a well-known bishop answered

³ Fundamental on this point are the remarks of the *Verbum Domini* (part I) which followed the recent Rome Synod on the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church.

me: "Because adults, parents, animators, catechists, teachers, even priests and bishops, do not truly love the young people, or at least young people are not conscious of being loved in their true need and in a way that matches their expectations. Only love is credible, and so it is only love that can make the Bible credible".

- Such a pedagogically intense relationship aims at a visible belonging to the community, seen as the living place (it is the Body of the Lord which grows thanks especially to the Eucharist) where the Word resounds and where the great biblical acts of listening, of contemplation, of service and of mission are exercised.

- Precisely with reference to these acts, in the event that the Bible (the Gospel) is offered to young people it cannot but orient them toward a twofold aim: the vocational choice, of which a first beginning is the choice of a voluntary work, a decision to offer concrete assistance to the world of the poor.

- If the Bible does not help (young) persons to re-discover the resources (the charism) of charity which is in them, charity which is the guardian of justice, the help of the needy, the search for peace....we risk making the Bible "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1).

15. Practical directives

What follows are a few suggestions, likewise derived from experience:

- a. It remains a valid idea to approach the Bible in the terms of groups that distinguish between elderly, adults, young people and adolescents, and between those who have already made a faith decision and those who are simply searching or who are in any case outsiders. The group experience should lead to the personal practice of the Bible.

- b. It is important to exploit times and spaces that can be most meaningful and accommodating (e.g., the powerful seasons of advent and lent, a pilgrimage, a retreat...).

Religious instruction should have a particular role in the school for those who have selected it. But also the journey of Confirmation and the time after Confirmation offer good opportunities.

- c. The process is fruitful, if it develops into an organic biblical journey that includes moments of study, of prayer, of evangelical discernment, of critical confrontation with the ever more urgent religious and cultural pluralism, of practical engagement in service.

- d. A *textual practice* is recommended that takes place at four levels:

- inductive (beginning with the story of Jesus in the Gospels, to arrive either in the OT, as the religious and cultural homeland of Jesus, or in the NT of the Acts and the Letters, as development of the message of Jesus in the life of the first communities);

- rational-explicative (criteria for resolving the "difficult pages" of the sacred Book);

- theological (recognition of the gift of the Word of God in the light of *Dei Verbum* and of *Verbum Domini*);

- spiritual (interaction of the biblical text with catechesis, liturgy, the exercise of charity).

- e. The most comprehensive and effective form remains the model of the *Lectio Divina*, recommended by Pope Benedict, but which needs to be reformulate and modified to suit persons who are not accustomed to this type of an approach, as it was, e.g., in the "school of the Word" of Cardinal Martini. We acknowledge its dynamic quality of hearing-study (without haste, but also without tiresome pedantry) – private meditation with the proper supports – sharing – climate of prayer – decision for life.

But this requires a patient apprenticeship. Here too the aim is to generate, to give birth ...

Reflections on the Word of God, Holy Scripture and New Evangelization

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Introduction

It is important to signal in advance how in *Verbum Domini* explicit reference is made to the relationship between Word of God and “new evangelization”. In n. 96 we read:

“Pope John Paul II, taking up the prophetic words of Pope Paul VI in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, had in a variety of ways reminded the faithful of the need for a new missionary season for the entire people of God. At the dawn of the third millennium not only are there still many peoples who have not come to know the Good News, but also a great many Christians who need to have the word of God once more persuasively proclaimed to them, so that they can concretely experience the power of the Gospel. Many of our brothers and sisters are “baptized, but insufficiently evangelized”. In a number of cases, nations once rich in faith and in vocations are losing their identity under the influence of a secularized culture. The need for a new evangelization, so deeply felt by my venerable Predecessor, must be valiantly reaffirmed, in the certainty that God’s word is effective. The Church, sure of her Lord’s fidelity, never tires of proclaiming the good news of the Gospel and invites all Christians to discover anew the attraction of following Christ”⁴.

The reflections put forward in this article follow on the proposal of Thomas Osborne and don Cesare Bissoli regarding the relationship between Word of God, Sacred Scripture and New Evangelization⁵. In view of the themes already treated, I will pause on only three aspects: A first aspect is linked with training, formation “the biblical animation of all pastoral activity” (*Verbum Domini*, 73). The second aspect focuses on the role of *Lectio Divina*. The third aspect regards the relationship between Word of God, witness and New Evangelization (cf. *Lineamenta*, n. 22)⁶.

1. The biblical animation of all pastoral activity (*Verbum Domini*, n. 73)

The *Catholic Biblical Federation* is keenly aware of its direct involvement in a process of cultural change whose aim is to move from a sectarian mentality that characterized “biblical pastoral ministry” in the particular Churches to a “new perspective”, which is linked to a “new way of being church” (cf. *Lineamenta*, n. 9)⁷. I maintain that one of the “new ways” of living the pastoral action of evangelization is represented by the renewal in the way we view the role of the Word of God and especially of “biblical pastoral ministry”. Such a renewal pro-

⁴ *Verbum Domini*, n. 96.

⁵ Cf. the articles assembled in *Ascoltare, rispondere, vivere. Atti del congresso Internazionale “La Sacra Scrittura nella vita e nella missione della Chiesa (1-4 dicembre 2010)*, eds. E. Borghi, Edizioni Terra Santa, Milan 2011.

⁶ Cf. R. FISICHELLA, *La Parola di Dio nella vita e nella missione della Chiesa*, in *Ascoltare, rispondere, vivere*, 97-104.

⁷ A. SCHWEITZER, *L’esortazione Apostolica Verbum Domini e la Federazione Biblica Cattolica*, in *Ascoltare, rispondere, vivere*, 189-194.

duces two effects: a) it restores the centrality of the Word and of its spiritual power in the Community; b) it contributes to the structuring (designing) of a biblical formation for believers and pastors (with attention to individual ecclesial situations and to their respective peculiarities) that will enable people to witness effectively to the Gospel in the new intercultural scenarios that are emerging in the world of today (cf. *Lineamenta*, n. 6).

a) The Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (nn. 73-74) expresses the wish for a structural change: “biblical pastoral ministry” is no longer thought of as one specific offer alongside other pastoral strategies, but should rather be conceived as “biblical animation of the entire pastoral ministry” of the ecclesial community. The document intends to bring out the totalizing dimension of the process of transmission of the Christian event, whose contextual mediations can never eliminate the uniqueness and the efficacy of the biblical sources. This involves above all a direct contact of believers with the inspired text, received in the faith of the Church⁸. Through this vital encounter a path of basic training, of inculturation and of constantly renewed presentation of Sacred Scripture for the formation of believers and their witness in the world is engaged⁹. In this perspective the Exhortation deepens the “biblical dimension of catechesis” which involves an approach to the Scriptures in the Faith and in the tradition

of the Church¹⁰. Emphasis is placed on how such an approach is to take place “in a vital manner”, through a comprehensive reading of the “story of salvation” that takes into consideration the chief contents of the Church’s Faith, such that believers are able to see themselves as personally implicated in this story as well¹¹.

b) After having spoken of the intimate connection between Word of God and catechesis, *Verbum Domini* n. 75 brings out the necessity for ongoing and qualified “biblical formation”¹². Two aspects must be distinguished. In the first place, some clarification is needed on the concept of “biblical formation”, which is not about mere doctrinal understanding of the historical-theological contents of Sacred Scripture. What is seen as crucial in today’s ecclesial context is the exigency of recalling believers to the dimension of a “hearing of the Word”. To “form” people to biblical sensitivity means to “educate” them above all to the virtue of hearing, through an “interior silence”, to openness of the heart and willingness to welcome the unforeseen, the ever-challenging Word of God, so that it can bear fruit¹³. A close relationship exists between new evangelization and an educative process that involves the whole life of believers,

⁸ Cf. C. BISSOLI, *La Catéchèse biblique aujourd’hui. Bilan de la recherche de ces vingt dernières années*, in *Lumen Vitae* 60 (2005), 307-324: AA. VV., *Bibel und Didaktik in der Postmoderne*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln 1999. For a comprehensive overview, cf. G. THEISSEN, *Motivare alla Bibbia per una didattica aperta della Bibbia*, Paideia, Brescia 2005; C. BISSOLI, “*Va e annuncia*” (*Mc 5,19*), *Manuale di catechesi biblica*, LDC, Leumann (TO) 2006.

⁹ Cf. Propositiones, n. 21. Cf. UFFICIO CATECHISTICO NAZIONALE – SETTORE APOSTOLATO BIBLICO, *L’Apostolato biblico nelle comunità ecclesiali. Orientamenti operativi*, Elledici, Leumann (TO) 2005; C. BISSOLI, “*Va e annuncia*” (*Mc 5,19*), *Manuale di catechesi biblica*, 296-300 (with bibliography).

¹⁰ Cf. VD, 74: cf. CONGREGAZIONE PER IL CLERO, *Direttorio generale per la catechesi* (15 agosto 1997), 94-96 (EV 16, 875-878).

¹¹ The existential dimension of catechesis, which should support and sustain the encounter between Sacred Scripture and the expectations of a person whose mind and heart are open to the hearing of the Word (cf. the iconic Emmaus story in Lk 24:13-35) is reasserted here. Such an encounter takes place through the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit (cf. also *Lineamenta*, n. 2). Cf. C. BISSOLI, *Bibbia e catechesi. Problemi, chiarificazione, proposte*, in UFFICIO CATECHISTICO NAZIONALE – SETTORE APOSTOLATO BIBLICO, *Bibbia e catechesi*, 20-58.

¹² Cf. Propositiones, n. 33. C. BISSOLI, *Il catechista biblico e la sua formazione*, in IDEM, “*Va e annuncia*” (*Mc 5,19*), 281-296; UFFICIO CATECHISTICO NAZIONALE – SETTORE APOSTOLATO BIBLICO, *L’animatore biblico. Identità, competenze, formazione*, 24-76.

