

World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate

N° 5

4 / 1987

Bulletin

*Dei
Verbum*

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English Edition

The World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA) is an international fellowship of Catholic organizations involved in biblical pastoral work. The members foster mutual service among all local churches.

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

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

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

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

*+ Alberto Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno
Président of the WCFBA*

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

**GENERAL SECRETARIAT
Mittelstr. 12, P.O.Box 601
7000 Stuttgart, West Germany
Tel. (0711) 60 92 74 or 60 40 99**

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Editorial Board :

François Tricard, Ludger Feldkämper,
Marc Sevin.

Editorial Team :

Linda Bryan, Heinz Köster,
Marc Sevin, Carola Tress.

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EDITORIAL

Dear Friends,

Your efforts and concerns in the biblical-pastoral field and biblical apostolate were brought up during the last Synod of Bishops. Fr. Henry Heekeren, Superior General of the Divine Word Missionaries, spoke at the IX General Assembly of the Synod about the Word of God in the vocation and role of the laity. He made use of the declaration drawn up by our Executive Committee during its meeting in Königstein (see Bulletin Dei Verbum No. 4, page 7), thereby echoing the work of the Federation. An extract from this presentation can be found on page 4.

You will notice that the recent Synod on the laity takes up a large part of this edition of the Bulletin. Abbé Francois Tricard, head of the French biblical organization "Evangile et Vie" and member of our Executive Committee, investigated the place reserved for God's Word in the preparatory document for the Synod, the "Instrumentum laboris". As can be seen from his paper (pages 4-5), it is very well presented there.

This Bulletin also wishes to give voice to lay people who are engaged in the biblical apostolate in their daily lives. The Königstein declaration states: "The lay person has his special competence with regard to the ministry of the Word in translating it into life and proclaiming it as a witness in the liturgical assembly and in the midst of the human community as an evangelizer". In this issue (pages 7-15) we reproduce a series of testimonies illustrating this statement.

An important event keenly awaited by everyone engaged in Bible translation work was the publication in their promotion of these events "Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible". The Federation was also involved in the revising of the "Guiding Principles", first published in 1968 (page 19).

"Bible Sunday" - "Bible Week" - Bible Month": For years now, many Federation members have been working hard to establish these events. The Executive Committee hopes that these "tried and tested" biblical-pastoral aids will extend to all members (page 20).

Please don't fail to inform us about all your biblical-pastoral activities. The Bulletin is particularly partial to such news items!

Marc Sevin

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUBSCRIPTION
OR FOR YOUR SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL FOR 1988.
(for conditions of subscription see page 2)**

The Federation mentioned during the recent Bishops' Synod

During the IX General Assembly of the Synod on the laity, Fr. Henry Heekeren, Superior General of the Divine Word Missionaries, recalled the importance of God's Word in the vocation and mission of the laity. The following are extracts from his address which was published in l'Osservatore Romano on 8 October, 1987. The complete text can be obtained from the WCFBA General Secretariat in Stuttgart.

No. 40 of "Instrumentum laboris", speaks about the importance of the Word of God for our spiritual life and Christian witness. Yet the Synod in 1985, had to acknowledge that the vision presented in *DEI VERBUM* in terms of what the Bible should mean in living out our call as Christians has not been sufficiently realized. There are many negative consequences of this, especially in first evangelizations. How can we remedy this situation? In view of our Synod, the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate recently prepared a declaration concerning lay people and the ministry of the Word (*BULLETIN DEI VERBUM* No. 4, 3/87, p. 7). It states with the Council document *DEI VERBUM* (DV) No. 25, that: "The biblical formation of the laity is necessary for an authentic Christian life because `ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ'" and with DV No. 22 that: "easy access to Sacred Scripture must be provided for all the Christian faithful". It goes on to say: "The basis of involvement of the laity in the biblical apostolate rests on the fact that the people of God, by virtue of their baptism and confirmation, have received the Spirit of God. The same Spirit speaks to them the Word of God; by responding to this Word, they become a community of faith. It is this *sensus fidei* which empowers them with the mission of proclaiming the Word... The lay person has his/her special competence with regard to the ministry of the Word in translating it into life and proclaiming it as a witness in the liturgical assembly and in the midst of the human community as an evangelizer. In doing this, he/she interprets the signs of the times in terms of the Word of God and interprets the Word of God in terms of the signs of the times."

Speaking as a representative of the religious superiors, Fr. Heekeren said that the declaration gives recommendations about the specific roles and characteristics of the ministry of the Word as performed by lay people. If these suggestions of the WCFBA were considered seriously, they would, among other advantages, result in: strengthening the vocation and mission of the laity; bringing a new springtime for first evangelization and re-evangelization; shortening the distance which still separates us from the other Churches; curtailing the alarming inroads being made by the aggressive, anti-ecumenical approach of certain sects. ■

God's Word according to the Work Paper (instrumentum laboris) of the Synod

Francois Tricard, director of "Service Biblique EVANGILE ET VIE" in France, examined the preparatory document of the Synod (Instrumentum laboris) in order to establish the position allotted to God's Word in the vocation and mission of the laity.

The "work paper for the Synod of Bishops, 1987" also prompted reflection on the role of the Bible in the vocation and mission of the laity.

1. Vocation and mission of the laity.

The document specifies: "Vocation has a greater extent than mission since it incorporates a double appeal: to fellowship and to mission. The most important of the two is the call to fellowship which should last eternally whereas the call to mission is only a consequence of the first and is limited to earthly life" (§14).

This call to the fellowship of love (vocation) is an initiative of God (Gal 1:6; 1 Peter 1:15; 5:10). The Father is its source, Christ transmits it and the Holy Spirit puts it into practice. The persons of the Holy Trinity work together to make Christians and the Church become instruments of communion at the heart of the world" (§15-16).

"The aim of this mission is to change the world by opening it to the love which comes from God and is given to us through faith in Christ" (§18).

One could say: God so loved the world that he gave his Church the mystical body of his only Son, so that those who believe in Jesus might not perish but may have eternal life (John 3:16).

"The role of the laity is to bear witness to this same faith and to permeate human relationships and all earthly realities with faith, hope and charity. They have also to make their contributions to the fellowship of the Church, although in a different manner than priests in their sacramental service" (§18).

2. The Word of God as source of vocation and mission.

The source of this vocation and mission is the Word of God. "His ever contemporary message illuminates the events of human history and prepares spirits and hearts to receive from the Holy Spirit a new light which guides the personal destiny of each individual and the future of the world" (§40).

The beatitudes, summary and perfection of the Gospels, inspire the daily lives of lay people. They will attempt to follow them

exactly, just as Mary, the perfect example of devout laity, did (§28-38).

The laity meditate on the Word of God. It permits them to discern the meaning and value of earthly realities clearly. This meditation of sacred Scripture requires practice ; it is a unique spiritual exercise. Priests must therefore make sure that the laity are provided with opportunities for continuous formation in sacred Scripture (§74).

The deeper Christians become scientifically involved in sacred Scripture, the better they will be able to explain their faith and understand the Bible.

3. The prophetic office of the laity.

Christ carries out his prophetic office through all the faithful. Thanks to the authority bestowed directly by him, the hierarchy receives the task of teaching in the name of Jesus Christ while the laity, endowed with a sense of faith and the grace of the Word, are called to bear witness. Even though they take on a ministry not linked with ordination they remain lay people thereby avoiding secularization.

There is no area in life, no district, school, office, factory or hospital in which the friendly presence of Christians does not bring the Church to life through dialogue. These Christians are open to ecumenical dialogue and to the spiritual richness of non-Christian religions.

Lay people take part in the missionary life of the parishes by assisting in the liturgy, holding community meetings, establishing classes in Christian doctrine according to age and social

standing (pre-sacramental catechesis; catechism instruction for children and youth; family and adult religious education).

In the context of the small Christian communities and the basic Church communities, the unique role of the catechists for the first announcement of the Good News and its continuation must be emphasized. They contribute towards maturation of the faith and serve as a link between the faithful and the priests.

A large number of Christian laity, both male and female, take upon themselves, the tasks of formation of courses and publication of materials according to their areas of expertise. They contribute in the search for Christian solutions to many of today's problems. It is especially in catechesis, spiritual leadership and the service of Church communities which have no priest that their activities are of the utmost importance (§76).

Conclusion.

Taking part in the offices of Christ as priest, prophet and king, the laity have an active involvement in the life and activities of the Church. Their assistance in Church communities is particularly necessary since without it, the apostolate of pastors would seldom be fully effective. Similar to the men and women who assisted Paul in spreading the Gospel (cf. Acts 18:18,26; Rom 16:3-4), lay people with a truly apostolic spirit come to the aid of their brothers and sisters and equally strengthen the pastors as well as the rest of God's people (1 Cor 16:17-18) (Decree on the apostolate of the laity §10)

Biblical-Pastoral Centre DEI VERBUM of Nemi (Italy)

The pilot formation course for biblical-apostolate or biblical-pastoral leaders ended in December 1987. You will find a brief report on it on page 15 of this issue.

