

World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate

N°9

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Bulletin



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, lectors and catechists, suggesting ways to form bible groups and recommending the use of both mass and group media to facilitate their encounter with the Word.

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

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

+ Alberto Abblondi, Bishop of Livorno
President of the WCFBA

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

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**EDITORIAL**

Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Moluccas, Irian...these islands are known as the largest and most important ones belonging to Indonesia. The entire area of Indonesia is 1,903,345 square kms. Among the 150,000,000 inhabitants, Catholics number only five to six million. Satisfying their hunger for the Word of God, is the goal of those responsible for the biblical apostolate in the Indonesian Church. A report on their work appears on pages 4-8.

We hope to receive more such contributions from the different continents. The regional coordinators of the Federation committed themselves to furnishing us with materials of this nature for the BULLETIN. In this way, we hope to convey information on various activities in the field of the biblical apostolate and the biblical-pastoral ministry and offer suggestions for reflection and new ideas. After this report from Southeast Asia, we expect for the next issues reports on India and Africa. We are grateful to our co-workers in Indonesia who made the start with this report.

The members of the United Bible Societies (UBS) can look back on a tradition older than 100 years. Their growing importance and dynamics makes people ask about the role and the goal of our Federation (WCFBA), an off-shoot of the last Council and still a young organization. In September of this year, the United Bible Societies held their General Council Meeting in Budapest to which the President and the General Secretary of the Federation among other Catholic delegates were invited. Fr. Ludger Feldkämper was asked as a "fraternal delegate" to speak about the relationship between the United Bible Societies and the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate. You will find his address on pages 13-16.

"The high price of ignorance": the National Seminar of the Catholic Biblical Movement in Nigeria points out justly that the neglect of formation of biblical experts in our Church at times becomes more costly than the formation itself. On pages 17-18 you find the final declaration of this seminar. It could serve to stimulate programs of similar seminars of numerous biblical Catholic organizations. Likewise, the Synod of the Diocese of Kinshasa demands that preference be given to the formation of those who assist in "the reading and interpreting of the Holy Scriptures" (cf. pag 18-19).

In their letter to all the members of the Federation, Bishop Alberto Ablondi and Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, call to mind that "a lot remains to be done more than two decades after the Council to implement the pastoral directives of the Council's Constitution DEI VERBUM". They call upon the members for active participation in the preparations for the 1990 Plenary Assembly in Bogotá which constitutes a decisive event in the life of the Federation. We continue the publication of contributions and reflections to the theme of the Plenary Assembly: "The Bible in the New Evangelization". On pages 9-12, Bro. Enrique Garcia offers a guide for analyzing the situation of our countries in correlation with this theme.

This issue of the BULLETIN is the last one for the year 1988. We are grateful if you have extended your subscription for 1989. The members of our Federation whose subscription rate is covered by their membership fee, are asked for an early transferral of these funds. We thank you most sincerely for your interest and confidence.

Marc Sevin

The Life of the Federation Region Southeast Asia: Indonesia

We hope to be able to publish in BULLETIN DEI VERBUM regular reports on biblical apostolate and biblical-pastoral ministry in the various regions of the Federation. The regional coordinators have agreed to send us contributions on a regular basis concerning the activities of the members of the Federation. These reports should not only elaborate on the fruits of their work, but also on the problems encountered with their strategies. This information may be of interest and use for all our members. From learning about what is being done in other countries, they may evaluate and enrich their own work based on the experience of others.

We begin with three contributions from Indonesia in the Southeast Asian Region:

- Fr. Groenen presents the aliveness of the biblical apostolate in the Catholic Church of Indonesia.
- M. Darmiwijaya presents the Catholic Biblical Association in Indonesia, a full member of the Federation.
- Since 1976, the first Sunday in September is celebrated by the Christians of Indonesia as "Bible Sunday" Fr. Harun reports on this event.

To all contributors, we extend our deep appreciation.

The Biblical Apostolate fully alive in the Catholic Church of Indonesia

The Catholic Community

In the 19th Century, the Catholic Church was established in the Dutch colonies of Indonesia. But only after the country declared its independence was it possible for the Catholic Church to expand and put down solid roots. Freedom, at that time, also meant genuine "freedom of religion". After the unsuccessful coup of 1965, the Catholic Church experienced and experiences even now a remarkable growth in this area of several thousand islands. But the Christians (about 16 million) and especially Catholics (5 to 6 million) remain a minority (among a population of about 150 million inhabitants) within a large number of people of other faiths. (There are five recognized religions in Indonesia: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism.)

The Catholic Church has found positive echos in the non-Islamic regions. This means Christianity in terms of numbers is stronger in the formerly so-called "outer regions" (for Catholics, especially in East Indonesia), in particular among the people of the nature religions. Although Christians whether

Protestant or Catholic are in the minority, their influence upon social and political affairs is still felt. This is based on two factors: 1. Christianity, especially Catholicism, was never identified with the colonial power; 2. The level of education of the Christians was often above average compared to that of the rest of the population.

Biblical Apostolate

A. The Foundation

The biblical apostolate in the Catholic Church of Indonesia appears very young. Compared with other older regions, however, Indonesia in this regard is not too far behind. One may think of the only Catholic nation of Asia: the Philippines. The biblical apostolate in Indonesia was begun only after 1975. It just lasted almost about that long until the Catholic community received as the foundation for their work a complete translation of the Bible in modern Indonesian language. Since 1945, Indonesian is the national language and it is given preference over the other 300 languages of the country. Before 1975, there was only a Protestant translation in very antiquated Malaysian. At that time, Catholics considered the Protestant Bible taboo. Since the 50's however, Catholics and Protestants have worked together on a new translation thanks to the guidelines of II Vatican Council and the initiatives of Catholics. A very close and regular cooperation existed already beginning in 1968. The translation of the Bible published in 1975 after 20 years of work, can be used by all Christians of Indonesia. It was published in two editions: one with the deuterocanonical books and one without. This translation was revised once more in 1988, and again two editions were published by the Indonesian Bible Society.

This cooperation between Catholics and Protestants is of great importance from an ecumenical as well as an economical standpoint: the selling price could be kept relatively low. Thus the Bible is affordable for almost everyone in the country. Those who cannot afford it, however, receive it free of charge from the Indonesian government through a very generous distribution system.

B. The Means

Since 1970, the biblical apostolate in the Catholic community of Indonesia is fostered and increasingly coordinated by a National Biblical Association (Lembaga Biblika Indonesia). This is an autonomous institution within the National Bishops' Conference of Indonesia. According to the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church, this biblical association is subject to the Bishops' Conference but administers its affairs independently and offers its services to all. The National Biblical Association has its origins in an institute for biblical apostolate founded by the Franciscan Friars in the 50's and had first as its primary goal, the translation of the Bible into the Indonesian language. The biblical apostolate in the proper sense in the beginning was very humble.

As late as 1970, this biblical association was recognized as an independent national organization and it was then that the

bishops assigned to it the task of fostering, controlling and coordinating the biblical apostolate in the country. Together with the Bible Society of Indonesia, it takes care of the translation and distribution of the Bible in Indonesia but does not, however, want to be considered the Catholic counterpart of the Bible Society. The biblical apostolate which in the beginning had few means at its disposal, experienced a noticeable upsurge in 1977 with the first celebration of National Bible Week and a National Bible Month.

The financial basis for the arrangements of the National Biblical Association is guaranteed through a collection recommended by the bishops and taken up on Bible Sunday. One third of this income may be used locally for the biblical apostolate, one third is for the Catholic participation in the common Bible translation and the remaining third is destined for the biblical apostolate on the national level.

The important contribution of the ministry for Religious Affairs deserves special mention as it is acting on the order of the Indonesian government which each year puts a large sum of money at their disposal for the cost-free distribution of the Bible. It would be ideal if each Catholic family could have their own Bible - this indeed would be unique in the world. For special projects, benefactors were found through the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate. Thus the Biblical Association was helped in the financing of office rooms and a bookshop with biblical literature in Jakarta.