¹³ The motif of hearing returns in VD 72; 73; 76; 83; 85; the motif of silence is recalled in VD 12; 21; 66; 119; 124. The educative process linked to the Word of God is recalled in *Lineamenta* n. 20.

on the basis of “first proclamation” and the programming of the paths of “Christian initiation”¹⁴.



Jesus and the Doctors of the Law (Zillis)

Only through constant contact with the inspired text, with the help of qualified pastoral workers, is it possible to generate a biblical sensitivity and to bring into being a personal and communal educative process. The “New Evangelization” requires in the first place a “biblical spirituality” incarnated in a “transmission of witness”. In second place, the biblical apostolate, whose planning in each particular church employs forms and modalities that best suit its context, has the function of promoting courses of formation in the service of the entire community, and specifically of group animators, associations and movements. In this context the interplay between exegetical research and theological-pastoral knowledge of Sacred Scripture, strongly wished for in *Verbum Domini* nn. 34-36, is made real and operative in concrete life situations. The fruits of exegetical research should be able to be at the service of the formation of pastoral workers, such that the academic level of biblical research can contribute to an ever more profound grasp of the theological message, adequately conveyed through popular publications and translated into the lives and spiritual journeys of believers. The

work of the *Biblical Federation* is of great importance in this process of inculturation and of curricula planning¹⁵.

2. The relevancy of *Lectio divina* for formation

Among the various methods that facilitate personal and community formation to the hearing and internalizing of Sacred Scripture from the point of view of “prayerful reading” emphasis is placed on the role of *Lectio divina* (cf. *Verbum Domini*, nn. 86-87). We focus on the importance of *Lectio divina* for the formation of believers in view of the mandate of the New Evangelization. Particularly in recent years there has been an increasing need to bring together the personal and communal formation of believers by offering them contact with the Word of God through this prayerful form in which the central aspects of the relationship with God and of engagement in the world are held together¹⁶. In its introduction to paragraphs 86-87 *Verbum Domini* alludes to the relationship between Word of God and liturgy, above all to the necessary condition of interior silence, of poverty and of “hearing” by means of which every believer should be able to encounter the God who

¹⁵ Cf. *Verbum domini*, nn. 75-76; cf. M. TÁBET – G. DE VIRGILIO (eds.), *Sinfonia della Parola*, Rogate, Rome 2011, 107-109.

¹⁶ On this theme, Cf. E. BIANCHI, *Pregare la Parola. Introduzione alla 'Lectio Divina'*, Gribaudi, Milano 1994; IDEM, *Bibbia e Lectio divina*, in *Ascoltare, rispondere, vivere*, 135-146; D. BARSOTTI, *La Parola e lo Spirito. Saggi sull'esegesi spirituale*, OR, Milano 1971; M. MAGRASSI, *Bibbia e preghiera. La lectio divina*, Ancora, Milano 1974; IDEM, “Lectio divina”, in E. ANCILLI – PONTIFICIO ISTITUTO DI SPIRITUALITÀ DEL TERESIANUM (edited by) *Dizionario enciclopedico di spiritualità/2*. Città Nuova Roma 1975, 1411-1414; S. A. PANIMOLLE et al., *Ascolto della Parola e preghiera. La "lectio divina"*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1987; M. MASINI, *Iniziazione alla "lectio divina". Teologia, metodo, spiritualità, prassi*. Messaggero, Padova 1988; IDEM, *La lectio divina. Teologia, spiritualità metodo*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 1996; G. ZEVINI, *Fare "lectio divina"*, Queriniana, Brescia 1999; I. GARGANO, “Lectio divina”, in *Temi teologici della Bibbia*, 717-725; D. D'ALESSIO, “Il racconto come vita. *Lectio biblica* come avventura della mente e del cuore”, 103-113.

¹⁴ Cf. *Lineamenta*, n. 22.

speaks¹⁷. The reference to liturgy as a “privileged place” leads to an emphasis on how the vital dynamism of the Word acts in a way that is analogous to the dynamic of the Eucharist, where the Word becomes “actualized” in community. In a sense, the prayerful reading of the sacred text is to be lived and understood in relation to the Eucharistic celebration¹⁸.

In *lectio divina* a two-fold dynamic movement is effected: from written text to encounter with the mystery of the will of God and from encounter with God to witness of the Word incarnated and actuated in history. This is why the process of *lectio divina* ends with a final step which consists in living the life of charity as ethical determination (*actio*) and historical response to the Word heard and internalized. It is quite clear that this method tends to fashion a unity between life and faith, between existence and prayer, between the human and the spiritual, between interiority and exteriority.

¹⁷ The liturgy is the privileged place for hearing and receiving the Word of God (cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini*, n. 52; the sacramentality of the Word (cf. *Ibidem*, n. 56); cf. M. TABET – G. DE VIRGILIO (eds.), *Sinfonia della Parola*, 87-103. Bianchi speaks of “spiritual poverty” as an essential condition for a fruitful hearing of the Word of God (cf. E. BIANCHI, *L’essere povero come condizione essenziale per leggere la Bibbia*, Qiqajon, Bose 1991).

¹⁸ The statement is strong and tends to bring the Word into close proximity with the sacrament, which is the “source and summit” of the whole Christian life. The comparison is developed taking as an example Eucharistic adoration: as Eucharistic adoration “prepares, accompanies and continues” the Eucharistic liturgy” so a prayerful personal and communal reading “prepares, accompanies and deepens” the mystery celebrated. In this sense the close relationship between “lectio” and liturgy can be grasped and the “criteria” that should guide the reading of the Bible in the context of pastoral ministry and of the spiritual life of the people of God can be better understood. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11; *Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica*, n. 1324. As regards the reference to the Eucharist, besides the extraordinarily rich nn. 54-55 of *Verbum Domini*, cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, Città del Vaticano 2007, nn. 155-156.

In approaching Scripture *lectio divina* helps to integrate study; it combines critical analysis of the text within an approach that is prayerful and wisdom-oriented. It is therefore very much a faith approach. The four steps can be synthesized in two fundamental movements: the first (*lectio* and *meditatio*) is more objective, where the effort is made to bring out what the text is saying; the second (*oratio* and *contemplatio*) is more subjective because it aims to bring out more the existential and experiential dimension of the reader. Finally, the process of *lectio divina* culminates in discernment and in concrete translation in the moral action of the believer (*actio*)¹⁹. A careful look at the practice of *lectio divina* reveals that it amounts to a tapestry of three component parts which affect the biblical formation of the subject:

- The “hermeneutical” component which takes place through direct, personal and ecclesial encounter with the Bible, facilitating a knowledge of the text and the vital contact with the world of the personalities and events narrated;
- the “pedagogical” component consisting of the “biblical” valency of the procedure, of its ecclesial dynamic²⁰, its expressive richness, which sets the Word, mediated by the inspired text, at the center of the God-man relationship;
- the “ethical-moral” component which recapitulates the entire hermeneutical procedure and represents the point of

¹⁹ “The word of God appears here as a criterion for discernment: it is ‘living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart’ (*Heb 4:12*). We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity” (BENEDICT XVI, *Verbum Domini*, n. 87)..

²⁰ From a comprehensive reading of the Exhortation one comes to grasp how *lectio divina* should contribute to the growth of a “biblical” spirituality, which enables the reader to live a new Christian stage of existence wherein “ignorance of Scripture” is conquered and the ability to interpret one’s personal and community story in the light of the Word of God, from a wisdom perspective, is developed.

arrival of that sapiential synthesis which takes place in the encounter between the "biblical text" and "life".

The entire journey implied in *lectio divina* can be synthesized in four points:

1. – moment of *attention* to the text [literary aspect]
2. – moment of *attraction* to the text [aesthetic aspect]
3. – moment of *actualization* of the text [existential aspect]
4. – moment of *application* of the text [ethical aspect]

We could more precisely define the last two moments and their respective hermeneutical functions, which correspond to the stage of *actio*²¹. In running through the steps of *lectio divina* the final moment of *actio* constitutes the phase of decision-making and of moral engagement. Sacred Scripture read in the Spirit, meditated upon, prayed over and pondered, is finally translated into the concrete experience of life through actualization and application. We must insist on this double moment as an important step for the formation of believers. It does not take place at the theoretical level of interdisciplinary dialogue, but deep inside the believer who is drawn to and transformed by the Word of God. So the actualization and application of the biblical message represent the most delicate and sensitive stage of the hermeneutical process²², which effectively brings together the world of the text and that of the reader. Further defining the terms of the procedure linked to *actio*, one can say that actualization is the moment of interpretation

through which the word that belongs to the text of yesterday becomes a resounding contemporaneous word for the today of the reader. Application is the phase that follows logically on actualization: the text is applied when the reader makes a decision and puts into action what he has freely received in his heart²³.

An important recommendation comes to us from the document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* which treats of actualization from three points of view: a) the principles; b) the methods; c) the limits.

Regarding the principles, the statement is made that actualization is possible because the richness of meaning contained in the biblical text gives it a value for all time and all cultures. The biblical message, the document affirms, "can at the same time both relativize and enrich the value systems and norms of behavior of each generation"²⁴. Moreover the actualizing moment proves necessary because of the very nature of moral action, which presupposes a constant hermeneutical effort capable of discerning the essential points of the biblical message through and beyond its historically conditioned mode of expression. A correct actualization can be achieved only when the dynamics inherent in the Bible (the relationship between Old and New Testaments; the role of Tradition; the history of the effects of the text in the life of the Church (Wirkungsgeschichte), are fully respected²⁵.

²¹ On the role of *actio* (*operatio*), cf. M. MASINI, *La lectio divina*, 439-443.

