

Catholic Biblical Federation

No. 19

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Bulletin

Verbum

* * * The history of the Federation, from its foundation (1969) to the Bangalore Assembly (1984)

* * * A commentary on the Final Statement of Bogotá

* * * The practice of *lectio divina* in the biblical-pastoral ministry by Cardinal Martini

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English Edition

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) 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 CBF 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 Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno
President of the CBF

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

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to the Bulletin?**
(See page 2 for details.)

Editorial

If you are a regular reader of our BULLETIN and don't know the slogan of our Federation, there is no excuse! For those who have forgotten, let me repeat it: "Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (DV 22). This short sentence, quoted from the Council document *DEI VERBUM*, explains the Federation and justifies its existence.

The foundation, development and gradual transformation of the Federation illustrate this goal of making the Bible accessible to all Christians. In this issue you will find a short historical review of the history of the Federation from its foundation in 1969 until the Plenary Assembly of Bangalore in 1984 (*pages 4-6, 15-16*).

To have access to Sacred Scripture, one has to have the Bible available in one's mother tongue. In this regard the Christian Churches have accomplished much. However, more work remains to be done to reach the numerous people still deprived of the chance to know the Bible, as well as to keep abreast with the development of languages and the needs of women and men. You will find here some echos of the actual work of Catholic translation teams (*pages 17-18*).

Reading does not suffice, for the Bible is sometimes a difficult book from an era and culture different from our own. The Pope has reminded the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of the "uncomfortable situation" of Christian exegesis, because "it entails an interior tension between two different orientations, that of historical research founded on verifiable facts, and that of research of the spiritual order, founded on an adherence of faith to the person of Christ" (*page 14*).

How should we deal with this tension? There are many different realizations and sensibilities according to time and place. The tested experience of Cardinal Martini starting with the "lectio divina" seems to have succeeded (*Pages 8-13*). To rediscover a savory reading of the Bible which does not deny any of the progress in exegesis is, indeed, an excellent illustration of the slogan of our Federation, "Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful." Maybe now it will be easy to remember.

Marc Sevin

The History of the Catholic Biblical Federation from its Foundation to Bangalore

To describe the life of the Federation from its foundation (1969) until the Plenary Assembly of Bangalore (1984) amounts to reconstructing 15 years of the history of an organization which counts hardly 22 years of existence. Within the frame of these pages it is our intention to show how in the very center of the Catholic Church the idea, which today rose and took shape at the universal dimension, the Catholic Biblical Federation attempts to realize.¹

1. Fruit of an Ecumenical Concern

The first fact which has to be confirmed in this retrospective vision is that the Federation owes its existence, above all, to the ecumenical concern which the Second Vatican Council roused in the Catholic Church. In fact it is in the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU) that the first efforts are registered towards creating an institution which would be capable of implementing the realization of the objectives marked out in chapter VI of the Council's Constitution *Dei Verbum* with relation to the use of Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church. Even though in this chapter the possibility of an ecumenical collaboration in the diffusion of the Bible is mentioned only in passing among other recommendations, it was this suggestion which gave origin to the idea and it was the SPCU as the Vatican organism within which the Federation was born and through which the Federation is linked until today with the central administration of the Church.

The first step in this process was the plan initiated in 1966 by Cardinal Augustín Bea, president of the SPCU, to set up within this organism a separate section concerned with the recommendations of *Dei Verbum*. The realization of this project was entrusted to Jesuit Fr. Walter Abbot, member of the SPCU and former director of the review, *America*, in the United States. Out of this section called the Office for Common Bible Work, Fr. Abbot initiated a series of contacts with Catholic biblicalists, professors of the Biblical Institute in Rome, and with the German Catholic Biblical Association, (Katholisches Bibelwerk KBW) in Stuttgart.

In this initial phase the interest was concentrated, above all, in promoting the translation, production and distribution of the

Scriptures and in investigating the possibilities of collaborating with the United Bible Societies (UBS) in this field. With this objective the SPCU sent out in the same year, 1966, a questionnaire to all bishops of the world in order to ascertain their opinion in this regard and to learn of the possible existence of Catholic organizations disposed for such collaboration. Seventy to eighty per cent of the bishops declared themselves in favor of the diffusion of interconfessional translations of the Bible. On June 5, 1967, the SPCU organized in Rome together with the UBS, the first meeting of Catholic experts and of representatives of the UBS. Apparently, it was hoped, even by some Catholics, that the SPCU or at least its biblical section, would become a member of the UBS.

2. The "Biblical Apostolate"

Contact with the UBS soon led to the realization that it was necessary to clarify the objectives of the project. It was Professor Otto Knoch, director of the German Biblical Association, who showed the way²: Among Catholics the special emphasis of biblical work should concentrate on the pastoral use of the Bible and its wide recognition in all sectors in the life of the Church; the production and distribution of the Bible would be only a preliminary step. Only at this level should close collaboration with the Bible Societies of Protestant origins be sought without, however, applying for membership within the Bible Societies. The Catholic scope as expressed in the term "biblical apostolate" should be much wider.

Therefore, Archbishop J.C. Willebrands, secretary of SPCU, was invited to a meeting in Rome on the April 22-23, 1968, to clarify what the biblical apostolate should be and what type of collaboration with the UBS would be possible. In the meantime Professor Knoch and Monsignor Sondaal, director of the Dutch Catholic Biblical Association, reinforced the idea of encouraging the creation of independent Catholic biblical associations with pastoral objectives and of a universal Catholic federation of such associations. As was said before, collaboration with the Bible Societies should be promoted, however, without affiliation as members. The first step in this plan was the creation of a Secretariat within one of the already-

existing national biblical associations, given the fact that the economic resources did not at the moment permit thinking of anything else.

Forty participants took part in the meeting in Rome, among them as representatives of the German association, professors Knoch, N. Lohfink and Hoffman. On that occasion Holland proposed the setting-up of an international Catholic foundation which for the moment could be only European. The proposal was supported by England, Switzerland, Austria and Italy, but Fr. Ahern, a participant representing the USA and Canada, suggested giving the planned organization the name Catholic Biblical-Pastoral Association.

Without reaching a decision, the conference recommended investigating further the possibility of founding an international Catholic federation for the biblical apostolate in answer to *Dei Verbum* and to investigate the manner of promoting a close collaboration among the existing Catholic biblical associations and with the UBS. A committee was elected to study this project more thoroughly and to prepare a meeting in Rome in 1969 during which a definite decision would be made. Both Cardinal Bea and Pope Paul VI thanked the participants for the first steps taken and encouraged them to continue in their efforts.

In August of the same year, the preparatory committee met in Boxtel (Holland) to discuss a concrete structure which could be given to the future association or federation and proposed two models: A: a Secretariat in Rome under the responsibility of a very dynamic Executive Committee and B: the step-by-step organization of a real international federation. Model A presented a double difficulty: that Rome would perhaps not accept such a Secretariat in its structure and that the money for realizing it would not be available.

To solve this second difficulty Fr. Abbot promised to look for a solution by trying to find in the United States a rich donor for a foundation with an initial capital of a million dollars. The efforts in this direction never succeeded.³ Model B, on the other hand, was still unclear and needed a concretism of the steps of realization; nevertheless, it seemed to correspond better to the proposals of Holland and Germany.

In any case, in the deliberations, the importance of the other two points could not be denied: the production and distribution of good and ecumenically recognized editions of the Bible and the setting-up of national biblical associations.

3. Foundation and Consolidation

The planned meeting in Rome took place under the patronage of Cardinal Willebrands, successor to Cardinal Bea, who had died on November 16, 1968. Thus, the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate was founded on April 16, 1969. Its objective was to "serve the bishops in their pastoral responsibilities concerning wider use and knowledge of the Bible."⁴ In particular the Federation was to "implement the very important goals set

forth in chapter VI of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on Divine Revelation."⁵

Adopting as basic plan Model A, the Federation was given the form of a Secretariat, incorporated for the time being in the Office for Common Bible Work of the SPCU under Fr. Abbot. He accepted the function of general secretary and of treasurer for the initial period of organization and Cardinal Franz König, archbishop of Vienna, that of protector; in 1972 Cardinal König was elected the first president. Responsible for further development would be the Executive Committee (EC), elected after the act of foundation of the Federation.

