

# World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate

Bulletin

*Sei  
Verbum*

N° 14

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English Edition

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

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

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

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

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

*+ Alberto Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno  
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**

The Second Volume of "A Guide to Catholic Bible Translations: Africa" by Fr. Piet Rijks of our Projects Department, has just been published. After leafing through this guide, one cannot help but be amazed at the efforts on the part of the local Churches to increase the accessibility of the Bible in this part of the world. The book contains 584 pages of condensed and instructive information concerning the translation and distribution of the Bible on the African continent (see p. 20).

The countdown continues... and in a few months, delegates from the various member organizations of our Federation, will gather in Bogotá for the Plenary Assembly. This Assembly is of paramount importance - not only for the life of our Federation, but also for the biblical movement in our Catholic Church. The reports we have received in the Secretariat from all corners of the world, confirm that there is an immense thirst for the Word of God among the faithful. Never before has biblical-pastoral work flourished as much as in these days and yet a lot remains to be done. The Assembly is an occasion to take stock, exchange experiences, and above all, give new momentum to the dynamics of biblical-pastoral work. We rely on all members of the Federation to continue preparing for this Assembly through reflection and prayer.

In view of the forthcoming Plenary Assembly and to stimulate your reflections, two contributions from Italy are printed in this issue of the BULLETIN (p. 4 & 5). Please remember to pass on to your delegate or to the Secretariat in Stuttgart, your own reactions and contribution to the theme: "The Bible in the New Evangelization". On this same topic, you will also find in this issue the address of Fr. Heekeren to the European Catholic funding agencies (p. 5 and 6).

The center pages (p. 9-12) contain a short commentary on the texts which will serve as the basis for Bible Sharing during the Assembly. You are encouraged to make use of these comments in your own reflections and Bible sharing.

Our standard "Information" section provides insights on Bible work around the world which could serve to refresh your own biblical engagement from a different perspective.

Marc Sevin

We thank you for your  
subscription or renewal to the  
BULLETIN DEI VERBUM  
(See page 2 for  
subscription information)

**ATTENTION**  
DOUBLE ISSUE NOs. 15 & 16  
following the Plenary Assembly

## PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF BOGOTA

(26 June - 7 July 1990)

*In preparation for the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá, a questionnaire, enclosed with the 3rd preparatory circular letter for the Assembly, was sent to all members of the Federation. Below you find two responses to this questionnaire which might serve as examples. We thank all those who have written to us and those who will still hand in their reflections on "The Role of the Bible in the New Evangelization", the major theme of the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá.*

### Questionnaire:

1. Today one speaks on different levels of the necessity for the "new evangelization". After ascertaining the meaning these words have for you, could you indicate the reasons or motives for the presence of the Bible in the development of faith?
2. If one considers the history of evangelization and of the biblical apostolate as well as the present day situation of humankind, what special contributions could the Bible offer our faith?
3. How can one understand the use of the Bible in the "new evangelization" from the view point of content as well as method?
4. The "new evangelization" may be accomplished only through the various components of the service of faith: proclamation, celebration, life in community, and mission to the world. How is the role of the Bible to be perceived in this further pastoral context?
5. Frequent experiences teach us that the Bible is subject to multiple misuse: fundamentalism, insufficient interpretation, detachment from tradition ... What, in your opinion, are the main difficulties pastors and community leaders are confronted with? Which of them need special attention?

\* \* \*

### Response by Francesco Masetto (Rome, Italy)

I want to center my contribution on one single aspect which to me seems vital and appears not to be sufficiently taken into account at least in Italy: basic biblical formation.

Biblical renewal favored and endorsed by Vatican II has already brought about several appreciable results: the Scriptures have become more familiar to Christian people thanks to the Sunday liturgy and the sacramental celebrations; numerous people attend biblical formation courses; the biblical dimension is for the most part present in catechesis; numerous religious educators prefer biblical content and introduce additional biblical aids and materials especially in the higher classes of secondary schools; likewise, personal and communitarian prayer is inspired in great part by the Word of God. There is nonetheless a deep lack. A basic biblical formation is missing on the child, youth and adult levels. One has the impression that the systematic obligatory character of catechesis does not leave adequate room for biblical initiation and that the various initiatives praiseworthy proposed by pastors, exegetes, and even lay people are not capable in great part to overcome this basic deficiency.

Therefore I want to propose something which is very simple and at the same time, ambitious. The bishops and those responsible for religious instruction should establish programs for catechesis which may assure a gradual initiation into the Scriptures in adequate form for different age levels; be it in conjunction with the contents of the Christian faith or the liturgical seasons or by more specific methods of finding access to the Bible and its different parts.

This distinct process of initiation into the Bible or biblical catechesis which may appear innovative in regard to the more recent catechetical tradition, has had great precedence in the preaching of the Church Fathers and been kept alive also during the last centuries with "Sacred History" which was running parallel to systematic theological catechesis. It is, therefore, a question of taking up this matter again, adapting it to the progress of biblical studies and utilizing the results of modern pedagogy. At the same time one has to be cautious not to limit oneself to the study of the Bible as an ancient book but rather that its interpretation respects the value of the Word of God and be directed to the life of the faithful.

\* \* \*

### Response of Fr. James Swetnam (Rome, Italy)

#### Question 1.

The various cultures in the world have been changing for the most part rapidly and in a converging way especially as regards communications, transportation and other branches of technology as well as in human knowledge in general ("the knowledge explosion"). As a result many once Christian cultures are no longer so, and individual Catholics are often required to maintain Catholic belief without the support which a culture imbued with Christian values can give. The "new evangelization" must convey Christian values to the various cultures of the world in a way appropriate for each, and must help each Catholic to muster within himself/herself in a way appropriate to each the

support which external surroundings can no longer be counted on to give. As Paul VI said towards the end of his life: "Take up again the construction of the Church, as though it were beginning psychologically and pastorally from scratch...so to speak, that it be born anew".

The Bible must be at the heart of the Church's evangelization because it, in the context of tradition, is the official way in which God has spoken to us. No matter how much the needs of cultures or individuals change with regard to receiving God's official message, the message itself remains essentially the same, even though our knowledge of it keeps deepening.

*Question 2:*

The use of the Bible in evangelization is necessary above all to show that faith is the reaction of persons to the message of the Divine Persons, and that true Christian religion is a matter of contact between persons, with Christ at the center. At its deepest level, Christian faith is not a matter of ideas but of Persons and persons.

*Question 3:*

Here I think the congress would do well to invite representatives from specialized official Vatican bodies, especially from the Pontifical Councils for Culture and for Communication, and from the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Other Catholic and non-Catholic organizations concerned with the general theme of the congress should be invited. All of these organizations should be asked to prepare a document giving their answer to this question.

*Question 4:*

This is much too large a question to be answered by any one person except in generalities when what is needed are particulars. Proclamation, celebration, life in community, and mission to the world are to be modified in accordance with the needs appropriate to different cultures and different people. I suggest that now is the time to begin "mapping" such needs and how the Bible is used to accommodate them in the context of its unchanging message which we are constantly understanding more profoundly. That is to say, various individuals from various cultures should be encouraged to describe in detail, according to the component parts listed, the Bible's role in as much as they are familiar with it. The congress would be a good occasion to launch such a "mapping" project.

*Question 5:*

The most important consideration to bear in mind is that everything involving correct interpretation and use of the Bible begins with the question: "What does the text mean?" Not "What does the text mean for me?", but "What does the text mean in itself?" Only when that question is answered as well as possible should one go on to the further essential question of: "What relevance does this meaning have for me/us in our situation today?" This distinction is essential. If it is disregarded the entire process of the use of the Bible is distorted from the very beginning.

*During a meeting with the funding agencies, Fr. Heekeren, former Superior General of the Divine Word Missionaries, developed several aspects on the theme of the next Plenary Assembly of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate in Bogotá: "The Bible in the New Evangelization". Originally this paper was not meant for publication. We thank Fr. Heekeren in view of the upcoming Assembly in Bogotá, for allowing us to print some of the major aspects.*

## TERMINOLOGY

According to EVANGELII NUNTIANDI (1975) the contents of evangelization is the reign of God: Christ, herald of the Good News, proclaims first of all the reign of God which is so important that in comparison everything else becomes "the rest" that is, "given in addition" (EN 8).

