

World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate

N°10

1 / 1989

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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

Congratulations are in order as the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate celebrates its 20th anniversary on the 16th of April! Since its foundation, the members have endeavored in multiple capacities to implement the recommendation of the Council: "Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (DV 22). It would be a good idea to read once again in the previous editions of WORD EVENT and of BULLETIN DEI VERBUM, the final declarations of the first three Plenary Assemblies plus the reports of the Regional and National Meetings to become aware of the fact that the members of the Federation have accomplished much and are continuing to do so. May this enthusiasm continue for the next twenty and more years!

This year 1989, marks the countdown before the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá. We hope the entire Federation will participate in the preparation of this event so that it may bring rich blessings not only to the internal life and well-being of this international organization, but may first and foremost give new impulses to the biblical apostolate and the biblical-pastoral ministry in our various regions. The questions concerning the what and why of the Plenary Assembly are answered on page 20 of this BULLETIN. Bishop Ablondi, President of the Federation, offers "food for thought" by giving us his reflections on the theme of the Plenary Assembly, "The Bible in the New Evangelization" (pages 9-12).

In Asia, the biblical apostolate is very active in spite of the low percentage of Catholics in the entire region. In the Final Statement of their second meeting, those responsible for the biblical apostolate in Asia, emphasized dialogue between the Bible and the holy scriptures of other religions - a concern they consider of the utmost importance (pages 5-7).

It does not suffice to repeat "The Bible, the Bible..." to discover its message and make it one's own. Reflection on the biblical apostolate and the biblical-pastoral ministry is today perhaps more than ever necessary in view of a very energetic biblical fundamentalism. In this issue, you will find three documents on this theme, each of which will make access to the Bible possible in its own way. We thank the authors for their permission to publish these contributions. From our friends in French speaking Switzerland, we borrow a proposal for governing and accompanying Bible groups (pages 8, 13-14). From Quebec, we received a simple method of text study (pages 14-15). Cardinal Martini offered us the Foreword of one of his new books in which he describes the method of the "Lectio Divina" which found acceptance especially among the youth of Milan.

If you know from your own experience with the Bible or from the experience in groups other methods of Bible reading which are new or particularly practical, please do not hesitate to send them to us. We would like to publish them in order to make exchange and thereby enrichment possible.

Marc Sevin

Thank you for your
subscription renewal
for 1989.
(see subscriber
information
on page 2)

Twenty Years...

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate, Cardinal Willebrands, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, sent a letter on 24 February 1989, to Bishop Ablondi, the President of our Federation. It was on 16 April 1969 that Msgr. Willebrands himself presided over the meeting of biblical organizations which decided to found the Federation. (The original text of this letter is in Italian with English translation by the redaction team).

Your Excellency,

With a joyful heart, we thank the Lord that 20 years ago he caused the founding and initial steps of the Federation. In view of the rapid growth and wide spread, we ask from him the grace of a deeper inner conversion for a still more fruitful apostolic activity. On the 16th of April 1969, Pope Paul VI, greeted with satisfaction the program of the Federation "which intends to serve the bishops in their pastoral responsibility concerning a larger use and knowledge of the Bible". It is nice to realize how much the Federation endeavored to enact the recommendations of the Council "to spread the living Word of God" under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Currently, it is established on all continents with 68 Full Members and 165 Associate Members and is preparing to respond to the challenges of the "new evangelization" of the third millennium. In fact, the central theme of the next Plenary Assembly in 1990 will be "The Bible in the New Evangelization".

The Bible which constitutes the core of the apostolic activity occupies the central place in the renewal of the ecclesial life, in the mission, in catechesis, in ministerial services, and the celebration of the liturgy: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the Word of God and the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy" (DV VI 21). The Second Vatican Council has brought forth a rich harvest for the biblical movement which together with ecumenical and liturgical movements, has developed in this century. Numerous documents give witness to this. The Council Fathers were conscientious that the local churches grow "from the seeds of the Word of God". They stressed that missionary, pastoral and ecumenical activities are "most strongly intertwined" (AG 1,7); they indicate that the Sacred Scriptures "are precious instruments in the mighty hand of God for attaining that unity which the Savior holds out to all men" (UR III, 21).

From there another dimension takes off which the Federation has developed during the past years: collaboration among Christians in the field of Bible translation and distribution. Cardinal Augustin Bea considered this collaboration which has increased since the Council, "one of the most important developments in contemporary Christian history". It has found its special expression in the "Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible", published first in 1968 and revised in 1987.

Pope John Paul II, in his recent Apostolic Exhortation of 30 December 1988, "The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World", pointed out to lay people the goals and steps of the new evangelization. He thereby also indicated the programmatic guidelines which may be useful for the work of the Federation in the next decades and may give her new impulses. This Apostolic Exhortation is rich in content and will be a precious guide for the spiritual and practical preparation of your next Plenary Assembly in Bogotá: "This re-evangelization is directed not only to individual persons but also to entire portions of populations in the variety of their situations, surroundings, and cultures. Its purpose is the formation of mature ecclesial communities, in which the faith may radiate and fulfill the basic meaning of adherence to the person of Christ and his Gospel, of an encounter and sacramental communion with him, and of an existence lived in charity and in service" (III, 34).

I hope with all my heart that the wishes of the Holy Father become a living experience for all the members of the Federation and I ask God's richest blessings for all people and organizations who have placed the Bible at the heart of their own apostolic activity.

Fraternally yours in Christ,


+ Johannes Card. Willebrands
Presidente



SECOND ASIAN WORKSHOP FOR THE BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE

In October 1985, in Hong Kong, the first regional meeting for the biblical apostolate in Asia took place under the theme of the Plenary Assembly in Bangalore "Would That All Were Prophets!". It was particularly concerned about the role of lay people. They wanted to deepen the reflection of the role of the lay people in their comprehension of the Word of God. The participants agreed on another meeting in three year's time. The Second Meeting took place in December 1989 in Singapore this time under the theme of the Bogotá Plenary Assembly, "The Bible in the New Evangelization". The following is a reprint the Final Statement of this meeting. Of special note is the invitation to dialogue between the Bible and the holy scriptures of other religions. In addition, the participants wanted to draw attention to the present day tendencies of biblical fundamentalism in Asia. They insisted on the need to give a greater pastoral dimension to the biblical apostolate.

THE BIBLE AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION IN ASIA

The prophets proclaiming "the mighty works of God" (see Acts 2,11) through the Biblical Apostolate have increased in Asia and the Good News of their ministry has been like the refreshing winds of December in a tropical isle to the fifty-two (52) delegates from fourteen (14) countries represented at the Second Asian Workshop for the Biblical Apostolate held in Singapore on 11-16 Dec. 1988.

The Word is alive and the Reign of God is growing fast in all Asia. The Spirit is working everywhere and a ferment of new life is gaining strength on our continent.

Not all, however, is rosy in the Asian field as attested by the absence of representatives from mainland China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma and Mongolia. However, we are all happy that a representative from Nepal has joined our ranks.

We are very much concerned that in a number of Asian countries, the proclamation of the Good News is met with serious difficulties and this poses a challenge to us ministers of the Word. We praise and thank the Lord for the heroism of priests, religious and lay people who have persevered in giving witness to Christ in spite of harassment, beatings and imprisonment for the sake of the Word.

Easy access to Scriptures has been denied to many Asians under governments opposed to the Christian faith by reason of religious bias or political ideology.

Poverty continues to be the scrouge of the Asian continent. It has reduced many of our brothers and sisters to a subhuman level of existence. Our proclamation of the Good News has not done much to remove the structures that have caused this situation to exist. This is a clear indication that our prophetic preaching of the Word does not have that sharpness it ought to have. It has not sufficiently challenged injustice and oppression.

Even within the communion of the faithful, the Biblical Apostolate has its difficulties and setbacks. Workers in our apostolic field have sometimes felt like voices crying in the desert of indifference and are clamoring for more support and encouragement.

We needed an assembly like this one to which the Lord has brought us together to learn from one another and especially to listen to Him Who is the Word of Life present in our midst and in the midst of our people proclaiming the Good News of salvation.

We are looking forward to the year 2000 and the third millennium of the Incarnation of the Word as the KAIROS when the seeds of the Reign of God in Asian traditional religions will start yielding a rich harvest, perhaps in a surprising way that we cannot presently fathom.