The EC, which met for the first time in September of the same year in Klosterneuburg, the seat of the Biblical Association of Austria, was busy with two basic questions: how to finance the work of the Secretariat and how to stimulate the Bishops' Conferences to establish either national or regional biblical-pastoral centers. As far as the financing was concerned, the Funding Agencies, Missio and Adveniat, upon the invitation of Professor Knoch, declared themselves disposed to collaborate. In its second meeting from May 18-22, 1970, in Rome, the Executive Committee nominated as new general secretary, the English Benedictine, Dom Bernard Orchard, who was to fill this post until Oct. 1972. His immediate task was to organize the first Plenary Assembly, which was planned for 1971, but in fact was held in 1972 in Vienna.⁶

From July 6-19, 1971, Dom Orchard organized a biblical-pastoral seminar in Rocca di Papa during which the following items were studied: the actual situation of biblical studies, the situation of the biblical-pastoral ministry in the various regions of the world, the possibilities of organizing national or regional centers for promoting the biblical apostolate, and collaboration with the United Bibles Societies.

For Dom Orchard the major challenge for the Federation in its actual phase consisted in making the bishops see that this institution was of great importance for them and for the people entrusted to their pastoral care, that it had no other ambition than to help them in the task of making the Sacred Scriptures widely accessible to all Christians, and that such access produces its fruits in every individual. Towards this end Dom Orchard initiated in January 1971, the publication of an informative bulletin called *Mundo Dei Verbum - the Biblical Apostolate*.⁷ It was meant to give all people who work in the biblical apostolate information on what was happening in the rest of the world in this area so that they could mutually profit from the experiences of others and could also occasionally receive their help.

The publication was entrusted to Fr. John van der Valk, a Dutch Salesian, with 16 years of missionary experience in China and a gift for organization. He worked as assistant secretary and on Oct. 1, 1972, he succeeded Dom Orchard as general secretary, a task which he held until the Plenary Assembly of Malta (1978). In a letter addressed to Cardinal König and published in No. 3 of the Bulletin (July 1971), Cardinal Willebrands urged that the Federation have its own full-time general secretary and treasurer so that it would develop as an entity independent from the Office for Common Bible Work.

4. Decisive Advances

The following steps were taken in this direction. The first one was the Plenary Assembly of Vienna (April 4-7, 1972) with a presence of 20 delegates from different countries, which proved to be of great importance for the following reasons: the approval of the first Statutes of the Federation prepared by an ad hoc sub-committee, the election of the president and of the Executive Committee and the mapping-out of a plan of action for the following six years. In the planning of this work, in elaborating of the Statutes, and in further steps until 1984, Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadass, delegate of India and elected member of the Executive Committee in Vienna, assumed ever greater importance. He was to be the moderator of two Plenary Assemblies but died in a traffic accident in his home country in May 1990. He has rightly been considered one of the "patriarchs of the Federation." In Vienna it was decided that Plenary Assemblies would be held every six years and criteria were set up for defining the categories of members.

The next decisive step was the transfer of the office from Rome to Stuttgart in December 1972 once it became clear that it was not possible to support an office in Rome and that it was necessary to accept the support of an already stable national biblical association.⁸ For Cardinal Willebrands this step was necessary for an autonomous development of the Federation. For this the opportunity was offered by the Biblical Association of Germany, whose director, Dr. Franz-Josef Stendebach, OMI, had been elected moderator of the Executive Committee in Vienna. The Federation enjoyed the hospitality of the Biblical Association of Germany for more than two years as can be seen from the address of the Federation's Bulletin from January 1973 to April 1976.

The transfer to Stuttgart and the purchase of the apartment in which the General Secretariat is functioning today was above all the work of Fr. van der Valk, who was supported by Dr. Stendebach. The impulse towards a relative autonomy came from the calm but efficacious activities of Fr. Christian Reusch, SVD, another of the "patriarchs of the Federation." As a member of the EC since Vienna and treasurer of Missio (Aachen), he was elected treasurer of the Federation in April 1973. For more than ten years he was the "successful hand" in numerous biblical projects and during difficult times for the Secretariat. The transfer to Stuttgart as was noted by Professor Knoch showed that plan B was more realistic and had to be given preference for the development of the Federation.

From the beginning of 1974 the editing of *The Biblical Apostolate* was entrusted to Dr. Robert Delaney whom Fr. van der Valk considered to be his assistant and capable co-worker in the various activities of the General Secretariat. Born in Los Angeles, USA, with pastoral experience in Latin America and a doctorate in theology from the University of Münster, he continued as editor of the *Bulletin* until after the Assembly of Bangalore.

5. "Come to Macedonia and help us"

Alluding to a passage in the Acts of the Apostles (16,9), one could say that once it has achieved a certain stability, which until today remains relative, the central office of the Federation perceived more and more the cry for help coming from other continents. Given his missionary experience outside of Europe, Fr. van der Valk was obedient to these voices and immediately initiated the necessary contacts to bring the services of the Federation to the countries of the so-called Third World. This phase of expansion, though without many of the details which are preserved in the archives, has to be included in this short historical review of the beginnings of the Federation.

In Asia the Federation made its presence felt since its very foundation, especially through India, in particular through the National Biblical Catechetical Liturgical Center of Bangalore whose director, Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadass, as well as the Thai Bishop George Phimphisan, belonged to the Executive Committee, elected in Vienna in 1972.

Regarding Africa Fr. van der Valk in 1974 entered into intense correspondence and personal contact with Cardinal Zoungana, archbishop of Ouagadougou, Upper Volta (since 1984 Burkina Faso) who in 1978 succeeded Cardinal König as president of the Federation and with the general secretary of SECAM.⁹ These contacts culminated in creating the "Africa Service" of the Federation with two branches: one for the English-speaking countries, with office in Lusaka (Zambia) under the direction since October 1975 of Fr. Adrian Smith, WF, and the other one for the Francophone countries out of Lomé (Togo), initiated in the beginning of 1977 by Fr. Dieter Skweres, SVD. For South Africa the Missiological Institute LUMKO represented the Federation and Fr. Smangalis Mkhawwa, secretary of the South African Bishops' Conference, was elected to the Executive Committee.

For North America it is a matter of justice to recall in this initial phase the venerable figure of Fr. Stephen Hartdegen, OFM, member and president of the Catholic Biblical Association, and for almost twenty years, director of the U.S. Center for the Catholic Biblical Apostolate under the Episcopal Conference in Washington. Fr. Steve, elected as member of the first Executive Committee, was not only the first who represented the Federation in the United States but also one of those who contributed most to solving the economic problems of the Stuttgart office in difficult times. He died in December 1989, and his name has a place of honor in the gallery of the "patriarchs of the Federation."

As far as Latin America is concerned, two facets have to be distinguished: the Federation as an instrument of ecumenism and the Federation as promoter of the "biblical apostolate" at the service of the pastoral ministry. In the first, the Federation was already present in its beginnings through the section of ecumenism of CELAM¹⁰ whose secretary, the Argentinian

(continued on p.15)

Follow-up to the Bogotá Assembly

In this section we will publish commentaries on the Final Statement and manifestations of the life of the Federation as it presents itself in the aftermath and development of the guidelines at the Bogotá Assembly.

1

A Commentary on the Final Statement of Bogotá

Fr. James Swetnam, S.J., professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and coordinator of the Roman members of the Federation, has provided us with a short commentary on the Bogotá Final Statement. We sincerely thank him for his contribution.

Any document on the pastoral use of Scripture as honest and far-reaching as the Final Statement of the 4th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation is going to have built-in tensions. These tensions are healthy and a source of continued growth provided that they be clearly recognized and not allowed to disappear by being absorbed into either of the extremes from which they arise. Here are some examples which bear consideration.

1) The tension between the original meaning of the text and its relevance for the world in which we live.

It is the work of biblical scholars and exegetes (§ 8.3.3.5) to make the original meaning of the text available so that its relevance for the world in which we live can appear (§ 7.1). This tension is fruitful for scholars in that it reminds them that the religious aspect of the biblical text is what they should highlight, and it is fruitful for us who learn from them in that it reminds us that we cannot bend the message of the Bible to whatever strikes us as desirable but are under the constraints of the original meaning (§ 7.3).

2) The tension between past and future.

As Catholics we read the Bible within the community and historical context in which we live (§ 7.1), mindful of what God has brought to be in the past (§ 5.5), but mindful also that he is calling us to newness in the future (§§ 2.3 and 2.4). The future will be seen in the fullness of its newness only if the past is recognized as worthy of being remembered, for it has its own values in God's plan (§§ 5.5, 7.4.2).

3) The tension between our plans and God's plans.

On our journey into the future we plan as seems fit in the light of what God expects of our Federation (§ 4.3). But we are all the while mindful that God acts for his own purposes, and that our very plans should make us aware of their limitations and of his transcendent power in using them as he sees fit (§ 5, 13).

4) The tension between institution and unstructured creative presence.

Our work as a Federation comes from the Church, which is part institution, part unstructured creative presence (§§ 7.1, 7.5.2). Both aspects are essential if the Church is to remain true to her founder. The Federation implicitly recognizes the need for the institutional aspect of the Church by appealing to the bishops (§§ 8.1.1-3) as well as - indirectly - by calling for the formation of new structures within itself (§ 8.2.2).

