

# Catholic Biblical Federation

**No. 28**

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**Bulletin**

*Sei  
verbum*

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**Orientations for Biblical  
Pastoral Ministry at the end  
of the 20th Century (page 4-  
8, 13-17)**

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**Bible Experts must be Guided  
by the Spirit (page 9-12)**

Address by Pope John Paul II

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**Life of the Federation  
Year with the Bible 1992 in  
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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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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*.

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Editorial

What will the biblical apostolate of the Catholic Church in the next century look like? That is difficult to say; however, one may assume that it will gain more influence and establish a better equilibrium. Thanks to the impulse of the two encyclical letters *Providentissimus Deus* and *Divino afflante Spiritu* and especially thanks to the endeavors of all those who have unwearingly toiled in the biblical pastoral ministry, one can indeed speak of an awakening in this pastoral domain over the last decades.

One likes to say the Bible should inspire all sectors of Christian life: catechesis, liturgy, prayer, and apostolate. That certainly is correct! If, however, the Bible is used like a reference book then its role is reduced. It is high time that the Bible be given a rightful place in the pastoral ministry of the Church. Pope John Paul II pointed this out in an address on the occasion of the anniversaries of the two encyclicals. That address is reproduced on pages 9-12 of this issue. Also, on that occasion, the Pontifical Biblical Commission presented a new document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, which will be published by the end of this year.

In view of the forthcoming European bishops' symposium on the biblical pastoral ministry, the Federation members of Southern-Europe subregion have prepared a document, "*Orientations for the Biblical Pastoral Ministry at the End of the 20th Century*", which is likewise made available in this issue (pages 4-8 and 13-17). It may offer suggestions and new ideas to one or the other.

Since the last plenary assembly of the Federation in Bogotá, the importance of Bible Sunday, Bible Week, Bible Month, or Bible Year for the biblical pastoral ministry has been called to mind once again. The year 1992 was declared "*Year with the Bible*" by Catholic and Protestant Churches in Germany and Austria. As a result, the Christian Churches have organized and implemented numerous activities. Two responsible leaders of the Catholic Church have gratefully recognized the impressive impact of Bible Year (pages 18-20). Their positive evaluation is an encouragement to make better use of that means.

Marc SEVIN

# Orientations for Biblical Pastoral Ministry at the end of the 20th Century

*The present document is the result of a long reflection on biblical pastoral ministry; the document can be of interest to present briefly the most important stages of the ministry's development:*

- 1) discussions of the Southern European subregion of the Catholic Biblical Federation in Milan in 1991 and in Malta in 1992;*
- 2) a first draft in December 1992;*
- 3) reactions of the members of the Southern European subregion;*
- 4) discussions by a task group in Luxembourg in February 1993;*
- 5) a provisionally "final" draft which took into account reflections of the Central European subregion.*

*This document constitutes one of the preparatory elements for the meeting of the European bishops on biblical pastoral ministry.*

## § 1. Biblical Pastoral Ministry and the Church's Global Mission

### § 1.1 Pastoral ministry and the mission of the Church

"I have come that men and women might have life and that they might have it in abundance" (cf. Jn 10:10). It is within this basic movement in which we might situate the Church's pastoral task of helping men and women to live truly as Christians in today's world. In particular, *pastoral activity* tries to respond to the fundamental needs of Christians and of Christian communities. Both attempt to exercise responsibly their threefold mission of announcing the faith, celebrating God's presence and serving those in need within the continually changing society of the 20th century.

The Church's activity cannot limit itself to Christian communities; in accordance with the calling of the Lord, the Church must open itself to the world in order to receive truly the Good News of the coming of the Kingdom of God by sharing it with all men and women.