The expression "New Evangelization" was apparently used for the first time by John Paul II (cf. L. Feldkämper, *BULLETIN DEI VERBUM* No. 11). In itself, the Good News is always new. Evangelization becomes new in as far as it attempts to answer the new challenges humankind has to cope with concerning God (cf. C. Herrera, *BULLETIN DEI VERBUM* No. 7). The pope repeatedly speaks on the dual task of evangelization of the world and the new evangelization of christianity.

The relation between Bible, evangelization, Church and world can briefly be outlined by Church documents as follows:

- According to Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN 14) the main task of the Church is to evangelize the world.
- Evangelii Nuntiandi 15 states that the Church herself must be evangelized to be able to evangelize.
- The Church evangelizes by bringing the Good News into all areas of humanity (EN 18).
- According to DEI VERBUM 21 and PUEBLA 372, Scripture is food, norm and soul of evangelization.

## NEW CHALLENGES

**A Church, growing old albeit in the process of being renewed**

According to John 17, 20-23, unity of all believers is the most important presupposition for an evangelization of the world. The neglect of Holy Scripture by the Church was one of the main reasons for the Reformation. May we then from a greater fidelity to the Word of God, await the reunification and growing radiance in today's world?

Signs for reconciliation through Holy Scripture are plentiful, to mention a few, interconfessional translations, joint commentaries, numerous ecumenically open bible groups and movements...

Especially in the so-called Third World there is a growing interest in the bible both within and without the Catholic Church. People want to own it, to understand it, to share it

within the group and to apply it to their lives. There is a high demand for biblical-catechetical materials, but as everyone knows, there is a lack of necessary funding. Basic and continuing courses for biblical formation are in demand. But again, it is a question of finances!

### Answer from the church

In theory, everything is fairly clear since Vatican II. I refer to DEI VERBUM which conveys in Chapter VI, the recommendations of the Council concerning biblical-pastoral ministry. Accordingly, the Church venerates the Scriptures as the Body of the Lord himself: "And the force and power in the Word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church ..." (21). "Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (22). Exegetes and theologians should help that "as many ministers of the divine Word as possible will be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the People of God, thereby enlightening their minds, strengthening their wills, and setting men's hearts on fire with the love God" (23). "The study of the sacred page" should be "the soul of sacred theology" (24). Pastoral preaching and catechesis find in it their power. For all believers, Bible reading is moved into the center to their Christian existence: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (St. Jerome). Suitable editions should also be distributed among non-Christians (25).

However, the Extraordinary Synod of 1985, 20 years after the Council, had to officially admit that DEI VERBUM belongs to those documents of the Council whose realization had been most neglected.

In 1986 the Pope reminded the members of the Executive Committee of the World Catholic Federation of the Biblical Apostolate of this fact. He asked them to channel all their energies into making up for this deficiency.

At the October 1987 "Synod on the Role of the Laity in the Church", I presented the Königstein declaration of the WCFBA Executive Committee on the vocation and mission of the laity (BDV 4, p.7). In my opinion, however, this important subject did not receive the attention it was due, neither during the Synod nor in the post-synod Apostolic Letter *CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI* by Pope John Paul II about the vocation and mission of the laity in the church and in the world.

How different with our separated sisters and brothers! Just some brief information about their endeavors for the distribution of the Bible in answer to the world-wide hunger for the Word: Approximately 692 million Bibles, New Testaments, Bible texts and leaflets were distributed world-wide by the Bible Societies in 1988, which is 11% more than in 1987... They are working in 108 countries. It is their goal to make the Bible and biblical texts available to everyone at low cost. Therefore, in Africa, Asia and Latin America numerous editions have been subsidized by donations from the more affluent countries.

[Editor's note: The Bible Societies are of protestant origin but understand themselves more and more as "interconfessional" and "at the service of all the Churches".]

### Doctrine, Regulations and Organization

Currently we are witnessing a growing emphasis on doctrine, regulations and organization in our Catholic Church. Paralleling that is a rise of disgruntledness and apathy towards the Church on the part of the faithful. The "above - below" polarization takes on dangerous proportions. It is also becoming a growing obstacle for ecumenism and for the Church's credibility in the world.

The new evangelization of all of us through the Bible offers the best way out of this dead-end situation. DEI VERBUM directs all believers, including the hierarchy, into humbly listening to the Word.

I would like to point out some areas of our Christian existence in need of (or in some places are already experiencing) renewal by a radical orientation to the Word of God:

- The often misunderstood "option for the poor" becomes fully understandable and practical only if we orientate ourselves more decidedly on the poor Son of God of the Gospels and on his teachings about the little ones and the last ones (cf. Mt 25 and Lk 4, 16-21).

- To the current crisis of Church authority Jesus himself offers the best answer through his witness in word and in deed of authority as a loving service (e.g. Lk 22, 24-30; Jn 13). The New Testament forms of office and service as practiced in the primitive Church, could serve at least as a model in our search for the Church of our time.

- The rights and duties of active involvement of all the believers in the life of the community become evident in light of the New Testament (cf. Rm 12; 1 Cor 12).

- Basic groups and other communities living the Word of God, are purified of a frequently unhealthy and wild-spreading popular piety, and Christ moves into the center of their lives.

- If we really want to become a world Church with unity in great variety, we can find the theological basis for this in the biblical teaching of incarnation. The various expressions of New Testament community life offer interesting models for this.

- The Judeo-Christian communities learned from former pagans whom they partially evangelized, that they could be good Christians without observing the Mosaic law.

- Because of these and other New Testament examples, an analogous practice of mutual enrichment in today's universal Church is mandatory... The Latin American Church with its special preferential option for the poor can help the entire

Church to recall this aspect of the gospel message as "mysterium liberationis" and to proclaim it to the world... Likewise, can Africa with its distinctive community-mindedness and variety of cultures announce anew to the entire Church (fallen prey to centralization) that the "mysterium incarnationis" permeates all of salvation history; and that the *logos* wants to be incarnate in every community and culture... And Asia with its religions, mystics and seers can enrich the Church, too.

### World mission

According to the New Testament, the Church, as well as each member, is essentially missionary. For centuries this awareness was lost. Mission had become almost exclusively the task of only a few authorized specialists.

For Catholics today, this missionary responsibility becomes self-evident when they once again live from the Word of God.

The separated sisters and brothers, however, greatly surpass us in their missionary zeal, simply because they believe more in the Word of God and act accordingly. I want to mention Korea as one example among many. After more than two centuries of preaching the gospel, the Catholic Church there has approximately 2 million members. By comparison, other Christians increased to 10 million in about half that time. All over the world they are more involved in the first evangelization than the more numerous Catholics.

### Mankind in search for unity

This strong trend surfaces e. g. in the Europeans' strive for economic and political alliance. However, here and as all over the world with similar initiatives, only little internal unity comes about. It is more like a "marriage of convenience" on the basis of contracts and structures. Power struggles and competitive ambition continue to prevail albeit in "regulated channels". The question of a meaningful ultimate goal in the process towards unification is rarely considered.

A Church that is not just another administrative union and strong organization but a serving community based on New Testament examples, would have a lot to offer. Her determined orientation towards the Reign of God proclaimed by Jesus would draw mankind's attention clearer to the fact that every search for fulfillment within this world will finally end in failure.

### A world in communication

Modern communications media relay information almost instantaneously, across the borders of countries and continents. Indisputable is their power to ally and unite peoples; often, however, under which conditions! Let us think of manipulation through advertisements and ideologies or of leveling cultural differences. The socially weak have hardly any voice - or none at all. A lot of words, lacking THE WORD which is the uniting and meaning-giving center!