Our confidence is based on the following facts. The whole Bible has now been translated into the major languages of Asia, in most cases in warm cooperation with other Christians. In achieving this goal, there has been a fraternal give-and-take of terms and concepts - a true dialogue that has enriched, rather than diminished, our understanding of our Christian faith. Basic Bible Seminars have become a feature in a great number of Asian ecclesial communities. In many Asian countries, serious attention has been given to the formation of Ministers of the Word, many of whom are lay leaders and women. The Catholic youth of Asia have enthusiastically joined the Biblical Apostolate and they promise to become, in the near future, the strong backbone of our evangelistic endeavors. Bible Sharing has played a vital role in the renewal of many Asian families. All these make us feel that God's Word is a source of hope for Asia.

WORD OF GOD FOR A NEW ASIA

To keep the momentum of our Biblical Apostolate at a high level, we reflected on three areas which seem to demand our main attention. These are: the relationship of the Bible with other religions, the Bible and fundamentalism and the Bible in the pastoral ministry.

Evangelization does not mean giving a book but rather making the Risen Lord present in the midst of people and making them

sensitive to the working of the Spirit. It means being seized by the Spirit to make the best of the present moment and to walk towards the future with someone, that is, the Lord.

Just as Paul opened up the Gospel message to *people* who worshipped the Unknown God (see Acts 17,23), today we have to proclaim the Word to the whole creation eagerly longing for God to reveal his children (Rm 8,19). In doing so, let us not forget that even before we engage in a dialogue with our brothers and sisters of other faiths, the Reign of God has already been active in their midst. May the third millennium of the coming of the Incarnate Word, through the ministry of the prophets, create a "symphony" of unity in diversity among all who have been moved by the Spirit and have accepted the Reign of God.

DIALOGUE WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

In spite of variety of conflicting attitudes towards the neighboring peoples (nations) manifested by the human authors of biblical texts, we can see that the Bible expresses the unicity of God, and the unity of the human race as well as its solidarity in sin and grace. Further, in the description of God's covenant with Noah, (Gn 9), the author stresses that God has entered into a relationship of paternal love not only with the Jews but with the whole human race.

Looking at the major world religions of our region, in the light of the basic attitudes of Bible towards religions, we recognize that we have to be open towards them not only because human beings are children of one God, but because each of them as a religion, has much in common with Christianity. Their scriptures embody their God experience and as such, these scriptures contain the "seeds" of the Word of God (*Ad Gentes*). Therefore, we cannot think of a Biblical Apostolate in Asia without initiating a meaningful dialogue between the message of the Bible and the message of other religious scriptures. May the Spirit of love and unity guide our brothers and sisters in the Catholic ecclesial communion in the study of and life-dialogue with the adherents of other religions so that in getting to know their beliefs better we may learn to increase our love for the people who hold them.

BIBLICAL FUNDAMENTALISM

In some parts of Asia, biblical fundamentalism is found attractive by all sectors of society, especially the young. We take this as an invitation to our ecclesial communities, to ask themselves whether or not they have been attentive to the signs of the times and especially to the needs of young people. These signs and needs include humanity's religious yearning, a yearning for identity, for community, for moral goods, for vision, for wholeness, for security and salvation. In responding to these yearnings, it should be clear that the answer must come, not only from the words of the Bible, but also from the concrete

realities of day-to-day living through which God still speaks in leading his people, especially those of the new generation, through tensions and struggles, to the fullness of his reign.

PASTORAL APPROACHES

Pope John Paul II stressed the urgency of a New Evangelization, both for the renewal of ecclesial communities and the rebirth of humankind.

This renewal of ecclesial communities requires not only the strengthening of catechesis, but also its enrichment through the involvement of catechesis in the building up of small ecclesial communities, characterized at a deep level by caring, sharing affirmation and forgiveness.

True responsibility for making the Word "living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb 4,12), must be given to the new generation of lay men and women as well as to the senior ones whose silence in our ecclesial communities, has often deprived the Word of existential force. Our youth must no longer be treated as children but as young adults capable of fighting the good fight (sec 1 Tm 1,18).

As the author of the Pastoral Letters says, we should not reproach anyone on account of his or her youth but we should encourage especially those in the vigor of youth to be models to believers in the way they speak and act, in their love, their faith and purity of life; let us encourage them to devote themselves to reading the Bible, preaching and teaching (see 1 Tm 4,12).

The inculcation of the liturgy is an urgent need for Asian ecclesial communities, especially where Christians are looked upon as aliens in their own country. Bible enthronement, when integrated into the liturgy on solemn occasions, will meaningfully proclaim the rightful place of the Bible in the midst of the people of God. This place of honor should also be expressed in Church architecture. Most of all, in the new evangelization, the liturgy should give the people an experience of the living presence of Jesus Christ at each moment of the celebration.

The new evangelization must be a liberation from all that prevents people from becoming fully alive, that is, from all forms of poverty, which in the final analysis is caused by the sins of individuals and groups. New evangelizers must not be afraid to ask why the people are poor materially, morally, spiritually or why they are in such a state. And they must not lack the courage to show the way and walk the way to true and lasting freedom, guided by the Word of God.

Recommendations:

The Second Asian Workshop for Biblical Apostolate continues the Biblical Apostolate of the past years and prepares for the Plenary Assembly of the WCFBA in Bogotá in 1990.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE SECOND ASIAN WORKSHOP AT THE DIOCESAN AND NATIONAL LEVEL

1. Continue the implementation of the statements from Bangalore and Hong Kong.
2. Promote the Biblical Apostolate by spreading the Bible and helping people to read it, share it, and put it into action.
3. Encourage priests and religious to a private daily Bible reading (not only in the Liturgy).
4. Put emphasis on working with lay people, especially youth and women, in promoting the Biblical Apostolate.
5. Make lay people, religious, priests and bishops aware of their distinctive role as agents of evangelization.
6. Invite local churches to help prepare for Bogotá '90 by organizing a National Workshop on "Bible in the New Evangelization".
7. That leaders and teachers of the Church should get acquainted with the religious traditions and Scriptures of the major religions of Asia.
8. Formation and ongoing formation of bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders should comprise openness to other religious traditions and Scriptures. The ability to dialogue with them should be fostered.
9. Our lay people should gradually be initiated to dialogue with their neighbors of other faiths.
10. Our parishes and institutions should have structures and materials to foster inter-religious dialogue.
11. The leaders of the Church should be made aware of the subtle ways in which fundamentalism makes inroads into our society.
12. The bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders should be trained to share the Word of God making use of up-to-date approach to the Bible in order to forestall a narrow and word-for-word understanding of the Bible.
13. We must train our people to listen to God's message. This is not possible without interior silence. We should, therefore, initiate them to meaningful silence during the encounter with the Word.
14. The homilies and other forms of proclaiming the Word must be experiential, situational and existential.
15. In the celebration of the sacraments and sacramentals, the Word of God should have a prominent place. We encourage the integration of Bible Enthronement in the principal Sunday Mass of a parish community. It is also suggested that those

building new churches and chapels should provide a place of honor for the Bible.

16. Our proclamation of the Word should question the structures of injustice, oppressions and inequality existing in our society which make it continue to be that sinful world contrary to the plan of God.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE ON REGIONAL LEVEL

1. Improve communication on regional level through the office of the Regional Coordinator. Exchange materials, ideas, experiences, resource persons.
2. Organize regional workshops. Subjects can be: "New Evangelization" or "God's Rule".

III. RECOMMENDATIONS ON ASIAN LEVEL

1. Support the Regional Meeting of the Laity in Northeast Asia, to be held in Japan on the subject "The Bible in the New Evangelization".
2. Stress the importance of "Reconciliation" in the perspective of the third millennium.

IV. ACTION FOR BOGOTÁ 1990

The Bishop's Conference of Asia could, on the occasion of the forthcoming International Eucharistic Congress in South Korea, and the Silver Jubilee of the Conciliar Documents: DEI VERBUM and APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM, send out a pastoral letter on "WORD OF GOD AND EUCHARIST" as Bread of Life for our Christian people.

CONCLUSION

We are at the threshold of a new era in the history of the world and life of the Church. We have been challenged by the Spirit to become proclaimers of the Word in a world that is going through the birth-pangs of a new existence. We have to be free to dialogue with the people of today; we have to be sensitive to what the Spirit is telling us through contemporary events; we have to be committed to the proclamation of the Word which alone can transform the world. We have to translate the Bible into a word of hope in a world tumultuous with toil and with struggle, but with widening horizons. As we go into the four corners of this great continent, strengthened by the Word of the Risen Lord, and comforted by the presence of the Spirit, we commit ourselves to be messengers of the Good News to all unto the day of the Lord, the day of the new earth and new heaven.