A second course, to be given in English, is planned from mid-August to mid-December 1988. The fee for this course will be US\$ 3,500.00. Applicants for this second course should write as soon as possible but not later than May 15, 1988 to:

Fr. John Füllenbach
Missionari Verbiti
Via dei Laghi 52
00040 NEMI (Roma)
ITALY Tel. 0039-6-936 83 66

Please pass on this information to persons involved in biblical-pastoral work who might be interested in this course.

The Bible and the Laity

In No. 117 of the Chilean biblical-pastoral review "Servicio", Bro. Enrique Garcá gives a short report on the Executive Committee meeting in Königstein, West Germany. Entitled "The Bible and the Laity", this short article is a special reminder of the significance of biblical formation of the laity.

The Bible has the reputation of being a book reserved for specialists and for our Protestant brothers. Since the II Vatican Council (Constitution *DEI VERBUM*, 22), it has also received great attention from Catholics. In the liturgical celebrations, however, the Word of God has been announced at all times, and today the catechesis makes equal use of it.

During its annual meeting, the Executive Committee of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate prepared a paper under the title "The Bible in the Vocation and Mission of the Laity" for distribution among the participants of the Roman Synod of Bishops last October. This paper emphasizes the importance of biblical formation and support for lay people.

Layspirituality.

The spirituality of lay people gains much when it obtains nourishment from sacred Scripture. Sacred Scripture also helps them to discover God's presence not only in past history but also in current events; it teaches them to hear his summons in family life as well as in professional and political affairs; it teaches them to meditate on poetical and other texts recorded in the historical and prophetic books and in the wisdom literature of the Old and New Testaments which have Jesus Christ as their center.

Jesus appears in the Gospels as the perfect example of a lay person, a member of the tribe of Juda and not of Levi, with a life-style differing greatly from that of the priests both in his private and public life. The letter to the Hebrews, the only one which explicitly describes Christ as a priest, attributes this title to him as an office acquired through the final act of his death and resurrection (Heb 8:1-9,27).

Formation aids.

For many years now, the Federation has pursued its suggestion that a Bishops' Synod be held on "The Role of the Bible in the Life of the Church".

When the invention of the printing press, on which the first book printed was the Bible, illustrated the possibilities of a wide distribution of sacred Scripture, the Protestant Reformation resulted in a counter-reaction on the Catholic side which centered its pastorage on the distribution and reception of the sacraments.

This decision, made several hundred years ago, meant that the laity were relegated to the background, while in the Protestant

evangelization they were given a central role which led to an expansive vitality still with us today.

The plan of a concise manual (catechism) of faith, which the Holy See hopes to publish in 1990, opens two possibilities: either to prolong this situation or to increase a hunger for the Bible among Catholics. This reference document might encourage a truly pastoral use of the Bible, destined to illuminate life and cultures without limiting itself to the original meaning of the text which, although necessary, is not sufficient for a growth in faith. The Federation also wishes to provoke thought on what biblical catechesis actually ought to be.

The initiative taken up in various countries to celebrate an annual Bible Week in each diocese received a favorable reaction from the Holy Father during a recent meeting with Msgr. Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno and president of the Federation. "La Palabra Hoy", the Spanish review for Federation members, is publishing a selection of the best experiences gained in this area. In some parishes one saw well-meant initiatives which, through bad organization, transformed the Bible into a catalogue of facts and archaeological presentations instead of displaying it as the message of salvation.

Federation members are presently compiling a biblical apostolate handbook for each continent. Experiences already published in "La Palabra Hoy" are being collected for Latin America.

Next Plenary Assembly

The IV WCFBA Plenary Assembly will be held in July 1990 in Latin America to correspond with the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the evangelization of that continent. In October 1987 the coordinators of five sub-regions, the bishops' conferences of which are members of the Federation, chose Colombia as the country in which the Plenary Assembly is to take place. They also discussed the participation of parishes, schools and Catholic movements in this event. The theme will be "The Role of the Bible in the New Evangelization". In Latin America the Federation cooperates with the Department of Catechesis of the Latin American Bishops' Council (CELAM).

**The IV Plenary Assembly of our
WORLD CATHOLIC FEDERATION
FOR THE BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE
will take place in July 1990
in BOGOTA (Colombia).**

**The theme will be:
"The Role of the Bible
in the New Evangelization".**

Please take note of this date.

Testimonies

In their last Synod, the Synod Fathers directed their attention towards the vocation and role of the laity in the Church and in the world. Within the perspective of this Synod, WCFBA Executive Committee members have collected the testimonies of lay people engaged in one manner or another in the biblical apostolate. These testimonies, compiled specially for publication in the Bulletin, prove both the vitality and the diversity of experiences gained throughout the world today.

- BOLIVIA -

Mr. Pédro Durán of Bolivia shows how the power of the Word of God is at work among the peasant communities in his country.

It is winter. The cold wind blows through the cracks in the windows of the hall. A large group of peasant catechists, men and women, attentively follow an introduction to bible work intended to help them afterwards to work with groups. In the course of the meeting, Severo, a young and active participant who showed a great deal of interest, reported:

"The Bible is really opening our eyes. We are not the same as before. We recognize what the landowners and authorities are doing to us farmers. I feel a special strength which comes to me though God's Word. I feel free to speak out and say openly what I think. Why have we lived like slaves for so long?" I remain sunk in thought, finally giving him a sign of approval.

I approach one of the groups at work. The participants are in the middle of a discussion. Some with raised voices, others softly, they are expressing their thoughts. One of the women, Lucinda, explains frankly:

"Women have a right to speak. Now we can talk and discuss matters here, and we are heard. Previously this wasn't allowed: "Women, to your kitchens!" they said to us. "The Word of God teaches us that we are equal and that we can fight for our rights. When I get back to my community I will call the women together and help them to open their eyes to inequality and to defend themselves."

All these testimonies impressed me considerably. I thought: The Bible really does give them a chance to express themselves, to discover their possibilities, taking into account their past experiences and their ability to change their lives. These are simple country people, who for more than four centuries have been neglected and pushed to the back. They are beginning to be different people, new people. Once again one can experience Jesus' immense joy: "I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children" (Mt 11:25).

Here and there, rural education centers are cropping up in Bolivia, and the same phenomenon repeats itself: the direct contact with the Word of God and the contact of the Word with life tear away the veils which kept reality hidden and prevented the people from discovering the meaning of life and their own capacity for change. This brings to my mind the bible passages concerning Jesus' miracles and those of the Old Testament:

"And his ears were opened, and the ligament of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly" (Mk 7:35). "... he was cured, and he could see everything plainly and distinctly" (Mk 8:25). "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy" (Is 35:5-6).

I see the same thing happening here. Through the power of the Word, the eyes of the peasants have been opened anew: they have begun to see their situation of suffering, misery, pain and neglect. The ears of so many of the inhabitants of the rural areas of Brazil (69% of the total population), after being closed for so long, are opening to hear the cries of their outcast and oppressed brothers. These people have realized that it is only in this way that they will become like God, who "saw the miserable state of his people in Egypt" (Ex 3:7). Their tongues loosened and they began to talk clearly about what they heard, their truth, their entire being. The miracles, "signs of the Kingdom" of Jesus at that time, are becoming reality again in these simple oppressed men and women who fight with incredible endurance and without losing hope.

It is true. The lay people are discovering the value of the Word, of the Bible. For so long now it has been kept from them, hidden, covered in dust. Now the fresh breeze of the II Vatican Council is blowing through the cracks in the doors and windows of an aging Church. With this breeze the people too are squeezing in, and with them the power of the Spirit which renews all things. Only now are the people discovering the buried treasure (the Bible). Now is the time "to sell everything" in order to buy the field in which the treasure is hidden, to dig it out and distribute it since it is the property of all and not just of a privileged few.

We are now at the experimental stage of "rediscovering" the Bible and reality. At the same time, endeavours at engagement and transformation can be seen. The prophetic impulses are manifesting themselves clearly if modestly. The greatest prophetic sign, we think, is this search for identity, for self-knowledge, this clear mutual affirmation of the human being and of the individual character of every community, respecting its language, organization, country, culture, beliefs and customs. One comes to feel and experience that God, the God of life, the creator and liberator, is in their midst. This experience cannot be clearly outlined. However, it is indeed an authentic faith, strong and enduring, which is lived there.

Bible work allows us to discover all this, but it also presents us with great challenges:

- The lack of Bible editions and translations. The people have an oral rather than a literary tradition: they prefer listening to reading.
- Communication, the language we use in trying to assist the

people in bible reading. There is a huge gap between our methods and the understanding of the people, especially the indigenous tribes.

- The Spanish Bible, itself a symbol of oppression of a dominant culture (especially for the *aymaras* who see in it a sign of the violent Spanish conquest which weighs heavily in their collective memory).

- The method of bible reading which is neither clear nor commonly adapted to pastoral work which should be geared to listening to the people, following the pace of their growth in faith, showing patience and hope, accompanying the people rather than imposing or directing, respecting the silence of the people and their historical mistrust of the "k'ara" (the white from the town), paying more attention to life than to formal aspects in which teaching and evangelization easily become confused ...

- How can one correctly combine faith and life, Bible and reality, Scripture and culture?

