

# Catholic Biblical Federation

**No. 27**

**2 / 1993**

**Bulletin**

*Dei  
Verbum*

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***Lectio Divina: Indispensable  
for Pastoral Ministry***

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**Bible and Catechesis: In  
Light of the New Catechism  
of the Catholic Church**

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**Follow-up to the Bogotá  
Assembly: The Laity and the  
Biblical Ministry in Asia**

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**Life of the Federation**

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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 these 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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**CONTENTS**

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\* **Lectio Divina**  
**Indispensable for Pastoral Ministry**

- **Episcopal Ministry and Bible Reading** by Cardinal Martini 4
- **The Episcopal Ministry and an Approach to Holy Scripture** by Cardinal Ratzinger 6

\* **Bible and Catechesis: In Light of the New Catechism of the Catholic Church** by Fr. Cesare Bissoli 8

\* **Follow-up to the Bogotá Assembly: The Laity and the Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Asia** 9

\* **Life of the Federation**

- Americas**
- **Subregion Latin America** 15
- **Subregion North America** 15
- Asia / Oceania**
- **Subregion Oceania** 16
- Europe / Middle East**
- **Subregion Latin Europe** 17
- **Subregion Middle East** 18

**1993**

One hundred years ago, Pope Leo XIII published the first pontifical document consecrated to the Bible, *Providentissimus Deus*.

Fifty years ago, Pope Pius XII gave new impulse to Catholic exegesis by the encyclical letter, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

**Editorial**

Two personalities of the Catholic hierarchy, Cardinal Martini and Cardinal Ratzinger, each in their own perspective, call our attention to the importance of the Bible and more specifically to the *lectio divina*. They address all those who have a responsibility in the pastoral work, beginning with the bishops. It is not unusual that Cardinal Martini, archbishop of Milan, calls our attention to this for after more than fifteen years of teaching in the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, he has become quite popular for the manner in which he tries to make the Bible accessible to the faithful in his archdiocese, particularly to the young people. (page 4-6) On the other hand, Cardinal Ratzinger's calling to make the Bible essential to the episcopal ministry and his invitation to his brother bishops to a daily *lectio divina* are quite surprising. (page 6,7)

What function does the Bible play in the new Catechism of the Catholic Church? First of all, there is reason for joy that the Bible has in fact influenced the whole concept and composition of this work, giving it a different character from that of former catechisms; however, there are some aspects to question. The Bible has not yet succeeded in having the place it should have. Nevertheless, from this catechism one can expect good impulses for the biblical apostolate. (page 8, 13-14)

The biblical pastoral ministry is a living reality in many Catholic communities of Asia, and lay people have gained a more active role in these ministries. This is obvious from the responses received from Asia to the questionnaire the General Secretariat sent regarding "Bible and Laity". (page 9-12)

Also in the Old Europe, the biblical apostolate is gaining a firm footing. In these countries the scientific exegesis has made remarkable development, but on the other hand, the spiritual reading of the Bible has been left behind and sometimes viewed as the "poor relative".

The Middle East subregion faces multiple difficulties besides those caused by the political situation during the past several years. Nevertheless, the subregion is in the middle of an organizational process that holds rich promises for the near future.

To conclude this overview, the America region, which includes North America and Latin America/Caribbean subregions also has something to offer our readers. The biblical apostolate makes progress in all the continents.

Marc SEVIN

## *Lectio Divina* Indispensable for Pastoral Ministry

After several articles on the theme, *lectio divina*, we would like to offer two more. Here, *lectio divina* is presented as an indispensable element for everyone who has a responsibility in the mission of the Church from the level of the bishop to the lay catechist working in a remote area. These two articles are especially significant for two reasons: first of all because the personalities who wrote them are Cardinal Carlo M. Martini, archbishop of Milan (since Dec. 1979), and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith; second, because the affirmation of each author coincides in spite of the different perspectives from which each author writes. Both of them were well-known university professors before they were appointed bishop. Cardinal Martini was rector at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and Cardinal Ratzinger was a professor at several German universities.

Cardinal Martini has already gained a reputation for his articles and books on *lectio divina* and even more so for his pastoral practice in the archdiocese in Milan. There, he uses a personal and communitarian approach to Holy Scripture as an instrument to awaken enthusiasm for the Church and recoup thousands of people, especially youth, who have seemingly lost all interest in Church life. Cardinal Ratzinger does not have quite the same reputation as his colleague regarding the practice of *lectio divina*, but his experiences gained from his theological formation and high level of responsibility in the whole Church have led him to the same convictions as those of Cardinal Martini: *lectio divina* is essential to the task of every bishop as well as everyone who has a leading responsibility in the pastoral work of the Church.

Cardinal Martini's article, "The Episcopal Ministry and Bible Reading" is a reproduction of a conference given by him on May 17, 1984 in Beuron, Germany to the "Foundation Vetus Latina" and was published in "Erbe und Auftrag" (60/5 October 1984). He explains how he understands his episcopal ministry in a city like Milan, the preoccupations implied by his ministry, and the elements that bring harmony to his numerous activities. He then goes on to explain why the spiritual reading of the Bible is

*the only means that enables him to maintain focus on that which is truly important and not to lose bearing among so many tasks.*

The second article is a summary of Cardinal Ratzinger's address to the Council of European Episcopal Conferences during the meetings held September 14-18, 1992 and was published in "The Catholic World Report" on November, 1992 under the title "Thorn in the Flesh, The Essence of the Bishop's Task: to be a Man of faith". In this address, he explains how he understands the task of a bishop in the actual European context, and how the daily spiritual reading of Holy Scripture and not only its study is the most important means the bishop has to look for orientation. We are pleased to offer the readers of *Bulletin Dei Verbum* the reflections of these two personalities because they will help us comprehend that the promotion of the biblical apostolate, for which the Federation was founded, is inseparable from the actual mission of the Church in Europe as well as in other countries. With permission from the named magazines, we summarize first of all what each author says about the ministry of the bishop (1a and 2a) and then literally translate what each author says about *lectio divina* in regard to the episcopal ministry (1b and 2b).

### 1. Episcopal Ministry and Bible Reading (by Cardinal Martini)

#### a. The Episcopal Ministry

Cardinal Martini includes here under the concept of bishop every person who has a responsibility in the pastoral work of the Church. He begins by pointing out the difference between the world in which he lived as a professor in the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and the world in which he lives today as a bishop. The first one, dedicated to research and teaching, was limitless, cosmopolitan, international, ecumenical, and in contact with the Jewish, the Protestant, and the Orthodox worlds and the oriental cultures. In the second, his immediate contact is not with books in a library, but with persons and communities, with a people. This world has limited territory and its own history, customs, traditions, and ecclesiastical structure. Milan is the largest diocese in the world. The number of the faithful in Milan is not as large as for example in Rio de Janeiro or San Paulo but it has over a thousand parishes, over 3 thousand priests, and over 11 thousand nuns compared to Cologne, the largest diocese in Germany, with only 800 parishes, and Chicago, the largest diocese in the United States, with only 300.

In his new world, Cardinal Martini's first concern is to know each of the people not only in a physical sense but in a sense of understanding in order to offer them as a bishop new impulses for life. To make pastoral visitations more effective, he is required to live for several days among a people of a selected sector, visiting the schools, factories etc. and set aside time to reflect upon experiences gained. For Cardinal Martini, his ministry focuses mainly on three key sectors: clergy, socially marginalized, and "bearers of new ferments" found in existing institutions or sought in other environments. Each of these sectors requires the attention of the bishop and presents its own problems.

Cardinal Martini's second concern regards his role as bishop in a city like Milan, the seat of the bishop. This relationship implies similarity to that of a married couple, a common life with all its trying experiences. Apart from the traditional tensions Milan has with Rome and the unique role Milan plays in regards to northern Europe, this city has experienced, during the last few years, a strong immigration that has caused many new problems like lack of housing and schools, unemployment, and inadequate social facilities and public security. The diverse dialects, local traditions, and cultures cause other problems. The bishop, through his mission, is touched by all these problems and starts to feel as though he is spreading himself too thin. He often needs to ask himself what exactly his role is concerning all of these issues.

Cardinal Martini understands his role in this way. In contrast with his function as a professor, who stresses his own subjectivity in order to give originality to his research and teaching, as bishop, he must renounce his subjectivity in order to listen, reason, seek, and handle with great modesty and always in cooperation with his priests. The basis for this is not necessarily his own initiative but his effort to gain and express that which is true and authentic. His function is to be an interpreter of the *Kairos*, that means, to interpret the present-day situation of his people from the perspective of God and according to the message of Christ. In this task, which gives harmony to all his activities, the bishop experiences daily, the presence of evil, negation of God, suffering, desperation, and multiple human tragedies; nevertheless, he must keep sight of the Holy Spirit that lives in the faithful, guides the faithful to truth and sanctity, and keeps them safe from evil and untruthfulness. Cardinal Martini asks himself "What is it that enables the bishop and every pastor to remain in this 'contemplative' attitude, and not lose himself in so many problems, always keeping in mind the core issues?"

### b. *Lectio Divina*

*Lectio divina*, the spiritual reading of Scripture, is important for the life of every Christian particularly for those, who through their charge, are required to make difficult decisions. What does the Latin expression *lectio divina*, which was known already by the early Fathers of the Church, really mean? *Lectio divina* is not the same

as "Bible reading" nor is it the same as Bible study or exegesis. The study of the Bible and exegesis are very important and render a good service to this spiritual activity, but what is meant here is an approach to the Bible which is necessary for daily life in order to make the right choice in difficult decision making. Such an approach is to be performed through a three-element process according to the old Latin tradition - *lectio, meditatio, contemplatio*. Latin terminology is intentionally used here not only to come closer to a famous man, Ambrosius, former archbishop of Milan, but also to recall the many treasures that exist in the Latin patristic tradition.