²² Cf. W. HEGGER, *Metodologia del Nuovo Testamento. Introduzione allo studio scientifico del Nuovo Testamento*, Dhoniane, Bologna 1989, 225-240; U. VANNI, "Esegesi e attualizzazione alla luce della 'Dei verbum'", in *Vaticano II: Bilancio e prospettive venticinque anni dopo (1962-1987)*, I, Cittadella, Assisi 1987, 308-323; B. MAGGIONI, "Il problema dell'ermeneutica biblica e dell'attualizzazione in prospettiva pastorale", in *Incontro con la Bibbia*, ed. G. ZEVINI, LAS, Roma 1978, 60-73; C. BISSOLI, "Va' e annuncia" (*Mc 5,19*). *Manuale di catechesi biblica*, 179-217; IDEM, "Interpretare per attualizzare", in *Rivista di pastorale liturgica* 19 (1981) 109, 13-20.

²³ Cf. C. BISSOLI, "Va' e annuncia" (*Mc 5, 19*). *Manuale di catechesi biblica*, 187.

²⁴ PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, IV, A, 1.

²⁵ "The work of actualization should always be conscious of the complex relationships that exist in the Christian Bible between the two testaments, since the New Testament presents itself, at one and the same time, as both the fulfillment and the surpassing of the Old. Actualization takes place in line with the dynamic unity thus established. It is the living tradition of the community of faith that stimulates the task of actualization. This community places itself in explicit continuity with the communities which gave rise to Scripture and which preserved and handed it on. In the process of actualization, tradition plays a double role: On the one hand, it provides protection against deviant interpretations; on

In this sense to actualize is not a matter of “manipulating” the biblical writings, nor of projecting novel opinions or ideologies on them, “but of sincerely seeking to discover what the text has to say at the present time”²⁶.

-- On the subject of methods to be used, the Biblical Commission opens the door to a methodological pluralism, pointing out how within the Bible itself processes of actualization of prior memories are frequently found. The principle remains firm according to which “actualization presupposes a correct exegesis of the text, part of which is the determining of its *literal sense*” and that “the most sure and promising method for arriving at a successful actualization is the interpretation of Scripture by Scripture”²⁷. Moreover, actualization cannot be correctly carried out absent an awareness of the relationship with the mystery of Christ and of the Church²⁸.

-- Regarding the question of limits, the *Biblical Commission* warns of possible deviations that a misguided actualization can produce. One must above all avoid “tendentious readings” which force the sense of the text or the assumption of principles that are

the other hand, it ensures the transmission of the original dynamism” (*Ibidem*).

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ The document summarizes in three stages the hermeneutical process of actualization: “Based upon various forms of the philosophy of hermeneutics, the task of interpretation involves, accordingly, three steps: 1. to hear the word from within one’s own concrete situation; 2. to identify the aspects of the present situation highlighted or put in question by the biblical text; 3. to draw from the fullness of meaning contained in the biblical text those elements capable of advancing the present situation in a way that is productive and consonant with the saving will of God in Christ. By virtue of actualization, the Bible can shed light upon many current issues: for example, the question of various forms of ministry, the sense of the church as communion, the preferential option for the poor, liberation theology, the situation of women. Actualization can also attend to values of which the modern world is more and more conscious, such as the rights of the human person, the protection of human life, the preservation of nature, the longing for world peace” (*Ibidem*).

inconsistent with fundamental orientations of the Bible (rationalism, atheism, etc.). If we retrace the history of biblical interpretation we note the sad results produced by flawed applications of the inspired texts. Professor Bissoli summarizes how the work of application is achieved in terms of four exigencies that define the awareness of the role of the Bible for believers: a) the Bible contains a “word” that speaks to the present; b) the Bible contains a “word” that remains faithful to its origins; c) the Bible is a “word” capable of speaking to all people of good will; d) the Bible reveals to believers a “word” that is directed to action²⁹. We have a good understanding of how the reception of the Word of God and the prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture imply a “vital circularity” that involves the “affective” dimension and the “normative” dimension present in the biblical text. The “power of the Word” of God implicates every dimension of human and cosmic existence. It is possible to affirm that the Word has a transformative power, and so it is impossible to dissociate the affective-illuminative aspect from the normative, because both participate in the hermeneutical process engaged by the believer. A hermeneutical consciousness that is trained to interpret, to actualize and to apply the message of the Bible is called to live the en-

²⁹ These exigencies determine also the guiding criteria in view of practical application, which Bissoli summarizes in five statements: 1. The Bible is to be seen not as a collection of abstract truths confined to the past, but as a truthful but open Word (prophecy); 2. The Word of God, which is addressed to man, is only understood through human agency; it then becomes efficacious, vital; 3. The Word of God views man according to a perspective that is intrinsically and constitutively religious, and hence in relation to ultimate questions (desires, needs, aspirations...), rooted in his person; 4. Man, to whom the Bible announces salvation, effectively attains this salvation through participation in the living Tradition that is the Church; 5. A unifying vision, the pastoral process: the Bible and man encounter each other in life; cf. C. BISSOLI, “Va’ e annuncia” (*Mc 5, 19*). *Manuale di catechesi biblica*, 182, 187-193; C. BISSOLI, “Attualizzazione della Parola di Dio nella pastorale e nella catechesi”, in AA. VV., *Attualizzazione della Parola di Dio nelle nostre comunità*, Dehoniane, Bologna 1983, 175-203.

counter with the Bible in a unitary and integral way. By way of summarizing all these aspects it would be possible to affirm that the affective dimension present in the inspired text enables us to: a) recognize the spiritual role exercised on the believer by the reading of the Bible; b) activate the hermeneutical dynamic between believer, community and Word; c) experience the appeal of the procedure that implements the triad: interpret / actualize / apply. For its part the “normative dimension” which is encountered in the biblical text makes it possible a) to contextualize and define the moral process witnessed to in the Bible throughout the course of history; b) to identify the concrete history of the effects of a text in the believing community; c) to insure the continuity between religious experience and moral experience in a process of ongoing perfecting and inculturation of the biblical message³⁰.



“One does not live by bread alone” (Zillis)

3. The relation between Word of God, witness and new evangelization

In the final section of the *Lineamenta* the relationship between evangelization and witness, in the perspective of the educational challenge of today, is underscored. In particular the statement is made that formation “will above all be a spiritual formation,

a school of faith in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, under the guidance of the Spirit, to enable us to live the experience of the fatherhood of God”³¹. The relationship between the Word of God proclaimed and the witness of those engaged in the work of evangelization implies an “encounter and a communion” with Christ. It is re-affirmed that the “new evangelization” is above all a spiritual undertaking (cf. *Lineamenta* n. 22). In this perspective the role of Sacred Scripture as “witness” and biblical formation as a journey of human and spiritual maturation open to witness before the world (1 Pet 3:15) needs to be further explored³².

In *Verbum Domini* the entire paragraph 97 is devoted to the relationship between Word of God and witness. In particular, it reads:

“The immense horizons of the Church’s mission and the complexity of today’s situation call for new ways of effectively communicating the word of God (...) Yet it is important that every form of proclamation keep in mind, first of all, the intrinsic relationship between *the communication of God’s word* and *Christian witness*. The very credibility of our proclamation depends on this. (...) In a particular way, young people need to be introduced to the word of God “through encounter and authentic witness by adults, through the positive influence of friends and the great company of the ecclesial community”. There is a close relationship between the testimony of Scripture, as the self-attestation of God’s word, and the witness given by the lives of believers. One implies and leads to the other. Christian witness communicates the word attested in the Scriptures. For their part, the Scriptures explain the witness which Christians are called to give by their lives. Those who encounter credible witnesses of the Gospel thus come to realize how effective God’s word can be in those who receive it”³³.

³¹ *Lineamenta*, n. 22.

³² Cf. *Verbum Domini*, n. 48 (the value of witness and the reference to the new witnesses of the Word).

³³ *Verbum Domini*, n. 97

³⁰ Cf. E. BIANCHI, *Bibbia e Lectio divina*, in *Ascoltare, rispondere, vivere*, 136-139.

We learn from this synthesis the formative and appealing role of the Word received, internalized and lived in the daily witness of life. In this perspective too the *Biblical Federation* assumes an important role of support and promotion of the process of internalization and of witness of the Word that reaches people through proclamation. Through its work of mediation and coordination of the experiences of biblical projects in the Catholic Church, the communication of experience and the pluralistic reflection of the individual members of the Biblical Federation prove to be invaluable in terms of their contribution to the Gospel proclamation³⁴. The new evangelization finds in witness its privileged category. Benedict XVI has written: “the renewal of the Church also passes through the witness offered by the lives of believers: with their very existence in the world Christians are in fact called to radiate the Word of truth which the Lord Jesus has left us [...] What the world needs today more than anything else is the credible witness of those who, having been illuminated in their minds and hearts by the Word of the Lord, are then capable of opening the hearts and minds of so many to the desire for God and for true life, the life that never ends” (PF 6; 15). The announcing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires witnesses who have the Bible as the reference point of life, who are persons of conviction, capable of placing their own lives at the service of the Word of truth, which can be received only through them. This is the main highway whose entire course must be followed without stopping at its first stage. Once the value of witness has been accepted one is led to a personal search for God, which has stages that need to be traveled with tireless perseverance.

Conclusion

The relationship between Word of God, witness and new evangelization is attested already at the level of biblical New

Testament theology³⁵. Ultimately the Church must be a witness of salvation that is still active in the lives of those who believe: this is the proclamation it must make and this is where its responsibility lies. From this flows the responsibility the Church has to learn how to create new signs that make it possible to verify and to convince people of the extent to which the Gospel is really an anchor that can ground the meaning of existence and of the real possibility that it can be received and lived even in our time.