The Catholic Church is not to be identified purely and simply with God's Kingdom, nor does the Church possess the Kingdom. The Kingdom surpasses the Church's boundaries and, like the risen Lord, precedes it towards the Galilee of the nations (cf. Mk 16:7). The Church is called to be the servant of the Kingdom's Good News by working together in the promotion of humankind and by testifying to the love of God for humankind through Jesus Christ. This is and has been for the past few years, in brief, the general concern of the discussion on *evangelization*.<sup>1</sup>

### § 1.2 "Biblical pastoral ministry" or "biblical animation of the Church's pastoral ministry?"

It is within this context that a discussion of "biblical apostolate" or "biblical pastoral ministry" might take place.<sup>2</sup> Emphasis is placed first on efforts to make the Holy Scriptures better known - through the distribution of Bibles, and through the organization of courses or conferences on biblical subjects. In this regard, one may say that biblical pastoral ministry concerns one aspect of the Church's life, namely its founding texts.

Biblical pastoral ministry, however, is not considered to be concerned with only one particular sector of the life of the Church; indeed, the reference to the biblical text and to its Good News must be the foundation of the entire pastoral and missionary activity of the Church. Moreover, in its quality of witness to God's presence in the life of the faithful communities of the first and second covenant, the Bible is, with the living tradition of the Church, especially a word which is spoken to us today and not only a word which was spoken in the past. This word can help us to be healed and freed from the forces which enslave us, to read the signs of the times, and to find our way in this world.

In this regard, it might be better to speak of "biblical animation" of the entire pastoral and missionary activity of the Church. We must assure that the biblical message in its full depth is one of the fundamental references in our search for the Word of God for our Christian community and for our contemporary world, or, in other words, that this message animates and inspires our Christian involvement in everything we attempt to live.

Biblical animation cannot be appeasing with the repetition of biblical history and biblical stories, nor with the propagation of a biblical language; it must enable God's word to come into contact with the men and women of our time, with their joys and pains, with their hopes and sadness. Within this vision of biblical pastoral ministry, it is clear that Christian communities cannot be simple "consumers" of the Word prepared and served by a group of experts; on the contrary, these communities, in communion with the universal Church, bear the primary responsibility for the hearing of the Word and for its contact with the concrete life of the world today, in all of its complexity. It is only in this confrontation between biblical message and real life that the Word of God can rise up in and for our world.



## § 2. The Reading of the Bible in our Contemporary World: An Analysis of the Present Situation

### § 2.1 The Bible in European society at the end of the 20th century

For many people - even for some Christians - the Bible has no relation to daily life, and this is so for several reasons:

- Our modern civilization bears no resemblance to the biblical world.
- Biblical language is often incomprehensible and irrelevant to men and women of the 20th century.
- Our society with its scientific discoveries has no longer a need for God to explain the creation of the universe, natural phenomena, the origin of sicknesses and their healing, etc. Many see neither the necessity nor the usefulness of a detour by way of these 2,000 year old texts in search of answers for today's problems; physics, medicine, psychology, even though subject to their own limitations, respond more directly and more effectively to contemporary problems.
- A certain secular mentality of the 20th century is very critical with regard to all forms of ecclesiastical discourse; the Church seems to contribute little in the search of real solutions to the actual major political, economic, environmental ... challenges and seems incapable of accomplishing within its own structures the principles of justice, human dignity, etc. which it constantly prescribes for the secular world. Dissatisfied with this religious discourse, many of our contemporaries turn to new forms of religion which seek the source of well-being in human or natural energies and wisdoms.
- Confronted with the obvious complexity of 20th century life, people in search of meaning are prey to two contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, faced with cultural fragmentation, they distrust all "totalitarian" systems which pretend to explain life in all its facets (cf. the efforts of a "Biblicism" in certain groups, which pretends to find in the Bible answers to all questions); on the other hand, faced with the difficulty of finding one's way in such a complex society, they renounce all personal responsibility and hand themselves over to a group or a person who makes all decisions in their stead.
- Within this context, the phenomenon of sects and new religious movements must be mentioned. Faced with the complexity and fragmentation of modern life, sects and movements offer systems of individual and collective meaning, a way of salvation, communities of a human dimension, a collective memory, and genealogy.<sup>3</sup>

And the list could go on.

If we ignore these facts, if we condemn purely and simply the contributions of the "secularized" society or, at the other extreme, idealize them uncritically, if we affirm obstinately that the relevance of the Bible is

evident and universal without entering into a real dialogue with the contemporary world, then we predestine biblical pastoral ministry to failure.