- How does one pass from enthusiasm for God's Word to active involvement with life in order to escape together from the personal and social sin which is part of our reality?

- How can we organize God's people better with regard to their faith and their mission of spreading the Kingdom of God here on earth?

These are only a few of the challenges which are set before us. But the signs of life which the Holy Spirit awakens in us through our common bible reading are full of hope. They are "advance indications" of a wonderful reality which is germinating. When the time to harvest has come, and this reality has reached its full extent, we will recognize that it comes from the Holy Spirit who gives it life for the good of the entire people eagerly awaiting liberation. It is up to us not to deceive these people nor to disappoint their legitimate hope and their hunger for the God of life who loves and who liberates.

- CANADA -

Réal Cliche of the Catholic Biblical Association of Montreal, Quebec, gives several accounts of experiences made with God's Word in Quebec. He chose them because of the dimension of fellowship and/or social involvement they represent. This description of the life situations of men and women gives an insight into the role of the Word of God in their lives. To observe the lifestyle and surroundings of these people with the eyes of a believer is basically the course of faith which one finds in the Bible: that of the people of Israel, of Jesus himself and of the first Christians.

A woman among women.

Lucie works in the Family Center of Hochelage, a popular area of Montreal. Although non-confessional, the Center originated from a parish meeting held in the mid-70's, the theme of which was "The Family". Run mainly by women, the Center also addresses itself to men who have little inclination to speak about themselves in family matters.

One of the main objectives of the Center, is to lend an ear to the men and women who visit. Many of the events with which the women are confronted spawn questions of a religious nature: the death of a spouse; one's own marriage or that of a friend; the baptism of the first born; time which flies by too fast; Christmas which approaches in great strides bringing loneliness or hectic commercialism; a sect moving into the neighborhood...

On the one hand, aware that a large majority of the inhabitants of Quebec need first of all to recover slowly from the religious weariness of the 60's, the Center does not want on the other hand to neglect the spiritual dimension of the work to be done in this area - especially when this is requested by visitors.

The people of Quebec generally associate religion with customs and traditional rituals to be preserved rather than with a path of faith characterized by deep inner warmth and human fellowship. However, using the numerous opportunities for confrontation with occurrences of a religious nature, and thanks to her competence in bible work plus the cooperation of other Center staff members, Lucie has organized a Sunday each month for reflection on matters related to faith with other interested women.

For a non-confessional organization to offer such a service is quite something in Quebec, especially considering that some institutions are still at the stage of deconfessionalization.

The step which Lucie is taking with these women is based on the concrete situation in which they live. Together they discover that God has something to do with their daily lives and their dedication. Their deliberations are derived directly from the Bible which tells through the eyes of faith about the life of an entire people, of Jesus himself and of the first Christians - through the eyes of those who know that God is at the center of the life which pulsates in them, in their neighborhood, in the world.

A brotherhood in which God dwells.

"When you have received something, you give; that is the law of nature", explained Rita from the basic community "CO-PAM" (Community Center for the sharing of faith and brotherhood). The report given by Rita, Pierre and Michel is striking through the constant interaction between "taking" and "giving". These words, associated with the joy they experience in being together, well describe the spirit which reigns at CO-PAM. However, each has his own style: one who makes use of the periods of silence to bring forth his own ideas; another who reflects within herself, letting the words ripen and considering carefully before delivering them with common sense; the third, full of temperament and the joy of life, who knows the misery of alcoholism and the excesses which follow throughout a lifetime.

These are three completely different people, but since 1972, they have shared with about 60 other members one and the same encounter: that with God who, at the center of the community, personifies the brotherhood. In this atmosphere of sharing, God is justly called the God of Love. This is evident

in the support given to members who have an alcohol problem in that they are reminded that they too are children of God and are called to a better life. The most generous are continually called upon to offer their services such as supporting one of the girls leaving the hospital or accompanying women whose husbands are alcoholics.

Here and there, at the regular meetings from which they draw inspiration, passages from the Bible accompany their everyday lives:

"That which you have done for the least of my brothers you have done for me" (Mt 25:40).

"Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his regalia was robed like one of these. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself" (Mt 6:28-29, 33-34).

"A curse on the man who puts his trust in man, who relies on things of flesh, whose heart turns from Yahweh ... A blessing on the man who puts his trust in Yahweh, with Yahweh for his hope" (Jer 17:5-7).

"Master, Master, we are going down! Then he woke up and rebuked the wind and the rough water; and they subsided and it was calm again" (Lk 8:24).

"Whatever you ask for in my name I will do" (Joh 14:13).

Two priests and a nun live permanently in the big house which also serves as a meeting place. They lead the community composed of four groups who get together every two weeks to share their experiences with the gospel. Each group sends a representative to the monthly meetings of those responsible, during which organizational matters pertaining to the community are discussed. A eucharistic celebration held on the first Sunday of each month, preceded by a common meal, brings the entire community together.

In accordance with the special needs of the members, new groups are formed. At the present time, two groups consist of families with small children and a third of young adults. Every 15 days, an open format meeting is held during which time social issues can be discussed. Formation sessions directed more specifically at questions of faith are organized regularly: a course on the Acts of the Apostles and the community has just ended. Depending on the events taking place, one pays visits, spends weekends in the little community house, goes to the hospital or organizes common meals. There is also a store which sells food at a reduced rate.

The relationships existing between the members of COPAM are of the utmost importance. Their main wish is to fit in with other members of the basic group, to engage themselves in the building of productive and consistent sub-groups. Although changes in society do not appear to be the main concern of the community, it has involved itself in this area as well. Examples of this are: their "go-between" role in the relocation of a home for the elderly which was to be adjacent to a motorway; their adoption of political prisoners from all over the world; and their relationship with a basic community in Brazil.

The work of COPAM was cast into shadow last year when the priests of the Work-Mission Peter and Paul, leaders of COPAM, took on the responsibility for a parish in the same neighborhood as COPAM. This meant that they were not so readily available and also led to a reflection on the purpose and mission of COPAM and its connection with the Church. Not everyone is of the same opinion in this matter, but all consider it important to tell those who want to hear how happy the God of Love, whom they became acquainted with through COPAM, has made them and how he helps them to live better lives. They want to spread the Gospel while maintaining the utmost respect for the faith convictions of others. Everyone has friends who are non-believers or are indifferent to the Christian faith. Their main preoccupation is not to convert these people at any price, but to experience with them the friendship which is the basis of their community and their faith.

Faith: an act of love.

Marked by the iconoclastic surroundings of a declining religion and by what, in Quebec, one calls "la revolution tranquille" (the silent revolution) in the years 1960-70, Gilles is part of that very active and militant generation which is concerned more with social changes and a just social order based on true fraternity. He is one of those who remained true to this social option beyond the comfort and indifference this silent revolution created.

Gilles, who for more than 15 years has been working in Quebec for international solidarity especially with Latin America and more specifically with Central America, in particular Guatemala (the whole family spent two years in this country), has incorporated this solidarity into all areas of his life: in his work, in his children's school, in his marriage and in his family.

Together with the other staff members in the Mission House he encourages and supports the Quebec missionaries leaving for or returning from assignments abroad. With his school age children who attend schools of increasingly mixed races, he assists with programs for anti-racial education and acceptance of other cultures. He fears for the quality of life in Quebec should we fail to react immediately to the racialism smouldering in the country.

When asked what connection exists between his involvement and God's Word, Gilles hastens to answer that the aim of his life and of his activities is to grow in love - a love characterized by compassion, gentleness and patience. Faith is not simply an act for him. The conviction that God is present in his life and in history is based on this experience of love. He knows that he still has a long way to go before his life is completely filled with love.

He sees his marriage with Louise as a very good opportunity for growth of love. The 16 years of living together restore the picture we have of man and wife. Each feels challenged by the new and more equal man/woman relationship. With the children, they try to find a less authoritative method of education aimed at the development of the child. Being a fighter in the 1980's, in Quebec means fighting for all areas of life, not just for social concerns.

A personal meeting with Gustavo Gutiérrez in 1975, renewed his faith in God. The discourse on liberation theology, the brotherly love which radiates from Gutiérrez and his faith, sum up the nature of his person, his rapport with others, his family life.

Maintaining his vigor, Gilles keeps sight of his goal to create a better world and is conscious of the efforts this action demands. He leads his practical life according to principles which he connects with his faith: respect for people and the importance of truth. He tries increasingly to base his actions on an all-encompassing love which unites opponents in brotherly love without weakening their cause. Whereas he often would take up a position of opposition, he now tries to develop a fraternal relationship with his opponents, those within the Church who hold a different opinion as well as those in society generally. "I want my actions to be based on love and not just selfish motives."

This option of faith and dedication is supported by a basic Christian community which has been in existence for the past seven years. This community, whose members are mostly employed full-time by the Catholic Action, bases itself on Jesus Christ and on the Jewish-Christian tradition. Is 65:21: "They will build houses for others to live in" is the expression of their aim for a better world.

Although a life of prayer may be hard, he feels himself to be with God. This option for love also makes him aware of his limits. He senses that his advancement is not just the result of his own doings: "The Lord uses me, he touches me somewhere and does something with me".