But at the same time the Federation recognizes the thrust of Vatican II as being toward an unstructured creative presence of the Church in the world (§§ 6.1, 6.2, 6.4) as the Church moves in history from the emphasis on institution which characterized the Council of Trent to greater realization of the Spirit's role in bringing the Word to the world (§§ 6.1, 6.8, 7.5.2-3).

5) The tension between Word and sacrament.

As heralds of the Bible within the Catholic tradition, we are conscious of the fact that living the Scriptures involves not merely proclamation of the Word as Word (§ 8.3.4.3) but a sacramental dimension culminating in the Eucharist as well (§ 5.5). Both of these aspects are present in the Mass, the center of Catholic life (§ 7.2).

6) The tension between means and ends.

The Bible is a collection of documents full of fascinating views of the ancient world, of the peoples who dwelt in it, of cultures different from our own, of literary techniques, and of exquisite power and sensitivity (cf. §§ 7.4.2-4). But this fascinating presentation should not become an end in itself, should not make us forget that the whole goal of the Bible is to reveal God in his three-ness and one-ness as Father, Son, and Spirit (§§ 7.1-2, 7.5.1) and to help us to reach an active acknowledgement of God's loving sovereignty in our lives.

7) The tension between the relatively limited resources of the Catholic Biblical Federation and the goal which it proposes for itself: helping the whole Church become preoccupied with the New Evangelization (§ 4.1).

The Federation, if it takes this goal seriously, is going to have to work actively in concert with other organizations and movements in the Church in order to share their expertise. What the Federation is calling for is nothing less than a "mapping" of the way Scripture touches Christian life today and the way it should touch it tomorrow.

8) The tension between the call for a Synod of the Bishops on "biblical-pastoral ministry" and the present state of knowledge about how such biblical-pastoral ministry takes place.

By issuing the call (§ 8.1.3) the Federation has implicitly promised to cooperate with the preparations for such a synod. The time for beginning such cooperation is now: the Federation should actively encourage its members to canvass those with experience in the biblical-pastoral ministry to begin amassing a storehouse of suggestions, ideas, experiences for use when the time comes to prepare such a synod.

Rome, October 15, 1990

2

The Pastoral Practice of *Lectio Divina*

A reflection by Cardinal Archbishop Martini: "*Lectio divina* as a Model and Instrument of the Biblical Apostolate" on the occasion of the celebrations of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* arranged by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity - Rome, Gregorian University, December 13, 1990.

The method of the *Lectio Divina* was explained by Cardinal Martini in BDV 10, p. 16-18.

The teaching of "*Dei Verbum*"

I would like to start my reflection with a sentence from the concluding document of the Bishops' Synod in 1985, on the twentieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. In the second part of the document, "The Word of God," we read: In the context of preaching the Gospel, "there emerges the importance of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* which has been too often overlooked, but which Paul VI nevertheless set out again in greater depth and in keeping with the times in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*."

To have a better understanding of why *Dei Verbum* has been "overlooked" in this way for the past twenty, or rather twenty-five years by now, let us begin by recalling some passages from this Constitution.

"Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture" which is "so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, food of the soul, and the pure and perennial source of spiritual life" (DV 21).

"Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (DV 22);

"Therefore, all the clergy, must hold fast to the sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study, especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists, who are legitimately active in the ministry of the Word. (...) This sacred Synod earnestly and specifically urges all the Christian faithful, too, especially religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the 'excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Phil 3:8). 'For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'(...)And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for 'we speak to him when we pray; we hear him when we read the divine sayings'" (DV 25).

"In this way, therefore, through the reading and study of the sacred Books, let 'the Word of Lord run and be glorified' (2 Th 3:1), and let the treasure of revelation entrusted to the Church increasingly fill the hearts of men. Just as the life of the Church grows through persistent participation in the Eucharistic mystery, so we may hope for a new surge of spiritual vitality from intensified veneration for God's Word, which 'stands forever' (Is 40: 8, cf. 1 Pet 1: 23-25) (DV 26).

We can summarize the Council's teaching on this subject as follows:

- all the faithful must have access, and *direct* access, to Scripture;
- they must read it *frequently* and *willingly*;
- they must learn to *pray*, basing their prayer on the direct reading of the Bible;
- they must do this all with the purpose of *knowing Christ Jesus*, because it is not possible to know him outside the

Scriptures, and with the purpose of knowing him *in an outstanding way*.

The words of *Dei Verbum* are therefore very strong and even new when compared with what existed in earlier times. In fact, in the past Catholics read very little of the Bible and were allowed to become familiar with only the Gospels. (Besides, many people were unable to read.)

However, the new cultural climate moved the Council Fathers to call upon all the faithful to become acquainted with the sacred text and to encourage them in the practice of *lectio divina*.

Has the call to *lectio divina* been heard?

Can it be said, twenty-five years after the Council, that this call has been renewed by the Church's teaching? Was it taken up by the Christian community?

The Synod of Bishops in 1985 stated that the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* has been overlooked too often and it seems to me that the call to *lectio divina* has likewise been ignored.

1. Reading over, for instance, the *General Catechetical Directory* for 1971-1972, which is a comprehensive document that takes its inspiration from *Dei Verbum* when speaking of Scripture as the soul of religious instruction, I noticed that it never mentions *lectio* as a suitable means for putting the faithful in touch with the Word. The omission is interesting because the document is the result of many people working together, none of whom addressed this important element in catechesis.

Nor is anything said about *lectio divina* in the *Basic Document for Religious Instruction in Italy* which was published in the 1970s. In the already-mentioned concluding document from the extraordinary Synod in 1985, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is quoted as being a significant restatement of *Dei Verbum*. Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* brings together the results of the Synod of 1974 on the subject of evangelization; we may therefore assume that, if on that occasion many of the Fathers had stressed *lectio*, it would have been placed on record.

In fact, when speaking of ways of evangelizing, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* emphasizes the witness borne by our daily lives, preaching, the liturgy of the Word, catechesis in the sense of systematic religious instruction, mass media, personal contact, the sacraments, and popular devotions as manifesting religious sentiment, yet it does not speak of the means known as *lectio divina*.

In the same way, the document *Catechesi Tradendae*, itself the outcome of a Synod, makes no mention of it, although being aware of the influence of *Dei Verbum*.⁽¹⁾

I would like, however, to recall a document dating from the immediate post-conciliar period which clearly addresses the urgent pleas of *Dei Verbum*. I do this the more readily now that we are in the year in which the fourth centenary of the foundation of the Society of Jesus is being celebrated. I have in mind the 31st General Congregation of the Jesuits which was held in 1965-1966. The Decree on Prayer talks about "the treasure of the Scriptures bestowed by the Spouse on his Church so as to guide and nourish the Christian life" and describes its worth in words that surely take their inspiration from chapter VI of *Dei Verbum*: "a pure and unending source of spiritual life, of prayer and of renewal of the religious life." We are then reminded that "the whole tradition of the Church rightly attests that Holy Scripture becomes our saving word only when heard in prayer and leads to the submission of faith. *Lectio divina*, a practice going back to the earliest days of religious life, requires that the reader surrender to God who is speaking and that he experience compunction of heart under the action of the two-edged sword that is Scripture and which is always summoning us to conversion" (*Decree on Prayer*, n° 6).

The following directive is given at the end of this decree: "Reading and meditating upon Holy Scripture, or *lectio divina*, are to be highly esteemed by all and faithfully implemented. By means of this reading, everyone should strive to acquire profound familiarity with the Word of God, to listen to the calls that God addresses to us and to be inwardly aware of the history of salvation whereby the mystery of Christ is prepared, is accomplished and is carried on in the life of the Church" (*Decree on Prayer* n°14). We have here a clear description of the main

characteristics of *lectio divina*, about which I shall say a word later.

It seems then that in official documents, references to the spiritual use of Scripture are not lacking, even though the guidelines given in chapter VI of *Dei Verbum* are still waiting to be taken into the life of Christian communities. In fact, I think that catechesis, the basic means of Christian education, must of necessity include knowledge of Christ Jesus through the Gospels, and must be read within the framework of Scripture as a whole. *Lectio divina* is an important part of the process of learning the faith and passing it on.

2. Although not often mentioned in the documents, *lectio* and in general direct access by the faithful to the Bible have been greatly developed over the last twenty-five years, but with varying results which perhaps explain the lack of insistence shown in the documents of the Church.

