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IX Plenary Assembly  
Catholic Biblical Federation

The Word of God – Source of Evangelization



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## Editorial

“Grace and peace be yours from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ!” I make my own the greeting of the apostle Paul to the faithful in Philippi as I address you in the name of the Catholic Biblical Federation. Also contained in this apostolic greeting is our prayer that our world may be receptive to the peace that God constantly offers us. We unite ourselves with the many victims of poverty, war, discrimination, injustice, exclusion, inequality, human trafficking, displacement and environmental catastrophes as we pray with Isaiah, “let justice descend, O heavens, like dew from above, let the earth open and salvation bud forth.”

My election as President of the Catholic Biblical Federation brought me much trepidation. But the assembly held last June 2015 in Nemi, Italy turned my fear into joy and I would like you to share in it.

The general assembly testified to the communion of the Universal Church in the Word of God and in the common mission to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth as we commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Dei Verbum*. The delegates were enriched by the exchanges that demonstrated the creativity and boldness animating the biblical apostolate in various parts of the world, while humbly admitting the need for constant purification and renewal.

Another sign of communion was the almost unanimous vote by the delegates in favor of the new constitution of the Catholic Biblical Federation. A few months later we received the official recognition from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The hand of God has been guiding us towards renewal.

Finally the assembly articulated directions for our common mission. We should explore more deeply and creatively the basic insight of *Dei Verbum* and *Verbum Domini* that the biblical apostolate should animate the whole pastoral life of the Church. The member organizations of the federation are also called to work closely with each other, to share best practices and resources. Biblical scholars and pastoral workers could mutually benefit from each other’s expertise and experience. The setting up of schools for biblical studies and for translators of the Bible in different languages is worth pursuing as collaborative efforts between member-organizations.

Having shared with you our joy, I now close with a word of encouragement: “Devote yourself to the reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching. Attend to your duties; let them absorb you, so that everyone may see your progress” (I Timothy 4:13-15). I commend you to the Lord and to His gracious word.



+ Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle  
Archbishop of Manila  
President of the Catholic Biblical Federation

## Final Message of the IX Plenary Assembly

At the end of the IX Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF), the participants from 63 countries, are pleased to share with the whole Church our sincere attitude of gratitude to Our Heavenly Father, in Christ, the Word of Life, for granting us the experience of new initiatives for the mission entrusted us by the Church.

### Inauguration of the Assembly

The Assembly was held at the *Ad Gentes Centre Nemi* (Italy) during the days 18–23 June 2015. Its opening coincided with the publication of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, whose foundation is the Word of God.

In the first working session, the unanimous approval of reforms to the Constitution underlined for the entire Assembly the renewal and sound foundations of the CBF.

### Papal Audience

On June 19 we were received by Pope Francis at a Special Audience and with his characteristic warmth, he responded spontaneously and affectionately to the greeting of the new President of the CBF, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle. He illustrated for us movingly the path of martyrdom which the Church must undergo as it *"goes forth"*, in the spirit of humility of the apostle Paul who, far from taking pride for what he had suffered in proclaiming the Gospel, confessed that *"he boasted only of his own weakness."*

*"I prefer a Church bruised in accidents rather than a Church sick from being shut in on itself,"* the Pope told us; and then he added: *"The Word of God is not something that makes life easy, it always puts us into difficulties".* *"One of the things that worries me a lot,"* he also said, *"is the perfunctory proclamation of the Word of God in the homily. Do everything possible to help deacons, priests and bishops to truly deliver the Word of God in the homily. It is a sacramental. Speeches are not sacramentals."*

### Contents

In the following days, Professors Nuria Calduch-Benages (Italy) and Maricel Mena López (Colombia) honoured us with incisive presentations that helped focus the Assembly on its theme: **The Word of God, source of evangelization.**

The address of Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle offered us a challenging guiding light on the direction the CBF is invited to take in the next six years. The Cardinal invited us to: – Develop a biblical vision of nature and the earth as God's creation; – Propose biblical pastoral programmes that help make sense of the situations of suffering and injustice; – Contribute to the celebration of the Holy Year of Mercy through the development of biblical inputs; – Stimulate a moral perspective inspired by biblical wisdom to help the search for an economy for the common good that excludes no one; – Offer reflections on family issues and their problems; – Encourage youth ministry imbued with biblical spirituality for today's digital culture; – Inspire popular piety with the



Bible and Catechesis; – Provide biblical reflection on the theme of the city, to help find ways of evangelization in urban centres; – Contribute from the Bible to the evangelization of cultures so as to respect sensitivities and cultural values; – Provide a biblical spirituality that helps to sustain the hope of persecuted Christians.

### Celebrations

During the days of the Assembly we experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit and his influence on creation of an atmosphere of conviviality, brotherhood and prayer that filled us with joy and inspired us to strengthen CBF organization as well as the Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Life (ABP) in our regions, sub-regions and individual Churches.

In a festive religious atmosphere we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution "*Dei Verbum*" of Vatican II. This Conciliar document changed the vision of Scripture which until then had prevailed in the Church. The most radical change was a new paradigm in the understanding of Divine Revelation, understood not as the mere communication of truths, but as a dialogue of friendship between God and humanity. This fundamental change revolutionized Catholic theology and pastoral life. The Council teaches:

*«In Sacred Scripture, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children and talks with them» (No. 21). «In this revelation, the invisible God (Col. 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17), moved by love, speaks to humans as friends (Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among them (Bar 3:33) so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself» (No. 2).*

From the heart of this Constitution was born Biblical Pastoral Life, considered today, not a pastoral ministry "*alongside other forms of pastoral life, but as Biblical Animation of all Pastoral life*" (Verbum Domini 73-75; 90-95; cf. Concluding Document Aparecida No. 248).

The Catholic Biblical Federation also had its origins in this same Constitution: On 16 April, 1969, Blessed Pope Paul VI established it in order to implement "*Dei Verbum*", and especially Chapter VI on "*Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church.*"

### Conclusion

With trust in God, the Merciful Father (2 Cor 1:3), we assume as Biblical Federation the challenges of *a new chapter in evangelization* (EG 1) in the context of a new era characterized by the immense wonders that humanity is discovering in God's creation, but where there is also present social exclusion, widespread violence, especially violence against women and children, the power of technology that paradoxically links us but also makes us more individualistic, the *feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures*, terrorism and fratricidal wars, mixed with religious elements, particularly in the Middle East.

In an act of solidarity with the sisters and brothers of the Churches of Nepal, following the recent earthquake that hit the country, a collection was taken up in the Christian tradition.

We invite all pastoral workers to serve as interpreters to all of the Word of God, previously *listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to* (EG 174).





## CBF Action Plan 2016 - 2021

***CBF Action Plan 2016 - 2021, approved by the Plenary Assembly  
18-23 June 2015 in Nemi (Italy)***

To better coordinate their activities and work together toward common goals, delegates from member institutions of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF), met at the Ninth Plenary Assembly in the city of Nemi (Italy) on 18-23 June 2015, at the end of which they approved the **"CBF 2016-2021 Action Plan"**.

As the CBF is an organization comprising autonomous institutions, this plan is not normative, but rather constitutes the reference framework for the activities of the institutions affiliated to the Catholic Biblical Federation within the different regions, subregions and zones.

Member institutions of the Catholic Biblical Federation are invited to consider this frame of reference when preparing their annual schedules and it is recommended that regions, subregions and zones develop their own short and long term action plans within this reference framework, so that we can, as a Federation, work towards common goals and further enhance our contribution to the development and strengthening of the biblical animation of the life and mission of our Church in accordance with the Constitution of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

Presented below [next page] is the outline and the detailed description of the main points of the **"CBF 2016-2021 Action Plan"** approved at the Ninth Plenary Assembly in the city of Nemi (Italy), 18-23 June 2015.

### 1. Coordination

One of the main purposes of the Catholic Biblical Federation is the coordination of objectives, strategies, activities and work of its members in order to achieve common goals. For this purpose, various levels of governance and administration have been created.

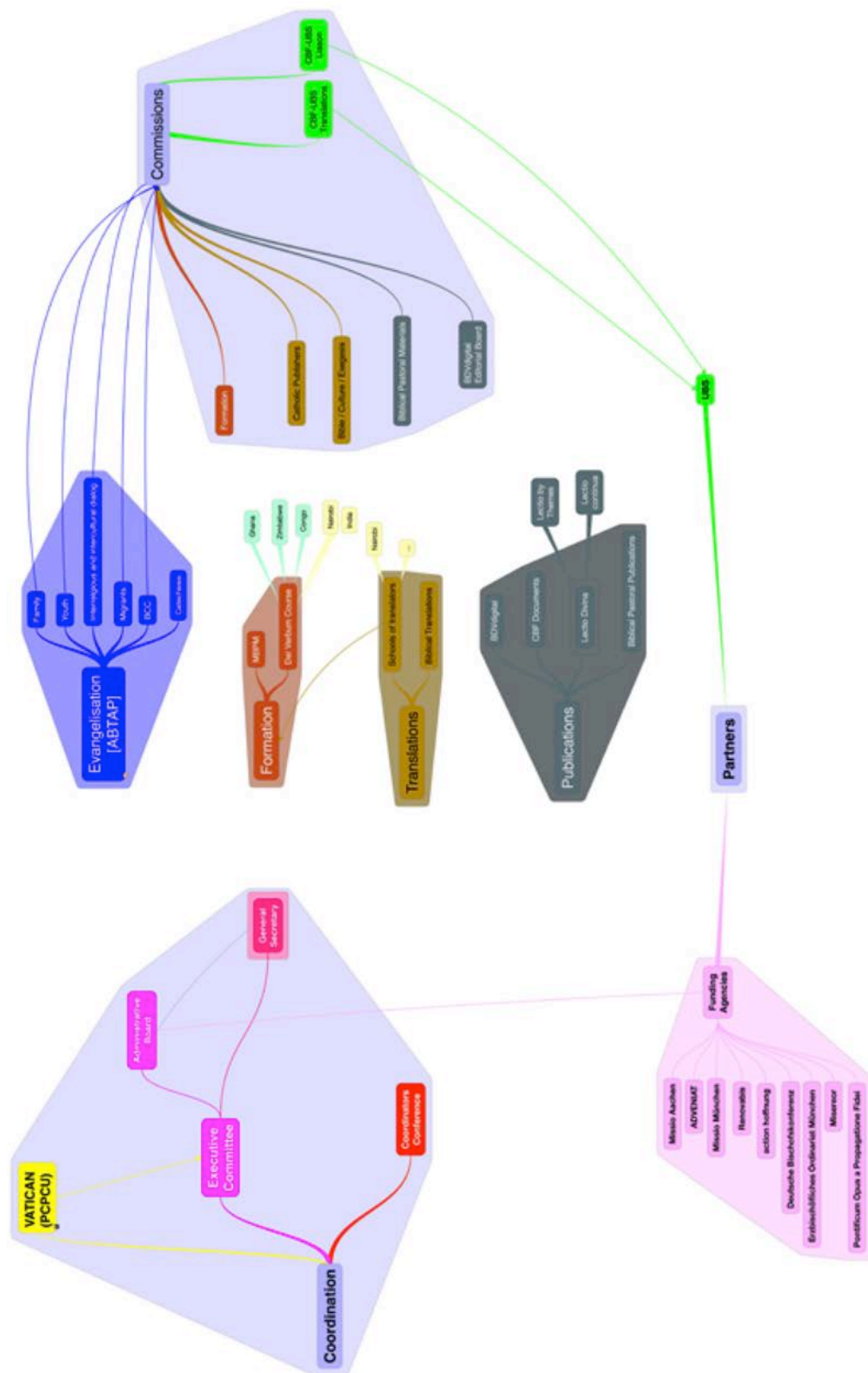
#### 1.1. Organs of Government and Administration

According to the Constitution of the Catholic Biblical Federation governing bodies are:

- The Plenary Assembly (Art. 17);
- The Executive Committee (Art. 23-32);
- The Administrative Board (Art. 33-40).



CBF Action Plan



Charged with the administration of the Catholic Biblical Federation and the coordination of its activities are the following:

- The Administrative Board;
- The General Secretary (Art. 49-55);
- Regional and Subregional Coordinators (Art. 63-70).

The powers of these constitutional organs of the Catholic Biblical Federation and their interdependencies and coordination are set out in the aforementioned articles of the Constitution of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

The CBF relates to the Vatican through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPU) (Art. 4) and it is the office of the PCPU through which all legal matters are processed with the Vatican and/or other internal bodies of the Church or international institutions.

## 1.2. Partners

In the development of its activities the Catholic Biblical Federation pursues dialogue and cooperation with various denominational, interfaith or civil agencies and institutions.

### 1.2.1. Biblical initiatives

The Constitution of the Catholic Biblical Federation invites and encourages its members to promote "*A constructive dialogue between scientific exegesis, theology and Biblical Pastoral Ministry, interconfessional and ecumenical cooperation in Biblical Pastoral Ministry*" (Art. 10.6).

In the field of ecumenical cooperation in Biblical Pastoral Ministry the natural partner is **United Bible Societies (UBS)**. To explore ways of cooperation and better coordinate joint and similar initiatives between the Catholic Biblical Federation and United Bible Societies the following commissions created in the context of the joint meeting of delegates in Rome at the end of 2013 are recognized and affirmed:

- CBF-UBS Liaison;
- CBF-UBS Biblical Translations Forum.

These spaces clearly do not exclude specific ecumenical cooperation initiatives undertaken by members of the Catholic Biblical Federation at the local, national or regional level, but rather will contribute to their better coordination and articulation.

### 1.2.2. Finance

The Catholic Biblical Federation is a non-profit association. Its income derives from membership fees, donations, earnings and grants. In order to finance the activities of its members the Federation maintains collaboration and has the support of the following institutions:

- ADVENIAT (Germany)
- Deutsche Bischofskonferenz (Germany)
- Erzbischöfliches Ordinariat München (Germany)
- Misereor (Germany)
- Missio Aachen (Germany)
- Missio München (Germany)
- Pontificium Opus to propagatione Fidei (Vatican)
- Renovabis (Germany)
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USA)

## 2. Evangelization

The emerging priority of the Ninth Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation held under the theme **"Sacred Scripture source of evangelization – 'What we have seen and heard we proclaim' (1 Jn 1,3)"** is the Bible in Evangelization. For the next six years the need is to intensify efforts to make the Bible truly the source and foundation of the life and mission of the Church.

### 2.1. Commissions (dimensions) of work

To meet this objective, 8 commissions corresponding to various dimensions of life and pastoral activity of the Church were created:

- Bible and evangelization;
- Bible and catechesis;
- Bible and family;
- Bible and youth;
- Bible and migration;
- Bible and charity;
- Bible in the formation of the laity;
- Bible and interreligious and intercultural dialogue;
- Bible and BCCs.