- FRANCE -

In the course of his professional life, René Huvet took time out from his work to study the Bible and theology. Now that he is retired, he dedicates himself to the formation of adults in the diocese of Beauvais in France. Here he reports on the initial formation of the laity in bible work - an endeavor in which he was actively involved.

In 1979, the new bishop of Beauvais, on studying the statistical data concerning the number and age of the members of his clergy, decided to develop the formation of lay people. He clearly recognized the necessity of giving the shared responsibility of priests and laity a proper content not composed of empty words.

The initial investigation into the questions and needs of adults revealed a priority: biblical formation. Many catechists admitted to being unable to carry out their work without a proper knowledge of the Scriptures. Many passed-on old fashioned concepts which the youth rejected. There are indeed several groups for bible work which voluntarily keep to the background, but these are far from sufficient in number on the

diocesan level. The bishop gave the go-ahead regarding a bible school for the purpose of teaching lay people to be biblical animators. A small team was given the initial responsibility to formulate the project: two priests (one of them is an exeget) and two lay persons who were educated at the Catholic Institute of Paris and at the Sèvres Centre of the Jesuit Fathers.

In May 1982, the Formation d'Animateurs Bibliques (FAB) began a three year program. The innovative concept of this enterprise was reflected on two levels: by the offering of a weekly evening course and by engaging teachers of university quality. After a trial year, the FAB grew: two then three schools were started in various locations of the diocese, and the possibility of a fourth school is under consideration.

The pupil population varies each year between 115 and 130 and the average age is 40. Women form a clear majority, partly because men are tied to their work and additionally, it seems women are more capable of putting themselves in question and are more aware of the importance of this formation.

Each school year consists of 14 courses on the Old Testament and 14 on the New Testament. During the first year of this three year course, the Pentateuch and the Gospel of Mark are dealt with; in the second year, the focus is on the Prophets, the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Paul; while in the third year, the Wisdom literature, Psalms, the Gospel of John and the Infancy Gospels according to Matthew and Luke take priority. Beside the course (and sometimes in place of it) there is group work which in some ways acts as preparation for practice. Occasionally, "make-up" or supplemental lessons are held on Saturday afternoons.

All the students take part in the same course. So far, one could expect beginners to have already been initiated into the Bible through a local group. To those who have not been prepared, however, this confrontation with exegesis comes as a shock. For this reason, a preparatory year is envisioned as a qualifying step and the program is being altered accordingly.

The administrative portion of the schools is handled by the students themselves. In each of the three locations, they chose a team of six people and these 18 people then meet regularly to discuss and resolve organizational problems.

Following the FAB course, students can continue into a three year course in theology. This consists of one year introduction to theology; one year of christology; and one year ecclesiology and sacraments. The course is divided into six terms and lessons take place on Saturday in workshops under the leadership of monitors for the preparation and assimilation of the courses.

Some people already run bible groups during their study time. Others become involved in community catechesis or in the school mission. This integration of lay people in pastoral matters is not always without complications. The conservatives are against changes in the church structure; some priests accuse the FAB of intellectualism; and others feel a threat to their identity as priests and sole authorities of theological

knowledge. It will take time before mentalities change- we are going through a very difficult phase, that of the great mutation of the Church. The future will provide solutions for the small local problems.

In answer to the above accusation of intellectualism, which fails to consider great intellectuals like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Luke, Paul and many others, we will one day be able to produce the wonderful testimonies of faith which come from the bible schools of the diocese. The students themselves will speak about how the FAB showed them the path on which they encountered Christ and how this changed their lives. Some will confess that they owe their return to the Church and to sacramental life to FAB. Others will speak of spiritual treasures they found in the prayer groups started by FAB. All will recall to mind what they experienced together: a fellowship throughout their course of study in search of God, through his Word. (Review "Catéchèse", Paris)

- INDIA -

"The Word of God and my Life" - this is the title Mrs. Mae Britto from Bangalore gives to her testimony.

Being born and raised in a Catholic family with strong Christian principles and high moral values, I was frequently exposed to God's Word - at home, school and church. When I was a child, Bible stories amazed me and touched me sentimentally. Later on, Scripture, when heard, was all too often applied to the lives of others rather than my own! The Bible adorned the bookshelf as my personal interests and pleasure centered on the cares and riches of the world. These and other temptations had a steady and damaging influence on me - I grew proud, over-independent and self-centered. I had little or no time for God and neighbor. I was very happy with my career (teaching) and my state of life (single). However, despite having and tasting all that the world could offer, there was an emptiness, a void that nothing could fill. I was alive, yet dead (Apocalypse 3:1).

After my mother's repeated invitations to attend "some meetings", I accepted her offer and in June 1981, went to a seven day seminar. I had decided to go with an open mind and heart (the right soil! Mk 4:20) and "By Jove!", the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle fell into place. It happened during a talk on "Repentance" - as the Word was boldly proclaimed, I wept unabashedly and knew that the Father had been waiting for his "prodigal daughter". Until that time, I had been a Christian in name only.

Since then, there's been no turning back. I had sought creation instead of my Creator and having experienced his love, it was only natural that his Word would hold an important place in my heart and in my home. I realized that in reading Scripture, I was not coming in contact with a book, but the very person of Jesus himself who is the Word (Jn 1:1-3). I soon found that by

reflecting on the Word and acting on it, my misplaced values, attitudes and priorities changed and I began to submit to God's standard of living.

This made my faith become so alive that I yearned for God, like the psalmist (Ps 42:1-2) and thirsted for his Word wanting it to "be a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Ps 119:105). My desire to study sacred Scripture at the Catholic Charismatic Bible College in Bombay did not remain wishful thinking.

From June 1983 to April 1984, I attended a ten month "live-in" course. It was an experience I will never forget or regret. We were ten students of varying ages, backgrounds and temperaments and we were expected to live out God's Word as we studied it! As we began to live together and "rub shoulders", the positive and the negative in each of us was bared! It was through reflection on God's Word, guidance and regular counselling that we were slowly but surely able to see God's plan in bringing us together - using the positive to build community as we helped one another overcome the negative (a painful process indeed!). But as St. Paul tells us in 2 Tim 3:16, it was primarily God's Word that helped in our formation (it informed, reformed, transformed and performed in us). We were indeed "melted, molded, filled" and are now being used in our respective regions.

Since my return, the daily reading of the Scripture is a must. As I reflect on it and grow in it, I am reassured by Jesus' words: "If you obey my teaching you are really my disciples and you will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free" (Jn 8:31,32).

It is this freedom that:

- draws me to God and to my neighbor;
- compels me to give up the teaching of academic studies to unfold the richness of God's Word to others and thus share Christ with them;
- makes tradition alive, enabling me to enjoy a newness in prayer and worship of God;
- gives me the peace and joy that surpasses understanding.

- KENYA -

During his trip to Africa in June of last year, Fr. Ludger Feldkämper met with Mr. Peter Kiarie, who has the distinction of being the first Catholic layman to become chairman of the Bible Society of Kenya. He also serves as member of AFREC, the Executive Committee of the Bible Society for Africa. In addition to this, he is secretary of the Catholic Lay Council in Kenya. Prior to this assignment, he served as secretary of the lay apostolate in the Catholic Secretariat of Kenya where he was in charge of the Department of Religious Education which in turn, is responsible for the biblical apostolate in the country. He attended the WCFBA Plenary Assembly II, in Malta, 1978. Mr. Kiarie kindly agreed to give an interview to Fr. Feldkämper, the key points of which follow.

L.F. My first question, Mr. Kiarie, linked with the situation in which we find ourselves in the Catholic Church. For quite some time, centuries we could say, the Bible has been the monopoly of the teaching office of the Church and the exegetes. During Vatican Council II, the Church opted for "easy access to sacred Scripture for all". This would mean the Bible should be easily accessible to the lay people who may in some way have been deprived of it. In this regard, I would like to ask you, do you think lay people have a special competent role concerning the Bible, since we can no longer say the Bible is the monopoly of the teaching office and the exegetes?

P.K. Fortunately, the laity are not aware that the Bible has been the monopoly of the exegetes and the magisterium, because the laity really live the Christian life. To them, the Bible is really not so much THE book as is the spiritual life they have been given. To them, the Bible has been the liturgy. Although some have never read Genesis, they know about Adam and Eve and that there was an original sin which must be removed through Baptism. Through the liturgy, however, they have learned about confirmation, the Holy Spirit and the Life of Christ. They have also learned Bible stories, so to them, the Bible is a WAY of life. From the laity's point of view, it is a major pastoral challenge to the Church that here you have the people ready to act; but they have not been properly armed with the sword of God's Word.

The Vatican Council came as a real Godsend at the time when African countries became independent. For the first time the people could hear the actual words of the Liturgy in their mother tongue and they welcomed this! There was a time when they thought the Bible was Protestant. They now realize the Bible Protestants use is from an authentic source and their desire to know the Scriptures is increased so they can relate to other Christian groups. In Africa, people are taught a religion orally and have lived it through rites and ceremony of passage. So the Bible serves as a reinforcement - as a "proving the point". The role of the family now is to emphasize living the Scriptures with the parents' level of understanding raised so they can "break it" for their children. The Bible is a living reality. God is not a historical thing of long ago, but is present in the whole concept of eternity.