In 1971, the Lembaga Biblika Indonesia was housed in one small room, today, it owns adequate offices. Through the income of the bookshop, the major portion of the salaries for a secretary and five full time staff members is paid.

C. Response

Although initially the activities of the National Biblical Association were geared only towards Church leaders, reactions came mainly from lay people. The reason might be that the biblical apostolate met a fundamental though perhaps an unconscious need, arising not from a Catholic tradition imported from Europe, but from an innate respect for the sacred books of revelation which is found also in Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Protestantism and in the religion of Java. The recommendation of the II Vatican Council that "easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" corresponds to this traditional reverence. One may state that nowhere else in the world are so many Bibles distributed and sold among Catholics as in Indonesia. The young generation especially takes the Bible into their hands in order to appease their hunger for the Word of God which is so characteristic of first and second generation Christians. The obligatory religious instruction in schools - even in high schools - seemingly does not satisfy this common and fundamental need. In addition religious education classes are very superficial: infrequent imaginative narrative and too much systematic instruction.

In the beginning, the response of the Church hierarchy to the biblical apostolate was rather hesitant. Since then, however,

bishops and the Bishops' Conference jointly support this concern. In 1977, the biblical apostolate (the integration of the Bible in the apostolate) was the main theme of the Bishops' Conference. Almost every diocese has nominated its delegate for the biblical apostolate who may be a member of the Commission for Catechesis. The annual collection is encouraged and taken up in most dioceses; and even the bishops of the less fortunate dioceses make a contribution from the diocesan income.

On the other hand, it can hardly be said that all bishops who signed the Council's Constitution DEI VERBUM are personally convinced that the written Word of God is really the foundation for every apostolate. Thus the support which indeed is given often remains superficial. Even if, for example, a delegate is nominated for the biblical apostolate, this nomination is frequently a mere formality and the representatives often have only a little interest and experience of this area, not to mention any skill.

Difficulties

It appears to me, that the main difficulty for a successful biblical apostolate with lasting fruits lies in the fact that the Catholic cadre, that is the leadership in the Catholic Church, was and is not prepared to meet the enthusiasm of the faithful, direct it in the right paths and provide further suggestions. Many priests and people with pastoral responsibility as well as catechists, often do not know how to use the Bible properly with their people nor how to accompany the faithful in the use of the Bible.

The people ask for help for their bible groups, etc., but do not receive it or acquire only such assistance that is as helpless as they themselves are in the use of the Bible. The National Biblical Association offers its services to remedy this inability. However, not too much use is being made of this offer. In addition, occasional help does not provide a lasting solution to the problem. In spite of DEI VERBUM and PRESBYTERORUM ORDINIS (the decree on the ministry and life of priests) seemingly a fundamental mistake is being made in the formation of future priests who are obviously fed more with fear than inspired with love for the Bible. The National Biblical Association which had its activities geared towards the hierarchy and thereby perhaps too much neglected the "ordinary" faithful has not yet found the right way. How can those responsible for formation centers be convinced that the Bible and its use are indeed of fundamental importance and that it is their task to transmit convincingly their love for the Bible to their students?

The above mentioned deficiency on the part of Church leaders brings along another danger. If the enthusiasm of the faithful for the Word of God is not met, they become frustrated with the use of the Bible in their daily lives. Since they have no genuine access to it, the Bible reading turns into a disappointment. The consequence is that many faithful take refuge in fundamentalistic sects - most of American origin - which are very active in this extremely tolerant country. These sects do not hesitate to

use the Bible not only fundamentalistically, but also in an anti-Catholic, anti-orthodox and Protestant way. Here, even the charismatic movement (not always accepted and supported by the Catholic hierarchy) plays an unfavorable role. We personally have no difficulty with a far reaching ecumenism but it must be honest and open. This, however, is all too often lacking among the sects with more or less charismatic tendencies. And Catholic charismatics are too easily infected by this allegedly bible-based, anti-Catholic attitude.

The Future

At present, the situation in Indonesia is very favorable for the biblical apostolate. Most of the Indonesian Catholics are young, enthusiastic Christians of the first and second generation. Now the time of grace has come to make the Bible a living instrument in the Catholic Church of Indonesia. If this is not done now, it will never happen. The Church (at the base) is presently very biblical minded - it presents itself really open towards the Word of God. At the same time, the National Biblical Association makes every effort to quench the thirst for the Word of God. But its means are limited. We personally are somewhat concerned that this time of grace might not be completely heeded. The Church hierarchy in its majority is geared differently than the "Church at the base": It concentrates more on projects than on the Bible. Some see in this enthusiasm for the Bible only a "fashion" and perhaps they are not totally wrong. But even this "fashion" may be inspired from the Spirit. What is produced in the theological field in Indonesia is likewise very biblical; however, it is not being read by the ordinary faithful. These must be led and accompanied by biblical formators from among their midst which unfortunately, happens far too seldom.

Dr. C. Groenen, OFM

* * *

Lembaga Biblika Indonesia: Its role and activities in the Indonesian Church

In its initial stages, the Catholic Biblical Association, "Lembaga Biblika", in Indonesia was an independent effort on the part of the Franciscan Fathers to undertake the translation and the publication of Scripture, an effort which began in 1956. In 1970 the Indonesian Bishop's Conference gave official status to this Biblical Association, and it was recognized as an organization of the Indonesian Bishop's Conference. The reasons for this decision are:

- the requirement of such an organ for initiating, controlling and coordinating publications on Sacred Scripture, whether these are in the form of complete works, adaptations, pericopes or commentaries;

- the requirement of the official status for such a body to be acknowledged as a full member of the World Catholic Federation for Biblical Apostolate;

- the intensification of existing cooperation with the Protestant Indonesian Bible Society in the field of translation, publication and distribution of Sacred Scripture.

Since then the membership of the Association is enlarged by the Indonesian exegetes and some institutions engaged in the Biblical Apostolate.

Further Development

On June 6, 1971 the Indonesian Biblical Association became a full member of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate. On January 19, 1973 the Secretariat of the Indonesian Biblical Association was opened in Jakarta with a full time secretary and a full time editor for publications. This secretariat had as its task the coordination of all Biblical Association activities, internal and external, with both church and non-church organizations.

Since 1974 the Biblical Association promotes national activities on the biblical apostolate, and since 1977 these national activities are coordinated by the diocesan delegates of the Biblical Association. This collaboration is constantly improving as the Biblical Association relates to the diocesan delegates as contact-persons in the vast area of Indonesia. Now we are planning to reinforce this contact with a formal meeting every two years, either with the exegetes or with the delegates.

Activities

Our major concern in all the activities is to make sure that Scripture will play a real part in the life of the Catholic people of Indonesia. These efforts can be achieved by spreading the Word of God in the parishes. Thus the Biblical Association through the diocesan delegates organizes exhibits, meetings, seminars, publication and distribution of texts, books, leaflets. By all of this, they introduce common people to the Bible, deepening their knowledge and inspiring them in the use of Scripture.

The members of the Biblical Association are also engaged in the organization of refresher courses, recollections and Bible study groups for Church leaders and activists.

The secretariat itself organizes the promotion of the biblical apostolate for families, children etc.

Cooperation with other groups becomes a major concern also. In fact, the Biblical Association works together with other groups in some projects. With the Indonesian Bible Society we prepare various translations of the text of the Bible. With the Bishop's Commission on Liturgy and Catechetics, the Catholic Information Center, the TV and Radio Apostolate we work together in their respective areas.

Some Concrete Achievements

The complete Bible with the deuterocanonical books: the manuscripts were prepared jointly by the Biblical Association and the Bible Society of Indonesia. This Bible was finally published in August 1974.