The word *lectio* means that the biblical text must be read and reread over and over again so the most significant aspects, the fundamental themes, the more meaningful symbols, and the basic concepts become apparent. The repeated reading of the text helps us to grasp the structure and richness of the text because we go beyond the supposition that the text (especially the Gospels) is the result of a profound reflection by the evangelist or the Church in which it was written.

*Lectio* is an activity that allows the text to speak by itself. With this activity, new aspects, that have not been brought to our attention before, of even well-known Bible passages, will be discovered. In this respect, my former experience in textual criticism, where one is accustomed to weighing exactly each word, has been very useful. *Lectio divina* is similar to a process of appraising a painting. First of all, you read it, identifying the persons, symbols, figures, effects of light, different perspectives, the contrasts between the positions of the figures; then you begin to grasp the whole context.

### *Meditatio and Contemplatio*

*Lectio* is followed by *meditatio*, the second element. *Meditatio* is thoroughly observing the values of the text. Once the meaning of the symbols, persons, figures, actions, and dynamics of the text become understandable, you can reflect upon the profound values of the text and their transcendency in the global context of salvation history.

*Contemplatio* is properly tasting or assimilating the text, not through analysis or meditation, but in some way spontaneously. Here we perceive the text as being "appetizing" - from this point the Word of God starts to nourish us. It used to be said that the Bible nourishes but it actually does not begin to nourish until it has been broken into little pieces so it can be absorbed by the spirit. Only then, the Bible becomes a source of contemplation that allows us to reflect upon the mysteries of Christ with admiration and upon the inexhaustible profoundness of God who reveals himself to us through the text.

In other words, *contemplatio* leads us to a point beyond the text itself and enables us to assimilate the energy beaming from salvation history. Through a simple passage, comparable to the hem of Christ's robe, we

experience the contact with his whole person and receive the beaming force from him. We now understand why this third element of the process ultimately is the most important. To omit it or take it lightly would lead us to a Bible reading that does not leave any traces at all in our life.

The element of *contemplatio* is that which makes Christians effective servants and heralds of the Word of God. While the exegete feels at home with *lectio* and the thinker, the philosopher enjoys the *meditatio*, it is only the *contemplatio* that enables us to convey the savor of the Word and the stream of life flowing from it. *Contemplatio* allows us to taste the Word and assimilate it in our own life.

*Contemplatio* is like a ground without boundaries, like a treasure containing many precious values; moreover, it contains what we could call *consolatio* (Greek: *paraklesis*), a feeling of joy resulting from the action of the Holy Spirit. The text becomes a source of joy, of true prayer, which is a consequence of the fact that the Spirit of God, that has also inspired the text, inspires our prayer so we are able to address the Father together with Jesus Christ.

#### *Discretio - Deliberatio*

Following the *consolatio* is the element of the *discretio -deliberatio*, the moment of discernment and practical decisiveness. This means that decisiveness of what to do and what not to do is a result of not only profound reflection but of impulses of the heart, which in a given situation, enables us to recognize clearly that which is in harmony with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to reflect upon the close and complex relationship between the Word of God and our daily life. This is not a dualistic relationship, meaning that the reading of the Word leads us to act more intensively and confidently. The Word of God is not only help for generosity but a source of discernment and sensitivity regarding the signs of the Holy Spirit in our own situation and regarding the Holy Spirit's expectations.

Jesus Christ is the full expression of human vocation. He is the perfect man who lives perfect righteousness and liberty and offers these things to God as perfect praise. He accepts every human being, makes everyone who is baptized a participant of his praise, and unites this with his own and offers it to God. In this way, he accomplishes what has been designed as priesthood of the faithful. Each member of the faithful is a priest inasmuch as he is called together with Christ to offer God our Father the world, human existence, work, family, politics, and society as praise. These are the new people of God, who have become a reality through Christ and act together with him.

The bishop is the man who through his charge is called upon to give harmony to the multiple historical situations the faithful live in. The life of the bishop is fully orientated

towards Christ and is a service of the faithful which consists of discerning the way the Holy Spirit has foreseen for each individual. To fulfill this function, the bishop must read the dynamics of the reality in the light of the faith. He has to face such a reality with the force of Christ's love towards humankind.

It is evident that the gift of discernment, which St. Paul speaks of in his letters, is basic for the pastor of souls because the bishop is the man who must discern between good and bad grazing and give warning of bad pastures.

Life is the fruit of courageous decisions which result from a discernment guided by the Holy Spirit. *Lectio divina* is the training for making such decisions, and its point of departure is an adequate Bible text; therefore, the bishop always depends on the Bible text and because he cannot always carry out its research, he is thankful to those who do and supports this work.

## 2. The Episcopal Ministry and an Approach to Holy Scripture (by Cardinal Ratzinger)

### a. The Essence of the Bishop's Task: to be a Man of Faith

To introduce the relationship between the episcopal ministry and *lectio divina*, Cardinal Ratzinger begins with two theses. 1st thesis: It is not essential for a bishop to be a specialist in theology, but he must be a master of faith. This presupposes that he be capable of seeing the difference between faith and the reflection upon faith. Consequently, it is not essential that a bishop enter into the debates of specialists, even if he must be willing to learn from the specialists and their discussions. His task remains to point out to the faithful and to theologians what the elements of the faith are, the object of reflection. The understanding of the faith may grow and become more profound through the work of theologians, but the faith itself retains its inviolate identity. Discernment between elements of the faith and reflection upon the faith should be the task of the bishop. 2nd thesis: It is not essential, and perhaps not even possible for the bishop to know all the interesting achievements of modern theology; however, to guide his flock well, he ought to know the essential characteristics of the chief currents of theology in his country and even in neighboring countries in so far as they are relevant for the universal Church. The bishop must be capable of orientating his faithful in public controversies which touch upon the faith.

This task presupposes a personal relationship with God, a colloquium with God called prayer. But a true dialogue demands reciprocity not only in our words, our speaking, but just as important, in our listening. Without the listening in a conversation, a conversation is reduced to a monologue. Furthermore, true dialogue is not only

words, but a coexistence, a communion of two wills, a communion of life; therefore, prayer includes the listening of God's voice.

### b. Listening to the Word of God, the *Lectio Divina*

The question now arises: How is it possible to hear the voice of God? The reply is simple, we hear God by listening to his words given to us in Sacred Scripture. In fact, we are convinced that *lectio divina* is the fundamental element in the formation of the sense of the faith and consequently the most important task for a bishop, teacher of the faith. *Lectio divina*, as thought of by the Church Fathers, is identical to Christian meditation; therefore, we are speaking not of a purely theoretical reading, guided only by intellectual curiosity, but also to be excluded is the arrogance that treats Scripture as a fossil. Such arrogance approaches Scripture as anatomy does a dead body studying it, cutting it up, dominating it. We must not forget that *lectio divina* is listening to God who speaks to us, speaks to me; therefore, this kind of listening requires true and profound attention of the heart and willingness, which is not only intellectual but also integral to the whole person. The words of others, and in a special way God's Words, are not understood with the intellect alone, but only by opening up the totality of our being.

#### *Complete Reading of the Canonical Text*

*Lectio divina* must be daily, our ordinary everyday spiritual nourishment, because only in this way can we learn who God is, who we are, what the meaning of our life in this world is. The breviary offers us a biblical reading everyday. This reading must not be done in haste. We should allow our minds to be penetrated by these words, pondering those which touch us the most. Such a reading becomes meditation, the appropriation of the biblical message, the assimilation of our being to the Divine Word.

*Lectio Divina* must be daily,  
our ordinary everyday spir-  
itual nourishment ...

Cardinal Ratzinger would like to insist that a reading of the Bible must be *complete* and -at least in the first stages- without comment (*sine glossa*). *Complete* means that every year we should read, apart from the passages chosen from the breviary and the liturgy, possibly the complete text.

What is meant by *sine glossa* is that the canonical text must be read just as it is, leaving out of consideration what may have been its sources, its literary genesis, and its literary components -the canonical text alone is inspired. The definitive edition of this text is the Word of God, whereas the preceding words, which can be reconstructed with greater or lesser degree of probability, are

not to be considered normative. Understanding the genesis of the text can be very useful for its comprehension, but what counts for the faith is always the integral text in the context of the unity of the canonical texts as a whole. A biblical text does not lose its value for the faith, if one can say that this text results from a long complicated editing process, just as the words of the Gospel do not lose their authority if a majority of the exegetes of the text in question do not see the exact words (*ipsissima vox*) of Jesus.

Just as it is important to read the canonical text as such and to listen to the inspired Word, the Word of God, so too is it important to listen to and digest the text in itself, as it speaks by itself with its perspicacity and profundity to the heart, without the filtering of comments. Saying this expresses no fundamentalism, no disregard for comments which have their indispensable function, but they must not prejudice or exclude personal and immediate contact with the Divine Word. On this point, in my opinion, Luther was right by underlining the lucidity of Scripture which speaks in a way that is understandable for every person, although each man received only a part, and the interpretation remains an infinite task in accordance with the inexhaustible profundity of Scripture. In this context, the beautiful words of Staretz Zossima addressed to the young theologian Alyosha in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky always come to mind. The wise old monk, Zossima, advises his young friend to read Scripture as it is to the simple people and adds "You will see how the simple heart understands the Word of God". It is important to listen always anew to the biblical message, in a way that is quite personal, as words directly addressed to me, as words that do not belong to the past but speak to me today. It would be dangerous to renounce this immediate listening or let oneself be guided by the opinion that the problems of the correct interpretation of the text are, in the present state of biblical research, so complicated that only specialists have access to the text. Scripture does not lie in the past, but has always a present-day voice. It does not become the property of an elite, but is always the property of the "poor in spirit".