This word of life for a world in search, has been entrusted to the Church. Unfortunately it often falls on deaf ears. The reason for this could also be found in the fact that too often it is experienced as a communication of neutral truths of faith rather than as a testimony of a true encounter with God. The God of the Bible, however, is communication as self-surrendering love within the Trinity, open towards creation. This self-surrender reaches its highest form in the WORD made flesh. To follow him and thus to become with him and in him words of life for the world, this is our calling as Christians. Is there a better way to this goal than the biblical one? By living from the words of God and in his WORD, the Christians become word of God for the world.

### The importance of a Scripture-nourished faith for the world

- The Bible contains ever always valid and always timely questions of God to man and of man to God which in this biblical presentation are taken more serious than if they were asked by the Church authority.
- "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" (Msgr. Ablondi, *BULLETIN DEI VERBUM* No. 10, p. 11).
- A world in which religions and cultures move ever close together is more in need of the Bible and its style of dialogue, than in need of a theology at times, too rigid (*ibid*, p. 12).
- In conclusion still, a word from the President of the Federation: "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" (*ibid*, p. 12).

### Proposals for Catholic Funding Agencies

- ...Provide information about the clear Church instructions on the importance of Holy Scripture for the Christian life and apostolate.
- Point out ways of a committed life out of the Word of God; report on successful examples, also about the prolific practices of Protestants.
- Submit prayer intentions on the theme: The Word of God in the New Evangelization of Church and World
- Increase biblical projects and encourage donations
- Promote ecumenical projects, e. g. interconfessional translations or joint Bible editions
- Appropriate more abundant means for pastoral Bible editions and for biblical-catechetical materials
- Promote basic and continuing Bible courses
- Generously support the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate in its very important service of the Word. In the past, this organization had to restrict its activities several times due to financial straits..



## TESTIMONY

*Under the title "Recovering the Word of God Today With and Among the Poor", the international bulletin of the Study and Documentation Center of Missionaries in Rome, SEDOS, reproduces the reflections of Sr. Anastasia Lott, MM, following her four years of experience working in a desolate region in the interior of Venezuela enriched by other pastoral experiences in the same country as well as in the United States.*

### THE JOY OF SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH THE POOR

Reading the Scriptures with the poor is a very different experience from reading the Bible with well-educated, middle or upper-class people. The community of the poor is a privileged place for knowing/hearing the Word of God. "Blessed are the poor for the Reign of God is theirs". For the person whose eyes are opened by the experience of walking with the poor, being evangelized with and by the poor, the concept and image of the Reign is irreversibly changed. The poor do not have the same sophisticated techniques for precise disarmament of the knife-edge of the Word because often their intellectual formation is less. From their perspective, they hear very differently such messages as the Exodus experience or the polemics about the rich entering the Reign of God.

#### The context of prayer

In my experience with poor people and with farm workers in abandoned areas, the Bible is always read within the context of prayer. This element has also been noted by Carlos Mesters in similar groups of Brazil. Although they certainly do not approach the Scriptures in a way that would be called "scientific", their efforts to understand the Word at deeper and more complicated levels grow. Little by little, their capacity to capture the Bible message in a more integrated way increases. The "from the heart" interpretation of the biblical message by poor people does not devalue scientific research, but in a sense, relativizes it.

The joy of sharing the Bible with the poor often comes about at a particular moment when suddenly there is a beautiful faith connection between the Word and an aspect of the lived daily reality and struggle. Suddenly members of a group realize in a special, deep way the message of challenge or consolation that is in the Scriptures. Typical examples have to do with the parable of the prodigal son or other moments concerning a family situation.

### Wisdom and Prophetic Literature

Another area of great challenge in the barrio communities is that of the wisdom and prophetic literature, each of which in its own way denounces injustice and oppression and calls upon the believer to assume a Christian, prophetic mysticism... The experience of an Exodus people is also very much felt by many Venezuelan (and other poor) urban dwellers because so many are migrants to the cities from a difficult and oppressed country life...

These moments of first encounter with the Scriptures in such manner that the gospel message can be understood and placed in dialogue with life are joyful and exciting moments. The Bible grows as a true book of the community, one that nourishes, orients, and challenges. Their joy is shared by the accompanying pastoral agents. The challenges are often multiplied a thousand times as the sharing role grows, and the confrontation with the growing authentic faith commitment among the poor and illiterate causes the pastoral agent to reconsider and revise his or her own expressions of faith.

### POTENTIAL DANGERS AND EARLY WARNINGS

Reading Scriptures with poor people in this manner anywhere in the world today is not without potential danger. As often happens, in situations of joy and great zeal, there are occasional errors, extremes, reductionisms, partializations, and gross generalizations that result in misleading conclusions.

#### Manipulating the Texts

One of the most common tendencies is to replace the old limiting dogmatic use of the Bible with a new, limited ideological use. Especially among newly "converted" pastoral agents lacking a more solid formation in Scriptures and its historical context, there are some strong tendencies to "pick and choose" texts that complement the popular ideology of the moment - especially today the option for the poor and the concept of liberation. It is not, however, only typical of Latin American pastoral agents to choose readings that help a group make the "right decision" about some problem - the right decision being one that the pastoral agent has already decided upon. The danger is the tendency, usually due to an inability to effectively integrate with the wider context of the Bible,.... condemning the rich, for example while failing to effectively and appropriately reflect on, preach, and challenge the passivity and resistance of the poor in assuming and sharing the gospel good news.

Part of this danger is related to an ongoing methodological dilemma: which comes first, the Word of God or our lived experience? It is usually easier and far more satisfying to begin with a sharing of experiences and/or contemporary issues followed by a spontaneous selection of texts that appear to illuminate them. However, this order is also much more vulnerable to least a subconscious manipulative selection.

## INTRODUCING THE TEXTS FOR BIBLE SHARING DURING THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY IN BOGOTÁ

*During the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá, time will be set aside daily for Bible Sharing. To allow everyone an opportunity to prepare for this, Silvia Schroer, member of the Executive Committee and Directress of the "Bibelpastorale Arbeitsstelle" in Zurich, proposes here from a feminist viewpoint a short commentary on each of the chosen passages infused with her reflections. Silvia Schroer, the first woman to attain a habilitation from the Old Testament chair of the Catholic University Fribourg, Switzerland, is very active in groups of bible reading from the feminist perspective.*

The first group of texts (Rev 21,1-5; Is 43,16-21; Is 65,17-25) evokes the announcement of "everything new", "new heavens, new earth".

The texts of the second group (Lk 4,16-30; Ac 8, 26-40; Ga 3,26-29) concentrate on the person of Jesus himself who proclaims the Good News to the poor, who himself is recognized through Scripture, and who breaks down all the boundaries between humans.

In the third group of texts (1 Jn 1,1-4; Mt 23,1-12; Rm 15,1-6), the accent is placed on the dynamic aspects of the new community.

### 28 JUNE

#### Revelation 21,1-5

Old Testament texts which are important for understanding the above passage include: Si 36,12-13; Ps 46,5-8, Is 26,1-2; 50,1-9; Ez 40-48

#### *Background*

Since the reign of Augustus, the Emperor was considered the religious ruler in the Roman Empire. Structuring society as a pyramid, the emperor was the supreme head not only in the political but also in the religious sense.

The Jewish people at that time comprised 10% to 15% of the population of the Roman Empire. They were privileged with some extraordinary rights, such as being the only ones not obliged to worship the Emperor as god. As the years passed, however, they became a threat to the sovereign.

- Israel is an occupied country having lost its national independence. War is raging between 60 and 70 which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. The Temple is also destroyed and thereby the center of national iden-

tification. Many Jews leave the country in search of a new refuge.

- Around the year 115, the Jews lose their economic privileges under Trajan.

- About 117, circumcision becomes prohibited in the diaspora.

Under Domitian, the cult of the emperor assumes grotesque features. It is he who stated in Roman decrees that he be addressed as "lord and god". To be a citizen now means to adore the head of state. Thereby the situation becomes perilous for people such as the Jews and the young Christian communities who acknowledge only one God above them.