Jesus heals a crippled man (Zillis)

In this sense the reflection that is generated within the *Biblical Federation* cannot be separated from the context of the “new evangelization”. I maintain that this inseparable union is providential in that it effectively characterizes and confirms the primary role of the *Federation* and of our individual associations in service of a “new humanism”³⁶.

³⁴ Cf. E. BORCHI, *La Lettura biblica dalla Chiesa alla società, dalla società alla Chiesa. Da “Verbum Domini” verso il futuro*, in *Ascoltare, rispondere, vivere*, 207-222.

³⁵ An example comes to us from the relationship between Word, Scripture and Witness in the Pastoral Letters of the New Testament (cf. G. DE VIRGILIO, “Parola di Dio e testimonianza nelle lettere a Timoteo e Tito”, in *Atti del Convegno della Facoltà di Teologia della Pontificia Università della Santa Croce* (Rome 12-13 March 2012) [in course of publication]).

³⁶ Cf. V. PAGLIA, *Bibbia e nuovo umanesimo*, in *Ascoltare, rispondere, vivere*, 201-205.

The New Evangelization and Preaching the Kerygma

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"When the Son of Man comes again, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk.18:8)

Looking at the situation of the world today, one may be tempted to answer Jesus' question with a "No." Archbishop Wilson of Adelaide told Vatican Radio on 12 October 2011 that the greatest challenge facing the Church in Australia is convincing people of the importance **faith** must have in their everyday lives. The president of that country's bishops' conference stated, *"The greatest challenge facing Australia is the influential power of secular views of life, so that people believe it is possible to live a fulfilled life without belief in God, and many people think that faith and the experiences of living in the Church are irrelevant to them in their lives."* To respond to this sad situation, he said the leaders of the Church must return **"over and over again to the freshness of the power of the Gospel, and the freshness of the relationship with Jesus that should be the center of our lives."**

I suggest that an important strategy for the New Evangelization will be to expose our people to more frequent doses of the *Kerygma*. In and through an anointed "preaching of the radical Gospel message," the Holy Spirit can create "faith" in the listener's heart. ["Human beings must have the grace of God, the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, to move and assist them, before they can exercise faith" – *Dei Verbum*, n.5. Benedict XVI also pointed out recently that "the first act by which one comes to faith is God's gift and the action of grace which acts and transforms the person deep within" – *Porta Fidei*, n.10].

An Advent Sermon given by Fr. Cantalamessa in the Vatican recalled that in the early Church, it was the preaching of the *kerygma* that "awakened faith" and gave origin to the Church. *"How are they to be-*

lieve in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" St Paul concludes: *"So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ"* - Romans 10:17 (here "preaching" is understood as the *kerygma*). The profound implications of this fact were explained lucidly by the then Cardinal Ratzinger in his book, *Introduction to Christianity*: "In the formula 'faith comes from hearing' ... the fundamental distinction between faith and philosophy is clearly considered ... In faith *the word takes precedence over thought* ... In philosophy, thought precedes the word; the latter therefore is a product of reflection, which one then attempts to express in words ... *Faith instead always comes to man from the outside* – it is not an element thought-out by the individual, but said to him, which comes to him not as thought-out or thinkable, but which questions him and commits him."



Jesus preaching to the disciples (Zillis)

Faith therefore comes from listening to "preaching."

But what is, precisely, the object of "preaching"? On the lips of the *apostles* it

was all about the work of God in Jesus of Nazareth, starting with the exclamation: "*Jesus is the Lord!*" pronounced and accepted in the wonder of the very act of faith being born. Faith is born through the sudden and astonished recognition of the truth contained in the *kerygma*. Fr Cantalamessa pointed out that the *kerygma* has an assertive and authoritative character, not discursive or dialectical. It has no need, therefore, to justify itself with philosophic or apologetic reasoning: it is accepted or it is not accepted, and that's it.

In the beginning, the *kerygma* could be distinguished from the teaching (*didache*) or from catechesis, since it had, so to speak, an explosive or germinating character; it was more like the seed that gives origin to the tree than to the ripe fruit that is at the top of the tree. The *kerygma* was not obtained at all by summary, as if it was the core of the tradition; but it was at the beginning of everything. From it all the rest was developed, including the four Gospels. But then came a change in the general situation of the Church. In the measure that one moves to an environment of Christianity, in which everything around one is Christian, or considers itself as such, *one is less aware of the importance of the initial choice by which one becomes a Christian*, so much so that baptism is now normally administered to *children*. Now, what is most accentuated of faith is not so much the initial moment, the miracle of coming to faith, but rather the fullness and orthodoxy of the contents of faith itself.

The Papal Preacher concluded that this situation greatly affects evangelization today! The Churches with a strong dogmatic and theological tradition (such as the Catholic Church), run the risk of finding themselves at a disadvantage if underneath the

immense patrimony of doctrine, laws and institutions, they do not find that primordial nucleus *capable of awakening faith by itself*. This is why in some parts of the world many Catholics leave the Church for other Christian realities; they are attracted by a simple and effective *kerygma* that puts them in direct contact with Christ and makes them experience the power of his Spirit.

Therefore, it is necessary today to propose the fundamental *kerygma* clearly and strongly, not only to the catechumens, *but to all Catholics*, given that the majority of today's believers have not gone through the catechumenate. The objective reason that explains the importance of the proclamation of Christ as Lord in the New Testament is **that it makes present and operative in the one who pronounces it the salvific events that it recalls**. There is also a subjective and existential reason. To respond to the *kerygma* means **to make a decision**. It is as though saying: I recognize Jesus' full right over *me*, I hand the reins of my life over to him; I do not want to live any more "for myself," but "for him who died and rose for me" (cf. 2Cor.5:15). To proclaim Jesus as one's Lord means to subject to him all the areas of our being, to make the Gospel penetrate everything we do. It means, to recall a phrase of Bl. John Paul II, "to open wide the doors to Christ."

I therefore suggest that, in the coming "Year of Faith" declared by the Pope, **all Sunday Mass homilies should focus on the basic Good News, the *kerygma***, Sunday after Sunday. Let it be *proclaimed* (not just taught) with deep conviction, personal witness and contagious enthusiasm, to make of it a New Evangelization, "*new in its ardor, methods and expression*." Then we will successfully foster a strong faith that will endure *till Christ comes again!*

“Ignorantia Scripturae ignorantia Christi est” (St. Jerome) Reflections on the Knowledge of Scripture and the New Evangelization

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“I interpret as I should, following the command of Christ: *Search the Scriptures*, and *Seek and you shall find*. Christ will not say to me what he said to the Jews: *You erred, not knowing the Scriptures and not knowing the power of God*. For if, as Paul says, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, and if the man who does not know Scripture does not know the power and wisdom of Gods, then ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. Therefore, I will imitate the head of a household who brings out of his storehouse things both new and old, and says to his spouse in the Song of Songs: *I have kept for you things new and old, my beloved*. In this way permit me to explain Isaiah, showing that he was not only a prophet, but an evangelist and an apostle as well. For he says about himself and the other evangelists: *How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news, of those who announce peace*. And God speaks to him as if he were an apostle: *Whom shall I send, who will go to my people?* And he answers: *Here I am; send me.*” (St. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*)

St. Jerome’s affirmation, „Ignorantia Scripturae ignorantia Christi est“ may be formulated positively as follows: The personal encounter with Christ, which is in fact the ultimate goal of all evangelization³⁷, whether old or new, requires the encounter with the Sacred Scriptures; even more strongly, an in depth knowledge of Jesus Christ can only occur through an in depth

knowledge of the Scriptures. It is indeed Jesus who announced the Good News (the Gospel) of the coming of God’s Kingdom to the men and women whom he met in first century Palestine, who spoke a word of liberation and of healing to them; it is the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, which is then announced as “Good News” in the Scriptures. And the basic way of knowing Jesus and his ministry passes by the Gospel narratives and, more largely, by the Scriptures, both New and Old Testament.

Reflection on “the new evangelization” cannot neglect to devote considerable efforts to the question of the ignorance or the knowledge of the Scriptures, determining for the ignorance or knowledge of Jesus. It must also subject our traditional way of reading the Scriptures to a sometimes scathing critique. Certainly, the Catholic Church has come a long way since it forbade Catholics direct access to the Scriptures. Vatican II’s constitution *Dei Verbum* has opened the access to the Scriptures broadly to all the faithful. And *Verbum Domini* has charted a sort of a road map for the biblical pastoral ministry.

The Catholic Biblical Federation devoted a significant section of its “final statement” at the end of its “plenary assembly” in Lebanon in 2002 to this question, some 37 years after the promulgation of the *Dei Verbum* and some 9 years after the publication of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”. Here is a quotation of this text in extenso:

1. The power of the Word

1.1 In designing our response to the reality as ministers and servants of the Word, we turn to the Word of God as the source not only of our vision, but above all, as **the source of divine power** (cf. Gen 1:3ff; Jn 1:3; Rom 1:16). The Spirit and the Word can over-

³⁷ “The centre of proclamation is Jesus Christ, who is believed and to whom a person bears witness. Transmitting the faith essentially means to transmit the Scriptures, primarily the Gospel, which give a person the opportunity of knowing Jesus, the Lord.” (*Lineamenta* 2).

take us as in the case of the Apostles and empower us provided we allow the Word to have a claim on our lives and on the life of the Church. The energizing power of the Word is felt only in an obedient surrender like that of Abraham and of the Apostles whose ministry we have contemplated as we read and prayed the Word in the Acts of the Apostles.

1.2 The question Pope Paul VI posed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "... what has happened to that hidden energy of the Good News, which is able to have a powerful effect on man's conscience?" (n. 4), continues to challenge us. God's Word is creative: it is the Word of power for renewal and transformation. Our task therefore is to **seek ways of making the Word of God the source of energy in the heart of the Church and world**. Bringing about a change of consciousness, a change of behaviour and a change of structures is all part of the one mission of the Church. All activities of the Church are in one way or another ministry of the Word. Therefore the Church has the Word of God in the centre of all her life and mission. Without it, we would miss the lifeline of power and blessings.