These days, the very name of God is challenged. In Africa, we are highly scandalized when people say there is no God - we think it is a joke! To us this is unthinkable! God is a parent - the parent of all people. It is through the competence of convinced lay people that the whole lordship of Godly creation will be brought back into line. In conclusion, perhaps theologians and exegetes will come "down to earth" and thus become more involved pastorally.

L.F. In this connection, if I remember correctly, the Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the modern world has a very appropriate expression: it speaks about gospel-inspired lay people - the challenge, the task, that all the realities of this world be permeated with gospel values. Now a second question with regard to the laity and the Bible would concern the needs of lay people. What do you think are the special needs of lay people concerning the Bible?

P.K. The first among these needs is the availability of the Scriptures themselves. In Africa especially with all the different languages, the Bible is not available to the Catholic laity who are now using translations made by the Bible Societies. Bible translations are made by these societies according to priorities often set by the churches who support them. The deuterocanonical books, which are used in our liturgy, are not available in many of the African languages. In Kenya, a translation exists, but only in the Luo language. The Catholic people should be encouraged to work with the Bible Societies and others in actual Catholic initiatives concerning the translation of the deuterocanonical books. We too should participate in this translation, production and distribution so the Scriptures can become available as complete Bibles, Testaments or portions thereof.

Another need is for the actual teaching of how to read the Bible. Many people are confused by the way in which some Evangelical denominations use the Bible to prove a point or emphasize differences. Guides to the Scriptures, Bible aids and things of that nature are very helpful in addition to preaching styles. I feel we have the best trained men academically, but when it comes to the actual delivery of the sermon, the approach is very routine. A Catholic who has been attending Mass regularly on Sundays and Holydays for fifty years, has listened to approximately seven years worth of theological lectures - but how much did he understand? I think priests should be trained so they actually educate people thereby helping them grow in competency and understanding regarding their faith. In the African community, as you grow older, you become wiser. This is not happening in the Church and I think it is an educational mechanism that needs to be examined. As we build small Christian communities, we are basing them on the ministries. The laity are becoming involved as catechists, teachers, and sponsors for the sacraments such as baptism and matrimony and therefore experiencing a kind of spiritual life. Among the laity, there are people who are becoming spiritual ministers to others either through religious teaching or breaking the bread of the Word. The pastors are learning from the small Christian communities and this is a very encouraging movement. The laity need access to the Scriptures and help in studying them.

L.F. You have referred several times now to the African context and the African situation. In this connection, I would like to address some specific questions concerning the Bible and Africa. You mentioned previously that people in Africa live an oral culture and the Bible is a book. Is there perhaps a gap to be bridged with regard to people in an oral culture and the Bible as a book?

P.K. When the Bible was translated into African languages and the people could actually read it, it brought about a sort of revolution. In most of the stories of the Bible, the scene of action was Africa itself, and as the people listened, the whole history of salvation became a kind of drama. It was very similar to the legends and stories the African people were telling about themselves so the Africans started composing songs. Practically every Biblical scene that matters is being put into song. In

fact, we have been considering a "sung Bible" edition with different tunes and dramatizations! Having lived an oral culture where values are transmitted from father to son through songs and proverbs, the Africans already appreciate the Bible's written word. The African people discovered that a lot of the legends and most of their proverbs and values were in the Scriptures. I think now that people have become literate and can read, every small group would like to have the Word of God in their own language. Even in the United Bible Societies, we cannot translate Scriptures for all, so we start with the big tribes. We have small groups of African people who have no hope of reading the Scriptures in their own language I don't know for how long. I think this should be seen as a special area to be looked into. In Kenya, we are happy we have some people from America who specialize in translating for the smaller tribes. In Africa, the Bible is also available on cassettes so people who cannot read can at least hear the word in their own language. My dream is that the Scriptures be read and danced and sung so it becomes part of the people's tradition. After all, the Word of God is a common heritage and a common property of all mankind.

L.F. You already mentioned the contribution of Africa to the understanding of the Bible. In summing up the last point, perhaps we can say that the Bible existed as a spoken, sung, and celebrated Word before it became a written Word, and now maybe the oral culture is called upon in a special way to bring that letter (perhaps the dead letter) to life. This may be a contribution Africa could make. Are there other contributions Africa, to include the culture of Africa, could make for the benefit of the whole Church?

P.K. Another major benefit I see Africa making is their belief in a living God. Scripture has existed as a celebrated Word and Africans believe God exists as surely as their parents exist. Although this value is threatened by secularism and materialism, the more Africans read the Scriptures the more they identify with the one God who created the universe. We are sometimes amused by the apologetic approach to religion in Europe where religion is occasionally seen as a private affair and the Churches almost appear to be subject to secular powers. In an authentic African approach, the position of God is not challenged because it can be explained. I believe a major contribution from Africa (especially from Africans who read the Bible) will be to bring humanity back to mankind. Africans are happy to be alive. They may be poor, but they do not like to be looked upon as objects or problems to be solved. They live in a communion believing that they die and are reborn. The African people have hope and the Bible confirms that hope.

L.F. We have touched upon many things already. A final question I would like to ask concerns the relationship between the Bible and evangelization in Africa. Evangelization, of course, I take in the wider sense. I am not only thinking of evangelization to non-Christians, but also of re-evangelization of the Christians proclaiming the Good News. Of course this also entails human development - building a just society according to God's plan. The question concerns the Bible in evangelization in Africa: its role, function and importance.

P.K. It is somewhat ironical that when evangelization was conducted rapidly especially by the Catholic Church, the Bible

was not very visible. It was more the other churches who had the Book so it has been a problem for Catholics to see the relationship between the message proclaimed to them and the message proclaimed by other churches. However, from the Vatican Council and the entire ecumenical movement, the Bible is becoming the central point of unity. Catholics are discovering that all their teachings and doctrines were originally from the Bible while on the other hand, Protestants are discovering that many things that Catholics did were also scriptural.

From now on, I feel the Bible will be seen as the textbook of evangelization. There is no avoiding it. While we may publish selections from it, the Bible must be the central source of the liturgy in the cultivation of spiritual life. I feel the Bible is a prayer book, especially for families and for people in difficult situations. Many of the Psalms and prayers found in the Old Testament are from people who were experiencing devastations such as war and famine. The one who inspired the Bible knows human life for he created it.

Everyone can identify with this book, from the holiest to the most sinful. When I go to seminars or to teach, I am always finding that Scripture itself is used as a text book. In discussions with others, the question arises concerning the usefulness of guides and other audio-visual aids such as slides and films. Biblical films are popular in Kenya as the entire family will go to the theater to see the Ten Commandments or other religious oriented movies. In many ways, the mass media can be used to publicize the Word of God and it is becoming clear that the people need the Word of God to grow as human beings. To me, hunger is the cause of moral degradation of the people, because what they are eating and the pleasures they are getting cannot feed the spirit. I believe there is a "spiritual hunger" which we as a church should fill. In Africa, it is important for people to talk and sing together in communion. Even a small amount of food can be shared because what is most important is the sharing. Shared food has a way of multiplying and helping people survive. I think we have no better means of evangelization than to continue to feed the people with the Word of the Scripture itself.

- SWITZERLAND -

On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, the Swiss Catholic Biblical Association (Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk) has published a booklet entitled "The Bible Lives" ("Die Bibel lebt") in which 21 Christians from various walks of life give testimonies on the importance of the Bible in their Christian lives. This booklet shows that anyone can give his/her life a deeper significance. Here we reproduce extracts of the testimony given by Mrs. Vreni Baumer, a catechist.

My joy for the Bible is not based on any sort of "conversion". I have no unusual memories regarding the Bible. What I have

to say is of such an everyday nature that it hardly appears worth saying - and yet this, I think, is the salient point: The biblical message has something to do with my - our - daily life. Therefore, it is worth considering what place the Bible actually occupies in our lives and to what extent, consciously or unconsciously, it influences and shapes us.

I go back a long way with my deliberations, right back to my early childhood, because those experiences had a strong hand in determining my present relationship to the Bible.

As soon as I could read, I read from the Bible. Although a born "bookworm", I was one of a large family and therefore obliged to help with babysitting and housework leaving little opportunity to satisfy my "hunger to read". Our parents were particularly concerned that we children get enough sleep so reading in bed was not permitted. Before long, I discovered my father turned a blind eye when he found the Bible in my bed. In fact, he even showed an interest in what I read and discussions developed. As a teacher, my father taught salvation history from innermost conviction. Many of his pupils obtained something for life from his biblical expositions as I did too. I don't remember ever having to learn anything for bible class - marks were unimportant and biblical knowledge was not tested. We discovered, however, that the Bible was a challenge for us Christians, and that sometime we would have to account before God for how we had acted in the face of this message and how we had lived it.

It wasn't only words which were passed on to us. I saw how seriously our father took the Bible - how he continually discovered new things and furthered his knowledge. I experienced a somewhat critical attitude towards church authorities, and it pleased me to see how happy our father was over many of the changes implemented by the Council. I also observed how his faith always strengthened his ability to overcome difficult situations.