The complete Bible with introduction and notes: based the 1973 edition of the Jerusalem Bible was published in 1975.

Today's Indonesian version of the Bible - the manuscripts were prepared jointly by the Biblical Association and the Bible Society of Indonesia - will be published soon.

The so-called "New Reader's Program" aimed at introducing Scripture to children, particularly elementary school-children, is published jointly by the Biblical Association and the Bible Society.

The New Testament in everyday Javanese: since the beginning of 1977 this project was undertaken jointly by the Biblical Association and the Bible Society, and it was published in 1980.

Besides this type of Scripture apostolate, the Biblical Association can look back on various other achievements through worship, especially through Bible Sunday (first Sunday of September), bible study and bible groups, mass media, and, last but not least; in these last few years through the education of leaders for biblical apostolate.

Conclusion

We have given a glimpse of the biblical apostolate and its role in the Indonesian Church. What has been accomplished is a small step in this vast area but tempered with strong hope and a great spirit.

St. Darmawijaya, President of Lembaga Biblika Indonesia

* * *

The Month of the Bible

The distance from Sabang in the West to Merauke in the East is about thirty times the distance from Dan to Beersheba. In between there are over ten thousand islands, only 10% of them populated, and only part of these with Christian inhabitants. But on the first Sunday of September these scattered Christian communities throughout the islands are united on one theme, the Word of God in the Bible.

This Bible Sunday is celebrated by both Protestants and Catholic Christians. For Protestants (about ten million) it is a thanks-

giving day for the gift of the Bible; they celebrate it according to an international UBS theme. For Catholics (about four million) this celebration with its own theme is a starting point for a number of biblical activities during the month of September, which is now known as the month of the Bible.

Variety of Activities

In most parishes of all 33 dioceses, the liturgy on the first Sunday of September concentrates in a particular way on the Word of God. There are special prayers, thematic sermons and quite often distinctive ceremonies like processions with the Bible or the enthronement of the Bible. Not only the Eucharist in the churches of the center, but also the word services led by lay people in the many chapels at the peripheries are marked by this singular attention to the Bible.

Aside from this central celebration which affects almost all the faithful, many parishes or neighborhoods will choose their own form of biblical activities on that Sunday or during the preceding or following weeks. It could take the form of an exposition, a book market with Bibles available, a recollection, lectures on a biblical book or theme, a biblical movie, video or slides, a course which trains people for some form of biblical apostolate, e.g. training of facilitators for bible meetings to be held afterwards in the neighborhoods. In many communities, there will be some evenings with prayer services or with group-sharing around the theme of the month.

Many types of biblical contests enjoy popularity. Some groups organize quizzes, others hold bible reading and speech contests, biblical drama, painting of biblical posters. These contests may start in the neighborhoods and have their concluding part in the parish center; or in a rare case, a finale is sometimes held at the diocesan level.

Purpose

All these different activities have one common, albeit general, purpose: to renew interest in the Bible among the majority of Catholics who have never been accustomed to opening the Book for and among themselves, and are not yet using it as a direct source for their prayer, faith and Christian life.

Fifteen years ago, the Bible was simply absent from almost all the families and did not function in meetings. In the meantime the Bible Sunday has been instrumental in spreading the book among Catholics at least in the cities. But interest in reading the Bible and sharing it with others is still restricted to a limited group of activists, members of the charismatic renewal movement and some others.

To enlarge this group there is still a great need for repeated annual celebrations and activities which each time open the eyes of more people who are then led to giving the Bible a larger role in their lives, and additionally inspire the communities to make better use of it in their gatherings.

Its Development

The idea of a Bible Sunday in Indonesia took root in the early seventies. It did not really catch on in the beginning, however, until finally the first national consultation on biblical apostolate in 1976 took it up, discussed its form, proposed after consultation with the Indonesian Bible Society its present date, and asked again for approval from the Bishops' Conference. Since then it has developed gradually, in one diocese more quickly than in the other. In a number of dioceses it received a new impulse when an active bible delegate was appointed by the bishop. These delegates give instructions to parish members and prepare additional Bible Sunday materials for them. With such aids and the necessary adaptation to the local situation, these people are then able to set up and carry out the Bible Sunday in their respective parishes.

Themes

The Bible Sunday or Month of the Bible has a special theme each year. In the beginning general slogans such as "Words of Life", "Thy Word is a Lamp Unto my Feet", were used merely to attract the attention of the people to the value and relevancy of the Bible for their lives. From 1982 until 1984, this was unfolded in three steps: the Word of God in the Christian Community; the Word of God in the Family; and the Word of God in Personal Life.

During the past four years we turned to specific books, the four Gospels, according to the liturgical reading cycles B: "Who do you say that I am" (Mark, 1985), C: "Good News to the Poor" (Luke, 1986), A: "I am in the Midst of You" (Matthew, 1987), and B: "My Words are Spirit and Life" (John, 1988).

Materials

The National Biblical Association (Lembaga Biblika Indonesia) prepares materials, copies of which are sent to all parishes, schools and religious communities. These materials normally consist of a poster and a set of five booklets. Preparations for the next Bible Sunday begin directly after the previous Bible Sunday. The theme is discussed and developed at a meeting of the Association's Board. Then a scholar is asked to write a booklet on the theme which will become the basis of all other preparations.

Around January this basic booklet is given to those who are asked to prepare the other four booklets. One will contain the Liturgy for Bible Sunday, and an additional or alternative service of the Word around the theme of the year. Another offers materials for neighborhood prayer-meetings including

the possibility of bible sharing. Another booklet offers materials for bible group meetings once again based on the theme, with emphasis on the preparation of the facilitators. Finally there is a booklet with suggestions and materials for a variety of biblical contests connected with the theme.

These materials are sent to the diocesan delegates as early as possible, and to the parishes about two months before Bible Sunday so that dioceses and parishes have enough time to arrange for the event.

Difficulties

There are some difficulties frequently voiced but not yet overcome. One of them is the late arrival of the materials in parishes in interior areas or on remote islands with irregular postal service. Therefore some areas must use this year's materials next year.

Others even choose to use the materials of ten years ago which in their judgement were more appropriate for an initiation to the idea of Bible Sunday. Stages of development differ from area to area with a major difficulty being the difference between urban and rural regions.

In fact, the materials are composed by people in some urban centers on the island of Java and therefore are not always well adapted to the many communities in the villages or to the situation and local culture of other islands. Therefore, adaptation of the national materials in the dioceses is essential. But most diocesan delegates for the biblical apostolate combine many tasks and have no time for adjusting these materials.

Notwithstanding these and other obstacles, the month of the Bible functions and has become a yearly event that continues to awaken interest in the Bible.

Collection

In many churches, the collection on Bible Sunday is earmarked for the biblical apostolate. Part of it is sent to Lembaga Biblika to cover the costs of the preparation and sending of the Bible Sunday materials, to subsidize the production of new Bibles in cooperation with the Indonesian Bible Society, and to support the national biblical apostolate. Without the support of many parishes it would be difficult to conduct the Month of the Bible - and the biblical apostolate in general - as can be done now.

(Martin Harun, OFM)

NEW EVANGELIZATION AND BIBLE (III)

In issues Numbers 7 and 8 of the BULLETIN DEI VERBUM, we published reports on the Bible and the new evangelization from Fr. César Herrera and Fr. Paul Puthanangady. In this edition, we present the description of a method of analyzing the characteristics of biblical apostolate in the new evangelization. Bro. Enrique García applies this method to the concrete situation in Latin America and invites us to apply it to our respective countries.

To discern the features of a new evangelization implies an analysis of the actual economic, social, political and cultural changes, in order to meet the new needs and the points of contact which facilitate the communication of the Good News to people in the near future.

Those changes might be described on a local, national, regional or world level. This paper tries to describe such trends on the Latin American level, but the reader may replace or enrich the description of the trends discussed here with the help of other information available, concerning the context which he wants to reflect on the Bible in the New Evangelization.