This affirmation, as I said, in no way denies the importance of interpretative comments. Just as personal, unfiltered reading is necessary, so too for a preacher it is indispensable to read the best comments. Only in this way can one see the historical richness of the texts, God's incarnation of himself in the history of salvation. The profound humanity of the Word of God, who precisely by uniting himself with human conditions, demonstrates the true face of God. Only in this way can one see too the polychromy of the Word of God and its symphonic character, the symphony that is created in its full beauty, in the diversity, and sometimes also in the contrast of multiple voices. It seems to me that a certain rhythm of reading is important. From personal reading we pass on to the study of comments; enriched and illuminated by the comments, let us return to personal listening.

## Bible and Catechesis In Light of the New Catechism of the Catholic Church

*Fr. Cesare Bissoli, SDB, is director of the Catechetical Institute of the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome and responsible for the Department of Biblical Apostolate of the National Office of Catechesis, an official body of the Italian Bishops' Conference and full member of the Federation. The General Secretariat staff thanks Fr. Bissoli for the following article which will provide a response to the concerns many people working in the biblical pastoral ministry have had since the publication of the new Catechism of the Catholic Church.*

### 1. Historical Overview of the Relationship Between the Bible and Catechism

The relationship between Bible and catechism has not been clear on specific questions in the past. Those who have faced this issue have often been in conflict. The main problem is first clarifying the relationship between Bible and tradition in which several different dialectical tendencies have come into play since the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century. These tendencies can be summarized as follows:

#### a. The Bible as the only Catechism

The deposit of faith (*fides quae*) as well as the attitude of the believers (*fides qua*) can be deduced completely from the biblical canon. This is an extreme tendency of several fundamentalistic movements which like to revive the biblical world even in regard to dress, prayers, laws, and other such customs. Included in this group are not only some sects but also -though with considerable differences- some Christian communities that are extremely critical of the established Church.

#### b. The Catechism without the Bible

This extreme tendency is opposite to the first. Here, the catechism is accepted as the only means to transmit the faith. The Bible is considered implicit in the catechetical teaching. This tendency was theoretically never defended in these terms by the Catholic Church; however, it was in another sense promoted by the Church due to the fact that the Church did not provide the people direct access to the Bible. Consequently, the people learned the faith through images that at times had little or nothing to do with the Bible. There are writings from the scholastic era that correspond to this way of teaching. The theology is based on the conviction that tradition (*magisterium*) transmits the Word of God perfectly and teaches the faith sufficiently.

#### c. The Bible serves the Catechism

This tendency has prevailed since the Council of Trent. In catechism, considered a means of expressing tradition, the Bible (mostly in quotation form) is used to introduce the contents of faith and this is then completed through the teaching of the *magisterium* and theological reflection. Here the Bible functions only as an "arsenal of proofs" (*dicta probantia*).

In this tendency, the catechism quotes the Bible but is composed not according to the Bible but according to other means of support: creed, sacraments, moral teaching, and prayer. The Catechism for Parish Priests (*Catechismus ad parochos* or *Catechismus Romanus* (1566)) is an example of this. Parallel to this type of catechism, the Bible is taught as a "holy history". Examples of this are the Catechism of Belarmine and the Catechism of Pius X which were valued until the Second Vatican Council. The danger of this tendency is that truths of faith are reduced to scholastic formulas which may result in the falling into the extreme tendency of "Catechism without the Bible".

#### d. Catechism inspired by the Bible

This tendency also maintains a strong relationship between Scripture and tradition but it also tries tradition to receive inspiration from Scripture. There are not many examples of this, but nevertheless, they have had considerable influence: The Catechism of Peter Canisius (1555), "Catéchisme historique" by the french Fleury (1683), the Catechism of the School of Tübingen by J.M. Sailer, J. B. Hirscher, and B. Galura (19th century), and more recently, the German Catechism (1955).

### 2. The Change Through the Second Vatican Council

The Council has marked a definite change by reaffirming the primacy of the Word of God transmitted in Scripture, as the unique and irreplaceable source in the context of tradition (cf. *Dei Verbum*). Practically, this means the people would have a more direct encounter with Scripture, an essential value of the life of faith (*lectio sacra* or *divina*), and at the same time, a profound biblical renewal in the transmission of faith no matter how it happens. According to the Council, the composition of the catechism should be inspired by the Bible. Additionally, it should inject what the Holy Spirit has produced in the Church during the course of centuries through the *magisterium* and the lives of the faithful taking into account the living conditions of humankind today (cf. DV 21, 24, 25; SC 24; PO 4). Resulting from the Council's recommendation, the Catechism of Christian Life (in Italy), The Dutch Catechism, the French Children's Catechism (*Living Stones*), and several other adult catechisms in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, etc were composed.

### 3. The Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

The CCC represents a new change. The aim is to make the CCC the necessary point of reference for all the national catechisms and provide the Church -according to the words of John Paul II- with a "valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith" (*Cons. Ap. Fidei Depositum*, 4).

What function does the Bible have in the CCC? The following are some positive aspects observed from an initial reading of it:

## Follow-up to the Bogotá Assembly

### The Laity and the Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Asia

The universal Church was in different aspects shaken up in 1992. The Old European Churches had an opportunity to reflect upon the unacceptable aspects of the colonial evangelization, and many "young" Churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America which have been born from the colonial expansion of Europe since the end of the 15th century became aware that in reality they are not young at all. The youth which is attributed to them alludes rather to their chronic scarcity of material and human resources and to their dependent situation. The Churches themselves are dependent on Churches of the Old World, and the laity are dependent on the hierarchies within their own countries. In both senses, these dependencies are perceived as being a lack of maturity.

From this perspective, the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Catholic Church in Latin America, celebrated in October, 1992 in connection with a general conference of the Latin American Bishops in Santo Domingo, deserves special mention. In the inaugural address of the Pope as well as in the two week deliberations of the bishops, the role of the laity in the Church was one of the main themes. The Pope and the bishops recognized that without a more active participation of the laity, the Church is not able to fulfill its future mission. "The lay faithful", said the Pope quoting his own encyclical *Christifideles laici* no. 64, "have to feel like a living and responsible part of this enterprise (the New Evangelization), called as they are to announce and live the Gospel."

The bishops affirmed in the Final Statement of their Conference no. 94,96 "The majority of the people of God are lay faithful. As Church, they are called by Christ to fulfill in the world an inexcusable evangelizing task... As a consequence of baptism... they are called to live the tri-fold ministry -the priestly, the prophetic, and the royal. This vocation needs to be promoted constantly by the pastors in the particular Churches... We have to face the fact that the lay people are not always adequately accompanied by the pastors in discovering and maturing their own vocation. The persistence of a certain clerical mentality in many pastoral workers, clergy as well as lay people (Puebla 748), the appointment of many lay people to preferentially intraecclesial tasks, and deficient formation hinder the lay people to give sufficient responses to the actual challenges of society."

Besides this, it is worthwhile to take into account the declaration of 205 Spanish missionaries -diocesan priests and lay men and women- who actually work in nineteen

Latin American countries. On January 4-8, 1993, they met in Santo Domingo to examine the challenges coming from the actual situation of Latin America in the light of the decisions affirmed by the bishops in regard to the function of the laity: "We experience intensively the lack of recognition of the dedicated pastoral work of the laity, especially of the women, as well as the lack of respect to their right of co-responsibility in the life of the Church." (Pueblos del Tercer, Madrid, March, 1993)

These affirmations made by the most recent general conference of Catholic bishops or in its context are undoubtedly valid for the whole Church. We recall them here because they touch the essential points contained in the questionnaire the general secretariat of the Federation sent concerning the role of the laity in the biblical pastoral ministry. Responses coming from Africa and Latin America have already been summarized and published in two previous issues of *Bulletin Dei Verbum*.

Beyond what has been mentioned above, the declarations of Santo Domingo show that the difficulties as well as the achievements regarding the role of the laity are very similar in the different continents. This is a clear sign that European Catholicism, transplanted during the colonial time to the other continents, included and still includes, among other typical characteristics, a passive function of the laity within the Church. Today, it is evident that such a reality is incompatible with the "New Evangelization"; therefore, the efforts to overcome this situation have much in common even though the regions are as different from one another as Latin America and Asia are. In this issue, we offer a summary of the responses to the questionnaire from the Federation members working in Asia. These responses allow us to gain an overview about the role lay people have in the biblical pastoral ministry. Our purpose is not to show the whole richness and variety of biblical pastoral work in this region, but to point out those places and programs in which special importance is given to the laity and convey the dominant tendencies, difficulties, and achievements.