The purpose of these commissions is to provide a space for interregional and intercultural dialogue, reflection and production of materials in order to:

- contribute articles and training materials in each of these pastoral dimensions;
- facilitate dialogue between the biblical dimension and the other dimensions of the organic pastoral life of the Church for the development of a Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Life (VD 73; EG 174);
- create and promote biblical pastoral formation processes and spaces in each of these pastoral dimensions;
- prepare Lectio Divina materials that address these specific issues in order to offer them to different parish groups and ecclesial movements.



It is not intended to press all members of the Federation to work in each and every one of the commissions/dimensions but rather to create platforms and spaces to channel, unify and strengthen the activities already developed by various institutions in different regions, while facilitating and enhancing reflection, training and production of materials for the common benefit of all.

### 2.2. Work methodology

To launch this exciting new initiative within the CBF this will be done in several stages corresponding to the internal characteristics of each region:

1. Initially member institutions of the Catholic Biblical Federation will be invited to disseminate information among their members about the existence of these spaces and they will be invited to participate in the area that is of interest to them.



2. CBF Regional and Subregional Coordinators will closely accompany and facilitate the creation of these working groups and reflection within the region/subregion and/or within the various linguistic areas of the same region/subregion.
3. Once these groups are created a small coordinating committee will be established for each to help to avoid single-person coordination.
4. Each group will establish its own work dynamic. To avoid duplication and the incurring of additional costs virtual work methodology will be used using the space reserved for members on the website of the Federation (<http://www.c-b-f.org>), social networks and other spaces and electronic media.
5. With the assistance of the General Secretary of the Federation the Coordinators will help groups to establish contacts and exchange materials with similar groups in other regions/subregions or linguistic areas.
6. The group coordinators will submit a brief written report of the activity of the corresponding Regional/Subregional Committee to be included in the annual report of the Region/Subregion.

### 3. Training

Biblical formation at various levels and coordination in regions and zones is one of the main activities of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

Members of the Catholic Biblical Federation conduct various training activities at national and zonal level. During the Ninth Plenary Assembly the commitment of the members of the Federation in this field was reaffirmed.

The General Secretariat prepares, sponsors and promotes courses offered at the global, regional and zonal level. During the next six years the General Secretariat of the Catholic Biblical Federation will promote as a priority two training opportunities: An academic Masters Programme in Biblical Pastoral Ministry (MBPM) and a training course for biblical animators – the "Dei Verbum Course".

#### 3.1. MBPM

The Masters in Biblical Pastoral Ministry (MBPM), the vision of which originated during the tenure of the Acting General Secretary, Prof. Thomas Osborne in response to a request that came from Africa, is designed for incumbents or those interested in holding the post of Coordinator of the Department of Biblical Animation or Pastoral Ministry at the national or diocesan level or within a congregation or province/region of a religious congregation. The first stage of development of this training offer is under the responsibility of the *Luxembourg School of Religion and Society* in coordination with its academic partners in Kenya, under the patronage and in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the Catholic Biblical Federation. The General Secretary of the CBF is a member of the *Honorary Board of Trustees* of this project and the General Secretariat is assisting in seeking financing for the project and its promotion among members of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

In its first phase, the course will be offered through BICAM to member institutions of the Catholic Biblical Federation of the African continent.

In future years, when the programme is up and running, it is expected to spread to other regions, such as Asia and Latin America.

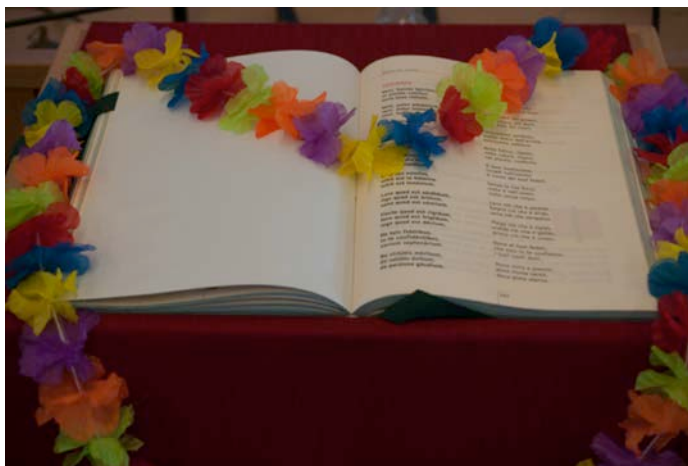
To enable the participation of more persons who might be interested in this kind of biblical training, the online distance option will be given preference when the definitive format for this degree is developed.

### 3.2. "Dei Verbum" Courses

After the suspension of the three-month "Dei Verbum" Course, conducted annually from 1987 in Nemi (Italy) as a joint initiative of the Biblical Catholic Federation and the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) there is an even more urgent need to provide the opportunity for training at the regional and zonal level of the Federation for future biblical animators in parishes and dioceses.

Similar courses, also called the "Dei Verbum" Course but with a reduced month-long programme, have already been introduced – at the initiative of biblical scholars and centres of biblical formation of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) – and have been ongoing for several years in some African countries: Zimbabwe, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Currently, with the authorization of the last Plenary Assembly of the CBF, and included in the 2016–2021 Action Plan, the General Secretary is taking steps to launch similar courses in other parts of Africa – East Africa (Kenya) and Francophone West Africa –, India, the Philippines and in at least three zones of Latin America. In its initial phase these initiatives have been launched within the General Secretary's own portfolio and without additional costs, but once up and running, for each one of these courses, in addition to the contribution of the participants financing for each of these will be sought by recourse to donor agencies and other sources of finance.



## 4. Bible Translations

Awareness of the need for more attention in the CBF to the area of Bible translations was brought to the Plenary Assembly of Nemi especially by delegates from Africa and Asia. Its impact was so powerful that it found its own place in the 2016–2021 Action Plan. So far two concrete initiatives have crystallized within this dimension:

### 4.1. CBF-UBS Biblical Translation Forum

The commission which was born in the CBF-UBS joint meeting held in Rome in October 2013 to seek to coordinate common initiatives for the International Year of the Family, aims to share, coordinate and, as far as possible, jointly carry out all CBF and UBS initiatives in the field of Bible translations.

This commission is formed of one delegate from each region from both parties. The meetings are scheduled on an annual basis between March and April to coincide with meetings of the Department of Bible Translations of United Bible Societies.

### 4.2. School(s) of Bible translators

This programme stems from the need for the Catholic Biblical Federation and the Catholic Church in general to pay more attention to the problem of Bible translations. So far there does not exist in the Catholic Church any training centre for persons specializing in Bible translations and coordination of new editions of the Bible in vernacular languages.

The programme initiated by the Catholic Biblical Federation starting with Africa is part of a larger project – African Bible Institute in Nairobi, Kenya – which is in the very early stage of development by SECAM through the Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM). The General Secretary of the CBF as ex officio member of BICAM and – being the only remaining member of the former "Africa Task Force" – trustee of the BICAM property in Nairobi, is indirectly involved

in the implementation of this project which seeks to create a centre for biblical formation with two departments:

- The Training Department – with the "Dei Verbum" Course as a main activity;
- The School of Bible Translators – with a view to preparing biblical translations by Catholics and/or make a more qualified contribution to ecumenical Bible translations carried out by the UBS.

In the next stages it is envisaged that similar centres will be established in the regions of the Federation where the need for formation of Bible translators is most urgent.

## 5. Publications

The CBF General Secretariat, learning from the negative experiences of the past, is presently not engaged in costly and risky publishing. Publishing initiatives will be channelled through a new platform – the Commission of Catholic Publishers, which is being promoted between publishers already affiliated to the Catholic Biblical Federation and other Catholic publishers involved in the field of distribution, dissemination and biblical animation.

The CBF General Secretariat continues to be responsible for the publication of the *Bulletin*, now named *BDVdigital*, and is promoting and intensifying the presence of the Catholic Biblical Federation on the Internet.

### 5.1. Commission of Catholic Publishers

To encourage and facilitate contacts between the various publishing houses operating in the Catholic world begun by publishers who are already affiliated with the CBF, the Commission of Catholic Publishers was established at the last Plenary Assembly in Nemi. The commission is still in its early stages of formation. The General Secretariat is responsible for promoting this Commission and inviting Catholic publishing houses from around the world to join the CBF and form part of it.

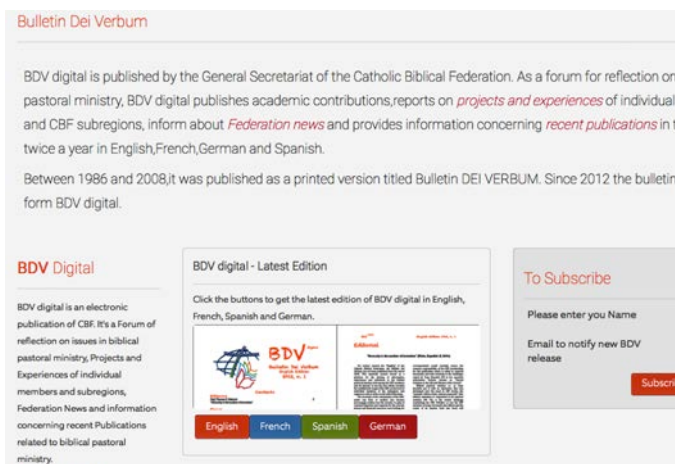
The agenda, responsibilities and work methodology will be defined once the commission is established, but the following initial objectives can be mentioned:

- coordination of policies, criteria, pricing strategies and distribution and sales of the Bible in its various Catholic editions and co-editions;
- participation of Catholic publishers in training and activity processes of Catholic Bible translators;
- participation of publishers in processes of formation and biblical animation in different regions/subregions and linguistic areas of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

### 5.2. BDVdigital

In 2008 the *"Dei Verbum" Bulletin* ceased publication in quarterly format. Four years later, in 2012, the Official Bulletin of the Catholic Biblical Federation edited by the General Secretariat was reactivated in digital format (PDF) with the name of *BDVdigital*.

At the meeting of the Editorial Board held before the Ninth Plenary Assembly the decision was taken to reduce the number of editions from four to two



issues a year along with an additional annual monographic issue.

The decision was also taken to create an "Expanded Editorial Committee" comprising one representative of each Region/Subregion of the Catholic Biblical Federation. These persons will be "correspondents" responsible for providing news from the Region/Subregion and for identifying authors and/or articles related to biblical animation for publishing in **BDVdigital**.

During the first quarter of the year, a meeting of the Expanded Editorial Board will take place to review and programme numbers of **BDVdigital**.

The costs of publishing **BDVdigital** are currently covered from the annual budget of the General Secretariat and include:

- translation of materials;
- cost of editing and layout;
- cost of the annual meeting of the Editorial Board.

A funding proposal that encompasses this publishing activity will be prepared for presentation to a Donor Agency or another body that may be willing to finance it.

The digitized archive of all issues published in print form of the *"Dei Verbum" Bulletin* along with the file and the latest numbers of **BDVdigital** have been made available publicly through the website of the Catholic Biblical Federation and may be consulted under this address:

<http://cbf.org/cbf-activities/publications/bdv-list>

### 5.3. Internet

The CBF is presently on the Internet through its website, a Facebook page and Twitter account.

#### 5.3.1. CBF website(s)

The address of the website of the Catholic Biblical Federation is [www.c-b-f.org](http://www.c-b-f.org). In 2014 a full modernization took place: the server was changed, the design was renovated, expanded services were offered by creating, for example, a private area for internal communication between members of the Federation.

The official relaunch of the site took place at Christmas 2014, but in fact the site is in a continuous process of improvement and expansion of content. The three main objectives of the website are:

- promotion of the Federation;
- information on the most important events in the life of the Federation and of the regions/subregions;
- communication between members of the Federation.

A financial plan is being prepared that covers all the costs of managing and maintaining the website for presentation to a Donor Agency or other body willing to finance it.

Members, delegates and coordinators of the Catholic Biblical Federation are invited and encouraged to make use of this communication space – especially by making more use of the "Members Area" – and to publicise the website and its contents widely.

The General Secretariat will also be encouraging and assisting the regions/subregions of the Catholic Biblical Federation to create and maintain their own spaces on the Internet (preferably as Wordpress blogs) linked to the official website of the Federation.

#### 5.3.2. Facebook

The official Facebook page of the Catholic Biblical Federation – <http://www.facebook.com/Cathbibfed> – was launched simultaneously with the new website of



the CBF. It aims to publicize the Catholic Biblical Federation among Facebook users and to publish attractive and timely information on all aspects of the life of the Federation and of the regions/subregions and activities of members. Additionally, in this space events and information relevant to the identity and activity of the Federation are published. The page is maintained by the General Secretariat and has a growing number of followers.

Members of the Federation are invited to link their own publicising spaces on the Internet to this space so as to convert it into a source of attractive and dynamic information about the life and activities of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

### 5.3.3. Twitter

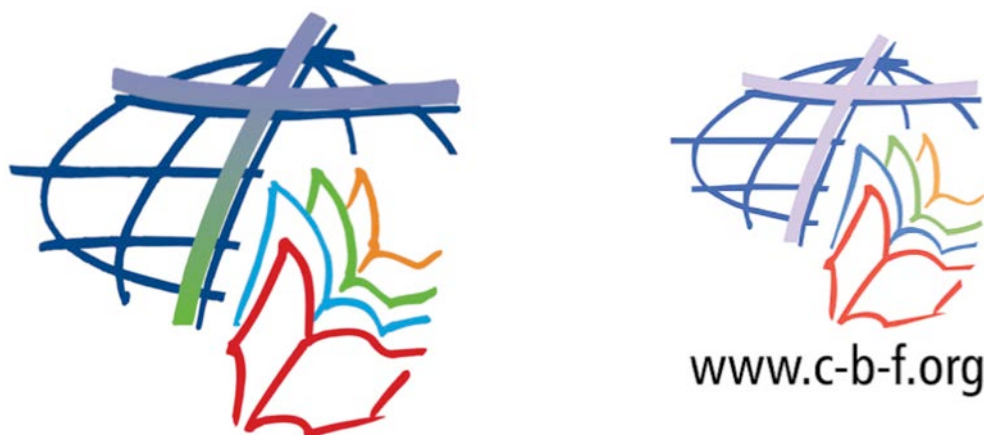
The presence of the Catholic Biblical Federation on Twitter – @cbf\_gensec – like the Facebook page, aims to promote the Federation and disseminate events and publications related to the identity and activity of the Federation.

The Twitter account is synchronized with the Facebook page and also has its own followers through Twitter.

### 5.4. The CBF Logo

One of the problems facing the Catholic Biblical Federation is its low public visibility. To make it more visible and known, the decision has been taken to undertake, from the General Secretariat, a process of unification of nomenclature and public symbols related to the CBF.