1.3 How can we experience the Word as the source of life? Without the light and grace of the Spirit, the Word will not generate the energy needed for transformation of life and society. Prayer accompanied by docility to the Spirit should become the hallmark of the ministry of the Word (cf. Acts 13:2). At this moment of history, we should listen to the pressing invitation of the Word of God for a **deeper conversion** of our vision, our attitudes and behaviour towards the "other" – religions, cultures and ethnic groups, and especially the poor, women and all those who are victims of exclusion and discrimination in our societies. A re-reading of the Word in such life-threatening contexts is an imperative that we can not set aside. For the Word of God comes to us with its power to impel us to live in solidarity. It is only when we feel the irresistible power of the Spirit that we can become effective instruments of transformation.

1.4 We reiterate our commitment to **self-critique of our way of reading Scripture** in the Church – individually and collectively. Do we allow the power of the Word to have its impact on the contexts of society? Have we used texts of Scripture to legitimize attitudes of superiority, discrimination and violence towards others? Fundamentalist and purely spiritualistic interpretations of the Scripture are an ever-growing phenomenon in almost all Churches. Biblical pastoral ministry has an

urgent task in this field in countering a sectarian and fundamentalist reading of the Word that builds walls of separation and discrimination. Along with this, we need to highlight the plurality that is a characteristic feature of the Bible: plurality of world-views, of interpretations of sacred texts, of theologies, of ecclesial structures.

1.5 In order to achieve this, **contextual hermeneutics** will have to be developed in every area of our involvement. Biblical formation of laity and clergy should have such a thrust. In the light of our reflections during this Plenary Assembly it is important, wherever possible, to undertake a dialogic reading of the Word of God, letting the echoes and resonance of the various religious traditions, scriptural or otherwise, enrich our experience of the Word, mysteriously present in our world. This will enlarge our vision of God and promote a depth-level dialogue among religions. Such a reading might help us to see the multifaceted face of God the Father and Mother of all and the face of Jesus the Word incarnate.

2. The Word of God itself determines our options for reading the Bible

The Word of God in Sacred Scripture releases its power if read appropriately. In fact the Bible itself teaches us the options for reading it properly and for living the Word. In this way, we are faithful both to the original message and to the people to whom it is proclaimed as Good News (cf. EN 4).

2.1 We are committed to an **attentive and respectful reading** of the biblical text. Being a book of a different time and culture, it must first of all be respected in its otherness. It is to be read in its original – historical and cultural – as well as in its literary context. "Our reading of the Bible should enable the people to discover the true content. All efforts to interpret the Bible in order to justify political and ideological positions should be considered as a betrayal to the message" (Bogotá 7,3). Even people who are not able to handle scientific and scholarly methods can be guided in an attentive reading of the Bible, and this in order to avoid the pitfalls of a fundamentalist reading which refuses to take into consideration a historical and pluralistic character of the Bible (Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* [IBC], I.F).

2.2 The Bible, in its canon as well as individual books, is a pluralistic phenomenon, an outstanding example of unity in diversity, a symphony of many voices. Convinced that "all

the different ways of reading the Bible are not equally apt" (Bogotá 7) but also that no one method captures the richness of the meaning of the Scriptures, the Federation advocates a **plurality of methods and approaches** which "contribute effectively to the task of making more available the riches contained in the biblical text" (IBC Introduction).

2.3 Reading the Bible and celebrating the Word in community: The Bible is the book of the community, an expression of its faith experience, and meant for building it. It has an important place in the liturgy and in catechesis. "The Scriptures, as given to the Church, are the communal treasure of the entire body of believers". "All the members of the Church have a role in the interpretation of Scripture". Even those who, "in their powerlessness and lack of human resources find themselves forced to put their trust in God alone and in his justice, have a capacity for hearing and interpreting the Word of God which should be taken into account by the whole Church" (IBC, III.B.3).

2.4 Reading Scripture in the life context: The Bible is the book of life in as much as it deals with life in all its manifestations. God has given us two sacred books: that of creation and history, and that of the Bible. God's Word enshrined in the latter is to throw light on and help us decipher the first. The Bible has "to be re-read in the light of new circumstances and applied to the contemporary situation of the people of God" (IBC, IV.A). Exegetes "arrive at the true goal of their work only, when they have explained the meaning of the biblical texts as God's Word for today" (IBC, III.C.1). We are committed to this life-related reading of the Bible, as formulated in several of the Final Statements of the Catholic Biblical Federation. "We should start with the reality in which we actually find ourselves today, and we should allow the Word of God to throw light on this reality" (Bogotá 7,1).

2.5 Mindful of the different contexts and cultures in which we live and having reflected on how the Word of God has been received in different cultures, we are convinced that we not only have to pay attention to the Word itself, but also to the different soils in which it is to be sown. The conviction that the Word is capable of being spread in other cultures "springs from the Bible itself ... in the blessing promised to all peoples through Abraham and his offspring" (Gen 12:3; 18:18) and extending it to all nations (cf. IBC, IV.B). An "inculturated" reading presupposes a respectful and in-depth encounter with a people and its culture and starts with the translation of

the Bible into the language of the people, to be followed by interpretation which then leads to the formation of a "local Christian culture, extending to all aspects of life" (IBC, IV.B).

2.6 The poor are the first addressees of the Good News (Lk 4:18-19; Mt 5:3). What God has hidden from the wise and learned, He has revealed to the little ones, to those of little or no significance (Mt 11:25). This fact demands that Christian communities read **the Bible from the perspective of the poor**. "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, than that which comes from a learning that relies upon its own resources alone" (IBC, IV.C.3). Reading the Bible in such a way will lead us necessarily to taking an option for the poor.

2.7 The Bible as Word of God can only be welcomed if we approach it also as the Church's basic source of prayer and if we cultivate the **prayerful reading of Scripture** (cf. Bogotá 7.2; Hong Kong 1.2). *Lectio divina*, formerly cultivated mainly in monasteries and religious communities, is more and more appreciated by all the Christian faithful (cf. DV 25). The Pontifical Biblical Commission has devoted an entire section to *lectio divina*; in numerous apostolic and post-synodal exhortations; notably in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (no. 39) and in his Letter to the Church in Lebanon (no. 39), John Paul II has insistently invited us to make use of this ancient and still valid method of reading the Word of God. This form of prayer challenges, gives orientation to and forms our existence.

The self-critique of our way of reading the Scriptures should lead fundamentally to the biblical inspiration or "animation" of all areas of pastoral life and commitment of the Church and its mission, the "biblica animatio totius actionis pastoralis", as Pope Benedict XVI put it in *Verbum Domini* 73, taking up an expression which has been dear to the CBF since at least 1993. This reflection will certainly lead to the proposition of new forms of formation concerning the reading of the Scriptures, to new forms of catechesis and homiletics.

The "Evangelizers" themselves must gain a profound knowledge of Jesus' own familiarity with of and commitment to the

people of his time, as this is presented in the Gospels. His ministry of healing and teaching should provide the model for the fundamental options of evangelization. In this regard, it is essential to note that Jesus' teaching is based upon his experience both of the mercy of His Father and of the concrete life of the people of his day, in all of its complexity. The language which characterizes Jesus' parables is based both in the concrete life of the people whose life he shared deeply in the some thirty years before he began his public ministry and in the Jewish Scriptures which he had come to know deeply within the multi-form Jewish community and culture in which he lived. His language is evocative, inviting the person to enter actively into the story of the coming kingdom, to take position and to commit himself or herself to personal conversion.

This knowledge of Jesus can only be gained in an approach to the Scriptures which does not exploit Scripture for one's own purposes by the use (or misuse) of isolated fragments taken out of their context in moralizing, spiritualizing or fundamentalist manners, but which rather opens the reader progressively to individual texts, to the narratives or other rhetorical developments which prolong themselves throughout entire Biblical writings and which allow the development of the symbolic and multilevel language inherent to the Scriptures, and finally to the so-called canonical reading of Scripture which allows inter-textual resonance of the Scriptures. The preparation of translations which strive, in so far as possible, to translate "concordantly" key biblical words and expressions in order to nourish and support the reader's memory, recalling the use of the same expression in unfolding contexts, should be favored.

The repeated reading of the Scriptures, in particular of the canonical books in their entirety, from beginning to the end, allows the progressive integration not only of isolated pericopes, but also of the narratives, etc. themselves into the memory of the reader. This slowly marks the language of the person, his way of thinking and reasoning, especially if these texts and narratives

are brought into dialogue with human life, in all its complexity. Indeed, the Gospels, for example, are themselves interactive paths of catechetical formation, which allow the reader to participate actively, with all of his interrogations and possible discoveries, disappointments and joys, on the road that leads him to discover Jesus as the Gospel of Peace and of Life that God offers to his people. It is clear that, upon the basis of an in depth familiarity of the Scriptures that may be gained in groups of Scripture sharing, the resonance of the liturgical pericopes will be greatly increased.

In this perspective, it may be strongly suggested that pastoral initiatives should propose over a period of several years the complete reading of Mark's Gospel, of Matthew's Gospel, of Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles and of John's Gospel, of selected Old Testament texts (the Books of Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy, of 1-2 Samuel and of 1-2 Kings, of several prophetic books, including extracts of the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the Book of the Psalms as prayerful meditation of the Scriptures at large, as well as several of the Wisdom Books), before returning to the essential letters of Saint Paul (1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians and Romans) and concluding with the Book of the Revelation. Such a multi-year planned Bible sharing and study can, with the accompaniment of trained group leaders, contribute to a solid basis for the process of a truly new evangelization.