### 1. Origin of Responses

- National Biblical Associations in Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan (8)
- Diocesan or interdiocesan centers in Kerala, Shillong Meghalaya, and Tamil Nadu, India; Davao City and Vigan Philippines; Chonju, South Korea (6)
- Religious Congregations: Daughters of St. Paul, Bombay; St. Paul Publications, Bombay; Divine Word Missionaries, Indore; Lay Apostolate Divine Word Society, Madras, India; Infant Jesus Sisters, Kuala Lumpur,

Malaysia; Divine Word Missionaries, Manila; Sisters of St Paul of Chartres Education Center, Seoul, South Korea (7)

• Institutes and major seminaries: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Hong Kong; Gyan Ashram Institute of Performing Arts, Bombay; Christopher Becker Institute for Biblical Studies, Meghala, India; National Pastoral Team, Pune India; Saint Sulpice Seminary, Fukuoka, Japan; Institute for Lay Spirituality, Cebu City, Philippines (6)

## 2. Summary of the Responses

### a. Activities, Objectives, and Methods

As several of the responses pointed out, in Asia as in countries where Catholics are the majority or are strongly represented the biblical pastoral ministry is an extraordinary dynamic movement, a true "rebirth of faith". At first glance, a large variety of activities catch the attention, but in contrast for example to Latin America, the initiative does not come from grass roots, that is to say from the ordinary people, but rather from church organizations (centers, institutes, dioceses) that have passed through a process of renewal or have been born into it and try to pass it on to communities and individuals. The lay people in their different situations are generally the first ones to be addressed with the programs. Another observation is that the younger the Christian communities are and the less weight of tradition they have, the more lay people engage themselves enthusiastically and actively in the biblical pastoral work. This contributes to the development of the laity's spirituality which manifests in stronger dynamics and in the growing recognition by the hierarchy.

#### 1) Objectives and methods

The responses indicate general objectives, which enable the systematization of the multiple activities: "he wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4); most responses insist that the main addressees of the running programs are the lay people and point out the youth in some cases, the poor in other cases, and the professionals in others. At the same time people are aware that without a renewed mentality of the clergy many projects don't succeed; therefore, efforts are currently being made to integrate priests and religious in the common programs or to offer them special courses or seminaries. For example in the diocese of Chonju, Korea, 30 of the 90 priests are already fully integrated.

Specific objectives can be summarized as follows: to teach and encourage individuals and communities to possess, read, study, pray, and share the Bible (Manila). This includes:

a) Facilitating the physical approach to the Bible for Christians and non-Christians by providing them with easily understandable and inexpensive translations of the Bible true to the original along with commentaries and study guides. In countries with electronic means,

this approach is facilitated through modern means especially for children for example in comics, cassettes, videos, animation, and expositions.

b) Offering formation courses to deepen the people's awareness of the importance of the Bible, to help them understand its real meaning and apply it to their lives, and encourage them to become active members of a prophetic Church.

c) Promoting a more biblical spirituality and overcome the spirituality inherited from Europe, nourished mainly by processions, rosaries, novenas. This is the case especially in the Philippines and India. These religious expressions are not reprehensible but they should not replace the personal and the communitarian encounter with the Bible. The obvious time to initiate this change of mentality should be the Sunday liturgy in which more and more autochthonous elements with biblical content are incorporated such as dances, songs, etc. In this aspect, India has accomplished an extraordinary progress of renewal in which we ought to recall with special gratitude, the significant contributions of deceased priest Amalorpavadass, founder and first director of the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Center in Bangalore and one of the co-founders of the Federation.

To determine the specific objectives, the geographical characteristics of the region have an influence, e.g. the Diocesan Center of Hong Kong makes it a priority to maintain contact with the Chinese communities worldwide. For this purpose, the center issues a bimonthly bulletin *Communion*. This is in support of the work of the Secretariat of the Chinese Bishops' Conference which is convinced of the biblical apostolate's importance and its promotion, and established an Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate, in Taipei, Taiwan in November 1991. In Taiwan where the sense of family is strongly developed, the episcopal commission aims to make the Bible available to every Catholic family and have each family enthrone the Bible in their home and that each Catholic association begin its meetings with a Bible reading. In Korea where the laity have accomplished a decisive role since the beginning of Christianity in this country, it is not necessary to push the people to become motivated. The slogan of the biblical animators is, "Do not plan too much; just start assembling interested people!"

The basic method for the biblical pastoral ministry in Asia could be summed up with the slogan of the Institute for Lay Spirituality in Cebu, Philippines: "facilitate the people to see, hear, and touch (what is happening), to smell and taste (what could be), and to walk (to do something)". With the collaboration of the laity, the material is prepared for each program. The Bible Sundays and Weeks are organized in such a way that bishops, priests, and lay people work together. The biblical formation, especially for professionals, is connected with the study of the Second Vatican Council documents. Also, the programs that give special attention to the laity are

implemented in formation courses such as the Lumko Method or the Adult Biblical Interdependent Learning (ABIL) program as is the case in Taiwan and New Zealand.

## 2) Activities

The responses revealed that the people are involved in many diverse activities, all of which correspond to the three objectives indicated above: to facilitate a physical approach to the Bible for Christians and non-Christians, to offer formation courses to deepen the people's awareness of the importance of the Bible, and to promote a more biblical spirituality.

Instead of offering a list of the single activities which may just be repetitious of what everyone already presupposes, we would like to call attention to some particularities which are typical of this region and could be useful in other regions.

a) Several biblical formation centers were founded through the initiative of one or several lay persons e.g. Catholic Gospel Center, Kerala and Lay Apostolate Divine Word Society, Madras, India, and founded especially for lay people e.g. in the Philippines and India. In some cases, all Bible translators are lay persons e.g. Indore, India.

b) In the formation of lay people, Bible courses and even correspondence courses for non-Christians are considered e.g. in Indore, India and Korea. In some cases they address children and youth which includes Bible camps, summer courses, expositions, and song and poster competitions e.g. Bombay, Meghalaya, Pune, Tamilnadu, India, and Korea. In other cases, they address professionals, school teachers, and leaders of grass roots communities in the parishes. Through this formation, the lay people learn not to be always dependent on the clergy when interpreting and using the Bible, e.g. Divine Word Biblical Center, Manila.

c) The resources of each country are taken into account e.g. the National Commission of Japan organizes every two years a thirty day adult course in Jerusalem, and the expenses are paid by each participant. In Fukuoka, Japan and in Korea, the computer is used frequently for elaborating biblical materials and carrying out each course.

d) The Charismatic Renewal Movement which flourishes especially in Pune, India pays special attention to the study of Holy Scripture as well as to Bible sharing and prayer. This has contributed to a more dynamic biblical apostolate in the parishes.

e) Interconfessional cooperation is effective regarding translations e.g. Japan. The New Interconfessional Japanese Version is the official translation used in the Catholic liturgy, and the latest calculation showed that over one million copies have been sold.

f) Without ignoring the value of other initiatives, the pioneer work of the Divine Word Missionaries and the Society of St. Paul within this region should be given special recognition especially in the Philippines e.g. Davao City, Manila, and Vigan and in India e.g. Bombay, Indore, and Madras. This pioneer work generally takes place in the biblical formation as well as in the promotion of laity. The work of these two institutions has been the deciding factor for the bishops to recognize and put the biblical apostolate into motion and to allow the laity to participate more in the pastoral work in their respective dioceses and countries.

g) More intensified programs, more dynamics, and deeper engagement on behalf of the people can be observed in this region since the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá, Colombia, 1990. The Final Statement has been translated into several languages. It is a common subject of study together with the Second Vatican Council documents and is used to define the biblical apostolate and clarify its relationship with the whole pastoral work of the Catholic Church. One has the impression in Asia that the role of the Federation is now recognized everywhere, and its work is followed with interest. Beyond this, the process of decentralization set into motion during the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá has consequently had a more active and effective Federation presence at both the local and regional level. This is true for all the continents but perhaps even more so for Asia.

## b. Difficulties

The enthusiasm for the achievements should not lead us to oversee the difficulties the responsible persons in the biblical apostolate in Asia, a continent full of contrasts, have overcome and still have to overcome. Without further commentary, the following are a number of difficulties the region experiences:

### 1) on the part of the laity themselves

a) Because the laity matured in a "super clerical Church", they have not received adequate biblical formation prior to the organization of the biblical apostolate. This has resulted in the scarcity of qualified lay people who are capable of actively participating in formation courses.

b) Generally, lay people are not accepted by the priests as "partners" in the common work of evangelization e.g. Hong Kong, Malaysia, and the Philippines. In 1992, the bishops had just begun to accept more the cooperation of women associations e.g. Korea.

c) Lay people are not accustomed to working together with priests e.g. Tokyo

d) Diversity of language is great and command of English, used as a common language, is insufficient. English is considered the common language used between the different countries.

e) The tendency of many Catholics to understand and practice religion in a fundamentalist way.

f) Voluntary animators e.g. Pune, India are not few but the means to offer them an adequate formation are lacking.

g) Animators e.g. Bombay are few because they cannot be paid adequately for their services.

h) The difficulty in competing with some Protestant organizations especially the Pentacostalists who donate Bibles and study materials. "Sheep stealing" is still a big problem in India. The desire exists to have something like a "Catholic Biblical Federation of India", that could donate or sell at a reasonable price Bibles and biblical materials

i) Lay people, especially professionals, have too many occupations or because of poverty are constantly forced to seek new jobs; therefore, they lack the time needed to collaborate in the biblical apostolate especially in the cities.

j) The people have a general lack of interest in reading the Bible e.g. Taiwan.