As the first and most important campaign for the unification of the image and promoting the public visibility of the Catholic Biblical Federation, all members are invited to use the official logo of the Federation in one of two formats:



The regions/subregions are invited to not create their own logos and/or discontinue using the logos already created and use the official logo of the CBF in all official correspondence and in their spaces on the Internet.

All full and associate members are invited to use the logo of the Catholic Biblical Federation in conjunction with the logo of the institution itself especially for events and publications related to or under the auspices of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

To prevent abuse and maintain control of the use of the logo each new use requires permission and written authorization of the General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

### Final considerations

As initially noted, because the Catholic Biblical Federation is an organization of autonomous institutions, this plan is not normative, but constitutes the reference framework for the activities of the member institutions of the CBF.

However, the visibility and effectiveness of the Federation and its contribution to the Church depend on the degree of unification of the objectives and actions of all its members. For this reason, the Regions, Subregions and Zones of the Catholic Biblical Federation, through their Coordinators and Regional Committees are specially invited to develop their own action plans with targets and more specific short and long-term goals within this framework.



*All pictures in this edition were taken at the IX Plenary Assembly, Nemi and are available at the CBF website (<http://www.c-b-f.org/gallery/ninth-plenary-nemi>).*

We would like to make our own and respond enthusiastically to the words addressed by Pope Francis in his private audience with the Ninth Plenary Assembly:

*The invitation to a special pastoral commitment to witness to the centrality of the Word of God in the Church's life, with a priority of the biblical animation of all pastoral Life continues to be important. We must ensure that in the ordinary activities of all Christian communities, parishes, associations and movements, we really take seriously the personal encounter with Christ who communicates with us through His word, because, as St. Jerome teaches us "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (Dei Verbum, 25).*

*The mission of the servants of the Word-bishops, priests, religious and laity is to promote and facilitate this encounter, which kindles faith and transforms life; for this reason I ask, on behalf of the whole Church, that you fulfil your mandate: in order that "the Lord's message may spread quickly, and be received with honour" (2 Thes 3:1) until the day of Christ Jesus.*

*May the "Handmaid of the Lord", who is blessed because she "has believed that the things that were spoken by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45), accompany you during these days, as he accompanied the disciples in the first community, so that you may be guided by the light and power of the Holy Spirit."*

## Papal Audience



Audience with Pope Francis on June 19 (Photo © L'Osservatore Romano)

### Address to the Holy Father

Most Holy Father,

In the name of the delegates to the Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation, I greet you with the “grace and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (I Cor 1:3). We thank you for granting us this audience as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of *Dei Verbum* and explore ways of announcing the Word of God to our brothers and sisters in our present time, with its tragedies, contradictions, opportunities and hopes. We thank you in a special way for the new encyclical on creation, our common home. We pray that it may awaken in all peoples the responsibility to care for and develop the earth so that the poor may experience it as the home of the merciful and just God.

From the beginning of your Petrine ministry you have been reminding the Church to rediscover her missionary heart. The Church truly lives by going out of herself. The Church grows old and weak when she focuses on herself. We remember Jesus who sent his disciples on mission with the instruction not to carry gold, silver or money, neither purses, tunics or a staff (Matthew 10:9-10). They must carry only the Word of God, the good news that God’s reign is near. With this announcement, the reign of God breaks forth with conversion, the healing of the sick, the rising to life of the dead, the cleansing of those with leprosy and the casting out of evil spirits (Matthew 10:7-8). Holy Father, please remind us to bring the Word of God as we go out on mission. We bring so many things, gadgets, theories and plans but sometimes forget the Word of God.

The more we bring the Word of God to other people, the more we realize that the Word of God is not a thing or an object that we carry in our hand or lips. In fact it is the Word of God, living and incarnate in Jesus Christ that sends us or carries us where He wants to go, where he wants to be heard, to heal and to give hope. This is a great challenge for us: to allow the Word of God to carry us, to determine our pastoral priorities and approaches, to shape our lifestyle and attitudes, to bring mercy, love and hope.

Holy Father, please pray for the members and collaborators of the Catholic Biblical Federation and all who serve in the biblical apostolate in all parts of the world. Please pray that we may not only carry the Word of God as we go out to the world, but that the Word of God may carry us. May the Word of God find us light and docile! We promise to pray for you and your ministry of the Word as we ask for your apostolic blessing. Thank you very much.

+ Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle

## ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

### TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION (CBF)

Consistory Hall

Friday, 19 June 2015

I welcome everyone. I thank Cardinal Tagle for his words; he has led me to digress somewhat from what has been prepared... They are God's surprises, which help us to realize that all our plans, all our thoughts and so many things, before the living Word of God, the living Word, of the Living God, fall. They fall, they crumble. When a Church closes in on herself and forgets that she has been sent, that she has been dispatched to proclaim the Gospel, that is, the Good News, to move hearts with Kerygma – well said by the Cardinal – she grows old. Another thing the Cardinal said: she becomes weak. And I would also add two things: she gets sick and she dies.

I have heard it said, so many times, when speaking about the dioceses that were in North Africa in the time of St Augustine: they are dead Churches. No! There are two ways, two manners to die: either to die closed in on oneself or to die by giving one's life in witness. And a Church that has the courage – the *parrhesia* – to bring forth the Word of God and is not ashamed is on the path of martyrdom.

Today, in the First Reading of the Mass, we heard Paul who recounted the things he had suffered, from the perspective of "boasting": "They boast; I can also boast of what I have done" (cf. 2 Cor 11:21). This is the framework. But this man [St Paul], had he stayed there, in one of the Churches – such as that of Corinth – and only in that one, he would not have suffered all that he speaks of. Why? Because he was a man who went forth. When he saw that things were going well, he lay hands on another and went away. He is a model.

At the end he has this beautiful phrase, "to boast", after I boast of this, of so many journeys, of countless beatings, of a stoning... all of this... "But if I must boast" – today he said in that passage – "I will boast of the things that show my weakness" (cf. 2 Cor 11:30). In another passage – you biblicists know it – he says: "I will boast of my sins" (cf. 2 Cor 12:9). Paul's third source of pride is not vanity: "My glory is the Cross of Jesus" (cf. Gal 6:14). This is his strength. And this is a Church that goes forth, a "martyrial" Church. She is a Church that goes on the road, that journeys. And what happens is what can happen to every person who goes on the road: an accident... But I prefer a Church injured in an accident to a Church sick from being closed in on herself. With that *parrhesia* and that *hypomone*; that patience of bearing situations on one's shoulders, but also the tenderness of carrying on one's shoulders the wounded faithful, who have been consigned to her. A pastoral Church. Only the Word of God and, alongside the Word, the Eucharist. Brothers and Sisters who gather to praise the Lord precisely with the weakness of the bread and wine, of the Lord's Body, of the Lord's Blood.



The Word of God is not something that makes life easy. No, no. It always leads us to difficulty! If we carry it with sincerity, it leads to difficulty, it leads to embarrassment so often. But we must speak the truth, with tenderness, by bearing on our shoulders situations, people. It can be regarded as fraternal respect which is able “to caress”.

I thank the new President for his words. I thank all of you for the work that you do at the service of the Word of God.

One little *excursus*: one of the things that really concerns me is the act of proclaiming of the Word of God in homilies. Please, do everything you can to help your brothers – deacons, priests and bishops – to give the Word of God in homilies, so that it may touch the heart. Touched by a thought, an image, a feeling, but by the Word of God! So many are capable, but make mistakes and have a nice conference, a good dissertation, a fine school of theology... The Word of God is sacramental! According to Luther it is a sacrament which acts practically *ex opere operato*. Then the trend is somewhat Tridentine, it is that of *ex opere operantis*; and then theologians found that the Word of God is in between: part *ex opere operato*, part *ex opere operantis*. It is sacramental. Speeches are not sacramental, they are discourses which do good. But homilies should have the Word of God, so that it may touch the heart!

Thank you! Thank you for your work.

What was written here [in the prepared address], which is good, I shall consign to the President.



(Photo: L'Osservatore Romano)

### ***Address prepared by the Holy Father***

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you and greet you with the words of St Paul to the Christians of Philippi: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you... for your partnership in the gospel” (Phil 1:2-5).

I sincerely thank Cardinal Tagle, the new President, for the words of greeting he addressed to me also on behalf of all of you. I express gratitude to Archbishop Paglia for the service he has rendered to the Federation in these years.

You chose as the motto of this Tenth Plenary Assembly a passage from the First Letter of John: “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you” (1 Jn 1:3). In order to be able to proclaim the word of truth, we ourselves have to have experienced the Word: to have listened to it, contemplated it, practically touched it with our own hands... (cf. 1 Jn 1:1). Christians, who are “God’s own people, that [you] may declare the wonderful deeds of him” (1 Pet 2:9), must first of all, as recommended by the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, venerate, read, listen to, proclaim, preach, study and spread the Word of God (cf. n. 25).

The Church, which proclaims the Word every day, receiving from it nourishment and inspiration, renders herself the beneficiary and excellent witness of that force and power intrinsic to the very Word of God (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 21). It is neither us, nor our efforts, but it is the Holy Spirit who works through those who dedicate themselves to the apostolate, and who works in the listeners as well, predisposing one and the other to hear the Word proclaimed and receive the message of life.

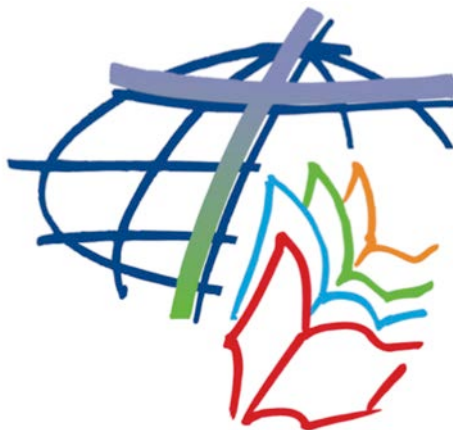
On the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, it seems very fitting that you should dedicate your Plenary Assembly to reflection on Sacred Scripture, the source of evangelization. St John Paul II, in 1986, invited you to carry out a careful rereading of the *Dei Verbum*, applying its principles and putting its recommendations into practice. Surely the Synod of Bishops in 2008 on The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church offered another important occasion to reflect on its implementation. Today too, I would like to invite you to carry this work forward, always enhancing the wealth of the Conciliar Constitution, as well as the subsequent Magisterium, while you communicate the “joy of the Gospel” to the farthest ends of the earth, in obedience to the missionary mandate. “The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized. It is indispensable that the word of God ‘be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity’” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 174).

However, there are places in which the Word of God has not yet been proclaimed or, although proclaimed, has not been accepted as the Word of salvation. There are places where the Word of God is drained of its authority. The lack of support and force of the Word leads to a weakening of Christian communities of long established tradition and slows the spiritual growth and missionary fervour of young Churches. We are all responsible should “the message run the risk of losing its freshness and cease to have ‘the fragrance of the Gospel’” (cf. *ibid.*, n. 39). Therefore, there is an open invitation to exercise an intense commitment to ensure the central role of the Word of God in ecclesial life, by promoting biblical reading throughout the pastoral ministry. We must ensure that in the usual activities of every Christian community, in parishes, in associations and movements, there actually be at heart the personal encounter with Christ who communicates himself to us in his Word, because, as St Jerome teaches us, “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 25).

The mission of the servants of the Word – bishops, priests, religious and lay people – is that of promoting and fostering this encounter, which arouses faith and transforms life; therefore I pray, on behalf of the entire Church, that you may bring to fruition your mandate: to ensure “that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph” (2 Thes 3:1), until the day of Christ Jesus.

May the “Handmaiden of the Lord”, who is blessed because she “believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken” (Lk 1:45), accompany you in these days as she accompanied the disciples in the first community, so that you may be guided by the light and the power of the Holy Spirit.

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## Conferences

## Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Dei Verbum* Some Paths and Challenges for the Future

CBF Plenary Assembly, Nemi, Italy, June 21, 2015

LUIS ANTONIO G. CARDINAL TAGLE \*

Dear Friends in the Catholic Biblical Federation,

Once again I would like to thank you for showing great trust in having me as the President of the Catholic Biblical Federation. This is the first time I am attending a CBF meeting. I am neither a representative of any member organization nor an expert in the Bible. But I have been brought into the “boat” of the CBF as I am. With you I hope to grow in the service of the Word of God.

Allow me to share a few thoughts on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the promulgation of *Dei Verbum* and some directions that the CBF could take in the coming years.



### Celebrating *Dei Verbum* (1965)

One way of celebrating the gift of *Dei Verbum* (DV), the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council, given to the Church 50 years ago, is by looking hard and long at how it has reshaped our approach to the Word of God in the Bible and in Tradition. Fundamental is the teaching of DV 2 that by revelation the deepest truth about God and our salvation is made clear to us. We can ask: how have we grown in these two aspects of Christian life – namely, familiarity with God and participating in God’s saving action? But we can add other queries as though we are engaging in an examination of conscience or consciousness:

1) Have Scriptures provided the supreme rule of faith, together with sacred Tradition (DV 21)? 2) Has the Bible become easily accessible to the faithful (DV 22)? 3) Have the faithful been fed and nourished by the preaching of the Word (DV 23)? 4) Have biblical scholars become more energetic and loyal to the mind of the Church (DV 23)? 5) Has the Word of God been the foundation of sacred theology (DV 24)? 6) Have the clergy and pastoral workers become more diligent

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in their reading, study and praying of the Word of God (DV25)? 7) Have bishops been dynamic in giving instructions to the faithful on the proper use of the Bible (DV 25)? 8) Have suitable editions of Sacred Scripture been prepared and adapted to the situation of non-Christians (DV 26)?

These few questions should be answered by the local Churches for us to see the fruits of *Dei Verbum* in the Church over the past fifty years and where it still needs to be received and implemented.

### The gift of *Verbum Domini* (2010)

One of the most significant “receptions” of *Dei Verbum* happened at the Twelfth Ordinary Synod of Bishops held in 2008 on the theme The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. The fruit of the event was Pope Benedict XVI’s post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (VD), published in 2010. A rather faithful presentation of the many topics and concerns discussed in the Synod, *Verbum Domini* could serve as a guide on how we are called to push the pastoral agenda of *Dei Verbum* in our time. The contribution of the Catholic Biblical Federation to the translation of the Bible in various languages and their diffusion is mentioned in VD paragraph 115. But we should ask: Has *Verbum Domini* been studied and implemented sufficiently in the local Churches? I strongly suggest that this precious document be brought to the consciousness of pastors and faithful alike.