In the words of Enzo Bianchi, in a study on the central position of the Word from the time of the Council to the present day, "To give a precise and complete account" of what has happened in recent years "is not possible without doing a thorough-going research," but "it is possible to perceive how the Dogmatic Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Dei Verbum* have been the most productive of the texts, containing the greatest potential for development and the most widely received of the Council's texts, despite the obstacles and objective difficulties encountered in the way of reform." (2)

This result of the Council is thus a fact. However, we have to consider the varying attempts at direct reading of the Bible by individuals and communities, to which I have already referred. Since I have discussed on previous occasions some of the risks faced in recent years, I shall confine myself to mentioning them briefly.

a) The danger of a *formal use of Scripture* is still present, for instance, in working out pastoral plans. We asked more than one thousand parishes in the Diocese of Milan to work together as a team and map out a pastoral plan covering a wide area, and it is significant to notice the extent to which the Bible came in. It is observable, however, that the plans are sometimes biblical more because of the quotations than the inspiration; that is to say, they are not the result of unconditioned, disinterested hearing of the Word that changes our lives.

b) The second danger is that *lectio may be uprooted from its native soil, namely tradition and the Church*; Scripture is read not simply in terms of a critique of our idols but also of the established order and of everything in general indiscriminately.

This kind of reading has cooled the enthusiasm of many people for *lectio divina* and explains the resistance against the use of such a means.

c) The third danger is that of making the Sacred Text *subservient to already existing ideologies* (political, social or philosophical), using it as a proof or supporting argument.

In all these cases, reading the Bible tends to go beyond the living context in which it was born and transmitted. This is why Fr. Feldkämper spoke of reading in context, i.e., that of tradition and the Church; taken out of that setting *lectio* is no longer *lectio divina*. The concluding document of the Synod in 1985, having said that *Dei Verbum* had been overlooked, went on to warn against a partial reading: "Exegesis of the original meaning of Scripture, highly recommended by the Council, cannot be separated from the Church's living tradition or from the authentic interpretation given by her teaching office."

The lack of confidence in *Dei Verbum* manifested in recent years now becomes more understandable. The fear is that putting Scripture in the middle could give rise to ways of thinking and of pastoral activity not really Church-oriented. Perhaps this is why some communities and groups these days tend to leave the Bible alone. These are probably communities which are already suffering from a kind of laziness or which have chosen other ways of keeping the community together, searching for the authentic expression of Christian life, for instance, in special achievements or in practical commitments, forgetting that all this springs from the force of the Word and that the Word creates community.

In any case, we are in a situation which, as I see it, does not measure up to the expectations of the Council. We are likely to lose the enthusiasm engendered by chapter VI of *Dei Verbum* which in reality is the basis of all pastoral planning. We are forgetting the words of St. John Chrysostom: "To become adult Christians you must learn familiarity with the Scriptures" (cf. *On the Letter to the Ephesians. Discourse on the Education of Children*). This great Father of the Church also said: "Whoever lives without *lectio* is involved in something satanic" (*On Matthew 2:5*). Ambrose echoes the same sentiment: "Read and meditate on the Word of God every day, take Moses, Isaiah, Peter, Paul, John ... as your counselors. Talk to them, meditate with them all day" (*On Psalm 118*). "Reading begets earnestness, earnestness begets familiarity, familiarity begets and increases faith" (*Jerome, Letter 45:2*).

The early Church based all her pastoral activity on Scripture and she, too, tended, as far as the times and culture of the people allowed, towards the personal contact of the faithful with the Word.

What is *lectio divina*?

At this point, however, and before passing on to the crucial question of whether it is possible or not in practice to have a *lectio divina* that can be practiced by a whole people and thus constitute an ordinary means at the disposal of pastoral practice, I would like to stress certain aspects of *lectio* which should not be overlooked, and this with a view of taking stock of the challenge that faces us.

In fact there is often a danger that under the heading of *lectio* we include any reading of the Bible linked with prayer. Not infrequently we also tend to do "biblical theology," dealing with subjects from one of the Testaments, or we look for practical applications based on a passage chosen at random or one occurring in the liturgy. All this is part of *lectio*, but it does not yet define it in its truest sense. Nor is it enough, when defining *lectio*, to talk about a certain methodical process, which, although very useful, allows for distinct phases such as *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, *contemplatio*, etc. It is not simply a question of reading certain biblical passages in accordance with a given method, even if every single episode in *lectio* refers to these characteristics.

According to Fr. Rossi de Gasperis, "*Lectio divina* is the continuous reading of all the Scriptures, in which each book and each section of it is successively read, studied and meditated on, understood and savored by having recourse to the whole of biblical revelation, Old and New Testament. Thanks to this simple adherence to and humble respect for the whole biblical text, *lectio divina* is an exercise in total and unconditional obedience to God who is speaking in which man becomes an attentive hearer of the Word (...). *Lectio divina* does not select

passages suited to themes and subjects already previously chosen with a view to needs or tastes already felt or noticed by the reader or the community engaged in the reading. It does not even adopt the method of 'biblical themes' but prefers to keep away from any theological picking and choosing from the message of the Bible. It starts with the Word of God and follows it step by step from beginning to end. *Lectio divina* presupposes and takes seriously the unity of all the Scriptures."

I quote these words of F. Rossi de Gasperis at some length; they occur in a stimulating study (*Bible and Spiritual Exercises*, Turin, 1982, p. 33). I do so because I consider these words put the problem lucidly and relentlessly, as it were. Is it possible to make this *lectio* a reality at the popular level which can be expressed in terms of the pastoral life of the communities?

I do not have an answer to this question, only some attempts at an answer which I shall outline later on, but I think the challenge must be kept clearly in view, while at the same time placing our trust in the general guidelines that the Church sets before the faithful in the liturgy. The reformed lectionary in fact tends to put the faithful in touch with virtually the whole of Scripture within the three-year cycle for Sundays and the two-year cycle for readings on weekdays. We must take this comprehensive reading set forth by the Church as our point of reference, helping all the faithful to fit the *lectio* set before them into the framework of the whole of Scripture and showing them how to look for and find (even on their own) the references that cast light on each passage. So let us now go back to the concrete question we asked ourselves.

Is the pastoral practice of *lectio divina* possible?

I will try to answer this question, which arises out of the foregoing reflections, with the help of some experiments that have been put into practice.

Is it really possible to have a pastoral practice of *lectio*? Is it possible to base the Church's way of proceeding upon it? How do you put *lectio divina* into practice in a Church setting, even for the benefit of the most unsophisticated of parish communities? Is it possible to make a practical reality of it at the people's level?

I had hardly arrived at Milan as Bishop when I realized that activities arranged with certain groups in mind do not

provide answers to such questions; what was needed was rather a whole diocesan pastoral program.

That program should above all start out from "wonderment," that is to say from those contemplative attitudes which precede the reading of the Sacred Text: reverence, listening, silence, adoration of the divine mystery and placing oneself in front of Scripture as Word of God. Starting from this contemplative aspect, one has to develop a community plan based on the Word as the main point of reference and to promote practical steps to be taken to put *lectio divina* within everyone's reach.

It is an ideal from which we are very far removed. I hope that one day it may be possible to hold a universal Synod at which the question will be asked: How have we applied *Dei Verbum*? How have we experienced it in real life and what practical steps have been taken? For I am convinced that for a Christian today in this complex, difficult and secularized Western society it is practically impossible to persevere in the faith without drawing sustenance, even on one's own, from Scripture. The Bible, as the Catholic Biblical Federation suggests, should enter into a serious program which will inspire the pastoral outlook of individuals and parishes.

For my part, as I said, I would like to pass on some observations based on practical experience which will help to show that there is no ready-made method but that we have to constantly scrutinize the signs of the times to understand the way in which the Spirit is guiding us to bring the faithful closer to Scripture.

1. The School of the Word

This initiative was first taken in our Diocese of Milan in an unpretentious way. Ten years ago some young people asked me to teach them how to pray with the Bible and, after a short instruction from me, felt the need to learn from practical examples. I then suggested the *School of the Word* in the Cathedral, starting in October 1980. From the three hundred present on the first evening, we quickly rose to five hundred, then a thousand, two thousand, three thousand (...). The appointment on the first Thursday of each month became familiar to many young people as the years went by. Now their number is greater than the Cathedral can accommodate, and I remember how seriously they listened in silence to the Word and how reflectively they followed the *lectio*. We began by reciting a psalm to create atmosphere, followed by a few remarks about the method being used, and then the reading of a passage from the Bible. This was followed by the explanation, a meditation which led up to the time for contemplation - fifteen minutes of absolute silence spent in adoration.

For these classes in the Cathedral, over a period of five years, we chose a number of topics: first of all, the prayers to be found in the Bible; the next year, some psalms; at another time it was the psalm *Miserere* (that was the year of the Synod on Reconciliation, 1983); the vocations in the Bible; woman in Scripture.

The secret of the success of this venture lies in the fact that we do not offer the young people a catechism lesson or even a homily but rather the necessary means for them to put themselves face to face with the text so that they can try out *lectio divina* for themselves.