### § 2.2 The reading of the Bible in the Church after Vatican II

§ 2.21 The present situation of reading the Bible in the Catholic Church seems profoundly influenced by several factors:

1) For several centuries, following its reaction at the end of the 16th century to different orientations of the Reformation, the Catholic Church practically refused to allow the "faithful" direct contact to the Bible; their access to the Scriptures was only permitted via an authorized interpretation and an accredited interpreter.<sup>4</sup> Progressively, the clergy as well as the faithful developed a distrust with regard to the Bible as such. They also developed serious reservations with regard to the Catholics' potential to read and understand the biblical texts and discover in community the Word of God in their life.

2) While the Protestant Churches recognized the importance of the "scientific" study of Sacred Scripture as early as the 18th century, *Catholic historical-critical exegesis* acquired its credentials only after passing through the painful modernist crisis and receiving the support of the popes Leo XIII (*Providentissimus Deus*) and Pius XII (*Divino afflante Spiritu*) as well as of Vatican II (*Dei Verbum*). The privileged position which historical-critical exegesis has come to enjoy in the meantime is presently questioned under a twofold heading:

a) The results of the historical method - the discovery of multiple forms of Christian faith and commitment among the diverse primitive Christian communities, for example - shows the relative character of formulations which become too absolute, too monolithic, and which lead, in consequence, to a certain disorientation of those who are looking for certitudes and absolute truths. It is easy to understand how this exegesis is accused of reductionism, destructive for the faith, not only by the "simple faithful", but also by certain members of the clergy and of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Some affirm that historical-critical exegesis, rather than assisting in the search for authentic religious experience, constitutes a real obstacle to the fulfilling of this authentic human desire.

b) Sometimes historical-critical exegesis seems to consider itself to be the sole valid interpreter of the Scriptures, refusing to recognize its own limits and to dialogue with other approaches to the biblical text, better able to permit the contact between the biblical message and the contemporary world.

§ 2.22 Since the Second Vatican Council, a movement of biblical renewal has touched several areas of Church life. Following up on the directives of the constitution on the *liturgy* according to which "the treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that the richer fare

may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's Word" by reading in a limited period the most important part of the Sacred Scriptures (SC 51), the reform of the lectionary has indeed multiplied the biblical texts read during the Eucharist. On the one hand, this broader access to the Scriptures has awakened the desire of many, on an individual basis or in groups, to deepen their contact with biblical texts, a process which is difficult within the pre-sent structures of the Eucharistic liturgy. On the other hand, the multiplication of readings served at the table of the Word, without the possibility of sufficient "digestion" within the liturgy, has often led to such a chronic "indigestion" that many are no longer motivated to listen to these texts. Some other problems related to the choice and order of the biblical texts in the lectionary may be cited: a "functionalization" of the Old Testament readings, chosen because of their thematic relation to the Gospel pericopes, without regard to their internal dynamic; the sometimes very arbitrary delimitation of certain texts; an insufficient number of texts, for example, that illustrate the roles of women in salvation history. In addition, the difficulties of two types of preachers have not yet been sufficiently taken into account: on the one hand, those who attempt to integrate the findings of critical exegesis into their homilies without giving biblical classes, and on the other hand, those who try to present the relationship between Scripture and life without moralizing

**§ 2.23** *Catechesis and religion classes* have benefited from an important effort to integrate biblical texts and elements of the biblical message into their formation plan. There as well, biblical saturation is sometimes experienced, especially when in these two areas the formation stops at the level of biblical knowledge without undertaking a reflection on today's life.