### Looking to the Future

The directions and challenges for the future that I would point out are inspired mainly the statement in *Verbum Domini* 73: “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. This does not mean adding a meeting here or there in parishes or dioceses, but rather of examining the ordinary activities of Christian communities, in parishes, associations and movements, to see if they are truly concerned with fostering a personal encounter



with Christ, who gives himself to us in his word.” I consider this paragraph one of the most stimulating in the whole document. It calls for a rethinking and reorganization of pastoral approaches and offices. The so-called biblical apostolate is not one ministry or office among many others but that which makes the Word of God the animating force of all other services in the Church. The CBF could help visualize this proposal of VD and offer

models of making it a reality. It definitely would require a re-imaging of pastoral life. Indispensable to achieve this is the full communication and collaboration between pastors, lay pastoral workers, catechists, educators, basic communities, exegetes etc. In this vision, the Word of God ceases to be an after-thought or a posterior justification for a pastoral plan already formulated without its input. On the contrary, the Word of God indicates for the Church a pastoral response to a given situation.



Allow me now to enumerate some areas where we can start responding according to the direction given by VD 73.

1. In response to Pope Francis' latest encyclical *Laudato Si'*, caring for the earth our common home, we need to articulate a biblically based vision of the earth or nature as creation, as well as a biblically inspired spirituality of stewardship. I suggest that biblical studies on creation should go beyond the book of Genesis and profit more from the new creation brought about by the total Christ-event, the action of the Holy Spirit, the "creation" of the community of the Church and the eschatological new heavens and new earth. The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences just published a study on ecology and stewardship, heavy on biblical-pastoral points, as well as what the ancient religions of Asia say about the theme. Similar efforts in other regions could be shared with the CBF secretariat for worldwide dissemination.
2. A biblical-pastoral programme on how to "make sense" of suffering, sickness, injustice, abuse, victimization, disabilities, etc. These are not just human conditions needing a Christian response. These same conditions put God at the centre of human questioning. Can our local CBF members initiate a programme to train emotional first aid givers, disaster responders, counsellors, ministers in prison, and social workers in shelters for abused women and children in providing biblically adequate responses to the questions these people ask? Many stories of conversion and encouragement came from former prisoners and victims of natural disasters who received booklets containing bible stories and quotations appropriate to their condition. A particular phenomenon is that of forced migration due to poverty, conflicts and environmental degradation. A solid biblical study of movements of people could help the Christian migrants and refugees find resources of hope in their sad situation. It could also guide the Churches in receiving and integrating displaced peoples in their midst. In many occasions forced migration becomes an "unplanned" but providential missionary movement when the Word of God accompanies the migrants and their co-journeymen.
3. Pope Francis declared a Holy Year of Mercy to begin on December 8, 2015, and to close in November 2016. In coordination with the many groups that would surely be mobilized for the events of the Holy Year our local CBF members could contribute biblical studies on mercy. The faithful and pastors must realize that mercy is not just a feeling but the very face of God in the Bible (as contrasted to God's metaphysical attributes). The corruption, greed, injustice, violence and various forms of dehumanization besetting the world are all acts of mercilessness that need the response of the God of mercy who promises justice. We especially need solid biblically based reflections and programmes on the relationship between mercy and justice in God.
4. With the alarming phenomenon of economic growth that is not enjoyed by the majority of people in many countries, even politicians and business people call for a serious study of how to achieve inclusive growth. Sociological, financial and political policies fall short in addressing the growing inequality within nations and between nations. A moral vision of how to use the goods of the earth, of what a good life is, of sharing and giving and of brotherhood/sisterhood is badly needed. Our local CBF members can craft a programme that could share to policy makers and business movers the wisdom of the Bible in order to help in our common search for economic growth that does not exclude anyone. The Creator desires that everyone benefit from the goods of the earth.
5. The Synod of Bishops on the Family will open in October 2015. The *instrumentum laboris* talks about the Gospel of the Family. In preparation for the Synod it would be worthwhile to provide pastors and pastoral workers an overview of the family in the Bible, without hiding the complexity and ambiguities. This could be of use even after the Synod. Many people ask difficult questions: what does the Word of God say about contraception, divorce and remarriage, same-sex unions, indissolubility, etc. What we hear often are moral and canonical discourses that call for inspiration from the written Word of God.

6. A biblically inspired ministry to the youth is most exciting for various reasons. To single out a characteristic of most of our youth of today, we realize that they are digital natives, as opposed to those of my generation who are considered digital migrants. The youth think, understand and absorb differently due to their digital upbringing. How do we educate and form them in the faith? Are bible lessons available through video games? Would MTV or rap music be more effective vehicles of the biblical formation for contemporary youth?
7. From Blessed Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii nuntiandi* up to Pope Francis' *Evangelii gaudium* the role of popular piety or popular religiosity or popular mysticism in evangelization has been widely recognized. Popular piety is nurtured and spread by laypeople, mostly from the poor sectors of the Church. Their various forms, often with ambiguous elements, could even be considered bearers of the *sensus fidelium*. One big challenge is how to inspire popular piety with the Bible and catechesis.
8. In recent years there has been a growing effort to explore effective evangelization in and of big metropolitan centres. Most of the people of the world now live in urban settings. Former agricultural villages give way to the expansion of cities. We now hear of the phenomenon of the megapolis. Urban centres set trends in the arts, music, food, fashion, business and almost all aspects of contemporary life. But the same cities are like deserts of poverty, anonymity, criminality, drugs, prostitution, human trafficking, homelessness, unemployment. Valiant efforts at evangelization already exist. Our local CBF members could contribute to vibrant evangelization suited to the realities of urban life. Let me give an example: most of the biblical parables and images come from the rural settings that are not part of the daily life of urban residents. People in big cities see illuminated advertisement rather than the sun, the moon and the stars; they see fish in cans rather than in rivers and seas. How do can the parables speak to city dwellers? Can we also articulate the theological and spiritual truth about cities in the Bible like Babel and Jerusalem?
9. In *Ecclesia in Asia* 22, Saint Pope John Paul II said, "The Synod Fathers urged that (the Bible) be made the basis for all missionary proclamation, catechesis, preaching and styles of spirituality." He encouraged or maybe even commissioned the pastors, experts and pastoral workers in Asia to examine how biblical and catechetical formation could adopt a pedagogy that is akin to the sensibilities, cultures and realities of Asian peoples. I suppose this directive appears similarly in the other continental synods held to prepare for the Great Jubilee of 2000. Have we studied how this has been accomplished and continues to be fulfilled? The CBF members could share with one another the initiatives present in their respective countries.
10. We need to face the unfortunate situations where Christians are forbidden from proclaiming, printing and disseminating God's word. In faith we know there is no chaining the Word of God. But we need to sustain those who are silenced on account of the Word and to prepare ourselves on how to spread the Word when it could not be spoken. Even where the Word could be uttered or whispered, one could not help but feel like a voice crying out in the wilderness. One's voice is swallowed up in the vast emptiness of contemporary deserts. Yet we believe that God hears our voice proclaiming God's word. And God will continue speaking even when we could no longer speak.



## From *Dei Verbum* to *Evangelii Gaudium*: Familiarity with the Word of God

NURIA CALDUCH-BENAGES\*

At first glance the title of my presentation may seem a bit ambitious, as between the publication of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, fruit of the II Vatican Council (1965), and the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) of Pope Francis almost fifty years have gone by in which society and the Church have undergone very significant changes. Thankfully there is also a subtitle, which serves to limit the field of study and focus the subject, perspective, text or discussion to be addressed in depth. In this case the subtitle reads as follows: "Familiarity with God's Word," because I think that this is the basic objective not only of these two documents but of another that comes between them and which is of great importance for the life of our Federation. Obviously I am referring to the post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*. I start my reflections based on the reading of this document and my experience as an expert during the Synod of the Word (2008).

Forty five years later *Verbum Domini* takes up the same message of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II, considered by many as the most important document of the Council since it touches on the fundamentals of the faith of the Church: The Word of God, its revelation and its transmission through the living tradition and Sacred Scripture. Who does not remember the beginning of the famous oft quoted Article 22: "Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful." Over time, enthusiasm for the Word of God highlighted at the Council has diminished because of routine, indifference and neglect, which has generated various distortions (spiritualism, scientism) and misinterpretations (fundamentalisms) among the faithful. *Verbum Domini* sought to fill this gap in the life of the people of God, by (re)establishing the Word of God at the centre of the life and mission of the Church. In its introduction, Benedict stresses its principal objective: "I wish to point out certain fundamental approaches to a rediscovery of God's word in the life of the Church as a wellspring of constant renewal. At the same time I express my hope that the word will be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity."

One of the issues which awakened most interest in the Synod and which the Exhortation addressed extensively is the hermeneutical question, i.e. the interpretation or exegesis of the Bible in the Church, and especially that which is done in academic circles. I remember when the issue was addressed at the Synod on October 14, 2008, Benedict XVI, to the astonishment of all participants, took the floor and intervened in the debate (the first time in history that this had happened): "Where exegesis is not theology, Scripture cannot be the soul of theology, and converse-



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ly, where theology is not essentially the interpretation of Scripture in the Church, this theology no longer has a foundation", thus clarifying a latent issue in the post-council period.

In the *Verbum Domini* Exhortation the hermeneutical question occupies approximately 40 pages under the title "The hermeneutics of Sacred Scripture in the Church." In this section of the document – difficult reading for those unfamiliar with biblical-theological language – Benedict XVI addresses a number of issues of concern to him and in particular: the theological dimension of the biblical texts, the harmony between faith and reason, the relationship between biblical research and the Magisterium, dualism and secularized hermeneutics as dangers to avoid, the literal sense and the spiritual sense of the Scripture, the need to transcend the "letter" of the text, the intrinsic unity of the Bible, the Christian reading of the Old Testament, among others. While we cannot cover all the issues mentioned, we will now just discuss three but not before underlining the fundamental criterion of biblical hermeneutics, at the heart of the reflections of Benedict XVI: "the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church" (*Verbum Domini*, 29). Later, citing the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993), he affirms that "access to a proper understanding of biblical texts is only granted to the person who has an affinity with what the text is saying" (*Verbum Domini*, 30). It is worth remembering that at the 2008 Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church animated discussions took place around the theme of hermeneutics: How can Scripture be read, interpreted and celebrated in the Church as the Word of God always valid and current? The context of biblical hermeneutics is, therefore, the Church's faith. Let us now turn to the three selected topics.



### Fundamentalism and ignorance of the Bible

There was much discussion at the Synod on biblical fundamentalism among movements that are increasingly numerous and flourishing in the five continents, including within Catholicism (cf. *Propositions* 46 and 47). Fundamentalism promises immediate access to the truth of faith by an immediate encounter with Scripture. We insist on the adjective *immediate*, i.e. without mediation. Very enlightening are the observations of the theologian and exegete Thomas Söding at a recent international conference on *Verbum Domini*, held in Rome from 1 to 4 December 2010. In his opinion, in practice fundamentalism is characterized by a triple *for* and a triple *against*: it is *anti-Catholic*, because it denies any interpretative competence to the Magisterium; It is *anti-academic*, because it turns its back on biblical science; and it is *anti-modern*, because it seeks to immunize the Bible from human criticism. Through this triple "no", it seeks to produce a triple effect: to make the Bible known as the book of life, to understand the simple message of the Bible and to establish the truth of the Gospel. The dilemma of fundamentalism is, in fact, how to combine the triple "no" with the triple "yes".



The fundamentalist reading of the Bible harks back to the time of the Reformation and is born of a concern for fidelity to the literal meaning of Scripture. It consists of a reading taken strictly word for word, in which absolute value is attributed, completely ignoring the history of the sacred text and the tradition of the people of God and of the Church. Let us recall the definition of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Section I.F): "Fundamentalist interpretation starts from the principle that the Bible, being the word of God, inspired and free from error, should be read and interpreted literally in all its details. But by 'literal interpretation' it understands a naively literalist interpretation, one, that is to say, which excludes every effort at understanding the Bible that takes account of its historical origins and development. It is opposed, therefore, to the use of the historical-critical method, as indeed to the use of any other scientific method for the interpretation of Scripture." Benedict XVI refers to this when he criticises subjective and arbitrary interpretations of this erroneous approach to the Bible: "The 'literalism' championed by the fundamentalist approach actually represents a betrayal of both the literal and the spiritual sense, and opens the way to various forms of manipulation, as, for example, by disseminating anti-ecclesial interpretations of the Scriptures" (*Verbum Domini*, 44).

On the other hand, among many of the faithful there is a notable ignorance of the Bible which in some cases translates into indifference or confusion of ideas. If we ask for the reasons for this widespread ignorance of the Bible we undoubtedly find a wide range of possible reasons: lack of interest, poor training, lack of initiatives on the part of parishes, religious communities and associations, the influence of the secularist and consumerist environment that fosters relativism and religious indifference, the multiple worldly pressures and the daily rush that stifle the spirit ... not to mention the lack of Bible aids that hinders the use of the text of the bible, its translation and dissemination in many regions of the world. I recall, for example, the intervention at the Synod by the Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria, Msgr. John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, who said that access to the Bible itself can be a problem in many parts of Africa, where its cost may be equivalent to a month's salary. We must also note the language problem, since there are still no adequate translations of the Bible in many local languages. The same problem affects Oceania where there is a total of more than 1,200 completely distinct languages: in Papua New Guinea alone, for example, 847 different languages are spoken.

How to reduce the gap between the faithful and the Bible? There is no easy answer, for although its message of life and salvation is universal and always current, the Bible is still a book of the past with difficult issues hard to understand. We have to prepare people's minds (biblical formation) and hearts (spiritual formation) to enable them to transform themselves by his Word. In it everyone can encounter Christ, can hear, see, touch and contemplate Him. Hence the invitation of Benedict XVI to a greater biblical apostolate, or better yet, the biblical animation of all pastoral life. Bible study in small communities, the practice of *lectio divina*, the formation of catechists and the acknowledgement of "feminine genius" in biblical studies (a completely new idea never before mentioned in synod documents) are some of the proposals accompanying the desire that that every household have its own Bible.

### Exegesis and theology in dialogue

"The tensions between the ecclesial Magisterium and academic theology" was the first of the burning topics that Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet raised in his intervention. Referring to *Dei Verbum*, which speaks of the delicate balance between Tradition, Scripture and the Magisterium, Ouellet had stated that "due to the existence of some tensions, it is necessary to continue reflecting on fundamental questions that determine the way to read Scripture, to interpret it and to use it profitably for the life and mission of the Church." The Synod Fathers' responses to this request were quite varied. Some stressed the importance of the Magisterium, others accused historical-critical exegesis of creating confusion among the faithful and also there was one intervention warmly applauded by experts present (we almost rose to our feet to applaud!) for its recognition of the valid contributions of the historical-critical method and dedicated work of exegetes so often misunderstood and criticized.