After five years in the Cathedral, with the numbers of those present continuing to grow, we chose twenty five large churches in the diocese and linked them by radio.

I gave the *lectio* on the diocesan radio, and the young people, listening at various places, met to sing, listen, meditate, pray and contemplate.

The results have been encouraging: about thirteen thousand young people followed the school. Later on, when we wanted to extend the coverage, we spread the *School of the Word* to the whole diocese. In addition, this year about seventy meeting places and seventy priests were chosen to whom I myself gave the topic and suggested the method to be followed so that the passage for *lectio* would be the same for all. By gradually getting better at it, we have now reached the time for *actio*, which comes at the end of the classic phases known as *lectio-meditatio-oratio-contemplatio*. This *actio* is a symbolic action which is performed or highlighted by the young people themselves at the end of the monthly meeting to give concrete expression to the activity deriving from the Word.

Besides this, many vocations to the priesthood, religious life and voluntary service have resulted from this simple attempt to put chapter VI of *Dei Verbum* into practice.

2. Evening Biblical Sessions in the Parishes

This is another experiment that is interesting from the point of view of bringing *lectio divina* into the popular sphere.

Spiritual exercises are given for six consecutive evenings, setting out the *lectio* for a passage. During a session in the Cathedral, I once gave a commentary for a week on the multiplication of the loaves (Mt 14); on another occasion on the washing of the feet (Jn 13) and on another on the miracle at Cana (Jn 2).

Hundreds of parishes have repeated the experience of the evening exercises, and the people, even the most unsophisticated of them, acquire a taste for getting to know Scripture and for passing some time in prayer and silence. However, it is important not to take advantage of this time for the exercises to preach an extra sermon or homily.

3. Systematic Lectio Divina on the Radio

After much hesitation and uncertainty, and after listening to so many conflicting opinions, I decided to experiment with giving a course of spiritual exercises on *lectio divina* on the radio to a group of religious communities. The seventeen enclosed religious communities in the diocese agreed to the suggestions. They all began the exercises together, following the same daily timetable, and I gave the *lectio*, either on the radio or over the telephone. I

noticed that interest in the exercises was great and that the nuns were successful in creating a living experience of the exercises thanks to the *lectio* (on the story of the prophet Elias). Besides, I also learned, from hundreds of letters received, that many religious communities in different parts of Italy had been able to listen to and join in the experience of the exercises.

This means that *lectio divina* has an extraordinary appeal which can reach people wishing to know the Lord more profoundly.

4. The Non-believers' Teach-in

The Bible sometimes lets non-believers have their say: "The wicked man said: 'There is no God'" (Ps 53:1). The Books of Wisdom, too, give non-believers a chance to express their beliefs.

So I decided to reach out to those who are seeking and who do not yet have the faith, beginning, as the Bible does, by hearing what these people have to say so that we can listen to each other afterwards.

After a long period of preparation, we planned a few sessions, each consisting of three to four meetings, inviting a non-believer (a philosopher, then a historian, then a psychologist) to speak in answer to the question: What is my unbelief? and letting what the believer has to say in reaction to this challenge be heard. In one session we started with the Book of Job (the meaning, or the meaninglessness, of suffering); in another we took Jesus' words: "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven," to find out whether the faith is a childish attitude or a new childhood regained.

Scripture thus enabled us to achieve a dialogue with non-believers, and I must admit that the meetings of the teach-in had some moments of high emotion and very great interest.

Between Easter and Whitsun this year we were thus able to organize some public meetings in the Cathedral, this time to hear some believers giving our faith's answers to questions from those who do not believe.

One result of the whole experience was a greater desire to search for truth and to let ourselves be stimulated by it.

Conclusion

Is it, or is it not, possible to have a pastoral apostolate that focuses on *lectio divina* and on bringing people closer to the Word?

I have not given a theoretical answer to the question, but I think I have shown that there are practical ways of reaching what the Church has at heart, and what all the organizers of this meeting and the Catholic Biblical Federation have at heart: making the Word of God accessible to all.

In conclusion I quote Holy Father John Paul II from a letter sent in June to Mgr. Ablondi in his capacity as President of the Catholic Biblical Federation: "By giving the Bible to men and women you are giving Christ himself who fills those who hunger and thirst for the Word of God and satisfies those who hunger and thirst for freedom, justice (...). The walls of hatred and selfishness that still divide men and women and make them hostile and indifferent to the needs of their brothers and sisters will fall like the walls of Jericho at the sound of the word of grace and the mercy of God."

The Pope adds, and it is a good thing to repeat it since mention was made earlier to the ecumenical dimension, as well as to the far greater one involving dialogue

between believers of different religions: "The Bible is also a treasure which to a great extent is revered in common with the Jewish people with whom the Church has been united by a special spiritual bond from its beginning. Lastly, this holy Book, to which the Islamic peoples to some extent have recourse, too, can inspire any religious dialogue between people who believe in God and in this way contributes to creating peace of heart for all through a universal prayer acceptable to God."

⁽¹⁾ Cf. in particular Part IV "All the Good News Drawn from the Source," and especially number 27: "Catechesis will always draw its contents from the living source of the Word of God, passed on in Tradition or Scripture" (Dei Verbum, nos. 10-24 is quoted later on). Catechesis "must be imbued and permeated with biblical and evangelical thought, spirit and attitude by means of assiduous contact with the texts themselves" (ibid.).

⁽²⁾ Cf. *The Centrality of the Word of God in Vatican II and the Church*, edited by G. Alberigo and J.P. Jossua, Brescia 1985, pp. 174-175.

Original in Italian

Pope John Paul II's Address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission

On Thursday, April 11, Pope John Paul II addressed the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission who had gathered in Rome for their Plenary Assembly. After a short welcome address, the Pope spoke of the importance of exegesis in the Church.

Continuing the study begun two years ago, you are seeking to show the place of biblical interpretation in the Church. This vital problem has indeed taken on new dimensions and some circumstances give it a timely birth. Several months ago we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the Conciliar Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, in which sacred Scripture naturally occupies a privileged position. Two other important anniversaries are already looming on the horizon: the centenary of the encyclical *Providentissimus*, published by Leo XIII on 18 November 1893, and the 50th anniversary of the encyclical *Divino Affante Spiritu*, published by Pope Pius XII on 30 September 1943.

These two anniversaries draw attention to the question which you are currently studying, that of "the interpretation of the Bible in the Church." I heartily encourage you to make the most of this occasion to arouse renewed interest regarding this essential question and to help men and women of our time to understand it better, in such a way that they can receive greater benefit from the Word of God, in its authentic meaning.

Towards this end, it is obviously necessary that you yourselves take stock of the question, without neglecting any of its principal dimensions. I know that this is your concern, and I congratulate you for it.

Coming after the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and continuing on the same lines, the dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* was very gratifying to Catholic exegetes by officially approving recourse to modern scientific methods for biblical interpretation in the Church. This position was all the more significant in that it placated the heated arguments raised by these methods at the beginning of the council. Exegetes are happy to read and reread the precise declaration of *Dei Verbum*: "This sacred Synod encourages those sons and daughters of the Church who are engaged in biblical studies constantly to renew their efforts, in order to carry on the work they have so happily begun with complete dedication and in accordance with the mind of the Church" (n. 23). It is a pleasure for me to repeat this to you today.

As the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* had already done, the council especially approved the scientific study of the "literary genres" necessary to "look for that meaning which the sacred writer...intended to express" (n.12).

Other methods were developed later for the interpretation of texts in general, such as semiotics, rhetorical or narrative analysis, and that of biblical texts in particular, such as the

canonical approach. It is up to you to examine these methods with great openness of spirit and to evaluate their merits and usefulness. Nothing is to be overlooked that can contribute to shedding light on the manifold wealth of the biblical texts.

Naturally it is fitting that you should be clear about the limitations of the new methods to avoid anything that could be unilateral about certain exegetical "fashions" which, in reacting against one extreme, fall into the opposite extreme and pass, for example, from an abuse of historical analysis, referred to as "diachronic" to an exclusively "synchronic" analysis deprived of all historical dimensions. An exegesis which chooses to be unilateral ceases to deserve the name Catholic because that name expresses an openness to the whole scope of reality.

This observation does not hold only for the use of methods. It is also true for the way to accept the teaching of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*. Authoritative sources have noted in this regard a sort of oneness on the part of certain exegetes: their sole reaction was that of proclaiming, to their great satisfaction, that the council approved the use of scientific methods for the interpretation of sacred Scripture. There they are limiting themselves to a single aspect of the council's declarations, and ignoring another no less important aspect expressed in the same paragraph of *Dei Verbum* (n.12). As soon as it approved - and even demanded - the scientific study of biblical texts, the council declared, in order to complete the perspective, that "the sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with its divine authorship in mind" (ibid.). The Bible has certainly been written in human language, and its interpretation, therefore, requires the methodical use of the science language, but it *is* the Word of God; exegesis would be seriously incomplete if it did not shed light on the theological significance of Scripture.