**§ 2.24** The biblical renewal has taken its most dynamic form in the *multiplication of small Christian groups* which meet more or less regularly to study biblical texts and/or to think about their Christian involvement in the world in light of the biblical message. These groups vary greatly in their sociological composition; they reflect extremely rich life experiences and spiritualities, and they make use of Bible reading methods more or less adapted to their concrete situation.<sup>5</sup>

**§ 2.25** The past few years have also seen the creation or development of *biblical pastoral centers* on national and international levels. In addition to the national biblical pastoral centers in Europe - *Austria*: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk (Klosterneuburg), *Flemish speaking Belgium*: Vlaamse Bijbelstichting (Leuven), *Croatia*: Institut za biblijski pastoral (Zagreb), *France*: Service biblique "Evangile et Vie" (Paris), *Germany*: Katholisches Bibelwerk Deutschland (Stuttgart), *Hungary*: Heiliger Hieronymus Bibelverein (Budapest), *Luxembourg*: Service Biblique Diocésain (Luxembourg), *Malta*: The Malta Bible Society (Floriana), *Netherlands*: Katholieke Bijbelstichting (s'Hertogenbosch), *Portugal*: Secretariado Nacional de Dinamização (Fatima), *Spain*: La Casa de la Biblia (Madrid), *Switzerland*: German

*speaking*: Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, with its Bibelpastorale Arbeitsstelle (Zürich), and *French speaking*: Centre Catholique Romand de Formation Permanente - must be added the national associations of biblical scholars which have been entrusted with a biblical pastoral responsibility: *England*: Catholic Biblical Association (Birmingham), and *Italy*: Associazione Biblica Italiana (Roma). Internationally, the Catholic Biblical Federation (Stuttgart) has been working, since its foundation in 1969, to promote biblical pastoral ministry and to coordinate the activities of the national centers.

### **§ 3. Biblical Orientations for Evangelization and the Reading of the Scriptures**

Faced with this situation, with its challenges and dead ends, but also with the elements of renewal in the society as well as in the Church, it can be of help to return to the biblical sources themselves in order to elaborate important orientations for biblical pastoral ministry at the end of the 20th century. Two directions of research have been chosen: announcing the Good News or evangelization, on the one hand, reading the Scriptures, on the other.

#### **§ 3.1 Evangelization in the synoptic Gospels, especially in Luke**

Biblical pastoral ministry can only be adequately defined when situated within the more general effort of evangelization. In this regard, the Gospels themselves provide us with important indications. In *Mark's Gospel*, evangelization is characterized by two essential elements: the call to conversion on the one hand and exorcisms and healings on the other:

*So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. (Mk 6:12-13)*

In the Gospel of Matthew, the mission of the community of disciples comprises two aspects: the healing proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom,

*As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. (Mt 10:7-8)*

and the invitation addressed to all men and women to become disciples of Jesus,

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. (Mt 28:19-20)*

It is *Luke's Gospel* which develops most broadly the movement and the terminology of "evangelization". Jesus' mission is understood in Lk 4:17-21 with the help of Is 61:1 and 58:6:

*The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he*

has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." *And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

and confirmed in Lk 7:18-23:

*The disciples of John reported all these things to him. So John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" When the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'" Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."*

This mission of healing and liberation is confided to the Twelve in Lk 9:1-2:

*Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.*

and to the disciples in Lk 10:9:

*Cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'*

Thus, Luke understands evangelization first of all as healing and liberation of those rejected by society; in a second step, the significance of these acts is given: "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

On the basis of this observation and following the inspiration especially of Luke, we will attempt to formulate certain of the most important orientations for evangelization and in particular for biblical pastoral ministry.

### § 3.11 *Evangelization takes place in contact with people who are "on the way".*

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke designates Christianity as "the Way" (Acts 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22). This intention is omnipresent in both parts of his work. We have only to read the important voyage narrative during which Jesus initiates his disciples in their mission while progressing on his own way to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51-19:28). Moreover, we find many texts in which Jesus and his disciples, "on the way", respond to the needs of those whom they encounter: the parable of the good Samaritan on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho (Lk 10:25-37), the healing of the leper on the road between Galilee and Samaria on the way to Jerusalem (Lk 17:11-19), Jesus' encounter with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35), the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian on the road between Jerusalem and Gaza

(Acts 8:26-40), Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19) and Peter's encounter with Cornelius between Caesarea and Joppa (Acts 10:1-48).