When *Verbum Domini* speaks of biblical studies and progress made in this field, it mentions the contribution made by the historical-critical method while warning against a "dualism" between exegesis and theology. On the one hand, it warns that an exegesis that is limited to the historical-critical method risks becoming a "secularized" exegesis reducing everything to the human element extending even to denying "the historicity of the divine elements"; on the other hand, a theology that "tends towards a spiritualization of the meaning of the Scriptures would fail to respect the historical character of revelation." Benedict XVI calls for the unity of the two levels of interpretation, that is, the historical-critical and theological, as "Unfortunately, a sterile separation sometimes creates a barrier between exegesis and theology, and this 'occurs even at the highest academic levels'" (*Verbum Domini*, 35). The unity of the two mentioned interpretative levels ultimately presupposes the harmony (the correct relationship) between faith and reason, so that faith never degenerates into fideism with the consequences of a fundamentalist reading of the Bible (*Verbum Domini*, 36).



The document warns, in my view, of a certain mistrust or caution regarding the historical-critical method and an excessively manifested tendency to favour canonical or theological exegesis (reading), which may seem the only solution to the problems of interpretation. Benedict XVI himself says in the preface to his book *Jesus of Nazareth*: "I have sought only to go beyond mere historical-critical interpretation, applying the new methodological criteria that allow us to make a properly theological interpretation of the Bible that naturally requires faith, without thereby wanting or being able

in any way to renounce historical seriousness." In technical language, this type of reading is called a "canonical approach" and consists of interpreting the text taking into account the intrinsic unity of all Scripture (cf. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* section I.C.1). Like any other method or exegetical approach, canonical exegesis is not without its limitations, although currently many scholars seem to ignore these. I mention just a few: canonical exegesis runs the risk of making a superficial, uncritical and overly pious reading of the text; too often it tends to present too easily and simply the process and criteria for the formation of the canon, issues very complex in themselves; it attaches great importance to the canon, which could reinforce the misconception that Christianity is a religion of the book...

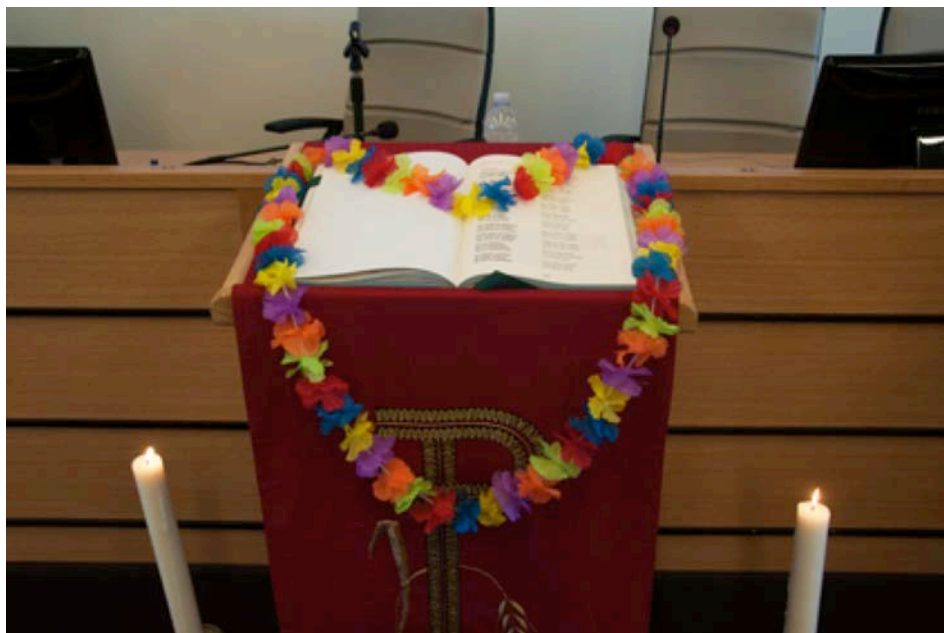
Benedict XVI's misgivings regarding the direction being taken by Catholic exegesis was evident in the preface to his aforementioned book: "I hope that the reader understands that this book is not written against the modern exegesis...". The same attitude emerges in the Apostolic Exhortation, when, in citing the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, the Pope recalled that "Catholic exegetes must never forget that what they are interpreting is the Word of God. Their common task is not finished when they have simply determined sources, defined forms or explained literary procedures. They arrive at the true goal of their work only when they have explained the meaning of the biblical text as God's word for today" (*Verbum Domini*, 33).

Today the historical-critical method doesn't get good press. According to Thomas Söding, "historical-critical exegesis is necessary but not sufficient, [...] it cannot be ignored, but it must be surpassed" (c.f. his intervention *Do exegesis like theology, do theology like exegesis. A necessary*

*and complex relationship*, at the conference cited above). I share his basic idea reflected in the title of his presentation, but I am not convinced by the formulation cited above in terms of insufficiency and being surpassed.

In my view, the polarity of the "exegetical process and the believing hermeneutic," should not be understood as opposed (in the Synod terms were used such as "divorce" and "dichotomy") but rather as a reciprocal relationship and dialogue, in continuous movement and oscillations from one side to the other depending on historical evolution. Exegesis of Sacred Scriptures, rigorously historical and literary, is often conducted within a context of faith that involves an ecclesial understanding of the Bible and its texts, either in the present or in past history. Regarding the believing hermeneutic, it is conducted very often using methodologies applied systematically and accompanied by a profound critical reflection. However, in both environments it is not uncommon to find opposing positions, which have become sharper in recent years.

If, on the one hand, it is true that an overly technical exegesis is incomprehensible to most Christians (the main recipients of the Bible), on the other hand, it is also true that a simplistic or superficial exegesis not only fails to contribute to nourishing Christian faith but also can lead to a fundamentalist reading of Scripture. Moreover, as aptly pointed out by Jean Louis Ska, not all exegetes are good specialists and good disseminators. We must work together. Pastors, preachers, teachers, pastoralists and catechists should be properly trained and consult the work of the exegetes. The latter, in turn, must not forget that they belong to a believing community in which they are called to bear witness to their faith. Each group, with different roles, is at the service of the faith of the People of God.



### **The dark pages of the Bible**

In response to a concern expressed at the Synod and in the context of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, *Verbum Domini* devotes its Art. 42 to the theme of "those passages in the Bible which, due to the violence and immorality they occasionally contain prove obscure and difficult." In fact, Christians do not normally go to the Old Testament because its reading and comprehension are difficult and they also fail to discover the relevance of these texts in their lives. Many passages in the Old Testament are totally unknown and others are indecipherable for most. In general, preachers avoid commenting on the readings from the Old Testament that the liturgy offers regularly, focusing on the Gospel or on other New Testament texts because they are more familiar, easier to explain and apply to the daily life of the faithful. In short, there are many obstacles that stand between today's reader and the Old Testament. How-



ever, the most difficult to overcome are those that directly relate to the content: scenes of divine and human violence, the amorality of certain important biblical characters and an inadequate theology about the afterlife. Let us focus on the first two questions.

Violence is present in our world and in current literature, as it was also present in antiquity and in its literary works. The Bible is no exception. One of the most critical problems that the reader of the Old Testament encounters is how to understand the harshness that God displays in some passages, especially in the Deuteronomic history, and how to understand the violence perpetrated against women in episodes as shocking as the story of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 13), the virgin daughter of Gibeah and the Levite's concubine (Judges 19) or the story of Tamar (2 Sam 13).

Several episodes of Deuteronomy, Joshua, and the first book of Samuel recount a practice according to which conquered cities had to be "consecrated for extermination", i.e., they had to be completely destroyed. Moreover, their inhabitants, men, women, children and even the cattle had to be slaughtered and all objects of value consecrated only to God (cf. Num 21:2; Dt 7:1-2; Jos 6:16 to 19:1; Sam 15:3). It was a religious act, sacred extermination characteristic of a holy war. The issue is further complicated because it is God who gives these orders (cf. Dt 7:1; 20:17; Jos 7:15; 1 Sam 15:2-3). So we cannot reduce sacred extermination to a custom characteristic of a primitive time or to a barbaric law in wartime. It is a theological problem. Moreover, this practice is radically opposed to the doctrine of Jesus to love our enemies.

Let us now turn to the second question identified: the amorality (not immorality as we read in the document) of some biblical characters. Genesis contains some scenes of deceit, lies and evil that have scandalized readers of all times. Patriarchs like Abraham and Isaac deliberately lie just to emerge victorious from dangerous situations. So they do not hesitate to pass off their wives as their sisters, exposing them to the abuse of strangers while making juicy profits themselves (Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-18, 26:6-11). Jacob twice deceived his brother Esau in the famous episode of the dish of lentils and the birth right, and then stole his father's blessing (Gen 25:24-34; 27:1-28:9). Before becoming reconciled with his brothers, Joseph treated them with a harshness difficult to understand and justify. The text says he spoke to them harshly (Gen 42:7), he had them imprisoned for three days (42:17), he proposed that one of them remain behind as a hostage (42:19), he had Simeon chained before them (42:24b), and on their last trip to Egypt he tested them by hiding his silver cup in Benjamin's sack who, because of this alleged theft, was condemned to become his slave (44:17). We could add other examples of not very virtuous figures like the judge Samson, King David and his son Solomon, whose weaknesses have inspired many artists. If what the modern reader is looking for in these personages of the past are models or example of virtuous behaviour, we must say in all honesty that it is not worth wasting time reading their stories.



What to do with these difficult texts? Are they worth reading? Is it better to leave them aside and concentrate on those that are more understandable? *Verbum Domini* rightly says that "it would be a mistake to neglect those passages of Scripture that strike us as problematic" and it then adds: "Rather, we should be aware that the correct interpretation of these passages requires a degree of expertise, acquired through a training that interprets the texts in their historical-literary context and within the Christian perspective which has as its ultimate hermeneutical key 'the Gospel and the new commandment of Jesus Christ fulfilled in the paschal mystery'" (no. 42).



If we choose not to give up on the difficult pages of the Old Testament, we have to abandon some traditional approaches that count on finding models of virtue in the biblical figures, or which lead us to reject some texts *a priori* because they contradict, for example, Jesus' teaching to love our enemies or faith in the resurrection. Instead we must apply another type of hermeneutics that considers the Bible, and therefore the Old Testament, in its dimension as a literary work; it is a literary work that conveys a religious message capable of influencing our lives, despite all the obstacles previously mentioned. Let us not forget that the meaning of the text is to be found in its internal dynamics, in the framework itself, with its own laws, and its literary genre. In the words of Jean Louis Ska, "the biblical texts define the relationship with historical reality according to the literary conventions of their time and they generate their peculiar theology following their own methods." Form cannot be separated from content, nor the narrative from its meaning. Moreover, the meaning emerges in the form of narration.

It is from this perspective that we must address their reading. Thus, we discover that the violence in their narratives of conquest is an element characteristic of the idealized world of the epic where there exist only two radical options and no intermediate: the battle, with either victory or defeat. Joshua is one of the few blameless heroes of the Bible who has the unconditional protection of God. Winner of all battles, he becomes the protagonist of the conquest of the Promised Land and the leader of a people who never abandon their God. A virtuous hero, a total conquest, a faithful people; this is the idyllic and triumphalist image presented by the book of Judges. But along with this image there are other elements of a more nuanced tone that reveal the tension between the utopian description of the ideal and the reality of the facts, a tension that the reader who is willing to understand the meaning of the texts will have to discover and experience.

And what about the scenes and metaphors of violence against women? In this case we also cannot resolve the issue by simply appealing to an ancient culture, patriarchal and full of prejudices against women, a very different culture from ours. More than that, we have to analyse the laws governing metaphorical language. Metaphors are not mere rhetorical ornaments; metaphors are alive, they form part of our life, interact with us. They provoke reactions and set in motion an imaginative process and reflection from which the reader cannot escape. Not surprisingly most translations attempt to mitigate the harsh and provocative tone of the language with the help of euphemisms.

If we examine the texts of the Old Testament from a literary perspective we will discover that the biblical figures in the history of Israel do not belong to a privileged class, free of defects and errors, but rather form part of the people and live their own dramas of human existence. Despite their difficulties they are the ancestors of the people of Israel, memories of their past, symbols of their identity. Despite their weaknesses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the patriarchs of Israel; despite their weaknesses, David and Solomon are emblematic kings of Israel; and so we could continue the list. Their relationship with God, just like ours, is marked by continuous testing and ups and downs that slowly but surely record their path of faith. And that, ultimately, is what counts.

In conclusion, the Old Testament is hard to read, because it does not use our language and often does not fit in with our mind set and culture. Its texts continually surprise us with unsuspected perspectives. Nevertheless, it is part of our heritage and identity as believers. It is a fundamental, not accidental, part of our Bible, the foundation on which the New Testament rests. When Paul wants to express the essence of the Christian faith he twice emphasizes conformity with Scriptures of the Jewish people by saying "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried and that on the third day was raised to life according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-5). This obviously constitutes a very strong link between Christians and the Jewish people. Unlike Jewish reading(s) the Christian, in the light of Christ and the Spirit, discovers in the texts of the OT an added sense that the texts themselves obscure. "In a manner similar to a 'developer' in the processing of photographic film – as no. 64 of the cited document explains – the person of Jesus and the events referring to him have made a fullness of meaning appear in Sacred Scriptures which previously could not be perceived." However, while being aware that only Christ himself can fully open our minds to the understanding of Scripture, we cannot expect

that the Christian reading of the Old Testament will solve all its problems. A competent guide is required for readers in their journey through the intricate Old Testament pages along with the desire to discover new and enlightening experiences of faith.

Many issues and nuances are still in the pipeline. We could go on if time had permitted. I hope, at least, to have contributed to the reading, understanding and discussion of the most challenging part of *Verbum Domini* and to encouraging greater collaboration and dialogue between all people, men and women dedicated to the service of the Word, not only among pastors, theologians, exegetes and scholars. The Catholic Biblical Federation is a key cog in this machinery, as it is entirely devoted to the service of the Word and has an enviable human resource potential. I conclude with some phrases of Pope Francis culled from *Evangelii Gaudium*, namely from the section “Centred on the Word of God” at the end of Chapter III (no. 174-175).

“The Sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization. Consequently, we need to be constantly trained in hearing the word. The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized. It is indispensable that the word of God ‘be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity.’”

“Evangelization demands familiarity with God’s word, which calls for dioceses, parishes and Catholic associations to provide for a serious, on-going study of the Bible, while encouraging its prayerful individual and communal reading.”

These two objectives are fully within the programme of the CBF.