We must not forget that Christian exegesis is a theological discipline, a deepening of the faith. From this fact, its situation is uncomfortable because it entails an interior tension between two different orientations, that of historical research founded on verifiable facts, and that of a research of the spiritual order, founded on an adherence of faith to the person of Christ. There is a great temptation to eliminate this inner tension by renouncing one or another of the two orientations and to be content with either a subjective exegesis which is wrongly called "spiritual," or a positivistic exegesis which makes the texts sterile.

The People of God need exegetes who, on the one hand, seriously perform their scientific task and who, on the other hand, do not stop half way, but who rather continue their efforts to find the real value of the treasures of light and life contained in the sacred Scriptures, so that pastors and faithful may more easily have access to them and benefit from them more fully.

Your work during these days and that which you will accomplish later will contribute, it is my firm hope, to give Catholic exegetes a better awareness of the greatness of their task and its importance for the Church's life.

priest Dr. Jorge Mejía, was member and moderator of the Executive Committee from 1969 to 1972. In Brazil two figures stand out, that of Msgr. Heladio Correia Laurini and of Fr. Joaquim Salvador, SDB. The second phase began in 1974 with the joint initiatives of Fr. van der Valk and of Adveniat. The privilege of initiating this phase fell on the Colombian Vincentian priest Fr. Dr. Florencio Galindo.¹¹ In 1973 he was charged by Adveniat to visit all countries of the continent and to prepare a report on the situation of the biblical-pastoral ministry in the region. The result of this journey was the establishment of a Catechetical Biblical Centre (CECAB) in Bogotá in September 1974 under the responsibility of the province of the Vincentians in Colombia and financed by Adveniat.

In August 1975 Fr. John van der Valk after previous agreements with Adveniat was responsible that in this phase the said religious province became the first Associate Member of the Federation in Latin America and that CECAB became the "Latin American Service" of the Federation with seat in Bogotá under the direction of Fr. Galindo. His immediate task was to maintain contact with the biblical associations and groups which he had visited and to promote with them the mutual collaboration at the continental level according to the spirit of the Federation. In the same year the general secretary of CELAM, Msgr. Alfonso López Trujillo, recognized this "service" as an instrument of the pastoral ministry and placed it under the patronage of the Department of Catechesis without, however, integrating it into the structures of CELAM. Due to the personal influence of the president of this department, the Chilean Bishop Francisco de B. Valenzuela, the Federation has increased its possibilities for growth in the following years.

No doubt the fact that the "Latin American Service" was not a part of CELAM's structure permitted its autonomous development; at the same time it proved to be an obstacle for its acceptance on the part of the bishops since the majority of them did not know the Federation at all. This obstacle was overcome when in the final document of the Third Plenary Conference of the Episcopate (Puebla Mexico, 1979) the Federation was explicitly mentioned by name (cf. DP No. 1001). Henceforth, at least by name, it had to be known by the bishops; this proved to be of great help in the future to the regional coordinator.

Since 1972, Fr. César Herrera, CSSR, accepted the responsibility of coordinator for Latin America, consolidating and expanding this service until 1990 when the Fourth Plenary Assembly was held in Bogotá.

6. Malta

The development of the Federation as described in the report of the general secretary in 1977¹² shows a considerable increase in members and a growing experience of collaboration at the international level. However, according to Cardinal Willebrands, more important than the numerical increase was the qualitative advance consisting of the fact that the Federation itself was fully conscious of its identity and that from outside its proper

function in the universal Church was recognized: "The development of the Catholic Biblical Federation constitutes a new and important step in the history of evangelization and in the common witness given by the Church."¹³

The Second Plenary Assembly held in Malta from April 11-19, 1978 marked the conclusion of the period of the Federation's "infancy." Its activities no longer concentrated on exploring the ground for planting and constructing, but rather on the fact that its members, active in many local churches, worked directly in promoting the biblical message within the process of evangelization and in integrating fully the Word of God in the entire life of the Christian community. Common projects with the Bible Societies in translating and distributing the Bible were already quite numerous. Such common efforts Paul VI said "are a living testimony for the non-Christian world that the Sacred Scriptures are the common source of our Christian faith."¹⁴

At the inauguration of the Assembly, Cardinal König expressed the nature of the biblical apostolate and consequently the identity of the Federation in these words: "It is not so much a matter of interpreting the Bible as to interpret life in the light of the Bible,"¹⁵ which corresponds well to the demand of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 20 "What really counts is to evangelize culture and the cultures of man." Malta drew together 76 delegates from 44 countries, representing 40 Bishops' Conferences and 125 Catholic Biblical Associations. This Plenary Assembly coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the Bible Society of Malta which was one of the founding members of the Federation. Its homage to the Assembly was a modern edition of 25,000 copies of the New Testament in Maltese translated in Malta and illustrated with Maltese art.¹⁶

After Malta the Federation was to enjoy a new experience which would grow stronger and stronger: that the success of an Assembly responds to the degree of previous preparation, to an adequate program, and to a good moderation while it is in session. The general secretary and the Executive Committee were very much aware of these prerequisites and acted accordingly. Two internationally recognized exegetes were entrusted with giving the participants a theological-biblical impulse, Professors Prosper Grech and Hans M. Wijngaards as well as Fr. D.S. Armalorpavadass with his introduction of the theme "The Bible and Catechesis." The latter, furthermore, was elected by acclamation to be the moderator of the Assembly. An exhibit of an abundance of materials at the service of the biblical-pastoral ministry showed the richness of activities which the members of the Federation realize in all continents. Evaluation of the past, done according to groups, was followed by a formulation of the policies and strategies for the next six years. The statutes were revised and the foundation was laid for strengthening the regional structures and for facilitating collaboration beyond all cultural and linguistic barriers among the members and with the Bible Societies. Their reflection and a summary of all this is the Final Statement of Malta.¹⁷

Summing up the journey between Vienna and Malta one has to state, above all, a change in the profile of the Federation: in Vienna 80% of the participants came from Europe; in Malta only 20%. The first president was Cardinal König; the new one

Cardinal Paul Zoungana, closely linked with the process of inculturation of the Gospel in Africa. But the more decisive change can be seen in the purpose assigned to the Bible: "From the apostolate of the Bible we have moved to the the apostolate with the Bible" (Cardinal Zoungana).¹⁸ To accompany the Federation on its journey mapped out in Malta, the Executive Committee entrusted the task of general secretary to Fr. Arnold Jurgens, likewise Dutch and a member of the Missionary Society of Mill Hill with eighteen years of missionary experience in Uganda and Kenya.

7. From Malta to Bangalore

In 1979 after ten years of existence, the Federation with its objectives was accepted as a "living reality," as "something that belongs to the essence of authentic evangelization." Being mentioned as an exceptional case in the document of Puebla, must be understood as a special sign of recognition and of encouragement coming from the entire episcopate and given to the whole Federation.¹⁹

The years after Malta were characterized by common efforts in realizing the objectives signaled by this Assembly and which can be summed up in the following six points:²⁰

- Liturgical celebrations based on the Word and animated by a more effective proclamation of the Good News.
- Formation of candidates to the priesthood as an experience centered in Sacred Scripture including practical training in the biblical apostolate. Modern exegesis has to result in an enrichment of spirituality and in an answer to pastoral needs.
- Formation of lay ministers which transmits to them a universal biblical vision and a sensitiveness for discovering the active presence of God in history so that these lay co-workers can be guides of their groups and communities in prayer, biblical catechesis and action.
- International collaboration with all those who recognize Sacred Scripture as common heritage.
- Dialogue with other religions and development of initiatives in order to reach the unchurched and non-believers.
- Commitment for justice and human rights and the creative use of the arts and media of communication especially for illiterates.

Thus insisting on the co-responsibility of all our members and recognizing, according to the spirit of the Council, the priority of the local Church, the Federation represents a common effort for placing the results of biblical scholarship, existing materials, and the pastoral experience of many at the disposal of the entire Church and for the benefit of an integral evangelization in which neither the fidelity to the message nor the fidelity to the human being suffers any neglect.