### **2) on the part of the hierarchy, bishops, priests, and religious**

a) The official Church speaks a lot about the biblical apostolate, but in fact, gives little support to its practical initiatives especially if it involves money. Even where biblical pastoral commissions have been established, their coordination leaves much to be desired.

b) The hierarchy uses the laity's services but it does not take them seriously. It does not seem to be very interested in biblical formation of the laity. The formation projects for seminaries, convents, and other ecclesiastical institutions are much more accepted.

c) The interest for the biblical pastoral ministry generally depends on the character of the bishop or the parish priest. This suggests that for the future more emphasis must be given to adequate formation in the diocesan seminaries.

d) The bishops have no personal contact with the laity; therefore, the bishops don't understand the role of the laity in the biblical apostolate e.g. Tokyo.

In contrast, several responses pointed out the specific interests of the bishops in the biblical pastoral work e.g. Bombay, Madras, and Meghalaya in India and Chonju, Korea and other responses explained that the bishops became interested only after they saw concrete results in the life of the parishes.

### **3) on the part of the organization itself**

In this aspect, each of the responses pointed out the same following difficulties:

a) lack of personnel (the collaborators can only dedicate a part of their time to this work);

b) insufficient knowledge of the various languages;

c) an unstable budget;

d) unreliable transportation.

Poverty was mentioned in all the responses as being the biggest difficulty; however, on the other hand, general experience has shown that those countries that have enough money do not always have the most active initiatives of the biblical apostolate. The biblical apostolate seems to grow the most in a "middle climate".

### **4) Positive aspects and reasons for optimism**

The first and most general reason for optimism is that "The Word of God continued to spread and to gain followers" (Ac 12:24) and that the Word of God possesses its own dynamism. A small amount of work is enough to show that there is a general hunger and thirst for the Word among the people and that this hunger grows proportionately to the contact the people have with Scripture. This is an experience almost all the responses underlined. Here are two examples from Northeast India. A Hindu husband of a Catholic woman working in the biblical pastoral ministry became interested in the work of his wife and started attending Sunday mass. Now he invites his wife every Sunday to reflect together upon the meaning of the lessons read during mass. The wife said "He reads the commentaries from A to Z.". An army commander of a regiment in the snow of the Himalayan mountains who is Catholic, worships in his tent Sunday after Sunday, meditating on the explanation of the readings and sharing them. He explains "They are the source of my courage in this God forsaken place away from my wife and children".

Other words of encouragement are that interest in knowing the Scriptures seems to be awakening because of Bible Sunday and Bible Weeks and seems to grow thanks to the work of the laity. When lay people feel they are supported by the hierarchy, they tend to engage themselves more enthusiastically in the projects. Annual biblical meetings even with several hundred participants have been organized exclusively by lay people. Sermons centered around the Gospels are accepted willingly not only by Catholics but by all the people in general. Music from each region plays an important role in the communication of the Word of God. In Japan, the one month pilgrimage to the Holy Land contributed extraordinarily to an awakening of an interest of the Bible and Christian awareness. Ecumenical cooperation becomes more intensive when it is based on biblical sharing and prayer.

Like the responses from other continents, those from Asia seem to give special importance to the fact, that the work in the biblical apostolate itself offers many reasons for optimism and that it is worthwhile for each person to engage in it despite the difficulties.

(cont. from pg. 8)

a. From a purely textual point of view, the CCC fulfills the wish of the Synod Fathers who, when they asked Pope John Paul II in 1985 for a "catechism or summary" of the Catholic faith, expressed their desire for this catechism to be not only liturgical and conciliar but also in a strong sense biblically inspired.

It is a fact that the Bible quotations in the CCC are greater in number than in any other national catechism in existence. More than 3000 quotations from 40 books of the Old Testament (not including Habakkuk, Obadiah, Haggai, Nahum, and Ruth) and all 27 books of the New Testament (predominantly from the Gospels, Paul, and Revelation) are dispersed throughout all four main parts, namely, the Creed, Sacraments, Commandments, and Prayer.

b. In dealing with Divine Revelation, the CCC (Part 1, Section 1, Chapter 2) assumes nearly the whole Constitution Dei Verbum (72 quotations). Here the Bible is in accordance with a theological conception deserving full recognition. In this chapter of the CCC, two points are emphasized: the centrality of Christ and the role of the Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture (spiritual reading (lectio spiritualis)).

c. The CCC gives special attention to salvation history, i.e. to a biblical presentation of the creed, particularly in the beautiful though condensed presentation of "the Mysteries of Christ's Life" (no. 512-594), the liturgy and sacraments (Part II), moral (law) (no. 1961-1986), and more particularly of prayer (Psalms). The connection between the beginning and the end of salvation history is significant: the Father whom we confess in the creed as creator of heaven and earth is the same Father we address in the prayer "Our Father who art in heaven"; therefore, the presence of the Bible in the CCC is authentic, organic, abundant, and valuable in the presentation of the contents of faith. In general, it can be said that the exegesis of the quoted passages is well done.

d. In the CCC, the Bible is not handled in an isolated way but rather in a way that acknowledges the whole context of the Church and is related to the teaching of the Fathers, the councils, the magisterium, the theologians, the saints. In a word, Scripture and tradition go hand in hand as is required in the Catholic way of thinking.

e. A brief but explicit recommendation of *lectio divina* is present in the CCC: The liturgy of the hours is considered a form of *lectio divina* (no. 1177), and this is understood as a privileged form of meditation (no. 2708).

On the other hand, the following questionable aspects should also be pointed out:

a. Perhaps because it is here a matter of a condensed theological summary, the logic of the classical theological treatises are predominant in the CCC: from fundamental theology to dogmatic and moral theology, from revelation to the treatise of the One and Triune God, the sacraments, the theological anthropology, the standards of Christian life and prayer. In all of these, reference to the Bible is

certainly made but from several aspects the Bible seems to act only as a guest and not as the host.

- A vast number of biblical passages are quotations taken out of context and two-thirds of them are only vague references (in fact, the CCC contains recommendations to refer to the original text for a deeper meaning (no. 19)).

- Because of the above, the Bible appears to be only a set of proofs for a doctrine that has already been ascertained. Consequently, the different quoted passages form a complex in which everything has the same provenience and value. Such is the case for example when the CCC deals with the truth of God in no. 215-221, his omnipotence in no. 268-278, his reality as creator in no. 279-324, and the contrast between the meaning of the commandment *Thou shall not kill* in Ex 23.7 and Mt 5.21 as emphasized in no. 2261-2262.

- Because of the above, of its nature, the CCC refers or better, prefers to refrain from choosing a unifying biblical category, as for instance, the French catechism which uses the expression "Reign of God" or "Covenant" and the Italian catechism which speaks of the "Life and Work of Jesus".

- The CCC in most cases ignores the critical dimension of the exegetical process in regards to the present culture even if it works with a sound exegesis.

b. The presentation of *Dei Verbum*, even though it is vast, falls prey to a certain simplification. For example in no. 76 the transmission of the Gospel is said to have been made "orally" and also "in writing". Would it not be better to have said "in a vital way" and to have included in the "oral transmission" the much more significant and effective function of institutions, models of life, etc. to which *Dei Verbum* itself makes a reference? Another example is no. 107 where the catechism deals with the *biblical truth* concept and says that it should be understood "in the perspective of our salvation" (DV no. 11). Regarding such an important concept, would it not be better to add further explanations to avoid potential conflicts with the human sciences? Such an explanation would be especially useful concerning the origin of the Gospels (no. 126).

The CCC deals extensively with the *spiritual reading of the Bible* and makes explicit reference to the medieval doctrine of the four senses of Scripture (109-119). Is it sufficient to be silent about the historical-critical method of interpretation at a time when so many people question it?

Can we be satisfied with what the CCC (no. 131-133) says about chapter VI of *Dei Verbum* which is so fundamental for the biblical pastoral ministry? Is it not too implicit? It is said in no. 113 that "Scripture has to be read in the living tradition of the Church". Is the opposite of this not equally true?

In summary, without clearing up the value differences due to the diverse manners of expression in the CCC (cf.

no 11), there is a risk for Scripture to appear more as an object to deal with than as a subject that animates the faith.

#### 4. Impulses the CCC gives to the Biblical Apostolate

In general terms, it is known that the CCC aims at helping the faithful and every person of good will to recognize what the Catholic Church believes (cf. *Fidei Depositum*, 4). In more specific terms, the CCC fulfills this objective by proposing a certain model of catechism. This model does not seem to continue the catechetical line of the Council (at least that which has been accepted up until now). Even though the CCC makes repeated reference to the Council, it explicitly takes its orientation from the *Roman Catechism*.

##### Consequences

a. The CCC has a clear global message. The Catholic Church is based primarily on two things, namely objective truth and communion in truth. To profess Christian faith means to engage oneself in promoting the authenticity, integrity, and systematic character of catechesis.

- The bishops (catechists, priests, etc) achieve this by accepting the CCC as a sure and authentic reference text for all the other catechisms.
- The faithful achieve this by accepting the CCC as the criterion of truth for their own beliefs and for the service of faith at the theological, ecumenical, and missionary levels.

b. The structure of the CCC consists of four parts which are in accordance with the model of the Roman Catechism and explain a certain fusion of Bible and tradition, or better said, the understanding of faith as that which is transmitted by tradition. In this way, any possible misinterpretation of the Second Vatican Council is overcome, and the CCC is a *precious symphony of faith* which "contains the new and the old" (*Fidei Depositum*, no 2,3).