Biblical Animation Techniques

During their annual meetings, the Executive Committee of the Federation has repeatedly dealt with the question of a "Handbook for Biblical Apostolate". To respond to this request, some regions began working on such a handbook corresponding to their local situation. Following such endeavors, BULLETIN DEI VERBUM will publicize excerpts from these publications. In the following, you find some contributions which may prove useful in this context. We thank the authors for these materials and for allowing us to publish them in part.

FRENCH-SPEAKING SWITZERLAND

The "Centre Catholique Romand de Formation Permanente" and the organization "Evangile et Culture" of French-speaking Switzerland jointly published a "Tool Kit for Biblical Animators". For some years, ecumenical groups gather experiences with a new form of biblical instruction and accompaniment based on "techniques for group leadership" and "exegetical work". The published dossier describes this method applied in numerous groups of French-speaking Switzerland and France: their objectives and risks in view of group leadership and exegesis. The entire dossier is at hand in the form of methodical worksheets.

This dossier from the French-speaking Swiss offers an important contribution. The following is a presentation by Marcel Durrer describing the goals of this "Tool Kit for Biblical Animators".

Ecumenical Biblical Animation

Biblical animation is a form of Bible reading in a group. The Bible texts written by authors who belonged to a community were addressed to communities. Therefore biblical animation fosters Bible reading within a group as a communal effort. Biblical animation is directed towards groups of adults. It addresses everyone who is ready to enter into dialogue with the biblical text, to be affected by it, and to work with biblical texts in groups while in search of the Word. Bible reading is an excellent opportunity of encounter between the Churches. In French-speaking Switzerland, the planned projects are, as much as possible, ecumenical.

1. The objectives of biblical animation

1.1. General Objectives:

One important objective or goal is to build up confidence in the relationships of man with each other so that they are able:

- * to SPEAK freely without being judged, and to ENCOUNTER THE WORD;
- * to DISCOVER the communitarian and universal dimension of the Word;
- * to EXPERIENCE in their lives the zeal and liberating force of the Word.

These general objectives are connected with specific objectives.

1.2. Specific Objectives:

- * to OFFER the groups a formation for Bible reading and to GUARANTEE the participants a permanent accompaniment which enables them to accept theological and animation tasks;
- * to CREATE a space in the community making possible the proclamation of the Word as a tradition and as a novelty;
- * to ALLOW the group and the individual to bridge from life to Scripture and from Scripture to life.

2. Three steps

The three steps have as their goal to give to the group itself the possibility to join their life with the biblical text rather than listening to a speaker who reports on his experiences on his manner of Bible reading and his practices.

2.1. Projection

This step allows the group to express themselves before and about the biblical text, to express their own understanding of the world and the text. It offers an opportunity to link their own situation with a text or a theme; to find their place as an individual or group within the society in which one lives and within its network of relationships; to determine the "situation" of the Bible reading. The projection offers the group the opportunity to recognize and to articulate its understanding of the text and of the group itself.

2.2. Analysis

The text is read and studied in its diversity to discover which meaning it had for the community for whom it was first intended. On account of this analysis, the text becomes a dialogue partner of the group.

The analysis demands of the group that it leaves behind the world in which it lives and enters the world of the text - a world which is alien to them in terms of time and culture. For this step, three points need to be distinguished and adhered to: *observation, *comprehension, and *interpretation.

The interpretation should always be verified in the text itself. This verification allows us to become conscious of our prejudices.

2.3. Appropriation

The appropriation must take place in connection with the other two steps: projection and analysis.

The group "makes the message of the text their own" in an existential and actual manner. The read and studied text must

THE BIBLE IN THE NEW EVANGELIZATION (IV)

In the perspective of preparations for the next Plenary Assembly of the Federation, scheduled for 1990 in Latin America, the BULLETIN DEI VERBUM publishes regularly in these center pages, contributions on the theme of this meeting : "The Bible in the New Evangelization". Monsignor Alberto Ablondi, the very active President of our Federation, gives some points of reference in the following:

In order to understand the theme we have chosen for our reflection and which requires the involvement of both individuals and ecclesial communities, it is necessary to clarify the meaning and the value of each single word expressed in the theme.

THE BIBLE

Obviously it is not just a matter of distributing a sacred book. Certainly the problem does exist to reach every person with the Word of God, translated into their own language and adapted to their cultural level. But this alone cannot be the concern of a new evangelization. Who already possesses Sacred Scripture and those to whom it has to be offered must know that "evangelization" does not mean the giving of a book but rather making the Lord present - the Risen Lord, present in the revealed Word (Bible) just as he is present in the Incarnate Word of the Eucharist.

The intention to walk with the Bible in the new evangelization towards the third millennium means to present Jesus "who is the mediator and the fullness of all revelation" (DV 2); it means to participate in the work of the Church which offers "[the bread of life]... from the table of both the Word of God and of the Body of Christ" (DV 21); it means to invite every person to an encounter with "the Father in heaven (who) meets His children with great love and speaks with them" (DV 21).

It is fitting, therefore, to think of the Christian walking towards the future and towards men and women not with **something** but with **someone** - that is, the Lord. Only in this way can one walk towards the future; because **things** do not make or have a future; conversely, people, like seeds, become fruitful by loosing themselves in the present to prepare for the future; "preach the Gospel to all humankind.... signs will accompany you" (Mk 16, 15).

For this reason, to walk with the Bible towards people means not so much to offer them supplementary biblical

knowledge as to make ourselves instruments of the grace of the Word which became manifest and incarnate, which reveals to every person the gift of creation, which invites them to renewal by reconciliation, which communicates salvific redemption.

The Bible offered, proclaimed and entrusted to people and to communities has, consequently, this living and challenging identity of Him who is the "Word of life".

NEW

This word also deserves in-depth reflection. Let us begin by saying that "new" is one of the most frequently used words of the Bible. It is a word filled with the Holy Spirit who "makes all things new"; it is a word which expresses the renewing gift of the Resurrection - "remove the old yeast... you will be like new dough" (1Cor 5,7). Beyond that it is opportune to point out that the word "new" does not concern the Word of God, because this, by its very nature, is always new. This is confirmed by the very word "Gospel" which means "Good News". This indeed is always a beautiful word due to its newness for every person, for all times. The Word of God is, therefore, new in itself; it is only we who because of our inability to present or interpret it properly, make it old.

Not in this sense then, do we speak of a new evangelization but rather, it seems to me, for the pastoral newness which the new evangelization wants to bring about. We find an indication of this in the letter to the Romans. Read with the intention of actualization, this letter indicates to the Church those who await the new evangelization. The actualization of the letter is not difficult. In fact, the words of Paul, concerning "God's power to save all who believe, first the Jews and also the Gentiles (Rom 1,16)", open to the new evangelization two necessary horizons: the "Jews" who had to be evangelized yesterday were the Hebrews; today, they are the children of the abrahamic revelation, that is the Christians. For the Hebrews, as well as the Moslems of today, the Church must proclaim the new Good News, so that they may discover they are "adopted children" and

are able to cry "Abba" (Rom 8, 15). This is the first horizon of the new evangelization for the descendants of Abraham, the children of the abrahamic covenant.

But Paul invites us to open up the new evangelization to the "gentiles of today" also; that is, the children of the covenant with Noah. These are the whole of "creation wait(ing) with eager longing for God to reveal his children" (Rom 8, 19). In fact, Jews and Gentiles, that is believers and non-believers of today, are already united in the expectation, because all of us are groaning within ourselves, waiting for adoption as children of God (Rom 8, 23).

The children of Abraham, therefore, and the secularized world of today, are the new addressees who are expecting the "newness of the new evangelization".

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION FOR A CHURCH GROWN OLD

The new evangelization concerns the Church, primarily. There is a need for a new evangelization which would offer newness of life to a Church which, in certain aspects, has grown old, and which could offer fermentation to a Church that in many aspects is new today.

Is there a Church grown old to whom the Word could offer newness of life?

Above all, a Church has grown old when it is burdened by its divisions. True, the Word of God has already opened this Church to newness of life through the interconfessional translation and distribution of the Bible. One could even say that the most consistent success of the Ecumenical Movement is experienced in the encounter of Christians through the Word of God. Thus the Bible is new evangelization for the Churches split through ancient divisions.