From this prospective the bulletin which after Malta was called *Word Event* in order to underline the intrinsic efficacy of the Word of God gave priority to information on a variety of pastoral projects carried out by the members of the Federation in all continents. An expression of its growing "universality" was the annual meetings of the Executive Committee which in those years were held in Heliópolis (Cairo), Mexico, Stuttgart, Maredsous (Belgium) and Rome. The latter ended with a private audience with the Pope who affirmed: "Your work and dedication have already proved very fruitful and useful for the Church.... This service certainly fits into the frame of the great mission of the entire Church: to proclaim and to make relevant the Word of God. May the Federation continue to contribute that the Word of God may be spread and loved."²¹

In 1982 the systematic preparation for the next Plenary Assembly was initiated which was to be held two years later in Bangalore, India. In this year Cardinal Zoungana announced the chosen theme "Would that all were prophets" (Nos. 11, 29). The theme underlined the intention that both content and method of the Assembly would concentrate on how to respond to the needs of the local Churches in preparing their members to fulfill the prophetic ministry to which they are called and which includes proclamation, catechesis, testimony and liturgy.

A few months before the Assembly the new general secretary for this period was chosen. The choice fell on Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, SVD, born in Germany 1937, holding a doctorate in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome (1977). In the Philippines where he founded the John Paul I Biblical Center, he looked back at ten years of experience in the biblical-pastoral ministry especially in the formation of the clergy and lay ministers at the level of basic groups. His personal contact with the Federation dated back to the Assembly of Malta in which he had participated as a delegate. When he accepted the responsibility at the Plenary Assembly of Bangalore, he referred to himself as co-worker of the Executive Committee and of all the members of the Federation. He promised in the years to come to put at the service of the common cause of the Federation his own experience which, quoting one of the moderators of the Assembly, would consist above all in a "widening of horizons."²² Through the most active support of the new president of the Federation, the dynamic Bishop of Livorno, Msgr. Alberto Ablondi, this widening of horizons would become more and more a reality. The report on the activities of the general secretary, given by Fr. Feldkämper at the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá in 1990, is a proof of this and can serve as the foundation for writing the following chapter in the life of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

Florencio Galindo, CM

The references can be found in the Bogotá Book (to be published).

Original in Spanish

Translation and Distribution of the Bible - Projects Underway

BRAZIL, Sao Gabriel de Cachoeira: The Gospels in Tucana

The Tucana language is spoken by 2,600 Indians living in the region of the Amazon River in Brazil and by 2,000 others in Colombia. It serves also as a common tongue for many other Indian groups. Mr. Valerio Lopes, under the guidance of Father Gabriel Selong, svd, is reworking texts which have been circulating in the small communities for the past two years.

This project will be financed by the Funding Agency, Katholische Jungschar of Austria.

CAMEROON, Mokolo: The Gospels in Mafa

The Mafa language is spoken by approximately 200,000 people. The majority live around Mokolo in the Mandara mountains and on the plain of Koza in the diocese of Marona. Extensive work with the language has produced a system of writing which in turn has made possible the publication of the first edition of the Gospels. The Gospel texts will also help spread the new writing system.

The Mafa people of the mountains have no resources other than from a little cattle breeding and peanut growing. Some cotton growth provides the plains with slightly more resources.

The project will be supported by Missio-Munich.

CAMEROON, Ngaoundéré: Translation of the New Testament in Péré

Fr. Cosmas Dietrich is a "Fidei Donum" priest who has worked since 1964 in the Ngaoundere diocese. Together with his Péré catechists he would like to translate the New Testament into this language spoken by 25,000 people in the Northeast part of the country. A typewriter with special symbols is necessary to express this tonal language.

The team hopes to finish the translation by 1995. To promote the task of translation, the Catholic Biblical Association (Katholisches Bibelwerk) of Stuttgart will pay the translators for five years.

ETHIOPIA, Asmara: Publication of the New Testament in Cunam

In the beginning of the 1980s Father Egidio Kiar began the translation of biblical liturgical texts for his catechists. Soon he was asked to translate the New Testament for prayer groups. A team was placed under his direction. The difficulty to overcome was that this language, spoken by 60,000 people, has no words to express abstract ideas. It was thus necessary to invent new words to express theological and spiritual ideas. That made a small dictionary at the end of the volume necessary.

This project is being supported by several Funding Agencies: the Swiss Lenten Fund, Missio - Aachen, Aid to the Church-in-Need, and the Katholische Jungschar of Austria.

INDIA, Patna: Publication of the New Testament in Ho

Ho is spoken by 850,000 people in the southern part of Bihar and also in the state of Orissa. The Ho belong to a lower class in the Indian caste system. Father John Deeney, sj, who has worked with this tribe for 35 years has just finished the translation of the New Testament.

The Catholic Biblical Association (Katholisches Bibelwerk) of Germany and the Funding Agency, Missio -Aachen, are sponsoring the project.

PHILIPPINES, Manila: Publication of the Bible in Tagalog

In November 1990, the Christian Community Bible was published. Initially published in 1988 in English, this Bible met with such great success that early this year the 7th edition was published. The edition's success prompted Claretian Publications, in agreement with area bishops, to translate this Bible into the country's principal languages. The Tagalog version was printed in November 1990, thanks to the financial assistance of Missio-Munich, Missio-Aachen and Katholische Jungschar of Austria. In March 1991, the fourth edition was on the market.

Tagalog is the national language of the country and is the mother tongue of more than 15 million people.

Claretian Publications has just completed the translation of the same Bible into Visayan, a language spoken in the region of Cebu by over 12 million people.

VIETNAM, Thành-Phô Hồ Chí Minh: Publication of the New Testament in Vietnamese

Father An-So'n Vi, a monk in a Vietnamese monastery, translated the New Testament from the Greek original. He began his work in the 1950s and finalized it in 1972. He then had to wait until 1986 before the first edition of 3,600 copies could be printed.

With the government's permission a new edition of 10,000 copies is now being printed. Missio-Aachen is sponsoring this project.

ZAIRE, Bukavu: Publication of the Bible in Mashi

Work on the systematic translation of the Bible into Mashi began in 1958. In 1962 the first edition of the New Testament, Endagano Mpyahya, appeared and the second in 1975. These two editions have been sold out for several years. Now the entire Old Testament has been translated, but due to the length of the endeavor a complete revision of the texts will be necessary. There are over 1.5 million inhabitants in the archdiocese of Bukavu, almost exclusively of the Shi tribe.

The complete edition of the Bible in Mashi, *Biblia Ntagatifu*, is forecasted for this year, 1991, the year of the diocesan Synod and the celebration of three great anniversaries in the life of the Church of Bukavu: The founding of the Apostolic Vicariat of Kivu and the episcopal ordination of the first bishop (1929-30); the sacerdotal ordination of the first local priest (1941); and the episcopal ordination of the first native bishop (1966).

Propaganda Fide, the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, will partially take charge of the project, which is primarily entrusted to *Verbum Bible in Kinshasa*.

ZAIRE, Kinshasa: Republication of the New Testament in Lingala

Lingala is one of the four official languages of Zaire. Initially Lingala was the "lingua franca" language of the river tribes of the upstream area - in essence, the language of all those who have had contact with people who speak other languages: military personnel, business people, missionaries. Consequently, it spread along navigable waterways and roads to Zaire and the Congo. In Kinshasa, Lingala became the mother tongue of the younger generation. Since the country's independence in 1960, Kinshasa's population has grown from 300,000 to four million, representing all areas of the country. Today Lingala is the common language in 14 dioceses in Zaire.

The complete New Testament in Lingala was first published in 1972. By 1977 there were ten editions. Using earlier text revisions, the publishing house, *Verbum Bible of the Divine Word Missionaries at Kinshasa*, in collaboration with the *Scheut Missionaries*, published the New Testament in Lingala with the Psalms in 1983. Half of the 50,000 copies sold in fewer than two months. A new edition was published by *Verbum Bible in 1986*. Another revised edition of the New Testament with commentary was published in 1987, this time without the Psalms. The 40,000 copies sold in fewer than three years. A new edition due out this year will be sponsored partially by the Funding Agency, Aid to the Church-in-Need.



NEWS AND INFORMATION



GHANA: The Biblical Apostolate in the Kumasi Diocese

The biblical apostolate started in the diocese of Kumasi in 1973. Originally it was meant to update Catholic teachers of second cycle schools since there was too much biblical fundamentalism among the students. As time went on, the scope widened to include selected groups from parishes. Today there are two groups of biblical apostolate programs, one on the diocesan level and one on the local level.

Every month interested Christians committed to the study of the Bible and recommended by their pastor meet for two full

days. This two-year formators' program is funded by the diocese.

Participants help organize the apostolate's schedule, interest parishioners in reading the Bible, train lectors for liturgical assemblies and form Bible study groups.

Every year the diocese organizes a Bible Sunday. This year it took place on February 10th and its theme was "The Bible, the Church, and the Nation."

Further information: Catholic Diocese of Kumasi, Ghana

GHANA: 1991 Laity Week Theme

The National Catholic Council for the Laity chose as the theme for its twelfth annual Laity Week meeting, "The biblical apostolate for justice and peace in the world": "From what we have learned about the biblical apostolate, we now know that we have to LIVE the Gospel, i.e., READ it, STUDY it, PRAY it and SHARE it -which means SHARING CHRIST with others."