#### *Explanation of key words*

The sea represents the absolute chaos in Israel. It is part of God's work of creation the sea/chaos, is confined into its boundaries (compare, for example, Ps and Jb 38,39). John sees a new world, new creation without threatening powers.

The tent of God - the tent has a powerful symbolic meaning in Israel. It symbolizes the early beginnings of Israel and the defense against the Canaanite city culture

in favor of community life in solidarity. God does not live in a house and even less in a palace or temple. God simply lives among human beings.

#### Message of the text

John has a vision of a new creation. Visions in the Bible are not directed towards a future in eternity. The visions of prophets urge for change in the present and give hope in situations of despair. The new creation comes about through God's initiative. All threatening powers, all suffering and death have passed. God himself will wipe away the tears that have been shed during the disastrous history of mankind. Then there is no further need for a temple as an intermediary between God and mankind. God is eminently near.

#### Questions:

1. Which dream do I/we have of the heavenly Jerusalem? Very concretely...
2. What does God's promise in v 5 mean for us; does it strengthen us; does it unburden us; does it make us comfortable?
3. God does not need the many privileges we profit from. God does not need an expensive apartment. There is no Temple, there are no churches (no theologians and no Bible!) in the New Jerusalem according to this text. What does this mean for the lives as Christians we lead today? Are we prepared for an immediate nearness of God? Don't we often cling to the "provisional"?
4. What does the vision of a God who wipes away tears do for my/our image of God?

## 29 JUNE

### Isaiah 43, 16-21

#### Background

When the new Babylonian Empire comes under increasing pressure from the Persians, the Jews/Jewesses in the Babylonian exile began to put their hope on Cyrus II. According to the message of Deutero-Isaiah, he is to provide them with the possibility of a triumphant return to Judea.

#### Message of the text

The God who led Israel forth from Egypt will lead his people once again into a new future. God's saving intervention in history, his renewed election of Israel is described as a transformation of creation. The desert is watered so that Israel can drink. The animals of this most deserted area, jackals and ostriches, are the first to revere JHWH because of this, and lastly Israel offers songs of praise to God.

#### Questions

"See, I make all things new; already it is sprouting. Don't you recognize it?"

Do we recognize sprouting anew, that which God is creating?

Where are the people JHWH has formed for himself?

Where are people today in a similar situation as the Exiles of the Bible?

## 30 JUNE

### Isaiah 65,17-25

#### Background

The first unorganized group of exiles return. The new beginning is misery and wretchedness. Trito-Isaiah proclaims his theology of salvation.

#### Message

This miserable situation after the return is contrasted with the vision of human dignity, a vision which leaves nothing to be desired. The new world will be the all-encompassing goal, even the brutal "law of the jungle" of the animal world (devouring and being devoured), will be part of this healing of creation.

#### Questions:

What about our situation/our country?

\* Mortality of infants (v 20 and 23)

\* Life expectancy (v 20)

\* Housing situation (v 21)

(expulsions, slums, violent occupation, lack of housing)

\* primary economic independence (v 21) of families or forced export of essential foods

\* land owners; foreign debts of poor countries (v 22), underpaid work.

- what do we as Christians do in view of Is 65 for a new heaven and a new earth? Or do we ourselves steer clear of involvement in political and social questions?

## 1 JULY

### Luke 4, 16-30

#### Background:

The evangelist used the account of the admiration for and the rejection of Jesus in his hometown to map out Jesus' opening manifesto in which the quotation of Is 61,

1-2 and the reference to Elijah and Elisha found fulfillment.

#### *Message of the text*

Jesus presents himself with the claim of making JHWH's saving plan a reality. The gospel, the Good News, is meant for the poor, the captives, the blind, the downtrodden. This program, this claim, according to Luke meets with strong opposition from the very beginning because Jesus, according to v 25 f., does not intend to limit God's saving work to Israel but he invokes the openness of the prophets towards the non-Israelites.

#### *Questions:*

- Do we honor the "Good News"?
  - \* What are the Christian communities, what is the Church doing for the poor?
  - \* Who, in our ranks, are the poor (men, women, children)?
  - \* What are we doing for the prisoners?
  - \* How is the Church handling its mission to heal?
  - \* Does our Christian practice, that of the Catholic Church correspond to the openness of Jesus and the early Christian communities towards men/women of other faiths, of other descent, etc.?

## 2 JULY

### Acts 8,26-40

#### *Background*

The mission in Samaria meant opening up the young Christian community to the non-Jewish population. Luke in this context recalls Philip's missionary activity; John refers to that of the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at Jacob's well (Jn 4).

Philip reinterprets the quoted Scripture text, (Is 53,7.8) which originally spoke about the servant of God as referring to Jesus.

#### *Explanations*

The foreign eunuch who is involved with pagan state affairs and pagan money cannot become a Jew because of his castration. He is somehow half-Jew like all the Samaritans.

#### *Message of the text*

It is Jesus' intent that the Gospel be proclaimed to all, also to those who did not obey the then required prescriptions of purification. According to this narrative, mission and baptism thrive, to a great extent, on spontaneity and enthusiasm. Philip baptizes without having heard a creed, a confession of faith, and without having given

much catechesis; and he baptizes at the first available water pool along the road.

#### *Questions:*

- Which questions and problems impose themselves in our /my country regarding membership in the Christian community?
- Which criteria do exist, should exist?
- Who decides?
- What does the text say concerning today's situation?

## 3 JULY

### Galatians 3, 26-29

(Attention: when copying the biblical text for distribution, please replace in verse 26 "sons of God" with "children of God".)

#### *Background and message*

The context deals with freedom from the law which is given through faith in Jesus Christ. Not slavery, but freedom characterizes the relationship of the "children" with the parental God. Ga 3,28 is an old profession of the Church about the experience and practice of freedom in Christ.

In Christ all power structures are abolished. This has not only been formulated as a "vision" but from the lived experience of the primitive Church. The early missionary movement could no longer maintain the barriers between Jews and pagans, it could no longer treat slaves as second class humans, it could no longer bar women from responsible work for evangelization and leading positions in the community. Finished in Christ are all discriminations against people of other religions, other social classes and other genders. Paul himself and the young communities took up this radical challenge of the gospel and of Jesus' life. They have taken the risk of being considered an annoyance to others or even as hostile to the state.

#### *Questions:*

- Why are we inclined to "spiritualize" this text? How does the practice of Ga 3,28 look like in our Church?
- Do we live the openness towards other religions, confessions?
- Or do we cling small-mindedly to the "law" (to the Canon Law, to Dogma), instead of being and working free in Christ?
- Are the "free" and "slaves" of today equal in our communities or do we count only the "great" and the respectable? What do we do to overcome present day forms of slavery?
- How far away is our Church from equality of men and

women in Christ? How do women experience themselves in our local Church, what ideas do they harbor about "equality in Christ"?

## 4 JULY

### 1 John 1,1-4

#### Background

Instead of a formal opening, the first Johannine Epistle begins with a profession-like speech which in structure and key words is similar to the prologue of the Gospel according to John. The testimony to the Word of Life, Christ, is announced in order to form community. Community is the main topic of the Epistle which probably is addressed to the disbanded Johannine community at the first half of the second century.

#### Message

The Word of Life, Jesus Christ, can be experienced: to be heard, seen, and touched by hand (compare Thomas in the Gospel of John!). Only in this way can Christ, the Word and the eternal Life be witnessed and proclaimed. In this way only can community come about among us, with God and Jesus Christ; thus only can joy become complete.

#### Questions

How do we, how does the Church make the Word of God, Christ, the "eternal Life", audible? How do we give him a voice?

How do we make him visible, so that he cannot be overlooked?

How do we make him "tangible"?

Are we in contact with the Word?

Do we hear, see, touch?

Or do we close our ears and eyes and do we fear being in touch with the crucified today?

Where does the eternal life begin for me/us?

## 5 JULY

### Matthew 23,1-12

#### Background

Mt 23 is a sharp criticism of the influential group of pharisees and scribes. They are blamed for their greed for honor, hypocrisy, predilection for hair-splitting in the prescriptions of the law, for superficiality and beautiful,

deceitful facades. The evangelist, however, has already composed this chapter 23 in view of the "pharisaic" attitude within the Christian community. Therefore, passage 23,8-12 is a fundamental rule describing how it should not be in the Christian community.