### § 3.12 *Evangelization which takes place "on the way" is itself a process during which several stages may be recognized.*<sup>6</sup>

#### § 3.121 *The healing of the sick and the liberation from demons are battles which Jesus fights against physical sickness and against the mechanisms of possession and social rejection within the Jewish society of the time.*

Luke underlines the similarities between the healing of sickness and the liberation from demons. In this way, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (4:38-39) is presented as an exorcism. In the world view of Luke and of his time, sickness, demons and natural forces are all powers which imprison people, which prohibit the full realization of their life. Healing of sickness and liberation from the enslavement by demons constitute for Luke - and for Jesus - the difficult confrontation with those powers which do not allow people to realize their true calling. It is in this way that the first necessary stage of evangelization in Luke may be characterized.

#### § 3.122 *Sometimes - but not always - men and women who have been healed recognize in their healing the presence of God's action and they react by "praising God".*

- In the narrative of the healing of the man possessed by a demon in Gerasa (8:26-39), the man asks to stay with Jesus, but Jesus sends him away, saying: "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him (8:39).

- In the healing of the ten lepers (17:11-19), all are healed, but only one returns, recognizing in his healing God's action: "Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him." Jesus commented: "Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

- The blind man healed in Jericho responds by following Jesus and by giving glory to God. Then, everyone seeing what had happened gave praise to God (18:43).

We could multiply the texts in Luke for whom "giving glory to God" is a first reaction of men and women to God's action in their favor: this is what the angels sing in 2:14 and what the crowd acclaims in 19:38.

Evangelization may, after a first stage of liberation, allow those healed to open themselves to the presence of a God who desires their well-being. In this regard, nonetheless, Jesus recognizes as well the active and free participation of each person in his or her healing: "Your faith has saved you" (7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42; cf. also 8:50; in the negative in 8:12). According to Luke, faith intervenes in the "physical" healing of people; but this healing can also allow them to stand up, to walk erect as free persons, responsible and active in their destiny, who open themselves to others, and perhaps to the Other.

#### § 3.123 *Listening to the teaching of Jesus and the consequent change in one's life (conversion) as well as a*

*renewed appropriate way of living*, constitute a further stage in evangelization.

The narrative of Mary and Martha (Lk 10:38-42) is a typical example. Martha is so preoccupied with the table service (diakonia) that she neglects an even more essential element in the development of faith, listening to Jesus' words. Jesus wants to free her from this servility which ties her exclusively to a work which remains nonetheless important. The narrative does not invite us to dissociate the two functions nor to attribute them to distinct persons (kitchen work for Martha, the realm of faith for Mary); rather we should view the two women as two aspects of the human person, two aspects of the Christian community, both of which must certainly be assumed, but in a way which allows the growth of free, adult faith. Listening to Jesus' words does indeed bring with it a transformation of one's way of living.

Listening to Jesus and welcoming him and his message awaken in Zacchaeus a movement of conversion in the realm of human solidarity: "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Jesus answers: "Today salvation has come to this house ..." (Lk 19:8-9). Luke insists incessantly that becoming a Christian, being evangelized, brings necessarily the sharing of one's possessions in function of the needs of each person (cf. the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in 16:19-31; the ruler who cannot bring himself to give up his riches and the teaching on riches in 18,18-30; the sharing of one's possessions within the group of the disciples in 8:3 and within the Christian communities in Acts 2:42-47; and 4:32-35).<sup>7</sup>

**§ 3.124** It is also possible to respond to Jesus' word by following him, sharing his way, as did those women and men who joined their fate to his on the road from Galilee to Jerusalem. In this way, one might *join the community of the disciples of Jesus*, and share their life in all its aspects: sharing of possessions, common prayer, and the breaking of the bread (cf. Acts 2:42-47).

**§ 3.125** Those who join the Christian community might in turn *become witnesses of God's kingdom themselves*, and participate in the healing of concrete human beings and perhaps even open up the horizons of these men and women to God's presence in their lives (Lk 9 and 10).

**§ 3.2** Reading the Scriptures in the New Testament : Models for evangelization

Our analysis of the actual situation of Bible reading has called our attention to the existence of Christian groups who look to the Scriptures for orientation for their lives, which contributes effectively to their own evangelization. This phenomenon occurs frequently within Luke's two volume work.

Within the context of the Scripture reading in the synagogue, Jesus commits himself to announce the liberating Good News which he discovered and is revealed in certain passages of the book of Isaiah (Lk 4:17-21).