In fact this description takes into account suggestions from a seminar run by CELAM, the Counsel of Latin American Bishops, in 1986 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. John Naisbitt's Megatrends, a book written in 1982 which concerns the United States of America, was a useful starting point in that meeting. Certainly the forecasts of the Puebla Document, produced in 1979 by the III General Conference of the Latin American Bishops could have been used instead.

The most useful thing in this whole article may be the heuristic framework, which is suggested in three columns.

The first column tries to describe important and pervading economic, social, political and cultural changes taking place in Latin America. It may be entirely replaced by what can be verified happening in a country, or in a diocese about which a group wants to reflect. One needs only appropriate data resources, preferably obtained through interdisciplinary collaboration, and a dialogue until all agree in the description.

The second column assumes involvement in apostolic experience and criteria to discover the requirements for a new evangelization flowing from the previous description of trends. Obviously, it will be valid only for the area for which the first column is written, and for the team engaged in sharing their thoughts.

The third column is an example of how to draw conclusions for the biblical apostolate. The method is valid for other fields of ecclesial life, such as youth ministry, catechesis, liturgy, religious life, education, or whatever.

TRENDS IN SOCIETY**In Economy**

1. Methods are evolving to increase protein and genetically improve vegetable and animal varieties.
2. The mechanization of production leads to underemployment and unemployment, or it may lead to the increase of leisure time and a shorter work week, if work is socially regulated.
3. Scientific civilization is multiplying consumer goods and at the same time incentives aimed at fascination by and addiction to them.
4. The increase in small enterprises trying to respond to necessities not met by the larger industries and markets.

In Social Relations

5. Increasing recognition of the equality of women and men as people.
6. Progressive isolation of people in buildings where neighbors do not communicate with each other and in marginalized rural areas removed from the communications network.
7. Increase of small groups developing initiatives for: home education, prevention of delinquency, preservation of the physical environment, physical exercise for all ages, support groups for personal problems (drug and alcohol addiction, divorce, unhappy childhood, unemployment) and for local community concerns (housing, water, crops, etc.).
8. The compartmentalization of the channels of public communication (cable TV, specialized magazines) which restrict the common good and the possibilities for deeper and more global communication.

REQUIREMENTS FOR A NEW EVANGELIZATION

1. To include the overcoming of hunger and a fair distribution of the goods of creation in the Church's action.
2. To defend the rights of the poor as regards employment for livelihood, and to stress the duty of the rich to work for the common good, in addition to encouraging healthy, creative and honest leisure.
3. To help discern innovations capable of making the life of the impoverished masses more tolerable, and to foster conversion to forms of sobriety, wisdom, solidarity and commitment to eternal values.
4. To encourage initiatives and creativity in the production of goods and services and the discovery of sources of employment for an economy of solidarity.

5. To recognize the divine origin of the dignity of woman and to promote new roles for women in Church and society.

6. To design pastoral systems based on small groups with intense communication with God and one another, capable of reproducing themselves as communities every two or three years.

7. To motivate existing natural groups for self denial, perseverance and service, through shared prayer inspired by the commitment of the first Christians.

8. To multiply the opportunities for deeper communication among all people, stressing the sign and communication power of the sacraments, of educational activities and of actions for the service of humankind.

CONSEQUENCE FOR BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE

1. To promote a grassroots reading of the Scriptures oriented towards the transformation of persons and society through justice and love.
2. To underline the biblical teaching about transforming and beautifying creation for the service of the human community, and to promote reflection, art and celebration.
3. To raise Gospel-inspired prophetic criticism, concerning social values and sins of the consumer society.
4. To link biblical reflection with transforming action in small groups committed to prayer.

5. To deepen and expand a sound biblical mariology and to rouse its consequences for ecclesial and social life.

6. To foster through biblical prayer and reflection growth in the love of God and neighbor avoiding self-centered isolation and remaining open to the increase of small communities.

7. To underline in biblical reading whatever brings sense, motivation and stimulating witness to existing small groups.

8. To promote biblical reflection in families, and other groups, underlining the domestic Church and small neighborhood groups so common among the first Christians, and to present these communitarian experiences in the mass media.

9. The growth of social, economic, cultural, political and military interdependence among continents and countries.

In the Political Field

10. The development in consciousness of personal and social rights and of collective responsibility vis-a-vis their violation.

11. Authoritarian structures are losing approval, provoking a desire for participatory ones.

12. Pollution of the environment and the arms race provoke ecological awareness, pacifists and movements for the defense of the poor.

In the Cultural Field

13. Coexistence of two cultures: one of minorities, ruled by instant communications, having its own logic and share of systematized information; and the other for majorities, ruled by television with its emotivity and unsystematized variety of images where distraction dominates.

14. The worldwide diffusion of the scientific-technical civilization, which is based on supposedly scientific ideologies: secularism, positivism and economic reductionism.

15. The secularization of culture desacralizes the family, the transmission and care of life, the respect for people, and feasts.

16. The control of culture by economic and political powers.

17. Education is enriched by objectives and procedures appropriate for each age, from infancy to old age.

9. To accentuate the intercommunication between economic resources, apostolic personnel, significant apostolic experiences and theological-pastoral information.

10. To put into practice the imperatives of the liberating teachings of the Church.

11. To promote participatory procedures in family, school, work, civil society and the Church, making effective the evangelical doctrine on authority for service.

12. To illuminate through the Gospel care for creation, the dignity of all people and their promotion of peace in justice.

13. To make present the saving word of God in both cultures, respecting the norms of communication proper to each one.

14. To educate with Gospel criteria for the discernment of the values and counter values diffused by public education and the mass media.

15. To seek the reign of God's justice in each family, in pure love, in the care for and celebration of life, in a liberating attitude towards people, especially the poor, and allowing for the public character of religious life and of the ecclesial hierarchy.

16. To defend the freedom of conscience, expression and meeting and the inviolability of the home, promoting within the home relationships of trust, which can overcome external control and censorship.

17. To define objectives and procedures for faith education with apostolic-minded personnel well motivated and prepared according to

9. To print Bibles where it is least expensive and not where there are publishers and to send missionaries to wherever they are needed.

10. To find the biblical roots of the liberating teaching of the Church and to actualize it with the experience of the laity, the help of the social sciences and the teaching of Pope and bishops.

11. To multiply witnesses and facilitators for knowing and doing, after the example of Jesus Christ, avoiding doctrinaire, clerical and oppressive attitudes.

12. To impart a bible-based spirituality for a wise and equitable administration of justice, for educative pardon, and for compassion with the suffering.

13. To computerize biblical sciences for the benefit of scholarship and translate the biblical message into the narrative and audiovisual languages of the people.

14. To diffuse experiences of faithfully listening to the word of God in relation with popular wisdom and the values and pseudo values of modern civilization.

15. To relate the public revelation testified to in Sacred Scripture to the events and problems of private and public life.

16. To make the Bible a book of prayer and reflection for the home with a minimum of material aids, for overcoming external control and guaranteeing ecclesial communion even to the point of martyrdom.