## The fruits of *Dei Verbum*: Rereading the Bible from the perspective of cultures, new subjects and new hermeneutics

MARICEL MENA LÓPEZ \*

### 1. Introduction

I first want to thank the Catholic Biblical Federation for the honour of this incredible invitation. Secondly, I ask permission of my afro and indigenous orisha ancestors, and my eldest ancestor Jesus Christ to speak here. To many of you this unusual juxtaposition of divinities may seem ridiculous. And so you might even ask yourselves, how is it possible that Christ is put alongside pagan divinities? Is she is a Christian or not? Well, yes I am a Catholic Christian but along the way I have discovered my afro ancestral traditions and deeply share an attitude of



respect for the indigenous struggle for the preservation of their ancestral religions. If this permission is granted, it commits us to a genuine dialogue. A real dialogue that drives us to open ourselves to each other, to listen to each other's word without reservation or prejudice, to love the other's difference, even if we do not manage to understand it fully, as we reach out in a process of accompaniment and mutual learning. A commitment which is based on a reinterpretation and reconstruction of our own traditions from a liberating perspective; for dialogue requires concrete attitudes in favour of liberation.

My name is Maricel Mena López, I am an Afro-Colombian theologian and I belong to that generation of lay people who were born within the framework of ecclesial renewal brought about by Vatican II. From my childhood I experienced that period of transition and tension between those priests who refused to take on the challenges posed by the Council and those for whom the Council represented a true ecclesial springtime with regard to reading the Bible, to liturgical renewal, to the emergence of the laity as ecclesiastical protagonists. I lived out this tension in the slums of my hometown which experi-

enced a more lively and existential theology attuned to the modern world through community and faith processes initiated in the Basic Ecclesial Communities. However, these processes were constantly truncated when there was change of parish priests by dioceses. In the church such a process has always been observable; the thicker branches refuse to give way to the shoots that bloom with vitality.

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Contact with groups and Basic Communities in a barrio where 95% of the population was black, awoke in me from my earliest years my interest in Bible studies and more specifically a theological approach out of black Christianity. The main texts of tradition that inspired me to study revelation in peoples and cultures were specifically the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* on Divine Revelation followed by the Santo Domingo document.

Inspired by these documents of the magisterium, my first theological contributions affirmed the revelation of God in the life of black and poor communities, and thus we studied Gospel texts that reinforced the universalization of the Christian message for all peoples and cultures. Over time, new questions became relevant: Would genuine enculturation of the Gospel be possible without the Christian religious exclusivism that rejects other cultural and religious practices of faith? How were these issues dealt with in the time of Jesus and the early Christian communities? Did black people participate in the geopolitical, cultural and religious space of ancient Israel? In order to try to provide answers to these questions we sought tools to better understand our cultural reality and thus approach the reading of various Biblical accounts.

All this was possible thanks to the ecclesial turn around fostered by Vatican II, and I think that today in the period when we celebrate the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the most important document of Vatican II *Dei Verbum* many questions are arising for Latin American theology, especially because we live in a period of crisis<sup>1</sup> as a result of the epochal change in religious representations that had influenced the ecclesial community for years but which does not seem to have much impact in the post-modern era.

In looking at the past in times of uncertainties, anxieties, fears, it is important not to cling nostalgically to memories but rather to see whether the initiatives taken in the Conciliar period are valid today and if possible, launch new epistemological challenges that respond creatively to today's requirements.

Following this intuition, firstly, I will highlight those important elements of the document that in my opinion served as support for a Biblical reading from the Latin American theological basis<sup>2</sup> and which undoubtedly inspired the biblical approach by new actors and emerging hermeneutics. Secondly, I will limit my presentation to the study of a Biblical reading from a cultural perspective, exemplified by black Afro-American hermeneutics, and finally, present some epistemological challenges.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. *Verbum Dei* and the Latin American contextual biblical reading

The Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* proposes a biblical rereading of the revelation of God in Salvation History (DV 2), confirming the centrality to the Bible as God's inspired word:

Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred synod... wishes to set forth authentic doctrine on divine revelation and how it is handed on... (DV 1)<sup>4</sup>.

This centrality of Sacred Scripture inaugurates a new ecclesiastical era. The Church thus returns to its prophetic dimension of listening to and proclaiming the Word.

... like the Christian religion itself all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture... (DV 21).

<sup>1</sup> Crisis here means serious loss of credibility in relation to the message. J. Amando Robles, Rethinking religion. Religion in the current culture. In *Cuadernos de Realidades Sociales* No. 59/60 – January 2002, Madrid.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Maricel Mena López, *Pensamiento Bíblico latinoamericano*, Claretian University Foundation, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Maricel Mena López, "Aproximaciones bíblicas desde la óptica de los pueblos negros", *Revista Nova América* 137 (ene-mar 2013), p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Enzo Bianchi, Leer la Biblia después del Concilio Vaticano II, Apuntes para una animación bíblica de la Pastoral (Reading the Bible after Vatican II, Notes for the Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Life.) <http://www.itda.es/articulos/26.pdf> (Internet May 15, 2013).



This document provides a series of practical guidelines so that the biblical movement reaches all areas of church life. It endorses exegetical work, it urges clerics and faithful to read the Bible. It invites prayerful reading now termed "*lectio divina*"<sup>5</sup>.

In response to the discussions on the interpretation of Scripture, *Verbum Dei* emphasizes the inerrancy of God's truth contained in the Bible (DV 11)<sup>6</sup>, understood today not as an abstract truth, but as the human capacity to interpret the God's guidance through Salvation History. It recognizes the Bible's human and divine authorship. Thus to know what God wanted to communicate to us, it is necessary to study what the biblical authors were trying to say.

Based on the biblical traditions of the Old and New Testaments, the Council sets the stage for an ecclesiology in solidarity with the suffering of the poorest in society. Its main contribution from a biblical perspective in relation to the poor and oppressed people can be systematized in the following three points:

- (1) Continuity with the humble and oppressed people of the Old Testament liberated by the God of the Exodus, vindicated and encouraged by the God of the prophets, heard by the God of the psalmists.
- (2) Continuity with the impoverished and despised masses of the Gospel narratives, sought out, served and evangelized by the Messiah Jesus of Nazareth, who with all their wounds and ambiguities know how to respond to him in faith, seek him out and follow him. And
- (3) Continuity with those poor and defenceless communities of Acts, the Letters and Revelation, brought together by the apostolic testimony and the Spirit of the Risen Lord: communities which through the same Holy Spirit live in filial prayer and fraternal love, recognizing the living Jesus Christ in the sharing of bread; the same communities that practise the communion of goods and ministries, and in solidarity assume the service of the poorest with the missionary proclamation of the Gospel<sup>7</sup>.

We must recognize that the Council made possible the celebration of the Conference of Medellín, Colombia 1968, which invited the solidarity of the entire church with poor and oppressed people and promoted her evangelizing mission within the Basic Ecclesial Communities from the perspective of an ecclesiology of communion inspired by the Council<sup>8</sup>.

In continuity with these principles, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*<sup>9</sup> facilitated the defining of a model of church opening the way to an encounter with the poor. God's accompanying the life of the poor in the Bible is concretized in the recognition of God's saving action today. The constitutive value of the laity is enhanced (cf. LG 30-38) and the importance of and the need to listen to the laity including in diocesan deliberations is stressed (cf. LG 37). That historical emergence of the poor has generated a civic and lay conscientization that has led to the recognition of the protagonist role and inclusion of the laity in social and ecclesial structures. Conciliar and post conciliar theological



<sup>5</sup> Pedro Pablo Di Berardino, *A Lectio Divina*, Sao Paulo: Paulus, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Maricel Mena López, *Pensamiento*, p. 15

<sup>7</sup> Ronaldo Muñoz, At 40 years since its proclamation by the Council, we review ... the response to *Lumen Gentium* in Latin America. *Koinonia Services*. Internet: <http://www.servicioskoinonia.org/relat/347.htm> [access May 15 2013].

<sup>8</sup> Ronaldo Muñoz, op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Constitution adopted in November 1964.

reflection describes their action and participation as a right and a duty that arises from the sacrament of baptism (cf. LG 23)<sup>10</sup>.

The document *Dei Verbum* made a great impact in Latin America, on the one hand, making it possible to understand the revealing action of God in history. On the other, it aroused the interest of the Catholics in the Bible, which took place in various ways: the liturgical renewal, the successive translations of the Bible, the growth of evangelical churches on the continent, the Catholic evangelizing action, which was initially a reaction to the "Protestant threat" and later became one of the greatest signs of the times of God's saving action.<sup>11</sup> *Verbum Dei* facilitated the start of a popular reading of the Bible based on "the preferential option for the poor."<sup>12</sup> The method used for the popular reading of the Bible incorporates the traditional approach of Catholic Action, See, Judge and Act<sup>13</sup>, which begins with an analysis of reality, followed by the illuminating of this reality through reading the biblical text and a celebrative moment sharing community life. The result of this Bible reading is concretized in the living experience of Jesus and his project of the Kingdom in the midst of the community.

Latin American biblical reflection, in turn, is not an isolated phenomenon by itself, nor of one social actor; it is the fruit of many other social and political, international and Latin American movements that defined new directions as the way to relate to and understand the world. In the international context, the Cold War, the Second Vatican Council, and in the Latin America and Caribbean the Cuban Revolution, the dictatorships in the Southern Cone and theories of dependency, among many others, demarcated a critical response towards the situation facing the region.

This critical perspective also came to the churches of various denominations. Latin American and Caribbean reality invited a much more concrete commitment to communities and populations identified as poor. And it forced a rethinking of hermeneutics and exegesis that had previously been conducted from a European viewpoint. Thus begins the reading of the Bible from the perspective of new subjects and Latin American hermeneutics.

Undoubtedly, several elements of liberation theology are present in the contextual or specific hermeneutics, but those elements are re-read in the light of the issues raised by different groups of Afro-Americans, indigenous people, women, children, etc. This introduces a new element into the liberation discourse, an element in which differences of race, ethnicity, gender, generations and religion appear to modify not only the theoretical understanding of liberation, but also its concrete expression in history. In this sense, to speak of contextual theologies means taking seriously the life and actions of the different actors and actresses of a given culture.

In Latin America today these theologies are sister theologies that go hand in hand. They share common goals such as breaking the limits imposed by the hegemonic theological discourse,

The specificities of each of them, far from fragmenting the theological discourse originating with the poorest, are differences that contribute to the formation of a plural, creative theology, which communicates and strengthens itself in its diversity.<sup>14</sup>

These reinterpretations are not simply complementary themes within theology. They are places of encounter and dialogue that journey in search of new theological contributions. Contextual theologies and hermeneutics are not incidental, and therefore should not be taken as if they were mere appendages not affecting traditional or universal theology in any way. Each from its specific gender, race-ethnicity or class perspective is demanding that universality is

<sup>10</sup> Maricel Mena López, *Pensamiento*, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Maricel Mena López, *Pensamiento*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Jon Sobrino, *The Poor*. In *Mysterium Liberationis. Fundamentals of Christianity*, 1993, p. 791.

<sup>13</sup> See, Judge, Act method originally employed by the Young Christian Workers (JOC) whose founder was the Belgian Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967).

<sup>14</sup> Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, Latin American feminist theology, in *Teología Afro-americana – II Consulta Ecuémica de Teologías y Culturas Afro-americana y Caribeña*. Quito: Ediciones Afroamérica, 1998, p. 119.

particularized, that rights and duties are established according to concrete actors facing specific situations. This particularity to some extent is presenting us with the issue of cultural relativism. And to talk about cultural relativism in these contexts means to recall that usually the analysis of cultures responds to pre-established categories and for this reason are relative and mutable. This particularization does not claim to be universalized thereby falling into a new cultural ethnocentrism. On the contrary it requires that theology well understands that true universality can only be achieved through a historically-particular mediation.

The commitment to the poor also facilitated a biblical reading from cultures from their languages and worldviews<sup>15</sup>. However, an ecclesial blindness is still evident today, since the real faces of the Latin American theological project are not widely recognized, and although recent years have witnessed an increasing role of the laity in church ministries, there is still scepticism about the theological contributions made from the fringes, from the frontiers, from the church as People of God. For from those places there has emerged a creative theology that challenges the hegemonic rationalities that are the legacy of our occidental ecclesial tradition<sup>16</sup>.

Based on these principles it is worth asking whether it is possible to continue supporting a church from the perspective of the poor without a critical evaluation of the mechanisms that result in two thirds of the world's population living in precarious conditions. Poverty is a sin on prophetic evangelical principles and must be denounced, but not only within impoverished communities, but in confronting the empires which sustain this inhumane economic model.



### 3. Re-reading the Bible from the perspective of Latin American cultures

One effect of Vatican II in Latin America was the emergence of Liberation Theology, whose discourse belatedly raises an awareness of the important contribution of Indian and African cultures for a truly liberating spirituality capable of transcending the limits of an ecumenical dialogue restricted to "historic" Christian denominations so as to encompass a macro-ecumenism that takes into account the "syncretic" (inculturated) religious practices, within the ecumenical movement. From a practical perspective, the "inculturated pastoral work" of the Catholic Church can be understood, as Raul Fornet Betancourt aptly describes, as the effort that the (Catholic) Church makes "to embody the Christian Gospel message in all cultures of humanity and to do so in such a way that by that inculturation the Christian faith attains the expression of all the richness revealed in Christ."<sup>17</sup> Through this process cultures themselves will develop and enrich the

<sup>15</sup> Document of Santo Domingo.

<sup>16</sup> Maricel Mena López, *Aproximaciones bíblicas*, p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Raul Fornet-Betancourt, De la inculturación a la interculturalidad, in: *Revista electrónica latinoamericana de teología Relat.*  
Available at: <http://www.servicioskoinonia.org/relat/355.htm> (access 17 april 2004).

Christian experience. Understanding inculturation in this manner reveals the limitations of the actual process, since there has not been a real dialogue, listening and mutual enrichment of the religious values of each of these religions.

The experience of the sacred as part of the culture has allowed Afro-descendants to construct religious models that are in profound solidarity with Catholic worship, and in this way devotions, festivals and processions are part of Afro-Catholic religious practice. This relationship was defined conceptually as syncretism understood as a deformation of authentically Catholic practices. However, all religions were originally syncretic, and for this reason no experience of this type should be treated pejoratively.

Openness to macro-ecumenism constitutes, in turn, according to Jose Maria Vigil<sup>18</sup>, the first step towards a pluralistic theology of religions. At present this theology faces many challenges including that of rereading the great theological and Christological themes such as the Trinity, the Kingdom of God, Revelation and Faith, to reconstruct new foundations in contributing to developing a Theology of Religions.

Thus, the Latin American church is beginning to develop a mature theology and praxis capable of responding to the reality of the people to whom it is addressed, imbued with the grace and love of God. Among the realities that must be taken into account by religious people who aspire to overcome ethnocentrism, is the affirmation of their guilt, repentance, forgiveness and tolerance. This is an area which the theologies should explore. For it is not simply to affirm that we all belong to one race – the human race – that there is no favouritism in the biblical God and that churches have the doors open to all who accept their teachings. Discrimination, racism, sexism, prejudice and bigotry remain taboo subjects in many ecclesial institutions.