It is, of course, true that the productivity of the Word of God does not depend primarily upon those who sow the Word but rather upon the power of the Word itself and the reception of the Word by the various soils that hear it and embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance (Lk 8:15); nonetheless, if there is no one to instruct in the understanding of the Word (cf. Acts 8:31) or to bring the good news and the message of peace, then many men and women of good will shall be deprived of the Word of God, source of life and of joy.

Projects and Experiences

Windows on God's Word and the New Evangelisation

Brother Mike Chalmers cfc
Catholic Bible Foundation
South Africa

The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican II is a fundamental document for the Pastoral Biblical Apostolate and the New Evangelisation. "Easy access to sacred scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful,"¹ (22) leaves us in no doubt as to the thinking of the council fathers. The scriptures are for all.

"Access to" means a lot more than just putting Bibles, written in the vernacular, into people's hands. Once they have the Bible, what tools can they use when faced with a text? What help can we give those not schooled in the skills of scholarship.

"Windows on God's Word" grew out of a personal need to enter deeply into the Word. Windows serves as a foundation for Lectio Divina. Windows is a help to making prayer a "life-giving encounter with the Word".

People need effective methods, which will enable them to enter into a deeper understanding of the Word. In "Windows on God's Word," every text is approached from the perspective of **story**. Everybody loves a good story. We can so easily identify with the joys and sorrows, triumphs and failures of the characters. Imagine wandering around a country house. The view from every window is different and yet one is looking at the same countryside. Using "Windows" we look at a Scripture text from a variety of perspectives.

These are the "tools / windows" we use:

1. Characters
2. Biblical Level
3. Repetition (what is important to the writer)
4. Images and qualities of God as found in the text.
5. Emotions

6. Movement
7. Memory
8. Wholeness and completeness
9. Pictures in the text
10. Geography
11. The Story says ...
12. Handles.

(Every window has a handle to open it. The view is so much better from an open window. By using these methods we get an even better understanding of the Scripture text we are reading.)

HANDLES (Preparation)

Divide the text: After initial readings of the text people are encouraged to divide the passage into parts and then to give each part a title. We are challenged to find our own understanding of what the text is about. It is often my experience that there is too much in a particular Gospel reading to handle during one period of prayer. Better use different parts of the text during a number of prayer periods. It is important to note that there are no right or wrong answers, only how the text speaks to each person at a particular time.

Find the context of the passage: Read what comes before the passage and what follows. Frequently this throws light on and offers a new understanding of the text.

Cross-references: Most Bibles offer a selection of cross-references. Look up just two or three. These help us to see how the text links up with other parts of the Bible and also explain what otherwise might be quite mysterious.

Commentaries: Finally, we should learn from the prayer experience of others. Read some commentary on the text. This should be of a pastoral nature and not technical. Remember we are not looking for a

scholarly exposition of the text. All we need is one or two fresh insights which will light the spark of prayer. I list some sources that I have found useful:

Armellini, Fernando; Celebrating the Word. Year A; Year B; Year C

De Verteuil, Michel; Lectio Divina with the Sunday Gospels. Year A; Year B; Year C
Fallon, Michael:

An Introductory Commentary. The Gospel according to Saint Matthew / Mark / Luke / John

How to read the Gospel of Matthew / Mark / Luke / John, published by Service Biblique Catholique Evangile et Vie

New Collegeville Bible Commentary; Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

NOTE: This exercise, handles, should be seen as our preparation for prayer. It is not wise to mix prayer and study.

WARNING: Take the handles one at a time. There is no rush. God is not in a hurry.

CHARACTERS

Identify the characters in the story – a simple task at first glance. However we often, overlook some very important characters. In the story of the healing of the paralytic, Mark 2: 1 – 12, we read “**They** came bringing to him a paralytic...” Have you ever asked yourself who is meant by ‘they’? Is it the “Four Men?” I do not think so. Then who are they?

The ‘crowds’ are frequently mentioned. How many crowds are mentioned and how did they behave?

Having identified the characters, we are invited to look at what they are doing.

We are now invited to enter into the story. Imagine yourself as one of the characters. How do you behave? What feelings do you experience, as the paralytic, when told, “your sins are forgiven?” Disappointed!! (I would have been most disappointed, particularly if I was hoping for a cure.) How do I behave towards Jesus as one of Scribes? This will lead us to respond, to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, in prayer.

BIBLICAL LEVEL

Now the scholars come to our assistance. The people of Jesus’ time believed that illness was a punishment for sin. The man was paralyzed because either he or a relative had sinned. This could give an in-

sight into his frame of mind as he was brought to Jesus. It could also explain why Jesus first tells him his sins are forgiven and cures him.

Questions we could ask ourselves having read some commentary are:

Have I seen something in a new way?

What new information about God did I receive?

What message do I receive?

REPETITION

The scriptures were written to be read out in public. They were not intended by the writers to be read silently, as we most often do. When the author had something of particular importance to say, he used repetition to lay emphasis on it. John 15:1–10 is a very good example of this technique. Try counting the number of times “remain in ...” is repeated in these ten verses, and yet somehow we do not feel that these repetitions are overdone.

You will be amazed how often this technique is used and at the new insights that will follow once you recognise the repetitions. In Mark 15:21–27 ‘Jesus, soldiers and crucified’ are frequently used. Mark these in different colours on a copy of the text. How does this speak to you?

IMAGES AND QUALITIES OF GOD

We are all familiar with the images of the Good Shepherd and “I am the true vine and my Father is the vine grower.”

Perhaps we are less familiar with the female images of God. Try looking up Is 49:5, Hos 11:1-4 and Ps 131:2-3.

The scriptures contain many wonderful descriptions of our God. Ps 145:8–21 will make you aware of the nature of our God.

Take time to go back and look how Jesus behaves in Mark 2:1–12. Notice what he does and what he does not do. Observe how Jesus behaves and you will soon get to know much more about our God.

Now try reading Luke 6:35–38 as a description of God. List the qualities of God, as contained in this text.

The more we allow the scriptures to speak in the depths of our hearts, the closer we will come to a true understanding of our God. One author has warned, “Unless our understanding of God has changed there is

the danger that we may be worshipping a self-made god.”

EMOTIONS

Each one of us experiences emotions throughout each day. Stories are filled with emotions. Many of us will recall how when watching a movie we experienced emotions of fear, excitement or empathy with the joys or sorrows of the characters. This applies equally to the stories we find in the scriptures. Sometimes we will find the emotions mentioned specifically, e.g., “Jesus wept” or “He looked around in anger.” More often we need to enter into the story, using our imagination to identify with the emotions of the characters.

In reflecting on Mk 2:1-7 we have already made reference to the possible feeling of disappointment experienced by the paralytic. It takes little imagination to realise how he felt after being cured. There are many other emotions which are implicit in this text. Take time to become aware of the emotions that must have been experienced by each of the characters in the story.

Earlier we were advised to place ourselves within the story as one of the characters. The story of the healing of the paralytic now becomes the story of our healing. His feelings become our feelings. This experience leads us into heartfelt (emotion filled) prayer. On the other hand we may identify with any other character in the story. The use of our imagination is useful help in prayer.

MOVEMENT

The characters in a story are flesh and blood people. Frequently they enter the story in one frame of mind, only to change for the better or worse by the time the story ends. We refer to these changes as “movement”.

In Mk 2:1-12 we easily identify the cure of the paralytic. Read the story once more looking for a second healing. In verse 12b we read, “They were **all** astounded and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this.’” A remarkable change has come over the scribes. Early in the story they did not have a good word to say about Jesus. Now, they and many others present; “were astounded and glorified God.”

Mark 3:1-6 has a very different movement. Here the Pharisees (see 2:24) move from “They watched him closely...” in verse 2 to plotting murder in verse 6 “The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians against him to put him to death.”

MEMORY

The Word of God throws light on our lives and the events of our lives throw light on the Word of God. As we enter deeply into the story in scripture, so it becomes our story.

Using John 10: 11 we will explain the window of “Memory”:

“I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

We are prompted to ask:

When was I a “good shepherd” to somebody else?

Do I know somebody who is a “good shepherd”?

In what circumstances was someone a “good shepherd” to me?

In Scripture we recognise our story of ‘sin and grace’, failure and success. The more we do this, the more meaningful will our going to the Word, become. Having this experience of the Word, will profoundly change our lives.

WHOLENESS AND COMPLETENESS

In the story of the paralytic Mark 2:1-12 we have already witnessed how the scribes went from being highly critical of Jesus to being “astounded” by what they had experienced. They moved from a state of brokenness to wholeness.

In John 8:3-11 we find the story of the “Woman caught in adultery”. Central to this story is Jesus. He dominates the scene. Then the Scribes and Pharisees enter along with the woman. The scene is completed as “all the people”, verse 2, expectantly watch Jesus and the woman. While not mentioned specifically, we can presume that the apostles and some of his disciples, also formed part of this crowd.

The Scribes and Pharisees go from self-righteousness, “Teacher this woman was caught in the very act of adultery,” to acknowledging their own brokenness, “And

in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders.”

All the people and the disciples follow in a similar manner until the woman and Jesus are left alone.

The Woman: She entered the story in shame, humiliation and condemnation. “Then the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle.” She was indeed a sinner, “... caught in the very act of adultery” She leaves the scene with her head held high. Her dignity has been fully restored. Her freedom is guaranteed. “Has no one condemned you?” ... “Then neither do I condemn you.”

We sin because we incorrectly think it is good for us. In fact, sin harms both ourselves and those we hurt. Jesus advises her, “Do not sin anymore.” It was obvious to Jesus that the woman’s present way of life was only going to bring her more pain and suffering.

It is significant that all leave Jesus presence having moved from their own brokenness to wholeness.

Read this story once again, looking for the “Qualities of God”, you find in it. There may be some surprises awaiting you.