For the biblical pastoral ministry which is the sole task of the Federation, attention may be drawn to some points as food for thought:

a. We cannot ignore the reality of the CCC and act as though nothing has happened. Important changes have taken place which appeal to all servants of the Word especially of the Bible and invite these servants also to look for a proper interpretation of the CCC.

b. The temptation must be overcome to sustain -even in the name of the catechism- that the CCC alone is enough to teach the way of faith not taking into account the Bible at all or placing it at a precritical or spiritualistic level.

c. Said in positive terms, we have to make the Bible explicit in the faith of the Church and in the context of living Tradition, overcoming all appearances of biblicism,

the attitude in which everything begins and ends with the biblical text. Christian faith is an ongoing process which is oriented by the genuine, systematic, and integral Word of truth which is the faith of the Church (*fides ecclesiae*). Therefore, a pastoral theology in which the Bible comes into dialogue with the life of the Church in all its dimensions is necessary.

d. The explicit reference of the CCC to *Dei Verbum* invites our biblical apostolate to accomplish a function of service which is more necessary now than ever before. It begins by developing several aspects which are only implicit in the CCC, then points out other aspects that have fallen short, and then fills in the gaps, all of which will prevent people from making mistakes and falling into error when they use the CCC. All these things lead us to affirm:

- the necessity of knowing *Dei Verbum* in a vital way;
- the people's direct encounter with the Bible is of value in itself; however, it should not be isolated from the global context of faith. This point is already implicit in the double recommendation of the CCC regarding the *lectio divina*;
- the leading function of the Bible for the Church is to make faith explicit; however, other determinants are not excluded. This is a consequence of the hierarchy of truths, a fundamental criterion which is underlined by the CCC itself through its constant reference to the Bible.

e. A worthwhile practical piece of advice recommended by the CCC itself is to verify the doctrinal data of the CCC by consulting the cited Bible passages, clarifying their proper meaning, pointing out their literal sense, and at the same time, making people attentive to possible new senses resulting from the total ecclesial discourse.

In conclusion, the CCC does not diminish the value of the biblical apostolate but on the contrary the CCC renders an immense service to the biblical apostolate by emphasizing the vital context of Holy Scripture. The CCC invites the biblical apostolate to engage in dialogue with the different expressions of revelation and not to isolate itself and take an elitist position. The CCC encourages the biblical apostolate to promote spiritual understanding of the Bible and not remain stagnant in the scientific and rational approach to it. In a word, the CCC is far from taking something away from the biblical apostolate, but it provides it with the right instruments. In the knapsack of the shepherd and of the Christian, the Bible continues to be the first book.

If Scripture failed to be present, the testimony of faith would lack vitality. On the other hand, if the truth of the Bible recognized by the Church failed to be present, then the Bible itself would seem to be sterile. Because we surely face unavoidable multiple changes, it is necessary to develop a more creative and mature way to accomplish the biblical pastoral ministry at a popular level. Let us, therefore, accept the CCC as a gift and at the same time as a sign and integrate it with the catechism which never loses its actuality, Sacred Scripture.

# Life of the Federation

## AMERICAS

### Subregion Latin America

#### Cuba: The First Biblical Pastoral Meeting

In the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, the biblical pastoral ministry in Cuba has unique character. The ministry addresses on the one hand people who are ignorant of Christianity and on the other hand those who wish to accomplish the New Evangelization mainly with Bible in hand. The bishops demand that the missionaries come with the Word of God, the Bible. In fact, the few materials that the Cuban Church has available for the pastoral work are based primarily on the Bible. For the Catholic Biblical Federation, this implies an appeal that must not be ignored.

As a result of the initial contact of subregional coordinator, Fr. Gerardo Mellert, and zonal coordinator, Sr. Carmen Rosado, with the Cuban Bishops' Conference held in June 1991, Sr. Rosado and Fr. Félix Catalá conducted the first two-week biblical pastoral seminar for priests, religious, deacons, and laypeople from September 14 thru October 2, 1992. This seminar served three dioceses, Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and Camagüey and attracted approximately 300 participants. Sr. Rosado summarizes this experience as follows:

1. In spite of general poverty in Cuba which has been aggravated due to the imposed economic blockade, the seminar experienced great interest from a large attendance which included several bishops.

2. From the very beginning, the biblical sharing led to an intensive dialogue about the present day situation of the country and the Church in which everybody expressed openly their fears and hopes and their decision to work together for a better future.

3. The theological reflection was characterized by a strong desire to relate faith with life, and to adopt a creative attitude in the face of the Cuban reality.

4. The actual challenge to the Church and also to the Federation is summarized in the following points:

a. To meet the needs of those who are interested, have the capacity to learn, and are willing to mature in their faith.

b. To respond to those who wish to deepen their knowledge of the Bible. All the groups asked the Federation to continue these courses and help them especially by providing the Bible itself and materials for their formation.

c. To encourage other Churches especially those in the Caribbean area to assist the biblical groups who are aware that they need help and at the same time show an exceptional capacity to organize themselves.

d. To support those involved in the pastoral work in the local churches who are conscious that they face a historical moment due to the fact that young and old alike are returning to the Church in masses and seeking orientation. The Church faces a huge influx of catechumens, who are eager to build up their future on the basis of Christian principles, requesting Christian formation based on the Bible, and be accepted into the Church through the sacrament of baptism. Another characteristic that should be taken into account by the biblical pastoral ministry is the people's devotion to the Virgin Mary, a consequence of the First Evangelization, and their joyous and optimistic attitude towards the idea of becoming Christian.

e. To continue bible seminars. An evaluation conducted among the participants themselves revealed immediate results. They have learned to orientate their lives according to Christian principles, to pray, and to find reasons for hope all in accordance with the experiences of faith described in the Bible. They have also learned how to communicate these experiences to others; therefore, there is a general need to continue the bible seminars.

In response to these challenges, the responsible coordinators of the Federation of this region have planned a second course to be held in October, 1993. In the meantime, thanks to Jungschar, the Catholic funding agency in Austria and to the mediation of the Federation, it will soon be possible for the Cuban bishops to receive 100,000 Bibles which will serve as a means to bring the Cuban people peace and harmony through a solid Christian formation.

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### Subregion North America

#### USA - Los Angeles, California

The *Franciscan Communications* is a pastoral center in Los Angeles, California that produces printed and audio-visual materials for adult religious education, for renewal of Christian life in the parishes, to motivate and accompany the catechesis, to help people who have been converted, etc. The primary goal of the center is to offer different programs that focus on the participants developing an intensive contact with Holy Scripture and then sharing it in groups. Directed by Robert Delaney, former staff member of the General Secretariat of the Federation in Stuttgart, one section of the center is specifically for the Hispanic population (3.5 million in LA and the surrounding area) to hold biblical pastoral sharing sessions. The Catholics of this group have indeed expressed great interest to make the faith come alive and to participate in apostolate activities. Many "barefoot evangelizers" (lay missionaries) have emerged from these

communities who wish to make Christian life in the parishes more dynamic.

The following is a summary of the goals Delaney hopes to achieve in his work with the Spanish speaking families and communities: *Formation*- To enable the participants to have experiences comparable to those of the first Christians by encouraging them to form their own image of Christ through their reading of biblical texts. *Information*- To help the people acquire knowledge about the main themes and characters of the Bible and ways to convey this knowledge. *Transformation*- To promote change in behavior and in ways of thinking, which, through the meetings, the people may experience progressively. *Communication*- To find and develop useful methods for deepening each person's faith and sharing it with others.

To achieve these goals, Delaney meets with a group for example at a family's home and divides the group into small working groups of five participants each with a group leader. Each session focuses on a particular theme of the Bible. A text is read from the Bible that coincides with the theme of the day, and each group is asked to describe as concretely as possible, for example through dramatization, the image of Jesus they have acquired through this reading. This procedure includes four steps:

*One's History*: Two people tell a real or fictitious account of one's own life related to the theme.

*Biblical History*: Read, meditate, and discuss the biblical text chosen for the theme of the day and then compare what you have learned from step one with the people of God as described in that text.

*Church History*: Apply the previous two steps to the reality of the people of the Church and use the commentary of the Latin American Bible (in English speaking groups, use the Christian Community Bible) for assistance. The commentary will help the group become orientated with a new way of living. It is accepted as the word of an "expert" even if it is more pastoral than technical. In other words, it is critical but not hypercritical and opens the door to further knowledge.

*New History*: Give meaning to the new knowledge and awareness that result from the previous three steps and give orientation for a new way of life overcoming selfishness. The results may differ from one group to another, yet as each small group shares them with others, it will become visible in the neighborhoods of each community.

Experience has shown that this work in small groups represents a real ongoing process of evangelization. We learn by doing and we do by learning. Each session concludes with a prayer and a symbolic action which sums up the experience and may provide a tool for each participant to share it with others. We call this program *Living the Scriptures* which can be considered an offshoot from other programs already in use especially those made known by Carlos Mesters in Latin America. Information: Robert Delaney, Franciscan Communications, 1229 South Santee Street, Los Angeles, Ca 90015-2566, USA

## ASIA / OCEANIA

### Subregion Oceania

Oceania is one of the four subregions that comprise the Asia/Oceania region of the Catholic Biblical Federation. It has three full members (Bishops' Conference of Australia, New Zealand, Papa New Guinea with the Solomon Islands) and five associate members (one from each of the same countries as above plus Western Samoa, American Samoa, and Tonga). The subregional coordinator is Fr. Wim Hoekstra from Penrith, Australia.