#### Message

In the Christian community there should be no master, no fathers and no teachers. What in the Gospel of John is expressed by the symbolic washing of the disciples' feet, is formulated by Matthew in the demands critical of dominion. In God and Christ, every human hierarchy is turned upside down. These phrases in Matthew can be compared with the primitive Church "Christ (alone) is 'Kyrios' ", hostile against state and empire.

#### Questions:

Is our Church free of "rabbis", fathers and teachers? Or has she rather done everything to preserve all inner-churchly power for the patriarchate and the teaching office? What would it mean concretely if the Church were to forego this very hierarchy, power and hypocrisy?

## 6 JULY

### Romans 15,1-6

#### Background and context

This passage deals with the difficulties arising in the communities of Rome on account of the different origins and religious-cultic practices of its members. The passage 14,1-12, explains who are the strong and who are the weak. According to Paul, the strong ones, who feel themselves more free from Jewish traditions, are to show consideration to the weak ones. V 3 quotes Ps 69. In v 4, the hope probably refers to the unity of Jewish and pagan members of the eschatological community.

#### Message

Unity in Christ does not only demand a "community building" in consideration of the poor, but conscious promotion of them.

#### Questions:

Who are the strong and the weak in our churches? (men, women, priests, laity, conservative, progressive, traditionalists and critics, rich and poor). Do the strong ones do anything in favor of unifying the Church, are they considerate, do they encourage the weak ones and foster the building up of the Church?

*continued from page 8*

### **Need for Critical Consciousness**

Another potential danger is the methodological language currently in style in Latin America and many other parts of the world as a product of the revision of life method of the young Christian workers and students movements. The idea of "see-judge-act" can be a subtle trap, adopting revision of life language without a deeper questioning of ideologies implicit in certain attitudes, language, and options. Unfortunately, this language is often used to justify pastoral practices currently in use in Latin America, regardless of how well based (or not) the element of critical consciousness in the judge/reflect stage may be.

### **Alienation**

A danger also exists of going from one extreme (Father knows all and teaches the people) to another (everything the poor say and do is right)... Some pastoral agents become blind and justify some of the less-than-gospel choices. It is only by mutual, communal support and challenge that we can begin to overcome this alienation.

### **Extremes of Interpretation**

Sharp extremes regarding the ways of understanding Bible interpretation can be another danger zone... On one side, exegesis is seen only as a science, and on the other, biblical reflection as only the interpretation by the heart of the poor. Neither extreme arrives at a true understanding of the Word of God, for neither takes into consideration the constant work of grace in the historical process of all creation ...

### **Criteria of popular exegesis**

In spite of the potential dangers, there have been some very fine experiences with popular exegesis.

What are the criteria for popular exegesis?

#### **1. Book of the Community**

Even when read individually, the Bible is understood more and more as a community book, one which only makes sense when read from the perspective of the community struggle for transformation of their living conditions.

#### **2. Conversion-oriented**

Although the progressive sector of the Latin American church carefully analyzes structural oppression and institutional sin, and has been criticized for failing to take into sufficient consideration the aspect of personal sin and conversion, there is a growing consciousness at the small group level regarding the importance of the personal conversion element.

#### **3. Response-oriented**

The gospel is very good news for the poor, but the communities of the marginalized and poor are not content to sit back and glory in their "status". Instead there is growing emphasis on fidelity

in the community action-response to the lived situation and the announced Word... Part of the good news is in the response.

#### **4. Telling/Retelling Forms**

There is a growing capacity, although still limited, to tell the gospel story; not only read it, but really assume it as part of our felt/lived tradition... The good news is not yet finished, has not yet been completely revealed, but it is still to be woven in the lives of those who are seekers and builders of God's home of love.

#### **5. Political**

The Bible message is understood as a political challenge with political implications and consequences... We read and live Scripture today with eyes on race, sex and class.

### **SOME OF THE SUCCESSES**

#### **Exodus Reflection**

The little reflection groups in Latin America have discovered in the Exodus account a key Scripture theme that truly resonates with their own experiences of enslavement, struggle, journey, organization, covenant relationship, and hope... Exodus seems to have become an archetype for the ongoing struggle for survival.

#### **Creation Reflection**

More and more Latin Americans are rediscovering in the creation theme an affirmation of their own beings as co-creators in the Lord's ongoing creation process. This was an important theme before and after John Paul II's January 1985 visit to Venezuela.

#### **Prophets**

Many poor people relate easily to the prophetic themes in the Bible. In group formation work on the books of the prophets, participants naturally see the parallel challenges of announcing God present, denouncing injustice and oppression, and calling for conversion... The prophetic message is also addressed to the church institution and its hierarchy.

#### **Wisdom Literature**

Among the small Christian communities and neighborhood reflection groups, there is, little by little, the discovery of the value and place of the Wisdom literature in the overall Scripture integration. Although initially many groups and communities sometimes find this part of the Scripture difficult to manage, with wider experience in biblical themes, poor people readily discover resonances to their lives.

#### **Early Christian Communities**

Just like in prophetic texts, the communities of poor find themselves immediately in the struggles of the early Christian communities...

### *Jesus of the Poor*

The small reflection groups in marginated areas also discover a radical spirituality when they study Jesus' tender relationship with poor people. The Jesus who preaches the beatitudes, who invites the rich young man to sell all and give to the poor, who is lovingly and gently at home with little ones, is a special force of love for the small, poor communities...

### *Access to the Word*

One of the most difficult aspects of biblical reflection among the poorest and most marginated people is the common problem of illiteracy. This presents the challenge of making the Word of God available to communities in such a way that it can be shared, reflected on and assumed. This is a matter both of method and of media. The pastoral agent, the exegete and the community, can work together to create means that are faithful simultaneously to the original text, the context of today, and the aptitude of the group...

### *Important Service of Exegesis*

One of the most important potential areas of service of the exegete to the small community is that of helping people to understand the original historical context in which the Scripture texts were developed...

### *Overview of Scripture*

The exegete or pastoral agent can enable the novice community to weave together in the reflection fabric of its common life the key theological concepts that form a solid base for an integrated biblical and theological reflection. Without this support service, it is difficult to avoid the common dangers and problems of departmentalizing the Word into little pieces that serve individual interests.

### *The Bible as the Historic Memory of the Poor*

The marginated communities perceive creatively and constructively that the Scriptures are the historic memory of the poor as the chosen of God. The exegete can help the communities to understand the historical development of the Bible and the relationships of the favored groups of God in each moment.

### *Poor People as Exegetes*

The community of the poor as a privileged moment for exegesis, as the best place (locus) for authentic exegesis. One must recognize the mutual limitations between exegete and community in terms of arriving at a faithful interpretation of the Word of God... The challenge here to the exegete is mutual accompaniment - supporting, affirming, questioning, challenging, and clarifying... One must have the courage to place one's knowledge at the humble service of poor people who are seeking to be faithful to the gospel promise and challenge...

Further information: The full text of this report is available from the Secretariat of the Federation in Stuttgart.