17. To express the biblical and ecclesial message in various languages and methods adapted to different age groups.

- diversified and organically structured pastoral plans.
18. The audiovisual and computer invasion weakens the habits of reading and writing, even among the graduates of secondary schools.
18. To use the audiovisual and computer-oriented languages in programs which increase the capacity for discernment according to the Gospel and the creativity for communicating it.
18. To computerize biblical formation programs and to create programs through use of traditional audiovisual languages (songs, dance theater, sculpture, handicrafts) and electronic ones (radio-drama, videotapes and movies) for faith education.
19. The discrediting of artistic elites which considered themselves as definitive vanguards, and the dispersion of aesthetic currents, through the multiplication of individual artistics.
19. To incorporate the beauty of music, choreography, drama, literature, sculpture and electronic audiovisual arts in liturgy and catechesis, adopting contemporary forms appropriate to the audience and inserted into the local culture.
19. To translate the narrative, prophetic and sapiential genres of the Bible into the distinct languages of arts and crafts, in a search of the best communication of its saving message.
- In the Religious Field**
20. The increasing awareness of religious diversity in the world.
20. To support the common witness of Christian Churches and dialogue with world religions, avoiding sectarian exclusiveness, condemnatory and intimidating language, producing false security and economic exploitation among their followers.
20. To make the liberating message of Scripture the point of encounter for Christians in their reflection, prayer and active commitment at the service to humanity.
21. The proximity of the year 2000 raises interest in the end and goal of the world, also awakens sickening responses, sometimes even encouraged by writers and the mass media.
21. To respond with an eschatological message which must be clear, scholarly up-to-date, popular, ecumenical, attuned to the needs of the masses for orientation.
21. To promote the responsible use by the ministers of the Word of the apocalyptic and prophetic messages of the Sacred Scriptures.
22. Growing diffusion of the Bible since II Vatican Council in addition to the service to the Churches offered by the Bible Societies.
22. To increase the number of courses in parishes, schools and Christian movements in order to help people read and live the Bible according to Catholic criteria.
22. To improve the training of lay facilitators for reading, praying and putting into practice the Sacred Scriptures.
23. Co-existence of affluent countries and groups in a process of de-Christianization, with impoverished countries and social sectors showing a Catholic-rooted popular religiosity in which apostolic dynamisms are growing.
23. To devise two main models of evangelizing: one for affluent countries and another for impoverished nations both of which must be liberating, complementary, oriented towards the salvation of the entire person, and promoting a preferential service for all those in dire need.
23. To devise two methods of placing the same Gospel within reach of the rich and the poor denouncing their unjust, man-made division while announcing the necessary change demanded by God's plan for mankind.
24. Rise of a secular religion, in which political authorities use Christian symbols for their own social legitimization without committing themselves to the values or norms of the Gospel.
24. To insistently publicize the meaning of the Christian symbols used in public ceremonies underlining their transforming consequences for the spiritual, ethical and social realm.
24. To constantly use symbols such as the Bible, the Church building, the crucifix, funerals, and other public symbols in connection with the call to conversion from sin, the serving love that overcomes even death, ecclesial fellowship, the social teaching of the Church and other issues about which secular religion keeps silent.

WORLD CATHOLIC FEDERATION FOR THE BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE AND THE UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES Partners in the Ministry of the Word

In September of this year in Budapest, Hungary, Fr. Ludger Feldkämper General Secretary of the Federation participated in the General Council meeting of the United Bible Societies. On this occasion he was invited to reflect on the relationship between the UBS and the WCFBA. For many members of the Federation who work with the United Bible Societies in their respective countries, the following text of his speech may be of interest.

My presentation is entitled "The World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate and the United Bible Societies: Partners in the Ministry of the Word". To understand this partnership (Part 3) it is important to have a clear idea about the WCFBA (familiar as you are with the UBS) (Part 2); but the WCFBA can be properly understood best against the background of the II Vatican Council (Part 1). I will start with the latter.

1. Vatican II and Sacred Scripture in the Catholic Church

The directives of the II Vatican Council on Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church were and still are of utmost importance in rediscovering the significance of the Bible in the Catholic Church today and in understanding the nature, aims and activities of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate.

These directives are found in many of the Council's 16 documents, for instance in the Constitution on the Liturgy (Nos. 7, 36, 51, 52, 54), the Decree on the Laity (No. 4), the Constitution on the Church (No. 15), the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (No. 4), the Decree on Ecumenism (No. 21), but especially in the entire Constitution on Divine Revelation, Chapter VI, in particular.

I would like to single out three of these directives even at the risk of having them lose their full meaning and impact by taking them out of context. I consider them most significant for understanding the biblical movement in the Catholic Church today, the Federation as the organization at the service of the biblical apostolate, and its relationship with the United Bible Societies and similar organizations.

* *"Like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture" (Divine Revelation 21).*

* *"Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (Ibid. 22) - "Editions of the sacred Scripture provided with suitable comments should also be prepared for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation" (Ibid. 25).*

* *"If these translations, given the opportunity and the approval of Church authority, are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them" (ibid. 22) - "Such versions are to be provided with necessary and fully adequate explanations so that the sons of the Church can safely and profitably grow familiar with the sacred Scriptures and be penetrated with their Spirit" (Ibid. 25).*

Again, even at the risk of simplifying matters too much, I would like to mention three results of these directives - being very much aware at the same time that the results are not only outcome of the directives, but also (and probably in the first place) fruits of the Spirit dynamically present in the Church.

The interest in the Scriptures, the hunger and thirst for the Word of God, experienced in particular among lay people, in the so-called renewal movements, and especially in the "young Churches".

The fact of collaboration among Catholics and Christians of other denominations in the translation, production and distribution of the Scriptures along the Guiding Principles/Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible, first edition 1968, 2nd and revised edition 1987, agreed upon and commonly published by the United Bible Societies and the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

An organization, within the Catholic Church, WCFBA

- at the service of the local Churches,
- for the implementation of the above-mentioned directives,
- through mutual exchange and assistance.

The World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA)

History

The idea of such an organization had already been proposed in 1950 by the Austrian protagonist for renewed liturgy and an awakened interest in Scripture, Canon Pius Parsch; on the 6th of Oct. 1964, during the Third Session of the II Vatican Council, it was demanded by Bishop Emile Cekada of Skopje, Yugoslavia ; it was led towards realization by Cardinal Bea, who in 1968 called Directors of Catholic biblical-pastoral organizations for a consultation meeting in Rome and it was finally founded on 16 Apr. 1969 by Cardinal Willebrands.

Milestones in the history of the Federation since its foundation are its Plenary Assemblies in:

- Vienna (1972) with some 20 participants who formulated the WCFBA Constitution;

- Malta (1978) with 77 participants from 44 countries who reflected on biblical spirituality and biblical catechesis;
- Bangalore, India (1984) with 120 participants from 53 countries under the motto "Would that all were prophets" (Num 11, 29);
- Bogotá, Colombia (1990) with the theme, "The Bible in the New Evangelization".

Nature

The WCFBA is a Catholic organization of autonomous members - all of which are organizations. We distinguish full and associate members (WCFBA Constitution Art. IV, 1.1 and 1.2):

- **"A full member** is any Catholic organization for the biblical apostolate, one from each country and continent, having the recognition of a bishops' conference or of an equivalent authority."

- **"An associate member** is any other organization or body engaged in any form of the biblical apostolate." These could be individual dioceses, religious orders, publishing houses, pastoral centers in general or biblical centers in particular, institutions of formation. Hence, they are Catholic organizations, have episcopal recognition and are involved in the biblical apostolate.

Today the Federation numbers 68 Full and 165 Associate members in 90 countries.

The WCFBA is an organization for biblical apostolate or a biblical-pastoral organization whose activities comprise three sectors:

.To promote and support translation, production and distribution of the Bible so that people have direct access to it, and this is done as far as possible in interconfessional collaboration with the United Bible Societies and other organizations.

.To promote and sustain the efforts made to facilitate bible reading so that the bible text, which being over 2,000 years old is not easily comprehensible to us now at the end of the 20th century, may be easily understood by all. This necessary work is accomplished through scientific research, courses, seminars, workshops, conferences, publications, Bible Weeks, etc. If the majority of our full members are not directly involved in the actual production and distribution of the Bible, which is the domain of translators and publishers, they are nevertheless involved in the essential work of bringing it to the people.