#### The First Pacific Consultation on Catholic Bible Ministry

To organize the biblical pastoral ministry is not a new concern in this subregion for Papa New Guinea (1975) and Australia (1977) have been affiliated with Federation already for many years. In 1988, the first subregional biblical workshop took place, and on December 7-13, 1992, after nearly a year of planning, the First Pacific Consultation on Catholic Bible Ministry was held. It was organized by the Fatuaiga Pastoral and Cultural Center (FPCC) of the American Samoa-Pago Pago diocese with collaboration from the Togiilogi Missiological Institute and from students who were training for the Permanent Diaconate. There were 15 official delegates from seven countries who presented reports on their arch/dioceses. After the reports, some areas of special interest for the future were pointed out, a two-day biblical pastoral seminar was conducted, and some recommendations were formulated to foster the biblical-pastoral ministry in the region.

1. *The situation*: The exchange of information did not only expose the fact that the biblical pastoral ministry is not organized in all the large dioceses but it also provided the participants with an overview of the situation in the Pacific area, prompted new suggestions for future priorities, and provided orientation about those dioceses where the biblical apostolate has not yet been initiated.

2. *Areas of concern*: The following general concerns emerged from the reports and sharing of experiences: the need for biblical ministry in the family and the relationship between the Bible and culture, youth, justice and peace, fundamentalism, the environment, and other holy scriptures.

3. *Introductory formation*: For two days the delegates went through a formation course on the Bible, The Basic Bible Seminar, popularly known as the BBS, an introductory course on the Bible. After the BBS, they initiated other methods of Bible ministry, i.e. Ripples of Peace; Called to Live Justly; Amos Program and *Lectio Divina*.

4. *Vision statement and plan*: During the last day of the consultation, the delegates put together a vision statement and a plan to implement it. The vision statement is as follows: "We, the diocesan delegates to the First

Pacific Consultation on Catholic Bible Ministry, are a group of people called and sent to make the Word of God alive in the Pacific area in response to the challenge of New Evangelization in the region." The plan for their response is to recommend the following to their ordinaries:

- a. To make the Bible ministry an integral part of the total diocesan pastoral plan;
- b. To appoint a diocesan coordinator;
- c. To develop a Bible institute at FPCC for training Bible animators in the Pacific;
- d. To ask the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Pacific (CEPAC) to establish a Bible commission that would help coordinate and facilitate the networking of Bible ministries in the Pacific;
- e. To encourage the arch/diocese to affiliate itself with the Catholic Biblical Federation.

The idea to have a network system for Bible ministry was strongly endorsed by the participants. As a result, they elected a coordinator and a secretary of a committee that is responsible for following up on the recommendations and for implementing the plan. A booklet describing the whole process is presently being published.

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## EUROPE / MIDDLE EAST

### Subregion Latin Europe

Latin Europe is one of the four subregions that comprises the Europe / Middle East region of the Catholic Biblical Federation and includes the french speaking part of Belgium, England (provisional), France, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Spain, and the french speaking part of Switzerland. Santiago Guijarro, the director of the Casa de la Biblia, in Madrid, has been the subregional coordinator since 1990

The development of this subregion could serve as an example for other biblical organizations on different levels. The subregion's development began with a meeting on June 6, 1987 in Madrid that focused on the members becoming acquainted and the exchange of ideas to form the basis for a vast plan of collaboration. This meeting was presided by Marc Sevin, from the diocese of Orleans, member of the General Secretariat staff in Stuttgart since 1985 and subregional coordinator until 1990. All the participants were of the opinion that the formation of biblical animators should be the most important task and agreed upon the following three decisions as a means to promote common efforts in the biblical pastoral ministry:

1. To exchange regularly publications and other information about the biblical pastoral activities of each biblical organization.

2. To make these publications and pieces of information available to the General Secretariat of the Federation in Stuttgart.

3. To hold a meeting such as this annually.

The second annual meeting was held on April 11, 1988, in Nantes, France. The discussions concentrated on a few basic concepts in the biblical pastoral ministry that should be cleared up: What image should each biblical animator portray? What is the function of the Bible in the pastoral work as a whole? What is the meaning of the biblical pastoral work in the Latin European countries? The participants also discussed ideas for the Plenary Assembly to be held in Bogotá in 1990 and reviewed their relationship with the Bible Societies each of which have a unique character in the different countries. All the participants held the same opinion that Bible Week and/or Bible Sunday, which are already common experiences in many countries, should be continually promoted through a common effort. Additionally, the subregional coordinator presented a report on the structure, objectives, services, and members of the Federation.

The third annual meeting was held on September 2-3, 1989 in Lisbon, Portugal. The host for this meeting was the National Secretariat for Bible Apostolate of the Capuchin Friars (Secretariado Nacional de Dinamização Bíblica, Franciscanos Capuchinhos) an associate member of the Federation since 1984. The reports from this meeting confirmed that not only do the situations differ among the members but the levels of representation differ as well, e.g. only some of the participants had right to represent officially the Bishop's Conference. Also during the meeting, diversity in facilitating a more vast exchange of experiences was discussed. The participants determined it essential to define precisely the meaning of the "Latin countries of Europe" and decided to invite Luxembourg, Catalonia, and possibly Greece and the french speaking part of Canada to future meetings. The objectives of the work to be accomplished between this meeting and the Plenary Assembly in 1990 were determined as follows:

1. To collaborate on a working paper to be presented at the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá. This paper would acquaint the other participants with the subregion and include a summary of previously discussed issues concerning the status of members and the function and formation of biblical pastoral animators in the different countries.

2. To promote Bible Sunday and/or Bible Week as common activities following recommendations that stemmed from earlier experiences, and recommending that these activities be evaluated from time to time.

The fourth annual meeting was held in Bogotá, Colombia in 1990 in connection with the Plenary Assembly. Further information about this meeting can be found in the recently published book *CBF IV Plenary Assembly* (Stuttgart 1992) and in several issues of *Bulletin Dei Verbum*. Santiago Guijarro was chosen to be subregional coordinator of Latin Europe.

The fifth annual meeting was held on October 18-20, 1991 in Milan, Italy. This meeting focused on how the recommendations of the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá should be implemented. Following the reports which covered a vast number of issues from the various organizations, the following difficulties were pointed out:

1. Convincing the national Bishops' Conferences of the importance of the biblical pastoral ministry.
2. Determining the image, appointment, and formation of biblical animators so they coincide with the general image of the Church within each country. Not everywhere, does the general image of the Church coincide with that which has been drafted by the Second Vatican Council.

The tasks resulting from the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá were summarized in two points:

1. Raising awareness: to translate and disseminate the Final Statement and provide commentaries on it; to take over the same theme used for the Assembly "The Bible and the New Evangelization" for Bible weeks and seminars.

2. Implementation: to expand Bible Sundays to a diocesan or national level; to emphasize the issues of image and formation of the biblical animator; to emphasize those points of the Final Statement relative to the local situation; to make the Federation known and to send on a regular basis information to the General Secretariat that could be published in *Bulletin Dei Verbum*.

The General Secretary reported about the Federation as a whole and about several celebrations that had taken place to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* and invited the participants to make suggestions as to how to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* and the 50th anniversary of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1993.

Looking to the future, the participants made two propositions for the next Plenary Assembly:

1. to change the method: meaning not to start with general principles but to start with the biblical pastoral experiences from each region. This method would give the participants an opportunity to receive an overview of the members and formulate a general analysis of all the regions by pointing out the differences and the values of each experience in order to search for a common means to promote them.

2. to review the function of the Federation which could entail making the various different experiences known or providing general orientations, and helping each region to implement them. It was also recommended to review not only the function of the Federation but also the overall function of each biblical group.

The sixth annual meeting was held on October 2-4, 1992 in Malta. The participants were from Catalonia, England, France, Luxembourg, Malta, Spain, and Switzerland. Following the reports about the pastoral activities from each country, the members discussed the responses to a questionnaire that focused on the criteria which are to be taken into account while evaluating a biblical

pastoral project. These criteria may be summarized as follows:

1. Biblical pastoral ministry forms part of, or rather, is essential to, pastoral ministry in general, which is aimed at Christian community building and evangelization.
2. In all the various phases of the biblical pastoral ministry (planning, realization, and follow-up) due attention should be paid to the community (perhaps one should say, Trinitarian) dimension of Christian living.
3. The biblical pastoral ministry should have as its aim that Christians should be able to read the Bible (or hear it read), understand it, and translate into concrete living the message of the Word of God contained therein.
4. Biblical pastoral initiative should encourage frequent reading of the Bible within the family circle, in small groups or communities, and in liturgical celebrations.
5. The biblical pastoral ministry should develop reader-oriented exegesis.
6. Since the Bible narrates a life parable, and since it constitutes the substratum of European culture, it offers a splendid tool for evangelization initiatives, especially if, in the social context, there exists the witness of a concrete Christian community.

The seventh annual meeting will be held on October 1-3, 1993 in Toulouse, France. It was decided to invite some associate members (diocesan secretariats, Bible schools, group animators) who have been especially active in the biblical pastoral ministry to share their experiences with the full members. A meeting comprising approximately 50 - 60 people is realistic. The organization of the meeting was delegated to the representatives in France and the french speaking part of Switzerland. The foreseen issues are: to discuss the implementation of the recommendations of the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá, the criteria on the biblical pastoral ministry, and methodology for a popular Bible reading in Latin Europe.