But the Word of God must help the Church to also break out of the old occidental world so that it may truly be today more so than in the past, a World Church. The presence of the Church of today in a world with an indigenous episcopacy and clergy, must overcome the image of a Church which is western, old and exported/imported. Important, therefore, is the role not only of a theology which is linked rather to times and places but also of the Word of God which is able to become incarnate thus making the Church respectfully present in every environment, in every culture, in the history so different in every people. In fact, the Word of God, exactly in its universal value, is necessary in order to overcome the ancient monoculture and to insert itself into the many cultures.

But the Church has become old and weak also because of the serious islands or "pockets" of so-called partial

adherence. Many Christians in these "pockets" live in the Church like schismatics, inasmuch as they remain in the Church but reject or err about many values of the theological and moral realm. I would like to think that these passive adhesions could be revived by the Word of God which many Christians have not yet encountered. For these "partial" Christians perhaps, the journey must begin not with the voice of the magisterium but rather with the teaching of the Bible.

The new evangelization, therefore, must not offer only commandments and doctrine, but the Word which inspires motivation for faith and moral action.

Another symptom of old age in the Church is the superficial listening to the Word of God. We are a Church in which too often one hears, but does not listen. Therefore, we are in need of finding again precisely in the Word of the God, the education to listen and to help to "preserve in one's heart" (Lc 2, 19.51). Thus could be overcome the serious danger of a people of God immune against the Bible precisely by this superficial knowledge of the Bible itself.

Another symptom of a grown-old Church is the imbalance in many believers between professional knowledge and mere acquaintance with the Word of God. To these people, the new evangelization must offer not only commandments or doctrines, but the Word which gives unity to human knowledge and helps to make a vocation out of professional life.

I would like to allude to other sectors of the life of the Church which again must be brought to life by the Word. Care must be given to the priority of the Word over the organization of the Church; furthermore, the expressions of popular religiosity, too often neglected or polluted by superstition, must be based on and purified by the Word. Again, there is a need for the fruitfulness of the Word, so that the authoritative voice of the magisterium may be integrated with the "sense of faith" of the people of God (LG 12) which is born of the Spirit and manifests itself in the indissoluble link with Sacred Scripture and the hierarchy.

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION IN A NEW CHURCH

Wide also is the horizon of new dimensions which the Church reveals in herself and for which she invokes the Word, precisely in order to consolidate its perennial newness. Some of the new dimensions which call for the Bible in the new evangelization, are the following:

1. The mystical dimension of the Church (LG 5) which incarnates the Trinitarian Community in the Universal Church and makes it visible, above all, in the Local

Church. Precisely this spatial-temporal identity of the particular Church demands in her a new link with the Word of God. The Bible, in fact, with its orientation towards dialogue, helps the Church to be truly local, incarnating itself in a particular territory, in a specific culture, in the history and in the hopes of a people.

2. The dimension of the Church which recognizes herself as "totally missionary". In her, in fact, there are no longer only missionaries sent from one territory to another. This Church which has become entirely missionary in each moment and in each person must also become entirely biblical, because it must find in the Word of God the formation and the motivation for, as well as the content of, her mission.

3. The dimension of the "ministerial Church" which must prepare the many ministries flourishing in her. Precisely these varieties of ministries call for formation through the Word of God so that each ministry in its specific realm, be always at the service of the Word, be always nourished and ruled by the Word of God.

4. The Church which offers a variety of expressions in the parishes and also in the multiplicity of Movements and Associations, this Church will have to preserve the variety and avoid the fragmentation if she nourishes with the Word of God the common ground of all these expressions.

5. A Church which in many parts of the world in vis-a-vis confrontation with its surrounding environment, has become "small, poor and scattered" (LG 26) can offer itself effectively only in that dialogue which the Word of God is able to solicit.

Hence, she must be a Church "which gives" the Word because she speaks with Scripture, and a Church "which gives" the word because she places on everyone's lips the Word of God.

The new evangelization, then, finds in the Bible the power of newness for a Church which has become old and also for the new dimensions which reveal themselves today in the Church. But the new evangelization reaches not only a new or renewed Church, it also reaches a "new" world.

THE BIBLE FOR A NEW WORLD

I would like to say that the needs for a new evangelization are as numerous, vast and profound as are the many new subjects of the world. New subjects or realities of the world waiting for the newness of the Word of God are the following:

1. First of all, the people and the communities. These are recently born both in the world and in the Church, of that

society which at one time was generally and officially evangelized. These new "creatures", however, the individual persons and the individual communities which mark the passage from Church-Society to Church-Communion are expecting that the Word would be first announced and entrusted to them.

The people are truly in need of this for understanding the meaning of their existence; and the communities are in need of it for living the genuine Communion. In the present and in the future, in fact, it is the people and the communities who make history. The Word of God, therefore, must help them to understand the plan of salvation which reaches them, of which they are a part and with which they must collaborate. They are, in conclusion, new subjects not yet evangelized.

2. Another new reality of today's world is, on one hand, the multiplicity and the facility of communication, while on the other, the frightening expansion of the inability to communicate. How to confront with the Bible this vastness and difficulty of communication? It is not just a matter of inserting the Bible into the communication media, although this also is necessary. The content and style of the Bible must be presented so that it be understood that all communication by voice, transport, images, and science makes sense when it leads to Communion. Through this process of multiple communication towards Communion, the Bible will be truly effective. On every single page and in its totality, it is always "communication for Communion". Is not this the meaning of the words of John: "What we have seen and heard we announce to you also, so that you will have fellowship with us" (1Jn 1,3)?

3. But Christian attention enlightened by the Word, discovers in the world not only new realities, but also new modes of being which justify and demand new evangelization and new forms of evangelization. Which are these new modes of being in the world?

. A new world which is more united and stronger through its technology is in need of the Word of God as complement of soul.

. A world totally projected towards the future is in need of rediscovering in the Bible the solidarity of a story of the past which permits serenity, fantasy and hope for the future.

. A world in which greater closeness exalts diversity often until intolerance, this world finds in the Bible itself the evaluation and the complementarity of the differences. Moreover, it finds the example of the fruitfulness of what is different in the very idea of publishing the Bible. In fact, the Bible grows out of the integration of the diverse: it is Word of God and, at the same time, a human word; it presents itself as a book of multiplicity and at the same time a profoundly unified one; it offers itself as a book of a people and of a Church and at the same time,

as a message for each individual; it is a book which speaks the truth and at the same time, contains different interpretations; it is a book of revelation which include many an obscure page; it is a book of the Old and, likewise, of the New Testament.

. A world which has experienced in the last century the exaltation of liberty and which in this century, even in dangerous forms, has committed itself to liberation, senses now the need to find, precisely in the Bible, the constant example of a God who indissolubly unites liberty and liberation because he calls us to the "freedom of the children of God". Thus he sends us via the Word of God a "liberation" which is rich in content, that is in salvation, love, solidarity: in a word - the Covenant.

. A new world and new human beings are often split in themselves. A division is created between technology and human responsibility, between the audiovisual and the personal encounter, between the new language of the computer and the need to preserve languages and dialects. The necessity, therefore, imposes itself to learn from the Bible the meaning of just "ruling" (Gen 1,28) and true "cultivating" (Gn 2, 15). "Ruling and cultivating" - this is the biblical norm which succeeds in bringing into harmony the grave disassociations today between technology and ecology, manipulation and respect, power and attention, means and end.

. A world in which the ease of encounter makes the dialogue between religions and cultures more frequent is certainly more in need of the Bible in its style of dialogue which is not that of a theology in which rigid schemes at times become ploys which hide and distort the partners in dialogue.

We have thus discovered the newness of the personalities which interest us: the new Church which is in need

of the Bible and the new world which, even unknowingly, invokes the Word of God.

But the new evangelization does not leave Church and world separate in their - at times dangerous - newness. From the moment that the human being is the way of the Church, the Bible in the hands of the "pilgrim" Church (LG 8) is offered for the tiresome pilgrimage of the new human being. From this results the new evangelization which prepares itself to live the history of the third millennium. And the Church which presents herself with the Bible, must comprehend her own history first in order to intuitively understand the history of the human being; above all, she must be attentive to the meaning of her rendezvous with the third millennium. The Church knows that the first millennium of her history was an "experience of unity" and the second one of "suffering under division". Now she has to prepare herself with an adequate evangelization to make of herself with the world and for the world in the third millennium, an experience of a "symphony" - a meeting of the diverse.