The theological approach from the perspective of cultures is justified by the fact that it has become one that is sensitive to the realities and specificities of faith experiences of afro and indigenous communities of our American continent. That is why the issue of religious pluralism, especially in regard to considerations in relation to African religions – Candomblé in Brazil, Voodoo in Haiti, Santería in Cuba, the Lumbalú in Colombia – is a dimension that has been integrated, following the opening to cultures of the Conciliar period.<sup>19</sup>

Listening to these new actors is required in an effort to reduce this tension. I will refer here only to two black/Afro-American contextual theologies. Rather than presenting the main arguments behind this theology, I would just like to identify some challenges that arise in biblical hermeneutical intercultural mediation and the challenge to decolonize afro-asiatic studies.

### 3.1. Intercultural and decolonized biblical hermeneutics

Intercultural hermeneutics deals with the analysis of the inter-relationship between culture and the process of interpretation of biblical texts. It recognizes the conditions that make possible the dialogue on the meaning of the biblical text beyond cultural boundaries. It focuses on the question of what is freedom and truth in any given situation. According to Hans de Witt<sup>20</sup> intercultural biblical hermeneutics contributes at the *textual* level, by detecting power relations in biblical times; at the *hermeneusis* level by providing a symmetrical dialogue between interpreters of varying contexts; and the *cultural* level, by determining the place from which the process of interpretation of historical texts is analysed.

Cultural determination can be established through the following questions:

<sup>18</sup> Jose Maria Vigil, Macroecumenismo: Telogia latino-americana das religiões, en: *Por los muchos caminos de Dios II. Hacia una teología cristiana y latinoamericana del pluralismo religioso*, Zaragoza: Comité Oscar Romero de Aragón et al, 2004, pp. 55-67.

<sup>19</sup> Antonio Aparecido da Silva, Teologia cristã do pluralismo religioso face às tradições religiosas afro-americanas, in: *Pelos muitos Caminhos de Deus*. Goiás: Editora Rede, 2003, p. 97-107.

<sup>20</sup> Hans de Wit. Yael reading: an exercise in intercultural hermeneutics. In: *Los caminos inexhaustibles de la palabra – Homenaje a Severino Croatto*. Buenos Aires: Lumen-ISEDET, 2000, p. 20-22.



1. Distance from power: Who declares an interpretation valid? What is the relationship between the exegete and the faith community? Is the relationship between popular reading and exegesis viewed hierarchically?
2. Man-Woman: What role does gender play in the interpreter's community? What role does praxis play in the process of interpretation?
3. Collectivism-Individualism: Is the interpretive process collective or individual?
4. Uncertainties: Who is debated and why? What is the main paradigm and what are its interests?
5. Time: How is space linked in the results of exegetical practice? What are the hermeneutical implications of time and space for understanding biblical historiography?

Cultural determination of intercultural hermeneutics enables a dialogue between contemporary African culture and the Bible. Despite this, the work is difficult because the African presence in the Bible is not evidenced in the historical-critical reading. This is because the interpretive process has blanked the contribution of these peoples in the history of Israel and early Christianity. There are two hypotheses for the ignoring of this presence:

- 1) methodologically, because you cannot put the question because of the limits of the paradigm: the pre text does not include blacks, there is only the oppressed, as also applies to women.
- 2) the ethnocentric question – racism is blurred in Latin America. Racism introduces hierarchies into ethnic groups and creates intermediary objectified relations, highlighting the mestizo. The relationship between white-black "is not evident" and we fool ourselves that racism does not exist.

Therefore it is essential to review our biblical tradition and uncover that the African people have not been only victimisers of the chosen people. Their presence has been important in the Jewish religion. Indeed, the people of Israel were formed only after spending 450 years in Egypt. In the case of Moses, the great Israelite patriarch, besides being educated within the Egyptian culture, takes an Ethiopian woman as his wife (Cushite) (Num 12:1), and Joseph marries an Egyptian priestess (Gen 41:45-50). The biblical panorama also includes an African geography as we see in Genesis 2:10ss. The peoples of Egypt and Ethiopia with Mesopotamian wisdom, educated Greeks and Romans in art, sport, mathematics, astronomy and other sciences.<sup>21</sup>

The cultural and religious heritage that African peoples: Egyptians, Ethiopians, Nubians bequeathed to Judeo-Christian religion needs to be uncovered. Thus the biblical text is also alerting us to the multicultural reality of biblical history; to recognizing that our tradition too is based on myths, and these myths are not opposed to history, for this too is considered "scientific." The myth gives identity to a people or group, so they too are important as entry points for a dialogue with afro and indigenous people of our continent. Thus, we must recognize that philosophical thought also developed in Africa and indigenous America and that we have several African representatives in the patristic tradition, such as St. Augustine.<sup>22</sup>

Decolonizing thinking in turn reviews the biblical tradition and discovers that peoples of afro-asian descent left an important legacy in the religion of Israel. Thus it breaks with predetermined patterns and values of the Western tradition and challenges the access to knowledge of the Eurocentric approach, i.e. a universal epistemological model for all peoples and cultures. It questions the eurocentric epistemological matrices, recognizing that these are constructs created and perpetuated over time but belonging to times and places understood as definitive. This epistemology ignored the old paradigm of knowledge created by people and cultures of antiquity and are located only in the Arian model. For in this historiographic model so-called peripheral

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Martin Bernal. *Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 1-2 New Brunswick, Rutgers University, 1991. See also Frank M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*, Cambridge, Harvard University, 1970.

<sup>22</sup> Diana Rocco Tedesco, Characteristics of African Christianity. In *Raíces afro-asiáticas en la Biblia. Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana*, n. 54, 2006.

groups were not considered. Thus the question is posed of why biblical science ignores the African roots present in its history, even though they were indeed present in the biblical traditions. Why was Egypt always considered white? Why is it difficult to assume that the biblical world also had African roots?

In the myths and worldview of the Israelites there is a strong influence of the peoples of the southeast and southern edge of the world (Gen 2:13; Jos 1:4; Zp 3:10). Africa's influence and participation in the biblical stories enables us to observe a multitude of religious and cultural as well as ethnic and racial strains in the origins of the people of Israel. It is thus possible to perform a parallel and – why not – complementary presentation of the history "of the people of God" to that which has been viewed from the western perspective.

But this inclusion does not seek to justify the participation of these peoples in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but rather to rescue cultural and religious plurality as important elements in the reconstruction of the historical and geographical memory of this tradition. Thus we seek to facilitate an intercultural and interreligious dialogue with communities and religions of African origin in our continent.

It is also necessary to assess the systematic and pastoral theological contribution which feminist, afro and indigenous theologies are developing on the continent and to understand that in their theologies there is no dichotomy between Jesus Christ, considered the eldest Ancestor, and the guardian ancestors of communities, for many Christian values have enriched their religious universe.

Given the analysis above, redirecting hermeneutics and exegesis is urgent due to the challenges posed by the new cultural context to the interpreter. Among these challenges they are, in addition to the socio-political and economic, those of a philosophical and epistemological character given that they too take seriously the context of the interpreter. This means that not only a methodology, philosophical and epistemological concern for justice and peace in the text be undertaken, but also that something in our context urgently needs to be done: to develop an appropriate Latin American biblical hermeneutics that is less European, Anglo-Saxon or regional. This goal is important and deserves to be stressed even more.



### 3.2. Black/Afro-American hermeneutics

Black/Afro-American Hermeneutics or of the peoples of African descent, as affirmed by Querino Sonia and Silvia Regina de Lima, is a community produced theology<sup>23</sup> conducted by a group of women and men working in an interdisciplinary fashion. It is a hermeneutic that emerges from the concrete reality of racism and discrimination experienced by our communities across our continent. For this reason it manifests itself especially based on our own experiences.

Its starting point is the assertion that racism and its operational instrument – racial discrimination – constitutes a violation of human rights<sup>24</sup>. Therefore racism is not a matter of interpersonal relationships, of "intimacy", of "affinity", of "like" or "dislike": "Although I do not like

<sup>23</sup> Abya-Yala and their faces – theological training and mainstreaming Sixth Theological Conference of CETELA, Cumbayá, 2-6, 2000, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Racism and violent racial discrimination referred to in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language ... "

blacks, I talk to them and do not discriminate against them," "I am not racist because my best friend at school was black", "black, not even my phone"... It is thus not a matter of "habits of the heart", as racism and racial discrimination result in exclusions and inequalities in all spheres of life for millions of women and men in this geographical corner of the "global village", we call Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>25</sup>

Afro-American and Caribbean theological thought takes as a basic point of reference the experience of God lived by the black communities of the continent. It is open to the geographical particularities and everyday practices that obviously are diverse and plural depending on the physical and social space occupied.

Afro-American hermeneutics enriches the theological task by proposing a reflection rooted in our cultural and religious worldviews of faith. Varied are the elements that characterize the Afro-American cultural and religious worldview and influence our theology. Among them I highlight the worship practiced by many Afro-Catholic communities. In Colombia for example, *Lumbalú*, a dance introduced by slaves who arrived in Cartagena, is a funeral song and dance practiced in order to open the way of the deceased and to the abode of departed ancestors. For death was the only physical and concrete possibility of linking the tragic present of the exiles to the deepest roots of their africaness.<sup>26</sup>

There is thus a close relationship between life and death in the African worldview. It is a theological concept in which there is no room for dualism, death interacts with life. The guardian ancestors protect and comfort the human who is being abused. The notion of family (*Muntu*<sup>27</sup>) for the Bantu is not limited to the nuclear family consisting of parents and children, but extends to the dead considered as living and active.

The Afro hermeneutic also leads us to reread our ancestral tradition in communion with other faith traditions. Although we have a widely Christocentric component, the challenge is to re-



read Christ from the ancestral perspective. Also in using the hermeneutics of suspicion to read the Christian tradition from an Afro perspective, the challenge here is to question the seemingly unquestionable mono-cultural Western tradition and to continually discover the richness of the contributions coming from other cultures and traditions. It then proposes to apply to problems the method we use within a liberationist ethical framework.

<sup>25</sup> Clovis Cabral, SJ, "Continental Encounter of Bishops Committed to the Afro Pastoral", 09-13 September 2002, Quito, Ecuador, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Manuel Zapata Olivella, "Afro-Catholic syncretism in the liberation struggles of America", in *Cultura Negra y Teología*, San José, Departamento Ecuaménico de Investigaciones, 1986, p. 105.

<sup>27</sup> Muntu: Is the singular of Bantu, the concept implicit in this word transcends the connotation of human being, as it includes the living and the dead, as well as animals, plants, minerals and things that serve humanity.

#### 4. Some theological-epistemological challenges from an Afro-American cultural perspective

I highlight ten aspects of this black hermeneutics that challenge the hegemonic models for conceiving the world:

**1. The perception of reality:** According to the perception of life characteristic of the peoples of Africa, reality is not dual but single, there are no dichotomies between good and evil, as we are taught by the West, since these two principles are part of the same reality. In that sense, there is also no distinction between spirit and body, between action and contemplation, between sacred and profane, as reality is imbued with the breath of life that comes from the Divine Creator.

**2. The perception of knowledge:** Afro knowledge is based on acknowledging our experiences, and the value of our traditions, in the oral tradition. This somehow demonstrates that knowledge is transmitted through channels that do not fall within the categories of rigorous traditional science. For afros oral tradition is the most authentic way to narrate history, to keep alive the memory of events from the beginning of the world, and this is done through stories, legends, tales, epics, myths, poems, chants, etc., so the challenge is to learn to interpret this history as ancient wisdom perpetuated in time.

**3. The concept of cyclical time:** The notion of time must also be viewed from a theological perspective, not as linear but cyclical time. A time that is articulated in communion with nature and has to do with life and death. Life and death are integrated in an indissoluble alliance. This relationship includes trees, plants, tools and things that are of service to humans, particularly the land where they are born, cultivate and are buried. Life and death are of divine origin, so that any kind of violence against human life is to be condemned. Paradoxically because of the violence perpetrated against slaves, death becomes an important mechanism of resistance and struggle for the conquest of the land.

**4. The view that the earth is sacred** and therefore it belongs to us all. One of the constant struggles of African peoples is for territoriality; this is a heritage that belongs to us in the order of creation. This view is also calling into question the assumptions of modern society and its scale of values, of hierarchies, in which only those who have power can possess land. These hierarchies are also evident in the social scale where the woman, black, indian, are so inferiorized that is only possible have access to land if one has a patron, a lord, a man capable of exercising control over these groups.

By claiming the right to land and defending territory, we propose to build a world where it is possible to live in harmony with all creatures. To make this possible it is necessary to reject a complex pattern of social relations and cultural constructs that promote social inequalities between people and between these with nature.

**5. The concept of geo-physical space:** The life of our communities is inserted in the context of capitalist globalization; this drives us to regard its space, its location, its geography as characterized by exclusion. Thus we observe the increasing feminization of poverty, with its mostly black and indigenous faces. Considering the ambivalences and other conflicts of the globalization processes and their tentacles of development and poverty, we denounce the use and distribution of resources to privileged groups and highlight the geographical contexts marked by exclusion. In response to this scenario we are called to seek alternatives to this imposition. Globalization endangers lives and cultures of our communities, and does not offer space for them to develop their culture. Super technology provides access to only a small part of the world where the large majority cannot enter. We link our territorial geographical contexts to our bodily geographical contexts. Geography has a social and political value. Not only where we are is important but also how we are. The interrelationship of this geo-physical and spatial territory has enabled the preservation of the identity of communities.

**6. The concept of the right to rest:** For afros, rest is very important for humans as well as for the earth. We work so as to enjoy the benefits provided by land, we rest to renew the body



and the earth. This idea has a highly religious component. The sacred embraces everything, everything lives and moves because of it. Thus moments of life such as work, sports, family, meetings of various kinds, music, dance, are steeped in that vital energy, that is, the spirit of the Divine that animates all things. This idea is usually interpreted to mean that afros are lazy. But behind all this, there is a different conception of the world which does not mesh with the logic of the global market, where competition is the only measure for both nature and humans.

**7. The preservation of historical memory:** The spirituality of each individual and people is rooted in their historical processes. For Afro-American people, the encounter with their history has been very important. In it they find processes of uprooting and exploitation but also of struggle, defiance and resistance, with the sole objective of rescuing their own freedom and dignity.

**8. The ethical, political and sacred framework of our ancestral traditions:** The historical voices and silences of Afro-American and Native American ancestral traditions challenge us to build and offer liberating alternative ways of thinking. We are reclaiming a wisdom woven in harmony into an integral and integrating body of life in fullness.