Difficulties in understanding Is 53 provoke the Ethiopian eunuch to seek someone to help him. When Philip announces the Good News of Jesus to him, he expresses his desire to join the Christian community and to be baptized (Acts 8:26-40).

While praying together, the community of Jerusalem comes to understand its own situation, with the help of Psalm 2, as the continuation of the hostilities undergone by Jesus. In this way, the community receives renewed courage in the midst of a menacing world (Acts 4:23-31).

In the Emmaus narrative, Jesus joins two disciples on the road and encourages them to speak freely of their desires and deceptions. It is in the opening of the Law and the Prophets and in the breaking of the bread that he helps them to understand the events which have upset their lives (Lk 24:13-35).

Luke allows us a glance into the life of the Church of his time. These four passages - the first two (Lk 4; Acts 8) proceeding from the biblical text towards a commitment in life, the third and fourth (Acts 4; Lk 24) proceeding from a situation in life, searching the text for assistance and returning to a commitment in life - show the importance of this back-and-forth movement of the Christian community between the biblical text and everyday life in order to discover God's Word for one's own life. It is within this ever-to-be-renewed dialectical movement in which the community experiences the living presence of Jesus in its midst.

#### **§ 4. Basic Orientations for Biblical Pastoral Ministry**

In line with the preceding reflections, it is now possible to propose several basic orientations for biblical pastoral ministry at the close of the 20th century.

**§ 4.1** The twofold historical situation of the biblical text In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (§ 4), Pope Paul VI insisted upon a double faithfulness essential to the process of evangelization: faithfulness to the message of the Good News and faithfulness to those to whom this Good News is addressed. In the same way, biblical pastoral ministry must take into account the roots which the biblical word has or takes in two distinct historical situations.

**§ 4.11** First of all, the Bible must be understood as a word pronounced in a particular cultural and historical situation: the ancient Near East of the first millenium before Christ for the Old Testament and the Hellenistic and Roman world of the first century after Christ for the New Testament. The biblical writings have developed within the context of the Jewish people and of early Christianity and have attempted to formulate the Word of God for concrete communities.

An in-depth confrontation with this word which originated in another civilization presupposes an effort to know precisely the original meaning and, to a certain degree, the circumstances of the text's composition, as well as its social function. As Pope John Paul II said, "Attention must be given to the literary forms of the various biblical books in order to determine the intention of the sacred writers. And it is most helpful, at times crucial, to be aware of the personal situation of the biblical writer, to (sic!) the circumstances of culture, time, language and so forth which influenced the way the

(cont. on pg. 13)



# Bible Experts must be Guided by the Spirit

## *Solemn assembly marks anniversaries of Encyclicals on interpretation of Scripture*

The 100th anniversary of Leo XIII's Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* and the 50th anniversary of Pius XII's Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* were celebrated by Pope John Paul II at a special gathering of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See and professors of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. The Commission, led by its President, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, presented the Holy Father with a copy of its comprehensive study entitled, *L'interprétation de la Bible dans l'Église*.

The Holy Father then spoke at length on the great encouragement these two Encyclicals gave to Catholic biblical studies, as he thanked the Commission for its recent study to be published in a few months and for all the work it has accomplished since its establishment in 1902. The Pope also addressed several important issues in current biblical research, particularly that of inculturation, "In order for the Bible to have a profound effect, there must be inculturation according to the genius proper to each people." Here is a translation of the Holy Father's address, which was given in French.

1. I wholeheartedly thank Cardinal Ratzinger for the sentiments he expressed a few moments ago in presenting the document prepared by the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the interpretation of the Bible in the Church. I joyfully accept this document, the fruit of a collegial work undertaken on Your Eminence's initiative, and perseveringly continued over several years. It responds to a heartfelt concern of mine, for the interpretation of Sacred Scripture is of capital importance for the Christian faith and the Church's life. As the Council well reminded us. "In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them. And such is the force and power of the word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting source of spiritual life" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 21). For men and women today the manner in which biblical texts are interpreted has immediate consequences for their personal and community relationship with God, and it is also closely connected with the Church's mission. A vital problem is at issue and deserves all your attention.