Face to face with this poverty and newness in the Church and in the world, with the chances of ever-maturing dialogue between Christians, different religions and human beings, the Word of God is a determining factor. For this reason, in the Church and for the Church, the biblical apostolate becomes extremely important as a service required from the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate.

The WCFBA, in the New Evangelization, on the eve of the third millennium, must be an expression of the Church which, with the Word of God, feels "an obligation to all peoples, to the civilized and to the savage, to the educated and to the ignorant ... to preach the Good News" (Rom 1, 14).

Msgr. Alberto ABLONDI
Bishop of Livorno
President of the WCFBA

THE FEDERATION'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY

After the II Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI entrusted to Cardinal Bea and to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity the mission to study how best to put into practice the pastoral guidelines of DEI VERBUM. In 1967, Cardinal Bea made contact with the Catholic Biblical Organizations in an effort to achieve this goal.

In April 1969, Cardinal Willebrands, successor to Cardinal Bea, organized a meeting with delegates from 24 countries. The principle of an international Catholic federation for the biblical apostolate is adopted. This is how on 16 April 1969, the **World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate** came into being.

Twenty years have passed and there is still so much richness to discover in the Councillor documents concerning the biblical apostolate. The celebration of this anniversary should stimulate us to continue on the footpath that has been so well established....

be heard and accepted as Word through which God calls man today and directs his view to the things of everyday life; to his doing and to his existence as individual and as member of a community.

* *Compare - Confront*

Compare the initial perception of the text by the group (projection) with the results of the text analysis.

* *A New View*

Bible reading allows the group to view all creatures, the world in its entirety, society, and last but not least God himself, with new eyes enlightened by the gospel.

* *To Engage Oneself*

Bible reading in the group causes the individual to become involved. The appropriation should guarantee that the group members not only interiorize reflections and discoveries, but it should also motivate them to act accordingly. The appropriation encompasses not only close relationships (individuals, family members, friends), but also those more distant (in social, ecclesial, economical and political life).

* *Celebration*

The celebration marks the welcoming of the Word and of the one who speaks to us through the group. The exchange of experiences often is almost a "liturgical" moment.

3. Those actually involved in the steps and their functions

3.1. The Group

Bible reading in the group is profitable only if each of the participants has the opportunity to comment on the text. Group dynamics may help in this process and should be considered.

3.2. The Animator

The task of the leader encompasses all aspects of the Bible course project, to include its sequence, execution and form.

* organization, * production, * regulation.

3.3. The Theologian

In biblical animation the theologian offers functional service consisting of research and furnishing all useful data thus allowing the group to comprehend the text in question in its historical context. If the technical aspect of exegesis calls for a specialist (biblicist), this theological task must be undertaken by all who are entrusted with the leadership of the Bible group. It encompasses three tasks: * exegesis, * analysis and * theological synthesis.

3.4. Coanimation

In practice, the team leading the group normally consists of a theologian (male or female) who handles the theological task, and of an experienced lay person knowledgeable in group leadership.

4. The use of active methods

The employment of active methods beyond discussion allows the individual group members to speak out freely. It offers the more quiet members of the group the possibility of being heard while those who are more outspoken have the opportunity to display other aspects of their personalities.

To employ an active method meaningfully and profitably in a group, it is important to clarify beforehand, the goal and to observe the following parameters:

4.1. The Animator

He must feel safe with the method he proposes and he should have tested it beforehand.

4.2. The Group

The applied methods must not confuse the group. They should be introduced progressively into the course program corresponding to the growth of trust between animator and group.

4.3. The Place

It must be adapted to the methods. For example, for work in sub-groups, there should be sufficient work space.

4.4. The Time

It must be sufficient for the normal progression of the course and should not be measured too stringently. The time needed may vary greatly depending on which method is applied for the course.

4.5. The Text

The method must be adapted to the chosen text. The text itself often gives directives for work; thus, for example, one could ask the group to emulate the author: to write a psalm or a letter or to narrate a parable, to compose a beatitude, etc.

5. Evaluation

Biblical animation is a group process in which everyone is involved. Therefore, all group members and animators should do the evaluation together. It examines whether the goals which were set and expressed at the beginning of the course - namely the biblical animation and progression of the course - have been reached. The following points should be observed:

1. The experience - 2. The content - 3. The methods - 4. The changes - 5. The future.

6. Biblical animation, its chances and risks

6.1. The Interpretation

Biblical animation does not escape the risks of interpreting biblical texts. The history of interpretation points out the benefits as well as the dangers of explaining the text for the reader of today. Any form of interpretation must take into account on the one hand the distance between the text and our present day modern world while on the other hand it should

make it possible for the individual and the group to discover the Gospel, the Good News, for our time.

6.2. The Psychology

Biblical animation is accused of a type of psychology which puts the bible reader's psyche, the ego, the personal experience into the foreground so that any critical examination of the text is lost. It is indeed a misuse behind which, however, is a good intention: to really draw the reader into the gathering, his life and his experiences as an adult with responsibility.

6.3. Leading the Group

Active methods may uncover dimensions of the person which normally come to bear little (affectivity, emotions, sensitivity, sentiments, etc.). These experiences are enrichment for the one in question and for the exchange within the group. But they may provoke also uncertainty, resistance and fear. It is therefore important that the leader of the group offers only methods which he himself is familiar with and has experienced.

6.4 Coanimation

At times it is difficult to harmonize two different kinds of leadership, it creates tensions which then render the group insecure and impedes good work.

6.5 The Choice

The shorter a work step is, the more carefully the leader must select the methodical means and the instructions for text analysis which may not need much time; and he must be conscious of their choice. The shorter the work step, the more apt the leader must be to answer the challenges of the text.

6.6 Privatization of Faith

Paradoxically, reading the Bible in a group does not protect biblical animation against the tendency of the privatization of faith. This privatization limits the actualization of the biblical text to personal or close relationships. For several years the animators have been conscious of this risk and they try to give bible reading a socio-political dimension. This attempt is not accepted without criticism in groups who meet only occasionally. For such reading presupposes that the individual in the group knows about her/his place within society and that on the other hand the animators are familiar with the instruments of socio-political analysis.

6.7 "Kitchen Recipes"

One should not take the preparation of the individual steps in group animation too lightly. Nonetheless the risk is great to handle suggestions made in books like "kitchen recipes".

Further information: For more precise information on the methods of bible reading in groups (*Boîte à outils pour l'animation biblique: fiches méthodologiques pour l'animation de groupes bibliques*): ANIMATION BIBLIQUE CECUMENIQUE ROMANDE, 3 av. d'Aire, CH-1203 Geneva.

QUEBEC, Canada - The Bible under the Microscope

"Parabole", a journal of the biblical apostolate is distributed free of charge to Canada's French speaking community by the Catholic Biblical Association in Quebec (Société Catholique de la Bible - SOCABI). Each issue usually consists of short articles on a biblical theme or question, gives reports on the biblical apostolate and the biblical-pastoral ministry in Canada and provides information on biblical aids and newly published books on the Bible. The following article appeared in the first issue of 1988 and presents a successful approach to examining a biblical text; in this case, the episode of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2,41-52).

We were looking for you (Luke 2,41-52)

Here is a well-proven method of closely studying a gospel passage. Try it!

MEMORY (Remembering)

(1) As a parent, have you ever lost a child in the crowd? What did you do? What did you feel (panic, annoyance, confidence)?

(2) Jesus, at the age of twelve, in the Temple, lost and found again. Does this say something to you?

Note down on paper all that comes to mind in whatever order. Take your Bible and look up chapter 2 of Luke's Gospel. Read verses 41-52.

Read the text again ... but pay attention to those bits that your memory had forgotten. Underline them in your bible.

And now re-read the text quietly ... jot down all the questions that come to mind as you re-read this text, even the strangest ones. Don't try to answer them. Leave them alone at this stage. If more questions arise, just keep adding them to the list.

EXAMINING ("STRIPPING AWAY") THE TEXT

How many people are clearly identifiable in this passage from Luke? Who are they? Let us look closely at the text. In my version, I counted 11. (Results may differ depending on the version used, but they do not influence the overall results of the exercise - the English version of this article uses the Jerusalem Bible)

They are: his parents - Jesus - their relations - their acquaintances - the doctors - all who heard him - his mother - his father - my father - God - men.

Three of these persons play a prominent role in the text, as can be seen by their actions, their behavior, their continual presence in the text, etc.