**9. The religious holism:** This opens the door to multiple human experience of the relationship with the "sacred" values that give meaning to our human existence. "Sacred" is the name for things and their relationships, the sacred is life. Therefore, if the body is sacred, so is pleasure. The body should be devoid of guilt, we should not be afraid to feel pleasure; pleasure that is bodily, sexual, mental and spiritual, manual but not servile nor agitated; pleasure of a body that does not yield to the fascination of market globalization. The latter sounds paradoxical, when considering the reality of poor communities of Latin American peripheries, who have no consumer power. However, the challenge lies in the capacity to implement gender policies that will help us alleviate poverty and violence inflicted on the bodies of our women.

**10. Fun and celebration:** In our communities we encounter a people who manage and share their poverty, not only with their immediate nuclear family, but also with friends and those who live nearby, that is, with their neighbour. This is the evangelical gratuity. We regularly encounter in the poor a people who, despite the situation of pain and poverty in which it finds itself, celebrate and celebrate in community. The *fiesta* is a time of fellowship with friends and family, where life takes on another dimension and the tensions and conflicts that exist between the domestic and professional, between home and work, between the family and society, take on a different meaning. It is also a time of playfulness, pleasure, of the body, food and fellowship. With regard to food and fiesta, there is much beauty in the hidden meanings in the preparing and serving the table that need to be explored as part of afro spirituality, since there is never a celebration in honour of the saints, where there is not food in abundance.

Finally I thank ancestral afro Divine Wisdom and the wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ for allowing me to be here and speak from the heart of my theological experiences and convictions. This wisdom undoubtedly made it possible for us to listen from another theological space, to listen without prejudice or preconceptions, which has put us in communion with the created beings and nature, for the comprehensive and inclusive holistic component of life is an essential part of this theology. A dialogue that enabled us to listen, even if we do not share the spiritual and epistemological richness of Afro-American traditions; that has made it possible to awake not only to the evangelical principle of compassion, mercy, but to a listening and fraternal mutual learning. May this event sow in us the renewing and burning spirit of the differences witnessed in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* that it is time to read and listen to new signs of the times. For only when as church we become aware of the new direction and situation will we be able to produce new ideas and attitudes that produce new fruits. This is perhaps the greatest originality of *Dei Verbum*. For this reason, it is a document that has opened up ways that we need to continue exploring.

## Federation News

### ***Meeting of the Editorial Board of BDVdigital***

**February 16, 2015**

The new *Editorial Board* of the BDVdigital Bulletin – Prof. Thomas Osborne, Fr. Christian Tauchner SVD and the General Secretary, Fr. Jan J. Stefanów SVD – held its first meeting at the House of the Divine Word Missionaries in Sankt Augustin (Germany) on 16 February 2015. The schedule for Bulletin publications was revised with a change from quarterly to twice yearly and topics for pending issues were planned. It was also decided to expand the editorial team by inviting a correspondent from of each region of the Federation.



### ***Official visit of the General Secretary of the CBF to Kenya***

**February 22, 2015**



The General Secretary of the CBF, Jan P. J. Stefanów SVD, along with an official delegation from the *Luxembourg School of Religion and Society* (LSRS) paid an official visit to Kenya 22–28 February 2015. The main reason for the trip was for the biblical-theological symposium at the *Catholic University of Eastern Africa* (CUEA) in Nairobi and the meeting between representatives of LSRS and CUEA for the preparation and signing of a cooperation agreement for the project of the Master's Program in Biblical Pastoral Ministry being prepared under the auspices of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

Fr. Stefanów also visited the facilities of "Bible on the Ground" in Nanyuki, Faculty of Theology of the *Tangaza College* and met the Coordinator of the Biblical Apostolate SVD AFRAM, Fr. Wojciech Szypula SVD.

### ***Anaheim – USA***

**March 12, 2015**

The *Religious Education Congress* held in Anaheim, California (USA) 13–16 March, 2015, was the motive for the first trip of the General Secretary to the United States. This event was an ideal setting for various meetings with the board of the US Association of Catholic Publishers and oth-

er institutions engaged in biblical animation in the US, which had been scheduled by regional coordinator for North America, Ms. Mary Sperry.



### ***Meeting of FEBIC-LAC Regional Coordination Team March 21, 2015***

In Lima (Peru) 17–21 March 2015, there took place the meeting of the FEBIC-LAC Regional Coordination Team along with that of the CE-BITEPAL Support Group. Zone Coordinators of the FEBIC-LAC subregion together with the Subregional Coordinator, Sr. Eleana Salas, addressed administrative matters of the Subregion and prepared the Action Plan for the years 2015–2021. The meeting was also attended by the General Secretary of the CBF, Fr. Jan J. Stefanów, who is an ex-officio member of the regional and subregional Committees.



On the same trip Fr. Stefanów also made a brief visit to Ecuador to meet with the Executive Secretary of the Commission of the Magisterium of the Episcopal Conference (EEC), Fr. Juan Carlos Garzón, and the Director of the Divine Word Bible Centre in Quito – both institutions are members of the CBF.

### ***Meeting with Donor Agencies April 13, 2015***

On April 13, 2015 there took place in Munich (Germany) the annual meeting of the Administrative Board of the CBF with representatives of donor agencies that provide financial support to the activities of the Catholic Biblical Federation. A financial and activity report for 2014, the financial outlook for 2016 and major projects prepared by the General Secretariat of the CBF were the most im-





portant matters addressed at the meeting. To ensure and facilitate the financial management of the Federation it was agreed that in future a three-year financial perspective will be adopted.

### ***Meetings in Manila and Vigan*** **April 28, 2015**

Meetings with the new president of the Catholic Biblical Federation, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, (on April 29, 2015) and with the Subregional Coordinators of the Asia Region were the reason for the trip by the General Secretary of the CBF to the Philippines.

Father Stefanów also visited the *John Paul I Biblical Center* – a member of the CBF – and other institutions involved in Biblical Animation in the city of Vigan.



### ***Congrès de les Associacions Bíbliques Ibèriques***

**September 1, 2015**

The General Secretary of the CBF, Fr. Jan J. Stefanów SVD participated in the *Congrès de les Associacions Bíbliques Ibèriques* in Tarragona (Spain). It was a good opportunity to promote the CBF among biblical scholars of Spain and Portugal. The conference also facilitated face to face meetings with the presidents of the Biblical Associations of Spain, Portugal and Catalunya (ABE, ABP and ABCat, respectively), Prof. Santiago Guijarro, Prof. Armindo Vaz and Prof. Joan Magí.

### ***I Archdiocesan Congress of Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Life*** **September 4, 2015**

This Congress was organized by the Archdiocesan Commission for the *Biblical Animation of All Pastoral Life* [Archdiocese of Santiago de Chile] and was sponsored by the *Vicariate for Pastoral Life* of the Archdiocese of Santiago.

The goals of the Congress were to celebrate and address the challenges emanating from the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* and the tenth anniversary of the implementation of Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Life in the Archdiocese of Santiago. Participants included lay pastoral workers, priests, men and women religious, secular institutes, movements, colleges, universities, Bible formators, students and graduates of the Diploma in Biblical Studies, Lectio Divina communities, teachers and students of religious education.

In workshops and presentations the following topics were addressed: *Pastoral highlights of the Constitution Dei Verbum* (Rosa Estela Yanez, a biblical theologian of the Silva Henríquez Catholic University and academic of Conferre Studies Centre), *Verbum Domini: Gift and task* (Gerardo García Helder, Masters in Scripture, Executive Secretary of the Department of the Biblical Pastoral Apostolate of the Argentinean Episcopal Conference, and FEBIC Southern Cone Coordinator)



and *Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Life and the Word of God* (Fr. Ruben Dario Bergliaffa, ssp, Director of the International Catholic Bible Society, member of the Editorial San Pablo, and of the National Commission for ABP of the Argentinean Episcopal Conference).

### ***Regional Meeting of Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Life (ABP) – Mexico*** **September 8, 2015**

For the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* there took place in Mexico City 8–10 September 2015 the regional ABP meeting of the Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean Zones of FEBIC-LAC.

As part of this meeting, the presentation of the new edition of the New Testament of the BIA (Bible of the Church in the Americas) took place.



### ***PCF/CBF Meeting of Catholic publishers – "Bible and Family"*** **September 23, 2015**

The Pontifical Council for the Family, in collaboration with the Catholic Biblical Federation, the Association of US Catholic Publishers and the Vatican Publishing House organized the meeting with Catholic publishers on the theme "Bible and Family". The meeting took place on September 23 in Philadelphia, in the context of the World Meeting of Families held in this city from 22 to 27 September.

The meeting participants of some 30 representatives from different Catholic publishers, mostly from the US, but also from Spain and the Republic of Congo included a conference by the President of the Pontifical Council for the Family and three short presentations by representatives of the Departments of Family Life Ministry from Italy, United States and Colombia (CELAM).

In a brief session in work groups that followed the presentations, the most important challenges



and possible ways to respond to them were addressed. The meeting ended with the commitment of all participants to continue working on this issue. The General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation proposed that the work be followed up in the newly created *Commission of Catholic Publishers* of the CBF in cooperation with the committees of "Bible and Family" and "Bible and Youth" which were also created in the last Plenary Assembly of the CBF and are commencing their tasks. Some of the delegates of Catholic publishers present at the meeting which are not yet affiliated to the CBF, expressed their willingness to formalize their membership.

***Regional Meeting of Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Life (ABP)***  
**– Sao Paulo (Brazil)**  
**October 1, 2015**



In the context of the 50th anniversary of promulgation of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* there took place in São Paulo (Brazil) 1–4 October 2015 the regional ABP Encounter of the Southern Cone and Andean Countries Zones of FEBIC -LAC.

During the meeting discussions and reflections took place on *Dei Verbum* and the Word of God in the understanding of the universal and Latin American Church. Priority emphasis was given to evaluation and programming work of FEBIC-LAC to 2020, through the "Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Life" (ABP).



***Annual Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation***  
**October 23, 2015**

The annual meeting of the CBF Executive Committee took place 23–24 October 2015 at the Casa General of the Missionaries of the Divine Word in Rome. In the framework of this meeting the President of the CBF, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle officially promulgated the new Constitution of the CBF approved by the Holy See.

### ***Meeting of the General Secretary with the Cardinal Marx*** **November 4, 2015**

On Wednesday, November 4, 2015, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Munich-Freising and President of the Episcopal Conference of Germany, received the General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation, Fr. Jan J. Stefanów SVD, at the Archbishop's Offices in Munich. The meeting was organized by Dr. Bernhard Hasslberger, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of München-Freising and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

The purpose of the meeting, which for logistical reasons could not be scheduled earlier, was to thank Cardinal Marx for the continued financial support of the Archdiocese of Munich-Freising to the Catholic Biblical Federation and for having given permission for the appointment of Bishop Hasslberger as Chairman of the Administrative Board.

Bishop Hasslberger presented a brief overview of the most important issues of his tenure as Chairman of the Administrative Board during the past three years and introduced Fr. Stefanów as the new General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation. Fr. Stefanów outlined to Cardinal Marx the structure and activities of the Federation, with special emphasis on the last Plenary Assembly in Nemi, and delivered to him the *Annual Report 2014* and a copy of the recently promulgated *Constitution* of the Catholic Biblical Federation.



The meeting was also an opportunity to discuss the challenges of Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Life in Germany and in Europe, compared with other ecclesial instances where the CBF is present.

Cardinal Marx thanked Fr. Stefanów and Bishop Hasslberger for the information received and for the work that the CBF is doing for the good of the Church. He confirmed his personal support, that of the Archdiocese of Munich-Freising and of the Episcopal Conference of Germany to the activities and projects of the Catholic Biblical Federation and conveyed his greetings to all members, friends and benefactors of the Federation.

### ***Colloque Panafricain sur le Cinquantenaire du Dei Verbum, Kigali (Rwanda)*** **November 14, 2015**

The Pan African Biblical Congress took place 9–14 November 2015 in Kigali (Rwanda) to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*.

Participants gathered around the Bible, solemnly enthroned in the venue of the encounter. The presentations traced the development of biblical work in Africa as well as the contributions and challenges that arise in the context of the Church and communities in reading the Bible. Other highlights of the conference were several presentations of new editions of the Bible and a visit to Kibelo in commemoration of the genocide that took place 20 years ago.

In summary, *Dei Verbum* has provided much inspiration for the biblical animation of all pastoral and Christian life in Africa, but there is still a lot more to be done: better coordination of pastoral



work, celebrations and actions to deepen biblical animation, need for translation of the bible to many local languages.

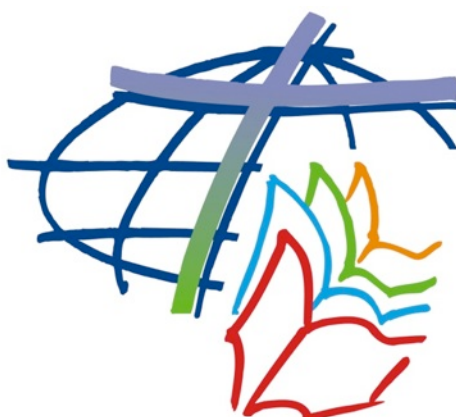


***Inauguration of new Regional Coordinator of FEBIC-LAC***  
**November 21, 2015**

In the city of Bogota (Colombia) the transfer of functions between Sr. Eleana Salas and the new coordinator of the FEBIC-LAC Region, Deacon Mike James took place. At the headquarters of CELAM in Bogota a meeting also took place of the new Coordinator and the General Secretary of the CBF with the new General Secretary of CELAM, Bishop Juan Espinoza Jimenez, and the Director of the School Bible of CEBITEPAL, Fr. Guillermo Acero.







**Catholic Biblical Federation**  
**Fédération Biblique Catholique**  
**Federación Bíblica Católica**  
**Katholische Bibelföderation**

The invitation to a special pastoral commitment to witness to the centrality of the Word of God in the Church's life, with a priority of the biblical animation of all pastoral life continues to be important. We must ensure that in the ordinary activities of all Christian communities, parishes, associations and movements, we really take seriously the personal encounter with Christ who communicates with us through His word, because, as St. Jerome teaches us "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (Dei Verbum, 25).

The mission of the servants of the Word—bishops, priests, religious and laity—is to promote and facilitate this encounter, which kindles faith and transforms life; for this reason I ask, on behalf of the whole Church, that you fulfil your mandate: in order that "the Lord's message may spread quickly, and be received with honour" (2 Thes 3:1) until the day of Christ Jesus.

May the "Handmaid of the Lord", who is blessed because she "has believed that the things that were spoken by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45), accompany you during these days, as he accompanied the disciples in the first community, so that you may be guided by the light and power of the Holy Spirit."

IX Plenary Assembly, 2015