## NEWS AND INFORMATION

### **AFRICA: The Biblical Apostolate of the Comboni Missionaries**

To evaluate their biblical apostolate in Africa, the Comboni Missionaries received the following questionnaire from the Mission Secretariat of their congregation in Rome:

1. What is the degree of familiarity of Catholic Christians in your region of Africa with sacred Scripture? Is a copy/an edition of the Gospels, of the New Testament, of the Bible in the hands of the people? Can they easily use them for their personal reading; for a communal reading in the family; on rare occasions or more frequently, in small Christian communities? Do they discuss together what they read in the Bible?
2. Are there organized groups that meet for Bible reading? How frequently? With a priest? With personal comments or interpretation? For a sharing of experiences?
3. Do Christians succeed in making a connection between the message of the Bible and their real life situations, their social environment, in answer to the challenges and contradictions which they encounter? Do they do this without difficulty? How often? How do they proceed? Do they have a method?
4. Does the Bible for the Christian communities in your region become a source of concrete action: for apostolic, charitable, social, educational or other initiatives?
5. Are there special initiatives (and results) to help children know and love sacred Scripture? To introduce them to salvation history? To have them understand the biblical message as significant in the context of their lives?
  - Are there Bible editions adapted to their situation?
  - Instruments to help them (booklets, videos, songs, theater, etc.)?
6. What relation do Catholic youth have to sacred Scripture? Do they read the Bible outside their school circles? Do they search (and find) in the biblical message those things which can give greater meaning to their life? Which could give them orientation? Are there occasions and initiatives for exchanging their experience in the light of the Bible? Do they know how to use the Bible when confronted by young, non-Catholic Christians?
7. As regards the catechumenat, what place does the direct biblical message (and the history of salvation which it contains) have in regard to the more systematic and doctrinal content of traditional catechism? How do catechumens respond to the biblical message and to the doctrinal instruction?

8. Do you have any other particular experiences to communicate on the distribution and use of sacred Scripture? Do you have any proposals to add?

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*Here are some of the responses received in the Secretariat of the Comboni Missionaries:*

#### North Sudan

1. The Christians in the Sudan deeply love the Bible. They study it in groups and demand its presentation and study in their own language. They all try to acquire a Bible. In some parishes of our dioceses, during a family feast, each family receives a Bible as a gift.

The Bibles are made use of in small Christian communities, at the diocesan synod, in families, in groups of families and in parish centers. For those who know how to read, the Bible is the most frequently used book (often it is the only book they use) for personal reading.

It is quite normal to get together on Sundays before and after Mass to discuss the Bible.

2. On-going Bible groups exist. Numerous catechists open a new center through Bible groups. Generally these are study and prayer groups.

3. Normally the Bible influences the life of the Christians. But since the question refers explicitly to the Bible in concrete situations, it is difficult to say more. Where groups are founded on the Bible, people are better able to tackle the contradictions of life. It is the Bible which allows the Christian to remain faithful to their own belief when Islam tempts or taunts. For example the Christians in our region only swear on the Bible (not on the Koran). The Lumko (South Africa) method of approaching the text is used.

4. Above all, the Bible is the prime source of activities in the context of catechesis.

5. For the children, school is where catechism class is based on the Bible. In school, each Christian possesses a Bible (the Bible is sold at a low price thanks to the activity of the Bible Society). We do not have a particular edition adapted to the children. On the other hand, we do possess numerous materials such as leaflets for catechism, photos, slides, theater presentations, biblical music (courses are given to educate choir directors and musicians).

6. Approximately 85% of the Christians in northern Sudan are youth, and all that was said above holds true for them. In schools, one attempts to collaborate with other Christians.

7. In the new catechism which is the principle means of instruction, emphasis is placed on the Bible and on leading the catechumens to concrete action: to live the message within the community.

8. We live in a Moslem environment, where the "book" enjoys a very definite importance. It is therefore fundamental to pay attention to the "book" (exposition, honor, procession with a gospel, readings, study and preparation, preaching, etc.). Upon seeing the "book", Moslems understand immediately what our religion is all about (dialogue).

The Christians who know from experience the importance of the "book" in religion are proud of "their book" which strengthens their identity and eliminates their feelings of inferiority. We live in an African and multi-lingual context. Catholic and Protestant ministers should be encouraged to translate and print Bibles in all the languages of the Sudan (and they are numerous!) and to maintain a very low price so that even the poor people can afford to purchase their own Bible.

#### Uganda

1. If one compares the present with the past, the familiarity of Catholics with the Bible has improved a very great deal. In the past, one could find only the catechism in the hands of the Catholics. The Catholics of Uganda often have the New Testament, or in rare instances, the Bible. The reason for this is the New Testament has been translated by the Catholic Church into many local languages whereas the Bible was almost translated exclusively by the Protestants with the help of the Bible Societies.

While family Bible reading increases, it is more practical to have these readings in small communities and in prayer groups. For prayer groups in Kampala for example, the Word of God is the subject matter of dialogue.

2. In the renewal movement, the groups meet every week. The reading of the Word of God is the most important moment. The agenda followed by the majority of groups seems to be the following: prayer, reading, sharing and actualization.

The hierarchy insists on the biblical formation of biblical animators, and the renewal program has decided that the group animators should get together for a more profound study of the Word of God. Various support materials are provided for them.

3. In this field also, much progress has been made over the last years. For the Catholics of the region, the Word of God is read for living. "Discussion groups on the Bible" are formed primarily on the Protestant side.

The method applied is the one indicated above in Number 2. There remains the ever-present problem of application to life. However, in committed groups (Focolari, neo-catechumenate, renewal) much work is being done and one notices great changes in very little time. The hierarchy has intervened periodically with an attitude that is more defensive than encouraging. This does not help. The Word of God in the hands of the faithful is quite different than in the hands of seminary professors and priests; it certainly comes closer to life.

4. Does the Bible become a source of concrete actions? The answer is not totally in the affirmative, but the Word of God becomes more often an inspiration for all kinds of initiatives. The documents of the Bishops' Conferences of Uganda, for example, refer to the Word of God before suggesting any initiatives.

The Christian communities are actually the fruit of the Word of God and their initiatives are based on this. They become more active and responsible and less dependent on the clergy.

5. There are initiatives for children, such as books with a series of picture designs, but because of the economic situation of Uganda, publishers are lacking and possibilities are limited. Other activities: song, theater, pedagogical, initiatives are among the most used, and video cassettes, though scarce, are a precious means.

6. Among the youth, on account of the obligatory religious instruction in secondary school, there is a certain knowledge of the Bible. The majority of the Catholic youth belong to a Catholic movement. Their "vital" knowledge of the Bible comes from the environment within these movements. However, they are not able to use the Bible as a means for the apostolate.

7. New booklets designed for catechumens often refer to salvation history. But some dioceses in Uganda recommend the catechism of Pius X. Changes are slow.

8. In the hospital of Nsambya (one of the two Catholic hospitals in Kampala), the Sisters offer the Bible to AIDS patients and help them read it. There are instances of conversion and also of healing through the Word of God. A minimum of annotations and introductions is necessary to understand biblical texts. The text alone is insufficient.

### Mozambique

1. The Bible has been translated into the local language and distributed through the entire Nampula diocese. However, because of the war, many Bibles have been destroyed and so again many are without it. Many Christians have bought the complete Bible, others only the New Testament.

2. The Bible is used very much in the small Christian communities as the center of Sunday celebrations. Reading of the Bible has replaced the Rosary and other customary Sunday prayers.

For personal prayer and reflection, the Bible is used less because many people, mainly adults, do not know how to read. The leaders of the communities however, talk about the examples and words of the Bible; they ask questions and are anxious to learn more.

3. The Christians try to relate their life situations to the Bible and can appreciate the many applications of the Word of God as being truly wonderful.

This is a process that takes a long time but it has already started and must be improved upon through biblical courses and workshops.

The method of reflection on the Word of God is simple:

- the reading is done once, or twice if necessary;
- the people share what they have heard;
- then they ask themselves if what is in the Bible can be related to their own life;

- they seek clarification;
- finally, they try to discover what can be done in the community or village through concrete actions.

5-7. Regarding the children, youth and catechumens, very few initiatives have taken place so far. In the parishes, we have organized many Bible studies in order to facilitate a better understanding. But the problem is that audio-visuals and other such aids are not available. During the three years of study, the catechumens have a special contact with the main figures of the Old Testament (first year) and with the Gospels and with the Acts of the Apostles (second and third year).

By the end we can surely say that they have become familiar with the Bible. Those who can read can then use it for their own personal reflection and to help others.