GEOGRAPHY AND PICTURES IN THE TEXT

Writers today go to considerable lengths to describe the scene where the events of their story take place. The writers of the gospels were also aware of the importance of setting the scene but had to do it in very few words; so few that often we do not recognise the few quick strokes of the pen for what they are.

Mt 16:18a reads:

“And so I say to you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church ...”

Let us just go back a few verses to see where Matthew situates this incident. Verse 13 tells us, “When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked the disciples ...”

In one short phrase Matthew describes the “rock”.

Those of us who have been fortunate enough to visit where Caesarea Philippi once stood will know that it is now called Banias. There is a cave at the foot of a sheer

rock face. Within this cave is a powerful spring from which torrents of water flow forming one of the sources of the River Jordan. With this in mind, there is no mistaking the “rock” as being the source of life (Br. K. McDonnell).

THE STORY SAYS

Once again we are encouraged to read the text prayerfully, with care, openness and attention to detail.

Then Jacob had a dream: a stairway rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God’s messengers were going up and down on it. And there was the Lord standing beside him saying: When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he exclaimed, “Truly, the Lord is in this spot, although I did not know it!” (Gen 28:12-17)

This story immediately poses a variety questions:

1. Where is God?
2. Where is the gate of heaven?
3. Where is God to be found in my life?
4. Why do the angels go up, first and then down – surely it should be down first?

The twelve windows have been found to enrich our insights, the understanding of the text and the impact that the Word has on our lives. As a foundation to Lectio Divina they have been found to deeply enrich prayer. Indeed, we prefer not to teach Lectio Divina until people have come to understand WINDOWS and use them extensively in their encounter with the Word.

Surely nobody would dispute that the primary aim of evangelisation is:

“To help people enter into a living and dynamic relationship with the Word of God, Jesus Christ.”

How will this be accomplished? John Paul II gives us a clear and authoritative answer:

“The Word of God is the first source of all Christian Spirituality. It gives rise to a personal relationship with the living God. The Word of God is brought to bear on life, on which it projects the light of wisdom, which is the gift of the Spirit.” (25 March 1996)

This is the New Evangelisation – the Hope for the world.

Federation News

Executive Committee Meeting**Rome, March 9-10, 2012****Final Message**

1. The Executive Committee (EC) of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) met in Sant Anselmo in Rome from March 9-10, 2012. In conformity with the CBF Constitution the quorum of five member representatives, including the EC Moderator, was obtained with the presence of Bishop Telesphor Mkude (EC Moderator), Bishop Vincenzo Paglia (CBF President), Abbot Primate Dr. Notker Wolf, OSB (Chairman of the Administrative Board), Father Giuseppe De Virgilio and Father Cesare Bissoli, SDB (Associate Member Representative). Father Bissoli represents the Istituto di Catechetica de la Università Pontificia Salesiana which was nominated as an interim member in replacement of the Catholic Bible Foundation of South Africa that had resigned from the EC in November 2011. This nomination was effected through a vote by mail called for by the EC Moderator in accordance with the CBF constitution and bylaws. The process of the establishment of the quorum was accompanied by the counsel of eminent canon lawyers.

2. In spite of the difficulties with which the EC has been confronted in the organization of its work, the Committee is highly conscious of the importance of the upcoming Bishops' Synod on the New Evangelization. Consequently, the EC has decided to produce a position paper on the role of the Bible in the New Evangelization, particularly in light of the option of the "Biblical animation of all pastoral action" (cf. *Verbum Domini*, 73). This statement shall be founded upon the fundamental concerns expressed during the Synod of 2008 on "the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church" and elaborate propositions concerning the role of the reading of the Bible in the New Evangelization, in dialogue with various members of the CBF world fellowship. Fathers Cesare Bissoli and Giuseppe De Virgilio and the Acting General Secretary have

been entrusted with the realization of this important project.

3. The EC has proceeded to the election of a new Administrative Board composed of Bishop Dr. Bernhard Haßlberger (Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Munich), chairman; Prelate Dr. Bertram Meier (Canon of the Diocese of Augsburg); vice chairman; Prof. Wolfgang Simler (retired President of the Bavarian Head Office of the Deutsche Bundesbank), Treasurer pro tempore; Father Jan Stefanów, SVD, member. The Administrative Board shall be further enlarged within the next few weeks in order to ensure a broad base of religious congregations and the representation of the funding agencies. The new Administrative Board will take up its functions on April 1. The EC expresses its sincere gratitude to the Archdiocese of Munich and the Diocese of Augsburg for accepting to actively support the CBF through their presence in the AB. The EC insists upon thanking the members of the outgoing Administrative Board for their selfless service during the past years.

4. The EC has requested unanimously that Bishop Vincenzo Paglia continue in his functions through the next Plenary Assembly. The procedure for the preparations of an election of a CBF President for the next period is now in preparation.

5. The procedure for searching for a preferably full time General Secretary has been entrusted to a "search committee", made up of Father Cesare Bissoli SDB, Bishop Dr. Haßlberger and Prelate Dr. Bertram Meier, with the logistic support of the Acting General Secretary. The target date for the conclusion of this process is the end of 2012.

6. Prof. Thomas P. Osborne has been asked to pursue his mandate of Acting General Secretary until the appointment of a new General Secretary.

7. The terms of office of the present coordinators shall expire on March 31, 2012. Preliminary decisions in view of the appointment of coordinators for the period beginning April 1 shall now be finalized; the final decisions in this regard shall be made by the EC before the end of March.

8. The EC treated various administrative questions during its meeting, including the approval of the reports of the Acting General Secretary and of the CBF treasurer, first steps to the development of a diversified and broad based fund raising strategy, the organization of the CBF General Secretariat in Sankt Ottilien, etc. The central office is being streamlined, in function of the redefinition of the essential missions and essential tasks

9. Father Cesare Bissoli, SDB was elected Vice Moderator of the Executive Committee in replacement of the former vice moderator who had resigned his EC membership on January 9, 2012.

10. The United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association presented its resignation in the EC effective March 7, 2012. The EC has acknowledged this decision; in order to ensure the full functionality of the EC, it was decided to nominate an interim member in replacement of the UCCBA. The Catholic Biblical Foundation of South Africa accepted the vote of the EC in this regard and thus returns to the EC with renewed confidence.

11. The Executive Committee decided to hold the next plenary assembly in 2015 (rather than in 2014) in order to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Dei Verbum. Several cities are presently under examination as locations for this highly significant assembly. This will allow the finalization of the revision of the constitution (revision, consultation, voting, approval by the Holy See) in advance of the assembly and takes into account the present economical situation of the CBF, only three years after the extraordinary plenary assembly.

12. The intensive activities of the central boards and officers of the past few months in

line with the decisions of the Ariccia Plenary Assembly have allowed the CBF to slowly regain the confidence of its members and refocus itself on its basic mission of contributing to the endeavor of the Catholic Church to contribute to allowing the Word of God to inspire all the life of the Church. Many signs of this development can be noted: requests for admission as new members coming from Spain, Australia and India; the progressive resumption of the payment of membership fees and the continuing generosity of German benefactors, as well as the support of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples; the support of the German Church in Munich and Augsburg; the widely acclaimed publication of the electronic version of the Bulletin Dei Verbum: **BDV digital**. In this regard, an editorial board and subregional correspondents shall be put into place in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of this unique and important publication for biblical pastoral ministry.

13. With the good will and support of all of the stakeholders, actors and supporters of the CBF fellowship, it shall be possible to redevelop the constructive and responsible collaboration that have for so long characterized the life and work of the Federation. Important challenges and projects are urgently awaiting our commitment and experience. Certainly the preparation of a CBF contribution to the upcoming Bishops' Synod shall require great efforts from us all, as will the establishment of a greater presence of the CBF in North America and an even more intensive collaboration in the various CBF regions and subregions. Let us now turn our attention to these challenges and commit ourselves, our energy and our hearts to sharing the Gospel of Peace, God's Eternal Word, among ourselves and with all men and women of good will.

*The CBF Executive Committee
Sant'Anselmo, Rome, March 10, 2012*

The CBF welcomes three new associate member associations!**1. Semillas Asociación Bíblica, Sevilla, Spain**

Contact persons: Joaquin Centeno Sagrario, Gonzalo Flor Serrano

Email: seguntupalabra@telefonica.net

Website: www.semillas-edit.es

Subregion: Southern and Western Europe

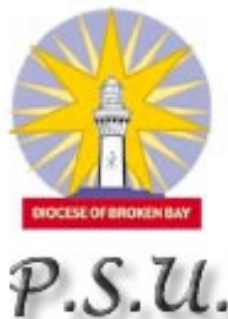
**2. The Diocese of Broken Bay, Pennant Hills Australia**

Contact persons: Ms. Carole Gan and Bishop David Walker

Email: carole.gan@dbb.org.au

Website: www.dbb.org.au

Subregion: Oceania

**3. The India Mumbai Province of the Society of the Divine Word**

Contact persons: Fr. Jolly Mudakkampurathu svd, Fr. Abraham D'Souza svd

Email: inmsvd@gmail.com, jollysvd@gmail.com

Website: www.svdinm.org

Subregion South Asia



The New CBF Administrative Board Members

In its March meeting in Rome, the CBF Executive Committee elected a new Administrative Board with took office on April 1, 2012.



The *chairman* is the auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Munich, *Bishop Dr. Bernhard Haßlberger*. Born in 1946 in Ruhpolding, Germany, Bishop Haßlberger studied philosophy and theology in Munich where he earned his doctorate Theology (Old Testament) in 1976. He was ordained a priest in 1977 and bishop in 1994. He has been entrusted with the pastoral care of the Northern Region of the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising.