We will analyze the text in an indirect way: ... by examining the verbal forms which are immediately, or after investigation, associated with these three "persons". (A) his parents; (B) Jesus; (C) his mother.

(A) His parents

Seventeen verbal forms are associated with "his parents".

- *used to go* (every year)
- *went up* (as usual)
- *on their way home*
- *without knowing it*
- *they assumed*
- *after a day's journey*
- *they went to look for him*
- *when they did not find him, / - they went back*
- *looking for him*
- (three days later) *they found him*
- *they were overcome*
- *when they saw him*
- *how worried* (we were) ... *looking for you*
- *why were you looking for me? / - do you not know...?*
- *they did not understand ...*

Do these verbs give you an idea of the parents' role? Is there a progression here? Do these actions happen by chance, or do they reveal a plan of action? For me,

* Jesus' parents are exemplary seekers: they are good church goers, they have a habit of doing, they act on the presumption that ... and suddenly they have lost sight of Jesus, they return along the way, full of anxiety and distress. In the end, they find, they express their frustration ... but even when they found him, did they really understand the meaning of their actions? Did they know what they were living through?

* "how worried", this is anxiety, distress and suffering felt on both the physical and moral level. This attitude is accompanied by grief.

(B) Jesus

The person, "Jesus", is linked with sixteen verbal forms. Have you identified them?

- when he *was twelve years old* ... (they went up for)
- the boy Jesus *stayed / - (he was) sitting among*
- (he was) *listening to them / - and asking them questions*
- why have you *done this to us? / - looking for you*
- he *replied*
- I *must be busy / ... with my father's business*
- what he *meant*
- he then *went down / - he came to Nazareth / - and lived under* their authority
- Jesus *increased* in wisdom, in stature and in favor ...

What do you think of Jesus' attitude, as you contemplate these verbs? Is there some strategy, a personal way of acting?

For me,

* Jesus comes to adulthood, by living through his first crisis with his parents. The "normal" break (between parents and child that occurs during adulthood) is prepared and announced. The first time in "breaking away" from under his parents' wings reveals his deep personality.

* Among the doctors, he becomes familiar with his task, of coming to the Temple: "sitting, listening, asking questions".

* This episode reveals the deep motivation which lies behind Jesus' actions, which his parents do not yet recognize, and therefore cannot understand.

* His first words are not understood - this will not be the last time this happens.

* Returning with his parents to "normal everyday life" allows a young adult of thirteen years to organize himself and to grow through the indispensable stages of "his time".

(C) His mother

Here is the information with regard to "his mother". I have included the interchanges between the persons.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| - <i>his mother</i> | <i>Jesus</i> |
| - (she) said to him | "my son" |
| - "your father and I were <i>looking for you</i> " | my Father |
| - <i>stored up ... in her heart</i> | |

What do you notice?

* There are no proper nouns or names here (Mary, Joseph, Jesus), but roles which have to be redefined.

Who is father/Father? The mother-son relationship is maintained, but a new link and relationship is established, "my Father's business", "with my Father".

* "to store up in her heart", everything is simmering in the mind of the believing woman; accepting, but not able to understand for a time; yet she does not dispose of the new realities.

Does the text give hints about the customs, the social habits, the ways of doing things or of working, which are proper to the times of Jesus (c. 30 CE) or of St. Luke (c. 80 CE)?

Note these indications in the text. Does your Bible give you information in the footnote about the significance of "every year ... for the feast of the Passover", "when he was twelve years old" or the "caravan"? Does anyone in your group know anything about this? If you are able, consult the commentaries.

"This episode in Jesus' life is found at the end of the second chapter of Luke.

Read chapter 24, the end of the Gospel.

Do you notice common themes in both texts: "third day", "looking for Jesus", "returning to Jerusalem".

Doesn't this give the Gospel an extremely ordered structure? The first trip of an "adult" Jesus is a preparation for his last - as if the author had already put into place all the pieces of the drama!

ACTUALIZING (Living it out)

Go back to the list of people and verbs. Do you recognize yourself in any of these people? (Does the list of verbs also play a role in your life? With whom ... doing what?)

Are these same verbs at work in your life? With whom ..., in what capacity?

If you had to give a Sunday homily, what idea would you develop, so that the whole congregation could be united, by this gospel?

Does this episode of the gospel allow you to discover an aspect of Jesus? Is there something new about the personality of Jesus which stands out for you?

For further Information: SOCABI, 7400 blv. St-Laurent 519, Montréal (Qc) H2R 2Y1, Canada. SOCABI can provide aids on this way of reading the Bible, called the Mé-Dé-Ac (Mémoire - DEcritiquer - Actualisation)

ITALY

Lectio Divina

Cardinal Martini, Archbishop of Milan, meets regularly with the youth of his diocese; he invites them to read the Bible and opens for them a means of assessing biblical texts. His method which combines scientific exegesis with a pastoral reading of the Bible has become a widely accepted practice.

At our request, the Cardinal sent a copy of the introduction to his book "The Joy of the Gospel" which provides a brief description of his method. There he presents the "lectio divina" as he uses it. We thank him for allowing us to reprint this introduction here. You may obtain the original text in Italian from the Secretariat of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate.

The Practice of the "lectio divina".

In my pastoral letter to the Diocese of Milan for the years 1986-1989, *God Educates His People*, I wrote that the Holy Spirit still speaks to us today: the same Spirit who "has spoken through the Prophets" and who inspired the Scriptures. And I added that learning to listen to our internal Master should be done through the exercise of prayerfully meditating on the Word of God, through the "lectio divina".

As an introduction, I wish to explain the method of the *lectio divina* as I use it on days of recollection with young people. Then I would like to explain its relation to the classical method of prayer which is subdivided into three parts: memory, intellect, will.

The *lectio divina* is a gradual approach to the biblical text; it goes back to the ancient method of the Fathers who in turn appeal to the rabbinic usage.

The classical subdivision of "memory, intellect, and will" is very old, and was developed in particular by St. Augustine, especially the theme of memory. Much later, these three became synonymous with a meditation process which has as its subject matter a scripture passage or an article of faith.

I would also like to mention briefly the method of "contemplation of the Gospel", a phrase normally used to indicate the method of meditating on a passage of the Gospel. A significant example is found in *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who from the second week speaks about "contemplation", since the work of the intellect leads to an existential and prayerful closeness to the gospel scene.

All this will be useful for a better understanding of what is the specific character of "*Christian prayer*".

The lectio divina.

The patristic method of the *lectio divina* is very simple and I always recommend it to young people as an introduction

to prayer. Basically, three major steps or successive moments are involved:

- The *lectio* consists of the repeated reading of a passage of Scripture which allows the important elements to stand out. I suggest that you read the text with pen in hand, underlining words that strike you and indicating verbs, actions, people, feelings expressed and key words with special markings.

In doing this, our attention is aroused; the intellect, the imagination, and the senses are activated and a gospel passage which seemed all too well known suddenly appears in a new light. For many years I have read the gospel and yet every time I apply the method of *lectio*, I discover new aspects.

This first step may last some time, if we open ourselves to the Spirit; to understand what he wants to say, we have to put the scripture passage into its larger context: the neighboring passages, the book as a whole, the entire Bible.

- The *meditatio* is a reflection on the lasting values of the text. While in the *lectio* I assume the historical, geographical, and cultural elements of the text, here I ask the question: What does the text say to me? What message for today is expressed in this passage, as the word of the living God? How am I challenged by the lasting values which underlie the actions, the words and the persons?

- The meaning of the *contemplatio* is difficult to express and explain. It involves remaining "infatuated" with the text and with moving from the text and its message to contemplation of Him who on every page of the Bible speaks to us: Jesus, Son of the Father, giver of the Spirit.

Contemplatio is adoration, praise and silence before Him who is the ultimate object of my prayer: Christ the Lord, conqueror of death, revealer of the Father, absolute mediator of salvation, giver of the joy of the gospel.

In practice, these three steps are not rigorously distinct; the subdivision however may be useful for those who are trying this method for the first time or who are taking it up again. Our prayer is like a red thread which joins the days together. It can happen that on reading the same passage of scripture, we may one day stay longer with the *meditatio*; and on another day, we may move quickly to the *contemplatio*.

The threefold division does not adequately express the dynamics of the *lectio divina* which I have explained in more detail in one of my books. In fact, the *lectio divina* comprises eight progressive steps: *lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio, consolatio, discretio, deliberatio, actio*.

I think these steps should be briefly described.