Information: General Secretariat, Stuttgart, GE

## Subregion Middle East

### 1. History

Middle East is also one of the four subregions that comprise the Europe / Middle East Region of the Catholic Biblical Federation. The Middle East subregion includes the following countries: Egypt, Holy Land (Israel), Lebanon, Iran, and Syria. In 1976, Fr. Antonios Naguib who at that time was a teacher at the Coptic Catholic Seminary of Maadi, Cairo initiated the first encounter between the subregion and the Federation which took place in Egypt. During the same year, Fr. Antonios Naguib sent a letter to Fr. Adrian Smith, at that time coordinator of the African Service of the Federation in Lusaka (Zambia), and suggested to him that a biblical apostolate center be founded for the benefit of the Arabic world. In 1978, Fr. Antonios Naguib was appointed Coptic Bishop of Minia, in Upper Egypt, and a year later the Egyptian Bishops'

Conference became a full member of the Federation, and the annual Executive Committee meeting took place in Cairo. In 1984, during the Plenary Assembly in Bangalore, Bishop Antonios Naguib was elected to be the Middle East subregional coordinator until 1991. In 1987, the Center "Mater Ecclesiae" (Tiberias) and the Center for Biblical Formation "Ecce Homo" (Jerusalem) became associate members of the Federation. The Federation is indebted to Bishop Antonios Naguib for his dynamic efforts particularly for visiting all the countries in the subregion, introducing the Federation to the different hierarchies in 1986, encouraging the Bishops' Conference in Syria to become a full member of the Federation in 1987, and for making several contacts in Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq all of which have given the biblical apostolate a powerful stimulus. In 1991, Fr. Paul Féghaly, a Maronite priest and Lebanese biblical scholar living in Beirut, was appointed the new subregional coordinator. In 1992, Lebanon and Iran also became full members of the Federation.

The subregion's relationship with the General Secretariat began with correspondence and later intensified through mutual visits, and above all, through the General Secretariat's participation in three Bible meetings that the subregion had organized: Lamaca, Cyprus in 1985 and 1988 and Beirut, Lebanon in 1993.

## 2. The Subregional Coordinator's Function

Fr. Féghaly understands his function on three levels:

*Subregional level:* To visit annually all the countries within the subregion or at least send them a letter. To organize an annual meeting with all those responsible for the biblical work from each country. To improve the cooperation between the different countries. To encourage other countries to become members of the Federation.

*Regional level:* To organize an annual meeting at which the coordinators can share their experiences with one another. To play a role in circulating information from one subregion to another. To participate in common projects and whenever possible attend at least one meeting in each of the neighboring countries.

*International level:* To maintain frequent communication and collaboration with the General Secretariat. To help disseminate news about the biblical work of the different continents throughout the subregion. For this function, it was considered important to publish a bulletin at the subregional level which, in a sense, would be an extended version of *Bulletin Dei Verbum*. In fact, in October, 1992, the first issue of "Bulletin d'Information" was published in Arabic.

## 3. Activities

The subregional coordinator has participated in a number of activities. He conducted a meeting with each one of the patriarchs of Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, the Holy Land, Iraq, and with many other bishops and informed them about the Federation. He met with the biblical apostolate representatives in Egypt and Syria and with

those who have assumed the task in Iraq. He met with the biblical commission in Syria and corresponded through letter with the religious and those who are responsible for the biblical work in each country within the subregion. He participated in the biblical pastoral work in Egypt (Bible courses in the seminary, workshops for religious men and women, training courses for young priests and lay animators in the parishes) and in Syria (two different workshops for animators). He organized the third Middle East Biblical-Pastoral Meeting with all the members which was held in February 1993, and for this purpose consulted with biblical scholars from France and Belgium.

## 4. Achievements

Since 1991, the subregional coordinator has achieved the following: influenced Lebanon to become a full member of the Federation; distributed throughout the whole subregion an Arabic translation of the Constitution of the Federation and an article covering the history of the Federation from its beginning until 1992 (including the 5th meeting of Latin Countries in Europe that was held in Malta).

## 5. Difficulties

a. The subregion lacks biblical scholars. For example in Egypt there is only one biblical scholar and unfortunately he will be absent during the whole 1992-93 school year; in Iraq there are only two scholars who work half time in the biblical apostolate field, and in Syria there is not even one. There are several scholars in Lebanon, but because they are responsible for so many other tasks, they have little time to work in the biblical apostolate. The subregion has also experienced a great loss in the area of biblical studies. Five biblical scholars in Lebanon alone have been appointed bishops or general superiors of religious congregations.

b. Apart from the problem between Israel and the Arabic countries, there are a number of obstacles that make communication between the different countries very difficult, for example insufficient postal systems, problems with obtaining visas, deficient means of transportation, and strong censorship on books and other written materials.

c. How should "Middle East" be defined? The Federation has two associate members in Israel and three associate members who are very active in the Arabic countries. What needs to be done if Turkey becomes a member of the Federation and which language should be used when corresponding? Due to the fact that the subregion is primarily Arabic, how should the countries in the Gulf be addressed where the Bible Societies are already active? How should Sudan and the North African countries be addressed? What needs to be done concerning Cyprus which is so near to Lebanon and Syria?

d. Because of the great diversity within all the Christian communities, it is difficult to determine which group to address with the Word of God. Limiting this issue to only Christian communities, here is a great diversity of groups

which includes Armenians, Chaldeans, Maronites, Melchites, Syrians, etc. Also, many different languages are spoken among these groups including not only English, French, and German but also Arabic, Armenian, and Syrian.

e. Because Christians are minority groups spread throughout each one of the region's countries, it is difficult to reach them. Is not the time used to work with these minorities, time that could be better used to address the vast population of Muslims with the Word of God? Is, to not only reach the Muslims individually but to also penetrate their whole culture, what needs to be done? It is necessary to hold a meeting that would deal with these questions.

f. Because the basic structures beginning in the dioceses themselves are lacking everywhere, the financial situation of churches that rely on charity is very poor; therefore, they have a difficult time supporting projects of any kind.

g. The subregion experiences difficulties in the area of publication and is very thankful for the assistance it has received from other organizations. Its goal is to eventually be self sustaining and then be in a position to help others.

h. The Catholic people of this subregion bear the mark of a piety coming from Europe: praying rosaries, making processions, novena, etc. To say the least, in this kind of piety, the Word of God does not have the place it should have. A true conversion, a return to *lectio divina*, is necessary. It is true that in some formation centers something has been done in this regard but that which has been done resembles more the academic lectures of a seminary than a seeking for the Word of God that conveys life.

## 6. Relationship with the United Bible Societies (UBS)

The UBS and the Catholics share primarily two common tasks: distribution and translation of the Bible. Additionally, they distribute Bibles and pamphlets published by "Evangile el Vie" and the Federation. They have also collaborated in the publication of a lectionary and two books by the Federation, namely, *a Christian reading of the Old Testament* and *Commentary on John*. Regarding translation, the UBS have accepted the notes and introductions prepared by the Catholics in their own Bible. There are many advantages for making these two tasks common among these two organizations; however, the problem is that some Protestants take advantage of the UBS name by making disloyal proselytism for their own groups.

## 7. The Third Biblical Pastoral Meeting

After preparing for two years, which included two meetings of all biblical scholars from Lebanon and weekly encounters of Fr. Féghaly and his two immediate collaborators, Fr. Ayoub and Sr. Wardé, the third biblical pastoral meeting took place in Saydet-el Bir, near Beirut from January 31 to February 6, 1993. The Lebanese and Syrian hierarchies were represented at the inauguration. Most of the participants were from Lebanon but there were also three from Egypt, one from the Holy Land,

eight from Iraq, one from Jordan, and ten from Syria, a total of 100 to 120 participants. Among these were six bishops, (one Armenian, two Chaldeans, two Maronites, and one Melchite), a large number of priests, some sisters, and a few lay people. Thanks to the excellent organization and prestige of Fr. Féghaly, the meeting was a success and in fact, a part of the meeting during one morning was televised and broadcast on Lebanese radio, which resulted in a half of million people being informed about it. Fr. Feldkämper, General Secretary of the Federation, also participated and explained how this meeting related to other events that take place in the Federation and pointed out the accomplishments that have been achieved in the subregion.

The theme of this meeting was "The Gospel - The Synoptic Gospels". Half of the program was dedicated to exegetical studies (one lecture each morning by a known scholar) and the other half was dedicated to pastoral work. The dynamics of this work came from a workshop held each afternoon that covered one of the following four themes: The Narrative Method of Luke; Psalm 22 - a Christian Reading; a Bible Reading with Young People, and Structural Analysis of Mark each ending with a plenary session. Each daily program concluded with reports on the biblical apostolate and the catechesis in the different countries. The whole event also included visits to Byblos and to other places of interest. Meetings were also held with the national coordinators from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. The representatives from Iraq discussed their affiliation with the Federation and the possibility of receiving *Bulletin Dei Verbum* and a visit from the General Secretary and the subregional coordinator.

Here is a summary of the General Secretary's impressions. The participants agreed that the meeting was well organized and the goals were achieved, and they decided that such a meeting should be held every three years in Lebanon. Meetings of the coordinators from each country would be held in their respective countries each year preceding the meeting in Lebanon. The progress that has been achieved especially in Syria and Lebanon since the second meeting in Cyprus is very obvious. In Syria, numerous activities have been initiated and the coordination has improved, and in Lebanon, the biblical apostolate has developed greatly, and the people have learned to use the vast amount of available biblical resources more effectively. In comparison, Lebanon has a much greater amount of available biblical resources than the other subregion countries; therefore, there is a danger that Lebanon may appear to be much more advanced with the result that the other countries become discouraged. In Egypt, excellent work is being done in the diocese of Bishop Naguib, but practically nothing has been done in the other dioceses. In fact the patriarch has not even appointed a coordinator to represent the country. The biblical apostolate has not made much progress in Jordan and the Holy Land because there is a big problem with the growing emigration of Arab Christians.

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