The deepest impression was left on me when my mother, on her deathbed, said good-bye to her seven children - each one of us separately. Although I was only two and one-half years old, I remember clearly as if it were yesterday. I see the expressive face of my father. I felt that he would not give up. Without a doubt, his deep faith helped him to believe in our dying mother's promise of a new, good mother; a promise which was fulfilled.

When someone is granted such experiences and is able to integrate them completely within himself, then it is likely that he will remain open for God's Word and for the people who announce and live this message.

I have often been confronted by the dark side of life. I asked questions and sought answers which often failed to appear; and yet, looking back, I am amazed how again and again the right book fell into my hands, how I met people who helped me onwards, how I encountered offers of courses which influenced my life.

There was the priest who opened my eyes to the Book of Psalms:

"Thou hast kept close guard before me and behind and hast spread thy hand over me" (Psalm 139,5). This was the first Psalm I learned by heart: the one that really took hold of me deep inside. "Save me, O God; for the waters have risen up to my neck. I sink in muddy depths and have no foothold ... I am weary with crying out" (from Psalm 69). "My heart is steadfast, O God ... I will sing and raise a psalm to thee" (from Psalm 108). Here in the Psalms, I came across people who cried out in their distress and on other occasions, broke into rejoicing and thanked God.

It is not possible for me to integrate every Psalm into my life. Of help to me were "simplified" Psalms for Christians today which I always carried with me on visits to the sick. It became increasingly apparent to me that the people of that time were also the people of today. I could identify with the characters in the Bible.

In this way, I found clarity for decision making, confidence for getting through difficult times, and in the person of Jesus, I met the human being - God himself as a challenge, an orientation, and hope for us all. The Bible became new and fascinating for me in connection with feminist theology. This recognition that the Bible must be read anew from the woman's viewpoint has a "liberating" effect on me. How beneficial such a refreshing "ruach" is (this means: "breath of life", "spirit", "breeze"; the Hebrew word is feminine!) Jesus' manner towards women holds the same fascination for me as seeking out the patriarchal inclinations of the Old Testament or reading information concerning the feminine character of God.

It seems to me the Bible is increasingly becoming, and must become, the book of liberation. We discover that anywhere people suffer - from their own misery or the misery of others there are also people who are called by God to rise up, and demonstrate the liberation contained in the biblical message. They continue to show it until we listen and are prepared to live our lives in accordance with it. "Prophets", both male and female, can indeed be "deprived of life", be brought to silence, but their message that every human being has the right to be a human being will live on.

The Bible challenges us, as humans, to cry out in our misery, our fear, our sadness and our pain; but since we may believe that we will always be in God's keeping, joy, trust and hope will also remain with us. This, for me, is the liberation in the biblical message.

- ZAIRE -

Tomada Mba-Abes, father of six children, is secretary of the publishing house Verbum Bible in Kinshasa, Zaire. He is engaged in working for better coordination of the biblical apostolate in his home town.

During the months of June and July, 1987, I visited several parishes in the town of Kinshasa to find out what sort of biblical

apostolate activities existed, how better cooperation could be achieved and what could be done to help the communities.

Questions

The questions which I asked in the course of discussions were, in general, the following:

- Is there a bible group in your parish? Or is there an initiative to start one?
- If yes, which programs are followed?
- Which handbooks are used?
- Who leads the group? What training does he/she have?
- Who participates in the formation? (catechists, leaders of religious movements, intellectuals, etc.)
- Do they show interest in getting to know God's Word?
- Are there other possibilities for bible study?
- Are there any definite requirements?

Replies.

Here is a summary of the preliminary answers I received.

- There are no systematically organized bible groups in the parishes which I visited. However, each parish does have a basic formation course in Lingala and sometimes in French.
- Usually the program followed is that of the Archdiocese of Kinshasa. This is planned over a three year cycle and is based on salvation history, social teaching, and the liturgy.
- The course leaders are a parish priest, another priest, a religious sister, and a "Mokambi wa paroisse" or pastoral assistant. The format is designed mainly for those engaged in parish work (catechists, leaders of religious movements, etc.).
- People are interested and one feels they are hungry for God's Word. They want to get to know the Bible in order to stand up to their Protestant neighbors or members of sects who sometimes challenge them.
- The content of the basic formation course is, according to some priests, too elementary.
- Apart from small meetings with specific groups (young intellectuals, "bilenge ya mwinda", etc.), there are no other opportunities for bible study. However, the Bible leagues, organized by the Protestants or by sects, are very active in various neighborhoods.

Special wishes.

Several priests expressed the following wishes:

- Establishment of systematically organized bible courses, if competent people can be found who are sufficiently available to lead them;
- Reconsideration and reorganization of the basic bible course which is considered too elementary;
- Bible courses for biblical-pastoral workers (priests, religious, lay people) on the diocesan level (different programs offer weekend, summer and vacation courses).
- A second formation course to follow the existing three year basic course for the purpose of deepening the biblical knowledge already gained.

Kinshasa

At the present time, Kinshasa has 123 parishes, sub-communities and pastoral offices. I only managed to visit 15 of these. Three quarters of the parishes visited are new ones situated on the fringes of the town.

Center DEI VERBUM of Nemi

In the first issue of the Bulletin Dei Verbum, we announced the opening of the biblical pastoral center for formators and promoters in Nemi near Rome. The first course was in English. In the 31 August 1987 issue of the "Osservatore Romano", a description of the experience written by Father Lüdger Feldkämper, was published. The following is a recount of this experience.

August 9, 1987, an 18 week biblical-pastoral course for formators was held for the first time in the Biblical Center "Dei Verbum" of the Divine Word Missionaries in Nemi near Rome. The course, probably the first of its kind, is a common initiative of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA), whose office is in Stuttgart, and the Divine Word Missionaries, an associate member of this Federation.

The course offers participants who have worked previously in the biblical apostolate an intensive personal formation by means of exchange of the experiences made with the Bible in the different cultural contexts on one hand, while on the other hand, it prepares them to develop similar initiatives and formation programs for other people who work in the biblical apostolate. Pursuit of these objectives requires prayer and celebration of God's Word, the study of the Holy Scripture which facilitates its comprehension and communication, and particularly the communal experience of God's Word during the course.

The group consisted of 28 participants: an Indonesian bishop, 17 priests, one religious brother, 3 religious sisters, and 7 lay people (4 men and 3 women). The participants who come from different countries and were on the average 43 1/2 years of age, worked in the biblical apostolate and biblical pastoral in 12 different countries and 5 continents other than Europe. Nine of these participants are delegated by pastoral centers, 3 by a biblical center and the other 16 by a diocese or a religious congregation. All of them have direct experience in the biblical apostolate or in the biblical pastoral field. After the Nemi course, all of the participants will probably work in the formation and animation of others in the biblical apostolate in their respective countries.

Coming from varying cultural backgrounds from the five continents, over a dozen biblical experts proficient in various pastoral areas such as liturgy, catechesis, community building, formation of animators, spirituality and social communication, were involved as teachers and moderators during the workshop portion of the course.

In the Nemi program, top priority is given to the inductive method of learning and the exchange of experiences between the students and the experts. Father John Füllenbach, svd, director of the course has been in charge of renewal courses in

Nemi for eight years. The assistant director of this course is Miss Teresita Nitorreda of the East Asian Pastoral Institute, which is an associate member of the Federation located in Manila.

At the end of the course, an evaluation will allow a determination of the strong points. Looking at the very satisfactory results up to now, the organizers have decided to establish other courses in the future. You will find in one of the next issues of the Bulletin Dei Verbum a more detailed report of this initial course.

The next course, which will be in English, is already scheduled for mid-August to mid-December 1988.

General Information

BELGIUM: Exhibition "Sons of Abraham"

The Center Informatique et Bible in Maredsous invited Jews, Christians and Muslims to an ecumenical discussion during July and August of 1987 and made use of this opportunity to present a biblical exhibition on the theme "Sons of Abraham". Msgr. Ablondi, president of our Federation, expressed his joy during the opening of the exhibition as an opportunity for "a great dialog" between the three great families of the Sons of Abraham. According to Msgr. Ablondi, three basic convictions can be found in the Tora, the Gospels and the Coran: 1. The face of man is formed by the Spirit; 2. God loves us; 3. God confided his Word to us. There are many other common traits which should permit descendants of Abraham to recognize each other as brothers.

Regarding the Word, Msgr. Ablondi stated: "It is the basic conviction already outlined by Moses who cried out: "Would that all were Prophets!" (Numbers 11,25); of Jesus who advised: "He who hears you, hears me"; and through the Islamic recommendation that: "The Coran is read out loudly in all languages, written down in books, preserved in the hearts" (Al Gazzali). Could one not say that the sons of Abraham are at the same time sons of the Word? Could one not say of our epoch that the sons of Abraham do actually meet each other in our countries but run the risk of being neither true Christians, nor Moslems, nor Jews because they have lost the Word? Should one not wish that, with their characteristic traits, the sons of Abraham will help all people to discover in themselves the bearers of transcendental values, the subjects of love, and humans rich in the Word which is passed on to prepare the way for community?"