- The *oratio* is the first prayer which comes from meditation: Lord, make me understand the lasting values of the text, those which I do not have. Grant that I may know what your message is for my life.

And at a certain point, this prayer focuses on adoration and in contemplation of the mystery of Jesus, the "face" of God.

The *oratio* can also express itself in a request for forgiveness and enlightenment or in sacrifice.

- The *consolatio* is very important for progress in our prayer life. St. Ignatius of Loyola speaks about it many times in *The Spiritual Exercises*. Without this aspect, prayer loses its salt, its taste. The *consolatio* is the joy of praying, it is intimately feeling the "taste" of God, of the "things" of Christ. It is a gift which is ordinarily produced in the context of the *lectio divina*, even though, of course, the Holy Spirit is free to act when he wills.

From the *consolatio* alone spring the courageous choices of poverty, chastity, obedience, faithfulness, forgiveness, because it provides the place, the proper atmosphere for these great interior options. Thus all that does not come from this gift of the Spirit only lasts for a short time and is simply the fruit of a moralism which we impose on ourselves.

- The *discretio* expresses even more clearly the vitality of the *consolatio*. Indeed through our "taste" of the gospel, through a sort of spiritual radar for the "things" of Christ, we become sensitive to all that is in line with the gospel and that which is not. We are therefore dealing with an important discernment since we are not called only to observe the commandments in general, but also to *follow* Jesus Christ. And following Christ is not immediately apparent in our everyday choices unless we have, as it were, entered into the mind of Jesus, that is, tasted his poverty, his cross, the humility of the crib, his forgiveness.

The ability to discern the gospel trademark in the ordinary emotions and movements of the heart is such a great gift that St. Paul asked for it for all his faithful: "May he deepen abundantly your perception, so that you can always recognize what is best...that which is pleasing to God and what is perfect." (cf Phil 1,9-10; Rom 12,2)

Today the Church very much needs the *discretio* because decisive choices do not only concern good and evil (you must not kill, you must not steal), but also what is best for the life of the Church, for the world, for the well-being of humanity, for youth, for children.

- The *deliberatio* is the next step. From an interior experience of consolation or desolation, we learn to discern and, consequently, to *decide* as God wills.

If we carefully analyze the processes involved with the choices of vocations, we see that they follow, for the most part unconsciously, this step. A vocation is, in effect, a decision taken on the basis of what God has made one hear, and on the basis of one's own experience of the gospel requirements.

The *deliberatio*, like the *discretio*, unfolds especially through the dynamics of the *lectio divina*.

- Lastly, the *actio* is the mature fruit of the whole process. The *lectio* and the *actio*, that is Bible reading and acting, are not to be considered as just two parallel lines.

We do not read Scripture to give us the strength to put into practice what we have decided! Rather, we read and meditate on it so that correct decisions are made and the comforting power of the Spirit helps us put them into practice.

It is not, as we often think, a matter of praying more so that I can act better; but rather of praying more so that I can better understand what I must do and how, through interior choice, I can do it.

Its Relationship with Memory, Intellect and Will.

Having examined the terms used in the patristic method of the *lectio divina* we see that there is an exact correspondence with the Augustinian terms of memory, intellect and will.

- *Memory* consists in recalling, in the case of a biblical meditation, a passage of Scripture or an event or a verse of a psalm.

We speak of memory and not of *lectio* for the simple reason that, at one time, books were rare and thus, once having heard a text, one had to try and remember it. The work of memorizing, among others, brings one into contact with the multiplicity of the text in its countless ramifications. Thus real memory not only reflects on the important elements of the biblical passage, but calls to mind other elements associated with those already remembered. Thus for those who know the Bible - and every Christian ought to know the Bible a little - there is not one word which would not have some connection with another. When we reflect on the deeds of Jesus, on the sayings, on a passage from the Prophets, on verses of a Psalm, we enrich our endeavours by remembering all the links with the text.

Today we use a concordance to do this. This is a real exercise of the memory, another way of expressing the step of the *lectio*; it is another way, if you wish, of storing up all these things in the heart, just as Mary did.

Using the word *memory* helps us to understand that *lectio* does not only mean to recall biblical facts, linked with what we have just read, but also other facts of life.

- The intellect corresponds to the *meditatio*; it seeks to give meaning to events. Memory is not enough; understanding must follow. "Do you not understand?" - Jesus asked. "Do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?...Are you still without perception?" (Mk 8,17-21).

Jesus invites us to remember, he invites us to "memory", to *lectio* and then he invites us to an understanding of the facts, to a comprehension of their meaning, their significance.

- The *will* comprises all that within a human being is self-giving, love, and consequently, also prayer as an expression of the affection, of the enthusiasm, of the desire. The *will* is, in another cultural model, the *oratio* and the *contemplatio* and all that follows.

The classical method of prayer is, therefore, another way of seeing the dynamics of the *lectio divina*; considering it less as *lectio* and more as objective facts and words which are recalled.

The Contemplation of the Gospel.

The contemplation of the gospel which St. Ignatius of Loyola speaks about in the second week of his "Spiritual Exercises" is simply a summary of everything we have said about the patristic method (of the *lectio divina*) and the classical subdivision (of memory, intellect and will), with greater emphasis on the theme of prayer-contemplation, which flows from the process of knowing and the prayer life.

Gradually the requirements of the *lectio* and the *meditatio* demand less time. At the same time, there is an increasing desire to be in the presence of the Mystery, in praise and adoration, to "taste" the presence of Christ.

Ignatius also speaks of "seeing", "listening", "touching", "tasting", and "feeling"; of allowing ourselves to be led into contemplation by using our spiritual senses (cf. *The Spiritual Exercises*, nn. 122-125).

The Universal Act of Knowledge

One last remark. The methods of prayer which we have considered correspond because they represent the universal act of knowing.

A human being proceeds from *experience*, from making contact with things; and the *lectio*, as the memory, is the experience of Christ in whom all reality is founded and contained. From this experience then, in the process of human knowledge, flows the intuition, or the interpretative hypothesis, an understanding of the collected facts; that is, the stage of *meditatio*, of the intellect.

The cognitive act then leads to a choice, to an engagement of the heart, in an act of giving; it is *contemplatio*, the will with all that flows from it.

I think it is interesting to point out that prayer, in its dynamic relationship with the Word of God, can be seen as reproducing the dynamic involved at the basis of human action.

The Characteristic of Christian prayer.

Naturally, the Spirit guides our prayer in various ways and everybody must find their own form of prayer which, above all, should correspond best to their way of life.

The rich patristic and classical terminology underscores a depth of experience which is common to the Christian centuries and shows rather distinct characteristics.

Therefore, we must not confuse it with the Hindu, Buddhist or transcendental meditation; nor should we confuse it with the various methods of prayer being proposed today because it has as its base the *lectio* or the *memoria* that is the fact of Christ.

Our prayer is *Christian prayer because it starts from Christ*. At certain moments, it may even be without object: the Risen Christ is present and I need not contemplate him with the eyes of my imagination. Basically - and I stress this - Christian meditation is directed by the Spirit and it is always focused on Jesus Christ, and thus also a participation in Jesus' prayer to the Father.

This poses the interesting question of the relationship between forms of prayer - namely, prayer centered on Christ and the prayer forms of other religions.

There are without doubt forms of authentic prayer from which we can surely learn but it is difficult to understand them if we have not begun on the serious and deep way of Christian prayer; if we have not yet discovered the precious pearl that is mystery of Jesus.

Whoever has gone through this experience, through assiduous practice and especially with the grace of God (for prayer is a gift), is instead able to appreciate that which is right and true in the prayer forms of other religions.

"To everyone who has, will be given more; but from the man who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Luke 19, 26). To whoever has the real sense of Christic prayer, will be given an understanding of other prayer forms; but whoever does not have it, what little prayer he has, will be taken away because he confuses prayer with a sort of inner peace which only changes his life a little and which runs the risk of cultivating his own gods, a cult focused on self.

I remember an old Buddhist monk - he was over 80 - who told me during my visit to his monastery in Hong Kong, "We search for the nothing, the goal of our life is the nothing".

What was he trying to say? What is his "real prayer" and how is it related to our prayer?

If we are really filled with the living dynamic of Christian prayer, it may be important for us as Church to discover the meditation without object, the significance of an encounter with the nothing.

Christic prayer is self-giving, *actio*; it means being crucified with Christ, giving yourself to the poorest.