Vice chairman of the Administrative Board is *Monsignor Dr. Bertram Meier* of the Diocese of Augsburg, Germany. Canon Meier was born in Buchloe, Germany, in 1960. He studied theology in the University of Augsburg and in the Gregorianum in Rome, where he did his doctoral thesis on the Ecclesiology of the Regensburg pastoral theologian and bishop Johann Michael Sailer (1989). He was ordained in Rome in 1985. He served as a priest in pastoral activities in his diocese as well as in the Vatican Secretary of State in which he led the German language department. His responsibilities include the departments of ecumenism and interreligious dialog, the world Church, mis-

sions and development as well as vocations. He received the honorary title of papal prelate in 2001.



Prof. Wolfgang Simler, Treasurer pro tempore, was born in Göggingen (now Augsburg, Bavaria) in 1943. He studied finances and banking in Munich). He worked in the Private Banking Industry, at the University of Munich and since 1975 in the Deutsche Bank, and finally as President of the Bavarian Head Office of the Deutsche Bundesbank until his retirement in 2008. Prof. Simler was professor at the Bundesbank University and at the University of Augsburg. His professional activities included frequent conferences and courses on banking supervisory and monetary policy, both in Germany and abroad.



Father Jan Jacek Stefanów was born in 1964 in Prudnik, Poland. He joined the Society of the Divine Word in 1983 and was ordained a priest in 1991. His responsibilities in the Verbiti have led him to work in Ecuador and Spain and now in Poland where he is biblical coordinator for SVD Poland Province. Father Stefanów is now preparing a thesis on biblical hermeneutics in evangelization at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

Three New Subregional Coordinators

In the last issue of BDVdigital, we were able to present the new regional coordinator of the Africa region, Father Yves-Lucien Evaga Ndjana, director of BICAM.

Since then, the Executive Committee has appointed three other new coordinators:



Sister Anna Damas SSps from Papua New Guinea as coordinator of the Oceania subregion



Father Alvin Peter Fernando from Sri Lanka as coordinator of the South Asia subregion



Sister Eleana Salas Cáceres fma from Peru as coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbeans.

The CBF thanks Sister Anna, Father Alvin and Sister Eleana for accepting this responsibility and wishes them success in networking among the subregional members as they seek to renew the bonds of friendship and solidarity in the biblical pastoral ministry. Their task is, of course, defined in the CBF constitution and bylaws; nonetheless, a great amount of creativity and initiative is required for assembling the member associations, identifying the major issues in their particular subregion and seeking, in collaboration with the subregional members and the General Secretariat, to support the members in the elaboration of strategies for reflection, formation and all other initiatives helpful for the spreading of the Word of God in today's world.

CBF President, Bishop Vincenzo Paglia, New President of the Pontifical Council for the Family

On June 26 His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI appointed Bishop Vincenzo Paglia to the office of President of the Pontifical Council for the Family and at the same time elevated him to the dignity of archbishop. He thus succeeds Cardinal Ennio Antonelli as the head of this Pontifical Council that Pope John Paul II created in 1981.



In his first message following this appointment, Archbishop Paglia expressed his deep gratitude to the Holy Father who has entrusted him with this important responsibility. The New President spoke of the family as the basis of human society that is in great need of protection and support. The Christian family, in particular, is called to be light and salt of a new humanity in line with the Gospel.

Archbishop Paglia, now administrator of the diocese of Terni, Narni and Amelia which he has led as bishop since 2000, follows in the footsteps of Saint Valentine, patron saint of couples, who during the period of the “first” evangelization travelled from Terni to Rome to assist a family that he had converted to the Christian faith. He was appointed President of the Catholic Biblical Federation in

2002 and has been confirmed in this responsibility recently by the CBF Executive Committee and by Cardinal Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

His experience both in the Catholic Biblical Federation and in the diocese of Terni has convinced him of the necessity of a strong presence of the Bible in the pastoral care and catechetical formation of the family and all of its members.

The Catholic Biblical Federation congratulates Archbishop Paglia as he assumes his new responsibilities and prays that God will bless him in his continuing endeavors in favor of the active and transforming presence of God’s Word in the hearts of all men and women, young people and children in today’s world.



The Holy Family (Zillis)

For the website of the Pontifical Council for the Family, see: <http://www.familia.va>.

Upcoming events

N.B. On this page, BDV^{digital} would like to announce meetings, congresses, expositions, etc. that may be of interest to the members associations of the Catholic Biblical Federation. Thanks in advance for communicating this information to the CBF General Secretariat.

2012 July 28-31: The 75th International Meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association of America

Location: University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IND (USA)

Including a continuing Seminar on "Verbum Domini and the New Evangelization"

For further information: <http://catholicbiblical.org/>

2012 August 6-10: Sixth CBF South-East Asia Workshop: Verbum Domini: The Word in our World Today

Location: Ursuline Convent, Jalan Supratman 1, Bandung, Indonesia

Objectives:

1. To be able to apply Verbum Domini in our respective contexts and specific ministries;
2. To exchange materials and resources in the implementation of Verbum Domini to different sectors of our society;
3. To make a common plan or program for Verbum Domini information and to implement the exhortations to different groups and ministries.

Speakers/ Resource Persons:

1. Keynote Speaker: Most Rev. Charles Maung Bo
2. Verbum Dei – Part I and Part II: Most Rev Pablo Virgilio David, D.D.
3. Verbum in Ecclesia – Most Rev. Renato Mayugba, D.D.
4. Verbum Mundo – Most Rev. Broderick S. Pabillo D.D.

Contact person: Sr. Emma Gunanto (emmanuel.gunanto@gmail.com)

2012 September 3-5: III Congreso Bíblico Internacional Los rostros de Dios en la Biblia (The Faces of God in the Bible) Asociación Bíblica Española

Location: Centro de Estudios teológicos, Sevilla (Spain)

Asociación Bíblica Española, in collaboration with, among others, the Editorial Verbo Divino

During the congress, an exhibition entitled "Across the centuries: the history of the Biblical Text" shall be organized in "La Casa de la Ciencia de Sevilla" (September 3-30, 2012)

For further information: www.abe.org.es

2012 September 10-14: XLII Settimana Biblica Nazionale Abramo tra storia e fede (Abraham between history and faith) Associazione Biblica Italiana

Location : Pontifical Biblical Institute (Rome)

For further information: www.associazionebiblica.it.

2012 October 18-21: Meeting of the CBF Southern and Western European Subregion The Implementation of Verbum Domini in the SWE Subregion

Location: London

Contact person: Dr. Luis Martínez (luis.martinez@cathol.lu)

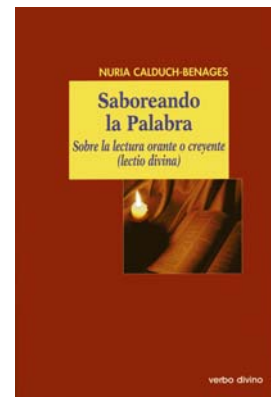
Biblical Pastoral Publications



Peter Zürn, Dieter Bauer, Walter Kraus,
"... da schickte Gott einen Wurm ..." Modell zur biblischen Beseelung der Pastoral
 – Zürich: Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, Bibelpastorale Stelle, 2012. – CHF 20. – Orders: www.bibelwerk.ch

This publication documents a concrete project in a parish in Switzerland that responded to the Swiss Catholic Bible Association's challenge of developing a model for the "biblical animation of all areas of pastoral life". This "across the board approach", in line with one of the major orientations of the Bishops' Synod in 2008 and of Pope Benedict XVI's *Verbum Domini*, sought to involve all parish groups and activities in the active listening to the Word. The report in this 60 page volume, completed by information and material on the SKB website, shows how the experiment was conclusive and invites the reader and other parishes to creatively take up the challenge.

Reflexiones sobre la Nueva Evangelización en América Latina: Desafíos y Prioridades / Pontificia Comisión para América Latina. – Ciudad del Vaticano: Tipografía Vaticana, 2012. With contributions by M. Ouellet, S. Fisichella, S. Silva Retamales, and G. Carriquiry Lecour.



Nuria Calduch-Benages,
Saboreando la Palabra : Sobre le lectura orante o creyente (lectio divina) [Tasting the Word: On the prayerful or faithful reading of the Scriptures]. – Estella (Spain): Editorial Verbo Divino, 2012. – (El mundo de la Biblia. Horizontes). – ISBN 978-84-9945-237-1.

"Tasting the Word" is a brief introduction to lectio divina or the step-by-step exercise of listening to the Word personally. After a first more theoretical and informative section, there follows three examples of lectio divina, one on an Old Testament text (Ezekiel 37:1-14) and two on New Testament passages (Mt 25:35-43 and Phil 3:2-14). The volume concludes with the presentation of some important texts, such as Guigo II's letter to brother Gervasio on the contemplative life.

The book is the result of the participation of the author as an expert in the XII Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (2008) as well as of her experience in the field of Biblical Apostolate. The author is presently professor of Old Testament and biblical anthropology at the Gregorian Pontifical University in Rome.



Catholic Biblical Federation
Fédération Biblique Catholique
Federación Bíblica Católica
Katholische Bibelföderation

Pope John Paul II, taking up the prophetic words of Pope Paul VI in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, had in a variety of ways reminded the faithful of the need for a new missionary season for the entire people of God.

At the dawn of the third millennium not only are there still many peoples who have not come to know the Good News, but also a great many Christians who need to have the word of God once more persuasively proclaimed to them, so that they can concretely experience the power of the Gospel. Many of our brothers and sisters are "baptized, but insufficiently evangelized". In a number of cases, nations once rich in faith and in vocations are losing their identity under the influence of a secularized culture. The need for a new evangelization, so deeply felt by my venerable Predecessor, must be valiantly reaffirmed, in the certainty that God's word is effective. The Church, sure of her Lord's fidelity, never tires of proclaiming the good news of the Gospel and invites all Christians to discover anew the attraction of following Christ (*Verbum Domini* 96).