Further information: CIB, Maredsous, 5198 Denée (Anée), Belgium.

Congress of the International Association for Bible and Informatics.

This association, located in Maredsous, is organizing its second international meeting in Jerusalem from 9 to 13 June 1988. After the conference of Louvain-la-Neuve (September 1985) which had as its theme "Bible and Informatics: The Text", the organizers wish to draw attention to the *METHODS, MEDIUM* and *RESULTS* in automatized research in the area of the Bible. Further information: CIB, Maredsous, 5198 Denée (Anée), Belgium.

CAMEROON: Congress of the African Biblical Scholars.

The third congress of African biblical scholars took place in July 1987 in Yaounde, Cameroon. Thirty participants representing eight countries, worked on the theme "Paul and the Churches" in the view and context of Africa. The African biblicists used this convention as an opportunity to create firm structures for themselves: the Pan-African Society of Catholic Exegetes (APECA) with Msgr. Monsengwo Pasinya (Zaire) as president and Msgr. Onayekan (Kenya) as vice-president. The next congress of African biblical scholars in July 1989, will be under the theme "The Communities in the Johannine Writings" (*Journal LA CROIX*).

CANADA, QUEBEC: Tenth Anniversary of the journal "Parabole"

The Société Catholique de la Bible (SOCABI) has edited for ten years now the newspaper "Parabole" with the intention of making the Word of God relevant to our times and thereby reach the largest possible number of Catholics. This 16 page publication filled with a variety of titles, articles and news items, is composed like a daily journal with 20,000 copies printed every two months. When the production committee begins to select a theme for an issue, it first investigates a question of timely importance and tries to illuminate it in the light of biblical text. In doing so, one is not concerned to spare the reader from making his own judgement or to submit to him a miraculous solution from the bible. The concern is to direct the readers attention to the way people of the bible solved their own problems relevant to their times. This return to religious roots may guide the reader on the way to his own decisions. Further information: SOCABI, 7400 Boul. Saint-Laurent 519, Montreal H2R 2Y1, Québec, Canada.

CHILE: First Biblical-Pastoral Seminar.

A booklet of 68 pages has been published on the First National Seminar for the Biblical Apostolate held from 25 to 29 August 1986, in Santiago (Cf. Bulletin Dei Verbum 3,2/1987, page 16). This contains the most important presentations made during the meeting (present exegetical currents and biblical translations; bible - ecumenism and sects as pastoral challenges; liturgy - the privileged place of God's Word: pastoral use of video - a biblical apostolate centered on culture and the message..) as well as a report on the many experiences in the biblical apostolate (bible circles; introduction courses to the Bible; biblical commentaries in rural missions; biblical formation for leaders of children's groups; bible encounter for youth, etc.).

Further information: Comision Nacional de Pastoral Biblica, Casilla 517-V, Erasmo Escala 1822, 4 piso, Santiago, Chile.

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY: International Congress of New Testament Scholars.

From 24 to 28 August 1987, New Testament scholars, members of the "Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas" (SNTS) met in Göttingen, West Germany, for their annual International Congress. Approximately 320 exegetes from all over the world and from the various Christian Churches participated.

Further information: Katholisches Bibelwerk, Silberburgstr. 121, 7000 Stuttgart 1, West Germany.

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, AUSTRIA, SWITZERLAND: Bible Week 1987/1988.

The German-speaking Protestant Bible Societies and the Catholic Biblical Organizations have set the theme for Bible Week 1988 as "Peace Through Justice". Seven passages from the prophet Isaiah form the basis of the material offered to the parishes. In many places, this week will be celebrated ecumenically. Some parishes arrange the week to culminate with Bible Sunday. Others choose a week particularly suited to their schedule.

Further information: Katholisches Bibelwerk, Silberburgstr. 121, 7000 Stuttgart 1, West Germany.

HONGKONG: Activities of the Catholic Biblical Association of Hong Kong.

During five consecutive weeks, discussions on "The Bible and Life", have been held by the liturgical circle of St. Joseph's parish. For his homily, the parish priest turned to the statement of the conciliary document *DEI VERBUM*: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord" (21). Five bible texts were explored in the discussion rounds, these also being used as the second reading in the liturgy: 2 Tim 3:14-17; Heb 4:12-13; Acts 17:10-12,; Acts 8:26-38; Jn 1:22-25. The aim of the organizers was to encourage the faithful in daily bible reading and meditation. Practical suggestions with a view to organizing a bible discussion group or study group were given. Bibles were given to the parishioners, who have now become accustomed to following the liturgical texts with a Bible in their hands. Following these five weeks, meetings were arranged for those who wished to continue with bible study. A bible group meets regularly every Friday for bible sharing and discussion of the liturgical bible text for the following Sunday.

Further information: HKCBA, 10/F, Catholic Diocese Center, 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong.

INDIA: Bible Correspondence Course.

Approximately 2900 people follow the correspondence course on the Bible prepared by the Commission for Christian Life of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) and the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Center (NBCLC) in Bangalore. The course emphasizes a community approach to the Bible (study and prayer) and aims at the formation of basic Christian communities. It also intends to make the results of modern biblical research available in simple language to lay people, priests and religious in India. The course is spread over five years: two for the Old Testament and three for the New. Every two months, the participants receive a study book of 40-50 pages. The entire course requires 30 study books.

Further information: BCC, Secretariate of NBCLC, Post Bag 8426, Bangalore 560 084, India.

INDIA: Course on Biblical Spirituality.

From 19 September to 14 October 1988, the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Center (NBCLC) will offer a one month course on biblical spirituality.

Further information: BCC, Secretariate of NBCLC, Post Bag 8426, Bangalore 560 084, India.

INDIA: Regional Meeting of Biblical Apostolate Representatives in Northeast India.

On 21 May 1987, representatives of the eight dioceses of Northeast India met to exchange and discuss experiences.

The reports of the various delegates can be summarized as follows:

1. No diocese has a full-time worker for the biblical apostolate. Those responsible are also engaged in other ministries and have no specific formation in biblical apostolate.
2. The Bible has not yet been translated into the different languages of this region in spite of interconfessional endeavors in this regard. Many christians do not have access to even a New Testament in their own language.
3. All the dioceses have developed programs to make the Bible more accessible: bible camps, retreats, films, competitions, songs, etc.
4. Two dioceses celebrate Bible Week and Bible Sunday.
5. Bible circles and prayer groups find only a faint echo in the region.
6. Greater coordination in the area of liturgy and catechesis is necessary.
7. In order to improve the coordination of efforts made in the field of the biblical apostolate, the creation of regional structures has been suggested.

The delegates then drew up a plan of action. A regional structure was set up, charged with the task of organizing formation for the biblical apostolate leaders in this region. Many activities were planned for the year 1988, which, in accordance with the wish of the bishops, is to be "The Year of the Word of God". A formation course for priests, religious and laity will be held on regional and diocesan levels. Pains will be taken to ensure that the pastoral letter, with which the bishops wish to open the "Year of the Word of God", is not only read but also put into practice. In order to encourage and support bible translation, Catholic translators are invited to take part in a formation course. A Bible Week with a Bible Sunday is to be proposed for the entire region.

Further information / Pastoral Centre, Tripura Castle Road, Shillong, 793 003, India.

INDONESIA: National Biblical Meetings.

The Catholic Biblical Association of Indonesia has informed us of two national meetings. The first, in December 1987, is intended for scripture scholars and has as its theme: "The Church in the New Testament". The second will take place during the same month and caters to biblical apostolate representatives throughout the entire country as well as to scripture scholars. The intention is to evaluate the course run by the Catholic Biblical Association and to define priorities for the future.

Further information: Lembaga Biblika Indonesia, Jl, Kramat Raya 134 pav., Jakarta, Indonesia.

ITALY: Activities of the Italian Biblical Association
Within the framework of the Italian Biblical Association, about 60 exegetes met from 6 to 12 September 1987, in Brixen to discuss their practical work. The next congress of Old Testament scholars will concentrate on an analysis of biblical texts from the 6th Century BC, while New Testament scholars will concentrate on the writings of St. John.

In the coming year, the XXXth National Bible Week will take place at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. The theme will be "The Mission" (origin and phenomenology of the concept and practice of missions based on the Bible; thoughts and experiences of the first Christians based on the texts of the New Testament).

The year 1988 marks the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Italian Biblical Association.

Further information: Associazione Biblica Italiana, Via della Scrofa 80, 00186 Rom, Italy.

JAPAN: The Bible in Today's Japanese.

An important event in the history of the Christian Church in Japan: The beginning of September marked the appearance of the Bible translated into modern Japanese (Shinkyodoyaku Seisho). This is the result of 18 years work, responsibility being shared between the Japanese Bible Society on one side and the Catholic Bishop's Conference on the other. It is the first publication of an interconfessional bible translation in Japan and comes 100 years after the first complete Protestant bible translation and 28 years after the Catholic one. Some 50,000 copies of this edition have been printed, 90% of which contain the deuterocanonical books.

Further information: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 4-16-1, Seta, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo 158, Japan.

MALAYSIA: Biblical Spirituality for the Laity.