### AUSTRIA: Biblical activities of the dioceses

The biblical activities differ in each diocese of Austria: conferences, expositions, group work, meditations, Bible Week. As an example, in the following we list only the activities over the past year in Vienna:

- . Ecumenical Workshop on "justification"
- . Bible reading with the youth
- . Biblical courses for animators "Learning to Read the Bible"
- . A series of lectures on "Mary and the New Testament" geared to priests and religion teachers
- . A series of lectures on the "Infancy narratives"
- . A seminar on "Passover-Eucharist" for the Little Sisters
- . A preparation for the theme of the year: "Living the Word of God Together in a Credible Way"
- . Formation days for lay leaders responsible in the parish councils of deaneries
- . Biblical encounter of young people from different parishes
- . Biblical weekend on the Epistle to the Galatians in a parish
- . Biblical exposition in several parishes

The 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the Council document DEI VERBUM will be celebrated on 18 Nov. of this year in Vienna and on other days in the dioceses. This celebration entails a workshop on the history of the document, its importance and its consequences and effects.

Further Information: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, Am Stiftsplatz 8, 3400 Klosterneuburg, Austria

### BRAZIL - Mendes - The 2nd Latin American Biblical Pastoral Consultation

*In the last Bulletin, we reproduced the paper which Carlos Mesters gave during the Second Latin American Encounter in Mendes (Bulletin Dei Verbum pages 7-14) on 17-23 July 1989. This important encounter gathered participants from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, from Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Uruguay together with observers from Europe, Canada and the United States. In the following, you find a summary of the Final Statement of this Congress.*

## Commentary

- The Word of God is about to change profoundly all pastoral activity. More and more it becomes the foundation and source.
- The Bible is once again in the hands of the people as in the beginning of the Church. It is the book of the community.
- In the Bible, the people encounter the living God and have dialogue with him. Bible reading becomes prayer and obligation.
- Bible study and biblical formation deriving from it have an impact on every level of pastoral activity.
- The methods and approaches are manifold. Nevertheless they are at the service of the same orientations: the people themselves are the subject of the reading, of the interpretation of the Word of God.
- The diversity of ministries are complementary - the Word of God allows people to understand their own history; the Word of God appeals for transformation of the persons and the structures of injustice or oppression.
- Many difficulties still have to be overcome inside the Church (theological conflicts, untrained pastors...) as well as outside (sects, illiteracy...)
- the challenges to be met:
  - . The Word of God must shed light on and purify popular piety.
  - . New religious groups and their fundamentalistic Bible reading.
  - . Utilization of the media.
  - . Ideological pluralism.
  - . Dynamize the socio-political dimension of the faith.
  - . The secularized world in view of transcendence.
  - . Ecumenical dialogue.

## Points of Agreement

- The Bible reflects the experience of the people of God and the Lord's presence in history.
- Christ is the key to all Bible reading.
- The Bible must be read on this continent starting from the context of the Latin American situation, in the light of the documents of Medellin and Puebla and in the perspective of the preferential option for the poor as clearly expressed by the Latin American Church.
- Bible reading today demands a renewed ecclesiology according to the II Vatican Council.
- It is necessary to present the message of Jesus as Good News to all, especially to the poor, the marginalized, and the down-trodden.
- Rejecting all fundamentalism, our Bible reading takes into account the pedagogical patience of God, the dynamism of salvation history which culminates in Jesus and the conditions of our language and our knowledge.
- This reading takes place within the praying and missionary church which is faithful to her Lord.
- The liturgical celebration is a privileged place to listen to the Word of God.
- We try to evangelize all dimensions of human life without forgetting the political dimension.

## Necessary involvement

The following areas are in need of deeper study:

- The concept "people" and "poor" in the Bible and their usage in our pastoral ministry.
- The method of popular Bible reading "starting from reality" or "starting from the poor".
- The problems which emerge from new hermeneutics with their methods and their ideologies.
- The dialogue with the indigenous and Afro-American cultures.
- The dialogue with the new culture marked by urbanism, industrialization, electronics and the means of social communications.
- The specific contribution of biblical pastoral ministry as the axis of the overall pastoral service.
- The problem of complementarity and co-responsibility in the pastoral interpretation of the Bible (magisterium, exegetes, theologians, faithful).
- The social message of the Bible for our world marked by injustice.
- The relation between faith and politics.
- The specific contribution of anthropological and social sciences and that of theology in regard to the correct interpretation of the Word of God.
- The relation between the life of the people, of the Church and biblical science.

## Suggestions and perspectives

- In view of the celebration of the 5th centenary of the evangelization of Latin America, we try to accept the challenge of a new evangelization. In the center of evangelization, we give the Word of God a privileged place.
- Nourish the Christian foundation of our people with the Bible.
- Promote the production and distribution of the biblical text at low costs.
- Invest in the formation of animators for the biblical-pastoral ministry.
- Promote biblical associations and biblical encounters.
- Elaborate a manual with the biblical guidelines for the biblical-pastoral ministry.
- Make concrete steps in the domain of ecumenism.
- Encourage the celebration of Bible days, weeks, months.
- Animate the regional life of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate through coordinators, meetings, publications...

Further Information: The original version of the Final Statement of Mendes in Spanish is available upon request from the Secretariat of the WCFBA in Stuttgart.

## CANADA: A Bible Game

SOCABI (Société Catholique de la Bible) years ago composed a Bible game, "Canaan". This educational game may serve as additional material in the Christian formation which children receive in catechesis class. It contains: a color map

of Palestine (New Testament); 400 questions and answers on literary and factual aspects of the Bible which do not demand any theological interpretation; additional playing pieces and the instructions for the game. Although designed for children, it may also be of interest for young people and even for adults. Further Information: SOCABI, 7400 boulevard Saint Laurent, No. 519, Montréal, Québec, H2R 2Y1, Canada

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#### **CANADA: The Catholic Bible College of Canada**

The Catholic Bible College of Canada endorsed by the Western Conference of Catholic Bishops opened its doors in 1985, in the Rocky Mountain region of Canmore, Alberta. The college is primarily designed for the Christian formation of young adult Catholics (18 to 30 years old). The word "college" must not be understood in the academic sense but as a "collegium" - people living in a community style - the communitarian experience of faith. During the year (from September to April) the students join in biblical-theological formation. Courses include the Old and New Testament, church history, prayer, liturgy, the sacraments, moral theology, and the church in the modern world. The college has space for 25 resident students.

Further information: Catholic Bible College of Canada, Box 1410, Canmore, Alberta, CANADA

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#### **CHINA: Catholic Printing House in Shanghai**

A printing house run by the Catholic Church is scheduled to open this year in Shanghai. It will print and publish the Bible and other religious publications. The printing machines are about to be installed. Noteworthy, is that the Printing House of the Bible Societies in Nanjing has already published more than 1 million Bibles during the past 21 months of operation.

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#### **INDONESIA: The Bible Center of Bandung**

The Catholic Biblical Association of Indonesia has issued many books to facilitate Bible Sharing and an understanding of the Bible. These books are used in seminaries and catechetical schools. People are not accustomed to reading (oral tradition is still strong). Currently every family possesses a Bible but lay people are still afraid to read it. Although they prepare Bible Sharing twice a month, beyond that, the Bible remains practically untouched.

The Bible Center has started to make people more familiar with the Bible by developing a biblical spirituality with the lay people, teaching them to pray with the Bible, and encouraging them to read it every day. The *Lectio Divina* could be a good method to achieve these goals; it allows the people to discover that biblical history links with their own history.

Further Information: Sr. Emmanuel, Ursuline Sisters, Provincialate Ursuline, Jalan Supratman 1, 40002 Bandung, Indonesia

#### **ITALY - A biblical department in each diocese**

The Italian Bishops' Conference has approved a proposal from Msgr. Ablondi, President of the Commission for the Doctrine of the Faith, that in the Catechetical Department of each diocese, a "Biblical Section" be established. The aim is to give greater attention to biblical values to ensure that the Church is better equipped to cope with the challenges of "the new evangelization". This emphasis on biblical instruction in faith education will enable a better preparation for the specific encounter with the Word of God, the nourishment for Christian life. A recent survey of religious values, needs, etc., brought to light that people spontaneously read the Bible; therefore, it seems pastorally opportune and prudent that the Bible be presented in the setting of Church as community. More profound biblical training gives added value to important, especially liturgical, moments in which the reading of Scripture assumes an integral part. More detailed knowledge of the Bible can be an effective defense against the widespread, intense activities of the sects. Furthermore, it should be noted that on the difficult path of ecumenism, the most progressive steps have been made in communal listening to the Word of God.