.To see to it that the pastoral ministry be permeated with the Bible. For this reason, these biblical-pastoral organizations which are members of the Federation are often consultants or even initiators in the distinct domains of the teaching office with its multiple functions, namely the liturgy, catechesis, social actions, prayer movements, etc. This again is an area in which the Federation members, both full and associate, develop considerable energies.

Organization

No fixed structure is enforced on our members. The organization of the biblical apostolate in their respective areas is left up to them.

Though not yet part of our Constitution, there is a strong interest in a movement towards regional organization within the Federation. Again no structure is enforced from "above", our policy is rather to let matters grow and mature from "below". "Regions" have emerged in the last few years (Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America, Europe, Middle East and Oceania), the situation being different in each one of them. In most of them (except Africa) regional or sub-regional meetings have been held.

Every six years a Plenary Assembly takes place in which delegates of all our full and associate members are invited to participate to assess the work of the Federation and to give directives for the following six years.

The Plenary Assembly also elects an Executive Committee consisting of nine full member and four associate member representatives in addition to three ex-officio members. The Federation's current President is Bishop Alberto Ablondi who at the same time serves as Vice-President of the UBS Executive Committee for Europe and the Middle East.

The "action arm" of the Executive Committee is the General Secretariat which was located for the first three years of the Federation's existence in Rome and has its offices now in Stuttgart, West Germany. Its main areas of service are:

1. Contacts with our members, promotion of "networking" and cooperation, in addition to contacts with organizations whose objectives are related to ours (Bible Societies, Funding Agencies, etc.) in view of promoting cooperation.
2. Exchange of information on experiences, approaches, projects, reflections, impulses..., mainly through our BULLETIN DEI VERBUM in English, French and German, with its Spanish counterpart, LA PALABRA HOY, published in Bogotá.
3. Assistance in funding biblical-pastoral projects through contacts with Catholic Funding Agencies (mainly European) and the evaluation of these projects.

World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate and United Bible Societies: Partners in the Ministry of the Word.

From the above description of the Federation, it is clear the WCFBA is not part of the United Bible Societies (this was one of the models proposed at the foundation stage of the WCFBA) nor is it simply a "Catholic counterpart" to United Bible Societies. A more adequate term describing the relationship would simply be "partners in the ministry of the Word".

The WCFBA and the UBS have their own identity, but are committed to collaboration. Though this may not have always been perfect in the past, it does provide encouragement to continue with renewed commitment in the future.

Identity

The concern of the United Bible Society was traditionally and to a great extent still is:

- being at the service of all the Churches,
- in the translation, production and distribution of Scripture,
- published without note or comment.

For the outsider, a change has taken place in these concerns and resulting activities through the realization that

- the Bible is a book of a time and culture different from our own, a book which consequently is not always self-explanatory
- the Bible is a product that can be used properly or improperly; in other words, the publishers of the book are co-responsible for the correct use of Scripture as medium and message in worship and evangelization.

The WCFBA's concern

- is primarily with the use of the Bible in the Catholic Church,
- goes beyond the translation, production and distribution of the Bible, and is as much directed towards:

“conscientization” - fostering an awareness regarding the role and importance of the Bible within the Church [cf. “table of the Word - table of the Eucharist”: - “intensified veneration of God’s Word” (Divine Revelation No. 21 and 26)];

“production of helps for the reader” - [cf. “necessary and fully adequate explanations” - “aids which in our time are commendably available everywhere” (Ibid. No. 25)];

“formation in the right use of the Bible” - [cf. “suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books” (Ibid. No. 25)].

Collaboration

Having their own identities, the two organizations are nevertheless committed to considerable collaboration

Though, lamentably, collaboration with the Bible Societies was eschewed in the past and even condemned by Pope Gregory XIV in 1844, it is an established fact that the United Bible Societies have served as a “model” in the planning stages of the Federation (cf. the above mentioned intervention by Bishop Cekada during the II Vatican Council). Moreover, representatives of the Bible Societies (Dr. Oliver Beguin, Dr. Laton Holmgren) were guests at the first meetings that led to the foundation of the Federation.

On several occasions, from the beginning of the Federation's history under Pope Paul VI till last year's audience with Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the signing of the Revised Guidelines, the Federation has been encouraged towards close collaboration with the United Bible Societies and other organizations.

The Federation itself, both in its Constitution (III:7) and its Plenary Assembly Resolutions (Malta I:8; Bangalore 3.3.2.) has committed itself repeatedly to collaboration with the Bible Societies.

This collaboration takes place in various forms and at various levels:

1. At the level of our members, Catholics are collaborating with the United Bible Societies in some 170 translation projects;

2. For the sake of mutual information and better collaboration, it has become customary over the years to invite representatives of the United Bible Societies to meetings of the WCFBA (Plenary Assemblies, meetings at regional levels). Likewise, we appreciate being invited to the meetings of the United Bible Societies as we have been on several occasions.

3. Contact at the level of the General Secretariats.

Since 1972, both General Secretariats of the WCFBA and the UBS have been located in Stuttgart and hence contacts between these two offices were frequent and fruitful.

Our office at the same time has held a liaison position between the Vatican Secretariat for Unity and the UBS General Secretariat. It remains to be seen how this function can be fulfilled and maintained when the UBS General Secretariat is moved back to London.

Evaluation

Collaboration being a two party affair, an evaluation of the relationship - to be fair - should be made by both parties. However, allow me to share with you some reflections evaluating the UBS - WCFBA relationship made by an ad hoc committee during our last Executive Committee meeting in April of this year.

Appreciation:

The fact that the WCFBA and the UBS can work together is in itself significant. The translation of the Bible has proved to be a very good form of interconfessional cooperation; thus, we appreciate the agreement on the Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible.

We thank the United Bible Societies for making Bibles available at a subsidized price.

We also thank them for giving various Churches the kind of Bibles they ask for.

We appreciate very much the United Bible Societies initiative in producing Scriptures for special categories of people such as the blind and the elderly.

Difficulties:

- The agreement to publish the Bibles with and without deuterocanonical books simultaneously is not always honored.

- The copyright is not shared even when a translation project has been a joint venture.

- On the international level, we are in agreement with UBS through the interconfessional Guidelines. However, on the local and national levels we experience difficulties dealing with local Bible Societies e.g. sometimes they do not feel bound by some of the provisions of the Guidelines (cf. 1. above).
- In some cases, Catholics are represented on the Board of Directors but not on the decision-making level.
- There are certain Bible Society policy making meetings to which Catholics are not invited, although it is publicly stated that Catholics are welcome.
- At times, we have the impression that Catholic participation is exploited and used for the purpose of advertisement and fund raising.

Recommendations:

- We recommend full implementation of §2.5 of the Guidelines and detailed agreement on the copyright issue.
- Cooperation should be from the beginning to the end of the project, i.e. the translation (to the final drafting), production and distribution.
- We ask that the UBS urge the local and national Bible Societies to implement all the stipulations and guidelines.
- We encourage interconfessional production of biblical audio-visual materials, taking into account the danger posed by fundamentalism.
- We request the UBS invite Catholics to their policy making meetings.

Conclusion

"God's Word: Hope for All" - this motto of the UBS General Council Meeting 1988, reminds a Catholic of the hope expressed in the closing lines of the II Vatican's Constitution on Divine Revelation, namely, "hope for a new surge of spiritual vitality from intensified veneration for God's Word which lasts forever" (Is 40,8; cf. 1 P 1:23-25). I am grateful to the Lord that you and I are called to this partnership and this ministry so that the Word of God may become ever more hope for all.