HONG KONG: Second Chinese Workshop for the Biblical Apostolate

From April 22-28, 1990, the Second Chinese Workshop for the Biblical Apostolate took place in Hong Kong, consisting of representatives of various Chinese-speaking Catholic communities from around the world. Over thirty people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and the United States participated in the planning for the Plenary Assembly of the Federation in Bogotá. Unfortunately, mainland China could not be represented. Here are the resolutions adopted by the meeting's participants:

- Establishment of the United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association,
- Formation of a Biblical Servicing Centre,
- Promotion of mutual sharing among biblical ministers
- Application of Gospel values for social concern,
- Formulation of plans for the service of overseas communities and the Church of mainland China,
- Intensive promotion of Basic Bible Seminar,
- Collaboration with the diocese in the formation of small faith communities, promoting and reinforcing biblical study,
- Promotion of Bible enthronement and Bible reading in families.

Further information: Father Dominic Chan, Catholic Diocese Center, 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong.

PHILIPPINES: A Course at the East Asian Pastoral Institute

The East Asian Pastoral Institute is organizing a six-week course entitled "The Pastoral Worker and the Bible" to take place in November and December of this year. This course is designed for pastoral workers in parishes, in campus ministry, in formation work (including lay formation work), etc. It attempts to prepare them to effectively bring the Bible to the people among whom they work. The core course focuses on

"The joy of discovery in Bible study." Participants can choose, depending on their particular ministry, need and interest, from among three areas for further training: "Practical teaching of the Bible," "Using the Bible in small Christian communities," and "Preaching from the Scriptures." The course will be conducted in English.

Further information: East Asian Pastoral Institute, P.O. Box 221, U.P. Campus, Quezon City, 1101 Philippines.

PHILIPPINES - Sixth Regional Biblical Meeting in Mindanao

From October 16-19, 1990, biblical animators of Mindanao held their regional meeting with the theme "A Biblical Education for all." The following subjects were addressed: "The Bible in the formation of the laity, youth and adults," "The Bible in the formation of priests, religious and seminarians," "The Bible in the formation of Basic Ecclesial Communities," "The Bible in the catechetical ministry."

Further information: Paul VI Biblical Center, Monte Maria Village, Catalunan Grande, 8000 Davao City, Philippines.

PHILIPPINES - Sixth National Meeting for the Biblical Apostolate

The sixth annual meeting of those responsible for the biblical apostolate in the Philippines took place in Bulacan from March 5-8, 1991. Their reflections centered around the question of inculturation. In their common declaration in the Final Statement the participants recommended with great emphasis that at all levels of the biblical-pastoral ministry one should be aware of the necessity of being open to inculturation so as "to proclaim the Good News in such a manner so that it could be incarnated in the varied cultures and sub-cultures that pervade our country," This is in keeping with the recommendation of the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá.

Further information: ECBA Office, Gen. Luna Sr., Intramuros, Manila, Philippines.

ZAIRE: A Great Need For Education

Zaire and its French-speaking neighbors together have 50 million inhabitants. Approximately 55% of them are Catholic. A considerable number of those Christians take correspondence courses through study centers and use of cassettes. The courses are designed by numerous sects spreading into the area and are supported by centers in the United States, Switzerland, France, Germany and South Africa.

Over the last few years several editions of the Bible have been distributed in French, English and in many of the languages of Zaire and Central Africa. The distributors are well aware that there is as of yet no means developed to teach Catholics to read and interpret the Bible in accordance with Church tradition. This represents a veritable gap, exploited by recently emerging religious movements (or sects), often of North American origin, which breed confusion among Catholics in the region.

A great need exists for biblical and doctrinal education of Catholic Christians living in that context.

Further information: Centre pour l'Apostolate Biblique, B.P. 246, Bandundu, Zaire

DOCUMENTS RECEIVED

Boîte à Outils pour l'animation biblique (A Tool Box for Biblical Animation)

The third edition, revised and supplemented with methodological handouts for the animation of Bible study groups, is a virtual "tool box" of 134 pages being published jointly by the Francophone Catholic Center for Ongoing Formation in Lausanne and by the Protestant center, Gospel and Culture.

The main chapters include: The leaders in biblical animation and their role, Reading and interpreting a biblical text, Narrative reading, Rhetorical reading, Semiotic reading, and Suggestions for active approaches: projection and appropriation. This document was written in French and has been translated into Italian.

Further information: Centre Catholique Romand de Formation Permente, Boulevard de Grancy 29, 1006 Lausanne, Switzerland.

Cahiers Évangile, no. 74, "Parole de Dieu et exégèse" (The Word of God and Exegesis)

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum* the Catholic Biblical Association Évangile et Vie of France published a copy of *Cahiers Évangile* which gives in its first part an overview of modern exegesis beginning with the great names who influenced this period from the Catholic as well as the Protestant perspectives. The second part is a reflection concerning new questions resulting from the Constitution *Dei Verbum*.

Further information: Évangile et Vie, 6 avenue Vavin, 75006 Paris, France

Celebrate Lent. The Biblical Way.

The February 1991 issue of the review *Update*, published by the Catechetical Center of Karachi, proposes a celebration of Lent in a biblical way. A different theme is developed every week: Read the Bible; Pray the Bible; Live the Bible; Share the Bible; Proclaim the Bible.

Further information: Catechetical Center Karachi, P.O. Box 7172, Karachi - 74400, Pakistan.

Écoutez et Annoncez (Listen and Announce)

This publication of the Centre Biblique de Lomé, Togo, attempts to assist those who prepare Sunday sermons. It gives special consideration to the many catechists in West Africa responsible for conducting Sunday services without a priest.

Further information: Centre Biblique de Lomé, B.P. 2698, Lomé, Togo.

***Scripture for Sunday Liturgy* by Father Peter Edmonds, sj**

This sixteen-page brochure offers a presentation of the biblical readings of the Sunday liturgy. Fr. Edmonds offers on one page for each Sunday short commentaries on the readings from the Old Testament passage, the Psalm, the Epistle and the Gospel. Brief suggestions drawing the reader's attention to the possible implications of these texts for today are often provided.

Further information: Fr. Peter Edmonds, sj, Pastoral Center, P.O. Box 8135, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Ta Parole, ma Lumière (Your Word, My Light)

This publication of the Centre pour l'Apostolat Biblique (CAB) in Bandundu, Zaire, was first printed in 1971. Since then a series of 50 issues has been printed which contains a wealth of useful information for the biblical apostolate. Its objective is twofold: 1) Choosing the essential elements of a biblical message, an overview of the story of salvation in a series of 50 booklets (30 for the Old Testament and 20 for the New Testament) for pastoral agents and catechists, and 2) Presenting this material in a way which would allow its use in Sunday services in the absence of a priest. The journals are translated from French into Lingala, Kikongo and Tshiluba.

Further information: C.A.B., B.P. 246, Bandundu/Ville, Zaire.

***The Way to Happiness, A Scriptural Catechism* by Bro. Merry Alphonse**

In traditional question-and-answer form this 94-page booklet, written in plain English by a Canadian De La Salle Brother, offers a short catechism in thirty biblical lessons. Many of the answers are drawn from the Scriptures.

Further information: De La Salle Brothers, De La Salle Center, P.O. Box 601, Ondo, Nigeria.

Conclusion of the speech at the Colloquium on the Bible in the Church, of the Swiss Bible Society, June 6, 1990, on the theme "What use of the Bible does the Catholic Church want for all of its members?"

by Mgr. Pierre Duprey, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity

"It is clear that the Catholic Church wants the majority of its members to enjoy direct and constant contact with the Holy Scriptures. It is a prerequisite for the soundness of their faith, a faith nourished by the light of the Holy Scriptures. The Church strives to help her members understand the meaning of the Scriptures, actualizing a tradition which is an expression of twenty centuries of thought and prayer. It is her hope that the Gospel will increasingly become the foundation, the source and the soul of theology and all pastoral activity, and that it will remain so for the religious life of each and every member. The Catholic Church also believes that the study, translation and distribution of the Holy Scriptures, done in prayerful collaboration with our Christian brothers, opens a bright path to unity which we seek and which God wants for his children. She thinks that this familiarity, renewed always through the Word of God, is the best condition for the conversion of the heart, and for an authentic renewal of the Church community without which there is no real ecumenical progress. Finally, she thinks that the presentation of the Scriptures to non-Christians is a means for them to meet Jesus Christ, as it were 'by the fringe of his robe,' (Mk 6: 56) and to introduce them to the dialogue with God which is the prerequisite for salvation."