When we are deprived of Christ's light, prayer forms of other religions (even the beautiful ones) are dangerous; they may lead to inner self justification, restriction to one's own choices, to self legitimization. There is nothing more terrible in the ascetic or "spiritual" way than the withdrawal into self-satisfaction.

I am thinking here of people who pray; they pray much and always manage to do what they want, to justify their own opinions without ever entering into the climate of Church or truth. Perhaps they were never encouraged to really practice the *lectio divina*, or perhaps they never passed from the experience of meditative reflection to contemplation and its successive stages which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, transforms the Word of God into life, into action motivated by the gospel.

Informations

The General Secretary In Latin America

As General Secretary Fr. Ludger Feldkämper visited various members of the Federation in Latin America at the end of 1988. He met with officials of the biblical apostolate of these countries and took part in several biblical activities. During our conversations following his return, I (Marc Sevin) noted down the following:

- VENEZUELA (October 15-19)

The purpose of the General Secretary's visit to Venezuela was to make initial contact with those responsible for the biblical apostolate, to gather information, and to make the Federation known.

The Venezuelan Bishops' Conference of is a Full Member of the Federation, but there does not yet exist national level coordination for biblical-pastoral ministry. At the Bishops' Conference, the General Secretary suggested to entrust biblical apostolate and direct cooperation with the Federation to an organization headed by a national director. He furthermore expressed the desire that all who are responsible for biblical apostolate in Venezuela should meet, in order to exchange experiences and ideas, and to work together for a common program for biblical apostolate.

One can notice in the country a great interest in the Bible. Numerous initiatives are taken. For two years there has been offered a national level "Bible Day" and "Bible Week" during September.

Possibilities for an education as Bible promoter exist in the seminaries of the country, especially in the Catechetical Department of the University of Santa Rosa de Lima, as well as in the National Institute for Pastoral Ministry and Religious Education in Caracas.

In Venezuela as everywhere Bibles at an affordable price are in high demand. Furthermore there is a great need for an extensive and easily accessible commentary to the Bible, for simple aids and reading helps, and for introductions to the Bible.

- ECUADOR (October 19-23)

In Ecuador the General Secretary participated in the third CLAR meeting (Council of the Latin American Religious) for preparation of the five-year project "PALABRA VIDA" (Word-Life) for the years 1988 to 1992. In connection with the 500th anniversary of evangelization in Latin America the CLAR team has made efforts to achieve reflection and a new orientation challenging in particular the religious through a Bible reading in the Latin American context.

Rather than keeping to the customary forms of Bible reading, many Bible promoters in Latin America feel obliged to a "popular exegesis" - a Bible reading which does not originate from the exegetes but from the people. Of special concern in Ecuador are the spreading of sects and their lively activities. The composition of a biblical apostolate manual in Latin America is progressing. The formulations create some difficulties: they should not be too theoretical and should correspond to the readers' level of education.

Together with the CLAR team the General Secretary visited the gravesite of the late Bishop Proaño who died in August 1988 and who stood up for the rights of the Indios. There they read some of his words, relating directly to Bible work: *"Our task is not to preach, but to read the Gospel, to interpret it and to transfer it to our own lives and to the life of the community...He who accepts the truth of the Gospel has to*

fight that the oppressed free themselves from their oppressors. This is a work of charity".

- COLUMBIA (October 23 to 26)

The 4th Plenary Assembly of our Federation is to take place in Columbia's capital of Bogotá in 1990. Together with Fr. Cesar Herrera, Latin American coordinator for the Federation, Bro. Enrique Garcia, Executive Committee member, and a representative from the Catechetical Department of CELAM the General Secretary discussed questions concerning the preparation and implementation of the PA on a local level. The location of suitable accommodations was especially important.

- ARGENTINA (October 26 to November 2)

During his visit in Buenos Aires, the General Secretary had the opportunity to meet with the Argentinian members of our Federation and to gather information about the biblical apostolate. There are many experiences and efforts in the area of biblical apostolate - some with an astonishing vitality. The question: "Is there a specific Latin American method of reading the Bible?" - this question is not answered as positively here as in other countries of the continent.

The following remarks, made to the General Secretary, testify to the richness as well as to the difficulties of biblical apostolate in Argentina:

- "We are all convinced that biblical apostolate is necessary; the difficulty is that the responsible people have not agreed on the way of how it should be carried out."

- "Numerous basic communities constantly stress the meaning of the Bible; this is a sign of hope for biblical apostolate."

- "A challenge for Bible ministry is the need for a "Bible culture" and the urgency of a training of how to deal with the Bible. Thus there are tensions that cannot easily be settled. And most of the exegetes lack pastoral experience."

- "The publication of biblical literature, often connected with liberation theology, has progressed amazingly during the last twenty years. The re-reading of the Bible in the Latin American context happens often without considerable "Bible culture", but it proves more valuable than a purely "spiritual" Bible reading, without any relation to life and reality".

- "Does the simple and popular way of reading the Bible also take into consideration the critical function of the Bible?

- "The influence of the sects has led to some kind of alienation among some Catholics in their attitudes towards the Bible."

- BRAZIL (November 2 to 7)

The General Secretary's visit to Latin America concluded with a stay in Brazil where the Second Meeting on the Biblical Apostolate in Latin America will take place in July 1989.

In São Paulo he was pleased to visit in the Centro Verbo, a new Associate Member of the Federation, which cooperates closely with Verbo Filmes, a media broadcasting center.

He spent a day in a quarter of the suburbs of this town where impoverished and expelled people from all parts of Brazil are crowded together. He was able to watch these people in a Bible study group when they were reading a passage of the Book of Exodus: How they not only became involved with their own lives, but how they were also encouraged by the message of the Bible.

Near São Paulo an ecumenical workshop was taking place for the first time, and its subject was "The Reading of the Bible in the Latin American Context" using the letter of James. Fr. Carlos Mesters, known for his popular Bible work and member of our Executive Committee, acted as vice-chairman of this meeting of 25 representatives from various Latin American countries. During his visit the General Secretary was asked for help, so that the legitimate issue of "Bible Reading in Context" would receive support from the Federation also.

THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE FEDERATION WHAT? WHY?

The 4th Plenary Assembly for the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate will take place in 1990 in Bogotá, Colombia. The Constitution of the Federation calls to mind the importance of this Plenary Assembly. The following are the most essential points:

1. “The Plenary Assembly, a meeting of the delegates of the full and associate members of the Federation shall normally be held every six years, at a time and place to be determined by the Executive Committee” (Art. VII, 1).
2. The main functions of the Plenary Assembly shall be twofold:

First, “to decide on the general policy of the Federation” (Art. VII, 5.2).

Obviously, this general policy, as debated and decided upon during the Assembly (cf. Art. VII, 5.5), has to be

- in line with the purpose of the Federation (cf. Art. III);
- an out-growth of the experience of the Federation’s members in Implementing the recommendations of the previous Plenary Assemblies (of Malta 1978 and Bangalore 1984);
- attuned to the “signs of the times”.

For this reason, the Plenary Assembly provides an opportunity par excellence for the members of the Federation to:

- reflect and share on “their responsibility to make the Word of God available to all” (Art. III);
- report - as has been customary during the previous Plenary Assemblies - on the implementation of the resolutions of the Assemblies of Bangalore and Malta;
- commit themselves anew to the biblical ministry at this historical hour after reflecting and sharing on the “Bible in the New Evangelization” as proposed by the Executive Committee.

Second, to take care of several business matters as specified in the Constitution, such as

- the approval of the financial and other reports from the Federation’s Executive Committee and other officers (cf. Art. VII, 5.4);
- the election of the Executive Committee (cf. Art. VII, 5.3);
- the amendment to the Constitution (cf. Art. XIV).

3. Accordingly the Executive Committee and the Preparatory Committee set up by the EC for this purpose, have decided on the following concerning the preparations for the Plenary Assembly:

First, all members are asked - we have previously launched appeals to this effect - to hold, if at all possible, assemblies on the national and regional levels, in order to

- take stock of their activities and developments after the last Plenary Assembly;
- reflect on the theme “The Bible in the New Evangelization”.

The reason for this is obvious: All WCFBA members are organizations. Thus

- all members should be involved in the Plenary Assembly as much as possible, not just the delegates;
- the delegates are expected to speak as representatives of the members, i.e. to bring to the Plenary Assembly experiences, reflections and proposals from their organizations.

Second, all members will receive about every two months a letter from the General Secretariat - some of them just giving necessary information, others seeking information from the members.