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Informations

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HUNGARY: Council of United Bible Societies (UBS) Meets in Budapest

From 14 through 21 Sept. of this year, 205 delegates from 105 countries met in Budapest, Hungary for the General Council Meeting of the UBS. This assembly takes place every eight years. In addition to evaluating the activities of the past eight years, and the handling of administrative affairs such as various elections, the meeting accentuated two themes: "Youth" and "Eastern Europe". From the Catholic side, Cardinal Martini was present for half a day taking part in the round-table discussion reuniting the responsible representatives of the Churches. Bishop Ablondi directed two workshops (in French and Spanish) on "What UBS members should know concerning the Bible in the Catholic Church?" These workshops drew the greatest number of participants. Bishop Phimphisan headed another workshop on the same theme in English. As other general secretaries were invited to present their collaboration with the UBS, Fr. Ludger Feldkämper presented the Federation. His presentation appears on pages 13-16 of this publication.

Bishop Phimphisan was elected President of the General Committee which is the most important body of the UBS, and Bishop Ablondi as one of the eight vice-presidents.

The successor of Dr. Ulrich Fick, Dr. Cirilo Rigo, a Philippino, was introduced as General Secretary. At the bottom of this page, appears a statement from Bishop Ablondi in honor of Ulrich Fick who has always proven reliable as regards cooperation between the UBS and the Federation.

THANK YOU ULRICH FICK

After 16 years Dr. Ulrich Fick leaves the office of the General Secretary of the United Bible Societies and the friends of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA) want to honor him with words of friendship and good-will by saying "Thank you".

"Thank you" for the esteem towards the Federation that has developed into fraternal collaboration.

"Thank you" for the contributions during the long hours that went into the revision of the "Guiding Principles for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible" of 1968, known now as the "Guidelines ..." of 1987.

"Thank you" for the commitment in spreading the Word of God in all the world, for the conviction and interconfessional openness within the UBS, and for the prudent and at the same time decisive approach to other cultures' first encounter with the Word of God.

And finally, "Thank you" that the UBS and the WCFBA, due to his efforts, succeeded in establishing and cementing a relationship which will continue into the future in friendship and in the service of the Word of God.

**Bishop Alberto Ablondi
President of the WCFBA**

NIGERIA: National Seminar

On 1-2 of July of this year, the annual National Seminar of the Catholic Biblical Movement took place in Awka, Nigeria. The "Organization of the Catholic Biblical Apostolate in Nigeria" was the topic of the 1985 seminar, while in 1986 it was "The Bible and the Catholic Practices". In 1987, "The Bible in Christian Unity" was the central issue and this year, the seminar was dedicated to discussing "The Training of Bible Study Group Leaders". In the course of the seminar, Bishop John Onaiyekan of Ilorin and member of the Executive Committee of the Federation, explained the theme of the meeting. In the following, you find a summary of the six points he proposed.

1. Signs of the Times:

A major characteristic of the Catholic Church in our country recently, is a marked upsurge of interest in the Bible among Catholics. Gone are the days when Catholics considered the Bible a Protestant book. Now they not only own Bibles, but are reading them and are anxious to study them. We are concerned with the use of the Bible by groups within the Church.

These groups are of different types. For example, apostolic movements, devotional sodalities and charismatic renewal groups. Some of them have bible study as their essential objective - something that is new in the country. The difficulty for these sometimes ecumenical or non-denominational groups, often arises from the fact that they are not prepared for bible sharing.

One significant characteristic of all these groups is that they are inevitably lay dominated. The clergy and religious are not really needed in a leadership capacity. At other times groups which would be happy to be led by a chaplain have to make do without one because one is not available. Thus training of competent leaders is urgently needed.

2. The Spirit is Moving:

The upsurge of interest in the Bible is not only an objective fact, a sign of our times, it is also the effect of the Spirit moving in the Church.

The love of Scripture among the members of the Church is a good thing. It is in accordance with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council (cf. DV 22, 25).

The emergence of lay leadership in the area of bible study is also in line with the spirit of the Council. The Council has stressed the importance of the lay person in the Church and in the mission of the Church to the world. As members of the People of God, they too have a share in the three roles of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. As "prophets" they have the duty to proclaim the truth about God, which includes teaching. As "kings", they have leadership roles to exercise in the Church, encompassing responsibility in bible groups.

To play these roles calls for an adequate religious formation. Although teaching the faith is the particular responsibility of

the ordained ministers, the Council urges pastors to involve suitable lay people in this program (CD 30), not merely as a substitute for lack of priests, but according to the grace given to each with their baptismal consecration.

3. Need for Training:

To teach, we must first learn. The first source of learning about the revealed truths, and especially about Sacred Scripture is to open oneself to the Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit in the process of understanding Sacred Scripture is indispensable. But it is not enough to presume that one can learn all that is required from Scripture through direct recourse to the divine illumination of the Holy Spirit. We must make the effort to study the Scriptures and learn about them from others who have authority to teach. A visible teaching authority is necessary in the Church, if only to discern genuine divine illumination. This is the specific role of bishops.

4. The Tradition of the Church:

The tradition of the Church from the very beginning shows that those with a mission to teach divine truths have to be properly trained. The Gospels explain how Jesus took special care to train his apostles.

The Church has always demanded special care regarding the training of church leaders, especially clergy and religious. The Second Vatican Council was well within the tradition of the Church when it repeatedly emphasized the need to give sound biblical formation to different categories of church teachers, among them all lay people devoted in any way to the apostolate.

We must admit that formation of lay leaders as biblical animators has been somewhat neglected during the last few years.

5. Training Lay Teachers:

Lay people engaged in the biblical apostolate need special training which should correspond to their particular situation and the degree of their employment. Likewise, their time and financial resource limitations need to be taken into consideration.

Some lay people aspire to become full-time professional teachers of faith. These people need systematic training to prepare them for their future work. Evermore often, outstanding theologians are found within this special category of lay people.

Their family obligations must also be considered, and, in this connection, the formation of the parents to be "heralds of faith to their children".

6. The High Price of Ignorance:

Ignorance has its own price, which is often much higher than the price to train and educate people. Neglecting to train leaders of bible study groups has serious consequences, for both individuals and the Church.

The ignorant teacher has nothing to give but ignorance. Where leaders are not properly trained, "bible sharing" becomes "error sharing". Worse still, the ignorant teacher soon convinces himself that he is a teacher and therefore knowledgeable. At times this position of ignorant pride is maintained in the name of the Holy Spirit.

On the church level, ignorant teachers are a grave hazard to unity in faith. By misleading others, the community is damaged. All too clearly, we see the damage caused by bible preachers and ministers peddling their tracts and cassettes.

Conclusion

Formation should be a pastoral priority today and this includes the formation of biblical animators.

Good will is not enough. Training of leaders must be planned, organized and systematically implemented. The price of neglect is too high.

Information: The full text of Bishop Onaiyekan's report is available from the General Secretariat in Stuttgart.

NIGERIA: Need for Catholic Bibles

During their March 1987 session, the Bishops' Conference of Nigeria put as first and foremost on their resolution list to make the Bible more readily available in the various languages of the people. There is an ever growing interest in the Bible among Nigerian Catholics. Unfortunately, the Church is not sufficiently prepared for this explosion of biblical enthusiasm. Pastoral structures, trained personnel, even bible texts are grossly inadequate. The result is that many people go all over the place outside Church circles in their desire to quench their thirst for the Word of God. In particular, they buy all kinds of Bibles, especially the Protestant Bibles which are almost always cheaper. Many Catholics easily fall prey to fundamentalist sects. They are first told that "one Church is as good as the other", and then "there is no need to go to the Catholic Church since they do not follow the Bible". It is no use warning people against Protestant or anti-Catholic bible programs if we do not give them a Catholic alternative.

On another front, there is the aggressive propaganda of Islamic religious fanatics who are trying to islamize the country. While continuing the struggle to maintain freedom of religion it is necessary to feed the Catholics with the authentic Word of God, and thus arm them with the truth of the Christian message.

As far as local translations are concerned, the Catholics work in collaboration with their Protestant brethren. There is no problem with patronizing them except with the English versions. The Bible Society of Nigeria will not promote the distribution of Catholic English versions, e.g. The Jerusalem Bible, and the Catholic edition of the RSV.