The pastoral institute of the archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur has instituted for the first semester of this year a course for lay people wishing to deepen their biblical spirituality.

Further information: Archdiocesan Pastoral Institute, 528 Jalan Bukit Nanas, 50250 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

NETHERLANDS: 25th Jubilee of the Catholic Biblical Association (KBS).

An estimated 600 friends and guests gathered in Tilburg at the Catholic University of Brabant in order to celebrate the 25th Jubilee of the Catholic Biblical Association of the Netherlands (Katholieke Bijbelstichting). On this occasion, the new translation of the four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were introduced to the general public - a first step in the revision of the "Willibrord" translation of 1961. This new translation is the common work of the KBS and the Belgium organization Vlaamse Bijbelstichting (VBS).

The KBS team publishes the bi-monthly biblical pastoral magazine "Schrift".

Further information: Katholieke Bijbelstichting, Baroniestraat 43, 5281 JB Boxel, Pays-Bas.

PAKISTAN: Celebration of the First Bible Sunday.

For the first time, on 22 February 1987, the Catholics of Pakistan have been invited to celebrate Bible Sunday. The

Catechetical Center of Karachi distributed some documents for the preparation and the performance of this Sunday.

Further information: Catechetical Center Karachi, 104 Mohan Terrace, Paar Street, Saddar, Karachi-3, Pakistan.

RWANDA: Biblical Pastoral Meeting.

All the biblical pastoral animators from Rwanda participated in the biblical pastoral meeting which was organized jointly by the National Biblical-Pastoral Center and the secretariate of the Federation in Stuttgart and was held 7 - 10 September 1987. Two points made up the agenda: the first concerned itself with the practice of biblical-pastoral work and the second turned around the necessity and possibility of establishing some primary pillars for coordinating biblical pastoral work throughout the country.

The participants were asked to reflect upon the criteria for biblical pastoral work in Rwanda. In the following, we render some of their conclusions.

1. A series of difficulties and dangers were registered in the biblical apostolate.

-There exists a certain difficulty to really hear the Word of God. One hears many words which one believes to know quite well then one goes on to other things. In prayer circles and in charismatic groups for example, one listens to the Word of God only in passing and quickly moves on to prayers which have no connection with the message received rather than hanging on to the Word, meditating on it and taking it to heart.

-Another fact which can be recognized is the fear (at times even the fright) of the population. This fear results from the uncertainty concerning the future, but can also be traced back to the traditional fear for everything unknown. There is however, even among Christians, a certain fear of God who had been represented far too long as an unmerciful judge. This leads to a situation where the Word of God is listened to in an insufficient measure and where legends gain more and more attention: (suspected) apparitions, visions, miracles, and even traditional sorcery. From there also comes the confusion with sects. This finds expression in the very strong desire for miracles.

-Also a great desire for affection is connected with it: most people are sentimentally oriented believing with their hearts.

-Another difficulty: people are drawn to reading the bible in a manner where everybody is reading and interpreting the bible according to his/her own fashion whether alone or in small groups. Only a few Catholics proudly read the bible in the community of the Church.

2. Facing these difficulties and dangers, the biblical apostolate in Rwanda could make use of the following criteria and convictions:

-Focus the biblical apostolate upon Jesus Christ and his many faces as we encounter them in the bible.

-Help Christians to accept the Word of God which is expressed in Jesus Christ "who is, who was, and who shall come again".

-Place the accent on the Good News of God the Father and on the many exclamations in Scripture to give up all fear: "Have no fear!..."

-Base the prayer upon the Word of God (upon the text which has just been heard).

-Help christians receive the Word of God in its rich variety: the Word of God reaches us over many words. Instill in the biblical animators a sense for the duration of the words (investigate word connections which express the past, the present and the future). The Word of God is living. This should be said in order to escape the danger of widespread fundamentalism.

-Stress the value of a catechist's testimony or witness of the Word of God. Point out all biblical "figures", or persons who in the bible show us how they received the Word of God among them, especially, the Virgin Mary.

-Help christians to recognize the position of Our Lady as she appears in Holy Scripture (this is necessary in view of the tendency of many to install Mary everywhere so that she at times even takes the place of Christ himself and replaces him!)

-Study the presentation of the Bible taking into account all suggestions from popular christianity.

Futher information: Center National de Pastorale, B.P. 405, Kigali, Rwanda.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: Revision of the New Testament in the "New American Bible".

Following a recommendation from the "United States Center for the Biblical Apostolate", full member of the Federation, the New Testament in the "New American Bible", first published in 1970, has been revised. Fifteen exegetes, one third Protestants, two thirds Catholics, have worked for six years to complete this revision. The "New American Bible" is used everywhere in the country for the liturgy. It is a characteristic feature of this translation to avoid the use of a too exclusively masculine vocabulary which often appears discriminatory towards women. For example, the expression "child of God" is preferred over "son of God". The common goal of this project was to create an English translation that makes use of today's American language and is understood by all without adapting too much to the popular or the "vulgar" use of the language.

According to a recent survey, 21% of American Catholics, consider bible reading and bible study as "very important" in comparison to 52% of the Protestant christians. However, the number of Catholics reading the bible regularly is mounting continuously.

Futher information: US Center for the Catholic Biblical Apostolate, 1312 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, U.S.A.



An Event: the publishing of the new version of the "Guiding Principles..."

On November 16, 1987, the new "Guidelines Concerning Interconfessional Cooperation in Translation of the Bible" were published.

History and Objectives of the Document.

This document was published by the United Bibel Societies (UBS) and by the Vatican Secretariate for Promoting Christian Unity.

The date of November 16th was chosen because it is the death anniversary of Cardinal Bea who died in 1968 and who was instrumental in organizing cooperation among all christians. The first version of this document had been published June 2nd, 1968.

The initiative to formulate common directives and procedures concerning the translation of the Bible is the joint result of the Vatican II's Constitution "Dei Verbum" and of the responsibility conferred by Pope Paul VI on Cardinal Bea to set directives for such a cooperation.

The World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate founded during 1968/69, participated in the evaluation of the document of 1968.

The objective of the document is to allow common translations which offer christians in their respective languages the same text for their spiritual life and witness.

The Basic Principles of the Document.

The directives provide that all interconfessional translations must be based on the Hebrew and Greek texts, published by interconfessional teams of experts. The directives are found in the two documents published by UBS: the "Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia" and the "Greek New Testament" by Nestle/Aland.

The directives stipulate which consensus must be obtained in the area of exegetical and linguistic principles and they include models for the style of translation.

The work will be done by translation, revision and consultation committees with the participation of persons who are experts in each area.

Recommendations concerning the mode and conditions of copyright, printing, and publication are also included.

The next Bulletin Dei Verbum will give further details about this important document with information on how to obtain a copy.



A BIBLE SUNDAY ON THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH LEVEL

● Following an survey conducted over a year ago (see BULLETIN DEI VERBUM, No. 1, page 8), the Executive Committee of the Federation recommended that, with the help of its members, the practice of Bible Sunday be extended throughout the entire Catholic Church. Bishop Alberto Ablondi, the Federation's President, in a private audience discussed these matters explicitly with the Holy Father. Don Giuseppe Danieli, formerly President of the Italian Biblical Association and now in charge of the biblical apostolate in Italy, replied by sending Bishop Ablondi recommendations for such a Bible Sunday. The following are excerpts from this letter. We ask the Federation members to send their own suggestions to the General Secretariate in Stuttgart, and also their reactions to the recommendations of Fr. Danieli. The group in charge of carrying out the recommendations of the Executive Committee can then draw up a plan for the entire Federation.

"...I have read again most attentively the memorandum on the Bible Sunday which you submitted to the Pope. It seems to me that this idea of a Bible Sunday comes directly from the Holy Spirit, and it is necessary that we give it substance. The main aim of this Sunday, as you yourself indicated, should be the faithful fulfillment of No. 22 of the document DEI VERBUM of the Second Vatican Council, in accordance with the wishes of the Holy Father who deplored the fact that the pastoral guidelines of this document had been "too neglected".

"In order to achieve this goal, should one not perhaps envision this Sunday as a Sunday of prayer: a chance to express heartfelt thanks to God for speaking to us and also an urgent invitation to listen to his voice. This should be a day of thanksgiving, of gratitude and of invitation to listen. All members of our Church should unite their voices. It is only in this way that the Bible will become what it is: the greatest of gifts together with the Eucharist.

"On this day, there should be no collection nor sales of Bibles or other books. There should only be prayer and reflection. God does not speak to us at random. He speaks to us so that we listen to him. God calls us to converse with him. He invites us to speak with him, to pray, and he even shows us how to do this: by praising him with the words of the Bible. All further concrete ways of approaching the sacred book should emerge as a consequence of this. God invites us to listen to him, but how are we to understand the Bible and then educate children to read it, to create and run bible groups, etc.?

"This day should be marked with ecumenical perspective. The Bible is common property which we share with other Christian Churches and with the Jews. It would be wonderful if our Catholic Church, so often criticized for neglecting sacred Scripture, should prove the opposite by leading the way, always in first place when it comes to hearing the eternal Word of God ..."