Such a biblical department could oversee the development of different initiatives:

- the organization of Bible Days or Bible Weeks (distribution, biblical formation adapted to different groups of faithful)
- the organization of biblical pastoral lectures within courses for seminarians and the faithful;
- biblical formation of catechists;
- the creation of and accompaniment for "bible groups";
- the reinforcement of the biblical dimension of catechesis for adults;
- the promotion of biblical values in Catholic religious instruction.

The Italian Biblical Association, the organization of all the exegetes in the country, supports this decision and has offered its collaboration to implement this proposal.

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#### **ITALY: The Bible Center Neustift**

The Bible Center of Neustift close to Bressanone/Brixen in Northern Italy offers biblical formation courses in German. During the year, the center offers numerous activities:

- an introductory course to the world of the Bible, to the biblical books, to the history and the geography of the Bible;
- a basic course on literary methods applied to the Bible, to the Canon of the Scriptures; this course includes also work on a selection of biblical texts;
- Bible Seminars on special biblical writings with specific themes;
- biblical conferences;
- the study of biblical texts used for the Sunday Liturgy;
- the formation of biblical animators and preachers.

Further Information: Bildungshaus, Bibelzentrum Neustift, 39042 Neustift bei Brixen, Italy.

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**PAKISTAN: Third edition of the Bible in Urdu**

Urdu is Pakistan's national language. The first Urdu Catholic Bible was translated in 1743 by a German missionary and published two years later. This Bible was printed again in 1958. Now work has begun on a third edition of a completely revised Catholic Urdu edition of the Bible.

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA:****Sub-Commission on the Biblical Apostolate**

The Sub-Commission on the Biblical Apostolate in Papua New Guinea organizes every year a Bible Week and a Bible competition. Last year, more than 8,000 people participated in this competition which had as its theme: "The Bible - Our Book of Life". It also organizes biblical workshops in various villages of the country. It hopes to be able to launch a course for biblical animators similar to that in Nemi, Italy.

An important event for Papua New Guinea was the publication of the Bible in Pidgin language. Organized together with the Bible Society of the country, various activities accompanied this event: Bible expositions, an exhibit of works of art on biblical themes, conferences, a Bible competition, small booklets, audio-visual means. "Why Do Catholics Have a Different Bible": Under this title, a booklet was published which explains why the Catholic edition of the Bible has a number of additional books compared to Protestant editions.

Further Information: Sr. Dominic Coles, Megiar Pastoral Centre, Post Office Alexishafen Mandang Province, Papua New Guinea.

**PHILIPPINES: "Sharing God's Word"**

The biblical apostolate is very much alive and well-organized in the Philippines. The Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate (ECBA) publishes the quarterly review "Sharing God's Word". It contains reflections on the biblical apostolate and on related burning issues.

Further Information: "Sharing God's Word", Mater Dei Printers, Inc, Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines.

**THAILAND: The Biblical Apostolate**

Though throughout the Catholic communities of the country interest in the Bible is growing, the biblical apostolate still has to develop. Some thousand people, mostly students from our Catholic schools, take a correspondence Bible course given by Fr. Phairoah with the help of a group of seminarians.

A booklet "A Glance Into the Bible" giving basic ideas about the Bible to those exposed to the Bible for the first time has just been published. Together with a list of the books of the Bible, it contains a summary of salvation history. A translation of the Council document DEI VERBUM as a guideline to read and understand the Bible has been published as well.

Further Information: Rev. J.M. Thasanai Komkris, Lux Mundi Seminary, Sampran 73110 Thailand

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**BIBLICAL BIBLIOGRAPHIES**

**Bibliografia Bíblica Latino-Americana, Programa Ecumênico de Pós-Graduação em Ciências da Religião, 1988, Caixa Postal 5150, 09731 Rudge Ramos, São Bernardo do Campo, S.P., Brésil.**

The first volume of the Latin American Bibliography of Biblical Studies contains within its 250 pages not only the list of books and scientific essays on biblical subjects but also small popular books on the Bible published in Spanish and Portuguese throughout all of Latin America. Different indices facilitate the usage of this bibliography: indices on the themes, authors and texts.

**Des livres au service de la Bible, Guide bibliographique, Cahiers ÉVANGILE N°69, Service Biblique Évangile et Vie, 6 avenue Vavin, 75006 Paris, France**

Issue No. 69 of the well-known series Cahiers Évangile presents a bibliographical guide to some 900 French titles useful to all who want to study the Bible. Each entry presents some indications concerning the: interest, limits, and level of difficulty of the respective publication or article. Omitted are books for children and young people except those which are also useful for adults. This edition of the series also contains:

- an index of authors quoted in the bibliography;
- an index of biblical texts studied in the entire collection of the Cahiers ÉVANGILE;
- a table of ancient texts (pagan, Jewish and Christian) quoted in the entire series of the Cahiers ÉVANGILE and their supplements.

**Thomas Manjaly, A Bibliography for the Study of Sacred Scripture, Centre for Biblical Studies, Oriens Theological College, Mawlai, Shillong, India**

A selective bibliography of the principle books for the study of the Bible in English, meant for students on the sub-continent of India. Typewritten on 17 pages, it omits books that appear too technical but reviews all basic and essential books for the study of the Bible. A list of addresses of the different Catholic Biblical Reviews and Catholic libraries of the country is enclosed at the end.

## THE PLACE OF THE BIBLE IN THE LITURGY

*In his Apostolic Letter on the Sacred Liturgy, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the conciliar constitution, Sacrosanctum concilium, Pope John Paul II called to mind the importance of the reading of the Word of God and of the biblical formation of responsible liturgists.*

8. ...The Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium sets out likewise to restore a "more abundant reading from Holy Scripture, one more varied and more appropriate". The basic reason for this restoration is expressed both in the Constitution on the Liturgy, namely, so that "the intimate link between rite and word" may be manifested, and also in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, which teaches: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures, just as she has venerated the very body of the Lord, never ceasing above all in the Sacred Liturgy to nourish herself on the bread of life at the table both of the word of God, and of the Body of Christ, and to minister it to the faithful".

Growth in liturgical life and consequently progress in Christian life cannot be achieved except by continually promoting among the faithful, and above all among priests, a "warm and living knowledge of Scripture".

### *Available Now*

This unique tool reflects the efforts employed by the local churches in the realm of Bible text translation and distribution in Africa.

Volume I, published in 1988, dealt with the Pacific Region. Although no longer in stock, a revised edition of this book should be available by the end of this year. Fr. Rijks has plans to compile similar volumes for Asia and Latin America.

*Volume II of this Guide can be ordered from the Secretariat in Stuttgart for \$15 or DM 30 plus shipping and handling fees. (For payment procedure, see "subscription payment" box on page 2).*

The word of God is now better known in the Christian communities, but a true renewal sets further and ever new requirements: fidelity to the authentic meaning of the Scriptures which must never be lost from view, especially when the Scriptures are translated into different languages; the manner of proclaiming the word of God so that it may be perceived for what it is; the use of appropriate technical means; the interior disposition of the ministers of the word so that they carry out properly their function in the liturgical assembly; careful preparation of the homily through study and meditation; effort on the part of the faithful to participate at the table of the word; a taste for prayer with the Psalms; a desire to discover Christ - like the disciples at Emmaus - at the table of the word and the bread.

15. The most urgent task is that of the biblical and liturgical formation of the people of God, both pastors and faithful ...

This is a long-term programme, which must begin in the seminaries and houses of formation and continue throughout their priestly life.

A formation suited to their state is indispensable also for lay people, especially since in many regions they are called upon to assume ever more important responsibilities in the community...

**John Paul II**

*"The reform of the Liturgy in the spirit of Vatican II"*