The Biblical Commission of the Nigerian hierarchy is studying the possibility of purchasing in bulk, copies of the Jerusalem Bible in English in order to offer them as low priced editions to their Catholic people. However, recent economic measures taken by the government, namely the reduction of Nigerian currency in relation to the dollar and other hard currencies, has jeopardized this project. A Bible priced at \$20, now costs the lower wage earner almost a month's pay. To offset this, an application was made to the Catholic funding agencies to aid in this bulk purchase project.

ZAIRE: The Synod of Kinshasa

The diocese of Kinshasa held its synod this year. The Bible and the biblical apostolate were important issues on the agenda. In the following, you will find the final declaration of the synod concerning the reading and interpretation of the Bible.

READ AND INTERPRET THE BIBLE

I. General Options

1. The Council has greatly encouraged reading and studying Sacred Scripture. As a result of this in our diocese, the entire Bible was translated progressively into Lingala. Commentaries, reading guides, and aids for bible courses have been published. More and more Christians own a Bible now in Lingala or French and they find in the Bible nourishment for their faith, light for the days of joy and pain, reason for hope and action in the interest of their personal development and social progress.

2. This discovery of Sacred Scripture, however, did not happen without posing problems. Many Catholics read the Bible in a translation not approved by the Catholic Church. Using editions without explanations, they read the biblical texts and interpret them in a different and sometimes really deficient manner. Only a few participated in introductory courses on bible reading.

These Catholics urgently need help with how to correctly handle the precious treasure of the Word of God. At the same time, in order to have access to the full meaning of its message, the dangers of a free and uncontrolled study of Sacred Scripture from a fundamentalistic or simplistic reading of the text must be pointed out.

3. For Scripture reading and Bible use two fundamental principles must be observed: the Bible is an organic unity and there exists an intrinsic bond between the Bible and the Church.

a) *The organic unity of the Bible.*

The two parts of the Bible, the Old and the New Testament, are complementary. This complementarity is a Christian and theologic fact. Indeed, for the Christians (contrary to the Jews) the entire Bible is read from the viewpoint of the New Testament and therefore appears in a new light. Likewise, one must avoid placing these Testaments in opposition to each other as well as preferring one book of the Bible over the others. An interpre-

tation which leads to the depreciation of the person and the mission of Jesus must be qualified as tendencies.

b) The Bible and the Church

The Church from her foundation on, had to fulfill three principle functions: the proclamation of the Good News; the instruction of the faithful; and the strengthening of the faith. The Bible is read and interpreted in this perspective. Reading and the interpreting the Scriptures are above all the affairs of the Church.

Every exegete of the Bible knows himself to be connected not only with the apostles who received and transmitted the message of the New Testament which allows us to read and understand the Old Testament, but also with the present community which continues to fulfill the mandate received. Without integration into the living tradition of the Church and obedience to the ecclesiastical magisterium, enthusiasm for the Bible can turn into a personal and false interpretation and lead to illusionary beliefs. Some people or groups end up reading the Bible in a utilitarian and literal way as if the Bible is the source which gives them isolated arguments for justifying certain theses or one reads the Bible in a fundamentalistic manner, that is to say, interpreting the Bible according to the literal translation of the words and situations without considering the literary forms or referring to Jesus who is the accomplishment of the entire Sacred Scripture.

II. Recommendations and Directives

1. "Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (DV 22). Would that all the translation teams, helped by professional exegetes, continue in their efforts to produce the text of the Bible in Lingala in a translation more and more faithful and accurate. They should also think of the publication of the scientific works for example, a concordance in Lingala, useful for biblical studies and for the improvement of translations. People involved in the distribution of Catholic Bibles in Lingala as well as in French at low prices should also be encouraged. The setting up of a "Diocesan Committee for Biblical Apostolate" could furnish useful service in coordinating as well as in stimulating the translation and

distribution of the Bible as well as in organizing bible campaigns and in taking other initiatives in this field.

2. The commission for the formation of lay people should consist of competent people and offer a solid initial bible course (in French) which could be used also in the basic formation of animators as well as in other groups and bible circles. They should also organize courses of continued formation for people who then with their own competence would offer such courses in parishes and groups. All groups in the parish including youth groups should have an opportunity to follow a serious initiation to reading the Bible.

3. In these courses and by other means, one should show the Christians that the reading of the Bible is not the affair of one single person who reads the Bible and interprets it in his/her own way, but that the Bible is read in the Church so that the meaning of the biblical message is understood as the magisterium and the whole Christian community interpret it since the time of the apostles unto this day.

4. As the Bible is the Word of God in human language, the Christians should be instructed how to distinguish in the biblical text the literary form or the cultural element conditioned by a given historical epoch from the proper religious message of the text in relation to the person of Jesus Christ.

5. The Bible is the fruit of the long history of salvation during which God prepared his people one step at a time towards maturity to receive the fullness of revelation in his son, Jesus Christ. One should instruct the Christians to put every biblical passage in its proper place within the history of salvation and teach them to discover the religious message by referring the text in question to the accomplishment given by Jesus.

6. Those responsible in the parishes and the groups should ensure that Christians are bound to use Bible editions which have the approval of the Catholic Church authorities. They should offer to the Christians numerous occasions to initiate the reading of the Bible and to study it profoundly so the faithful will not be tempted to search elsewhere for what they can receive so abundantly in their own Church.

THE BANGALORE PLENARY ASSEMBLY BOOK

The General Secretariat in Stuttgart has copies of the book from the Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation which was held in Bangalore, India in 1984. Besides a complete summary of the Assembly, the book contains reports prepared by the different members of the Federation to include contributions from experts on the theme of that Assembly: "Would That All Were Prophets".

This book is available free of charge as long as copies are in stock. It is requested, however, that postage be paid by those requesting the book.

In preparation for the forthcoming Plenary Assembly of the Federation, Bishop Alberto Ablondi and Fr. Ludger Feldkämper sent all members of the Federation the following letter:

Dear Friends in the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate,

Our BULLETIN DEI VERBUM No. 7 (2/1988), page 4, already informed you that our next Plenary Assembly will take place in Bogotá, capital of Colombia, around the end of September 1990. Since we attribute great significance to this influential event in the life of our Federation, we would like to personally address the representatives of our members with this letter. As you know, the Plenary Assembly takes place every six years, and has as its goal to evaluate work accomplished since the last Plenary Assembly and to delineate new aims for the next six years.

The forthcoming Plenary Assembly has this very same task. Through better cooperation in the context of Church and society at the threshold of the third millennium, new impulses are to be given to the biblical apostolate and to the biblical-pastoral ministry.

Our Federation is one of the results of the II Vatican Council and originated from the demand of Pope Paul VI to implement the pastoral directives of the Council Constitution DEI VERBUM. Much has been achieved in this large and important area since then. Still, there remains a lot to be done more than two decades after the Council, as Pope John Paul II observed in an address to the members of our Executive Committee in 1986. We must not rest on our oars.

Time and again, the Holy Father calls upon all the faithful to take part in the "New Evangelization". During its last annual meeting in Chicago, therefore, the Executive Committee opted as theme for the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá: "**The Bible in the New Evangelization**".

To make our contribution to the new evangelization at the dawning of the next millennium, it is imperative that all 68 Full and 165 Associate Members participate in the preparation of this Plenary Assembly. The more vibrant participation in these preparatory endeavors, the more productive the Plenary Assembly will be.

Therefore, we invite you to reflect upon your expectations as regards the Plenary Assembly and to comment on questions for a fruitful exchange of ideas. During the next weeks, we will send you documents and questionnaires to enable you to participate in these preparatory efforts. Thank you very much for your wholehearted cooperation.

Counting on you and united with you in the service of the Good News of Christ, we remain,

Fraternally yours,

Bishop Alberto Ablondi
- President-

Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, SVD
- General Secretary -