2. Your work is finishing at a very opportune moment, for it provides me with the opportunity to celebrate with you two richly significant anniversaries: the centenary of the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, and the 50th anniversary of the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*, both concerned with biblical questions. On 18 November, 1893, Pope Leo XIII, very attentive to intellectual problems, published his encyclical on scriptural studies with the goal "of encouraging and recommending them" as well as "orienting them in a way that better corresponds to the needs of the time" (*Enchiridion Biblicum*, n. 82). Fifty years later, Pope Pius XII gave Catholic exegetes further encouragement and new directives

in his encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*. Meanwhile, the papal Magisterium showed its constant concern for scriptural problems through numerous interventions. In 1902, Leo XIII established the Biblical Commission; in 1909, Pius X founded the Biblical Institute. In 1920, Benedict XV celebrated the 1500th anniversary of St Jerome's death with an encyclical on the interpretation of the Bible. The strong impetus thus given to biblical studies was fully confirmed at the Second Vatican Council so that the whole Church benefited from it. The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* explains the work of Catholic exegetes and invites pastors and the faithful to take greater nourishment from the word of God contained in the Scriptures.

Today I want to highlight some aspects of the teaching of these two encyclicals and the permanent validity of their orientation through changing circumstances, in order to profit more from their contribution.

### 1. From *Providentissimus Deus* to *Divino afflante Spiritu*

3. First, one notes an important difference in these two documents, namely, the polemical, or to be more exact, the apologetic part of the two encyclicals. In fact, both appear concerned to answer attacks on the Catholic interpretation of the Bible, but these attacks did not follow the same direction. On the one hand, *Providentissimus Deus* wanted especially to protect Catholic interpretation of the Bible from the attacks of rationalistic science; on the other hand, *Divino afflante Spiritu* was primarily concerned with defending Catholic interpretation from attacks that opposed the use of science by exegetes and that wanted to impose a non-scientific, so-called "spiritual" interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

This radical change of perspective was obviously due to the circumstances. *Providentissimus Deus* appeared in a period marked by vicious polemics against the Church's faith. Liberal exegesis gave important support to these polemics, for it made use of all the scientific resources, from textual criticism to geology, including philology, literary criticism, history of religions, archaeology, and other disciplines besides. On the other hand, *Divino afflante Spiritu* was published shortly after an entirely different polemic arose, particularly in Italy, against the scientific study of the Bible. An anonymous pamphlet was widely circulated to warn against what it described as "a very serious danger for the Church and souls: the critico-scientific system in the study and interpretation of Sacred Scripture, its disastrous deviations and aberrations".

4. In both cases the reaction of the Magisterium was significant, for instead of giving a purely defensive response, it went to the heart of the problem and thus showed (let us note this at once) the Church's faith in the mystery of the incarnation.

Against the offensive of liberal exegesis, which presented its allegations as conclusions based on the achievements of science, one could have reacted by anathematizing the use of science in biblical interpretation and ordering Catholic exegetes to hold to a "spiritual" explanation of the texts.



*Providentissimus Deus* did not take this route. On the contrary, the encyclical earnestly invites Catholic exegetes to acquire genuine scientific expertise so they may surpass their adversaries in their own field. "The first means of defense", it said, "is found in studying the ancient languages of the East as well as the practice of scientific criticism" (*EB* n. 118). The Church is not afraid of scientific criticism. She distrusts only preconceived opinions that claim to be based on science, but which in reality surreptitiously cause science to depart from its domain.

Fifty years later, in *Divino afflante Spiritu* Pope Pius XII could note the fruitfulness of the directives given by *Providentissimus Deus*: "Due to a better knowledge of the biblical languages and of everything regarding the East, ... a good number of the questions raised at the time of Leo XIII against the authenticity, antiquity, integrity, and historical value of the Sacred Books... have now been sorted out and resolved" (*EB*, n. 546). The work of Catholic exegetes "who correctly use the intellectual weapons employed by their adversaries" (n. 562) has borne its fruit. It is for this very reason that *Divino afflante Spiritu* seems less concerned than *Providentissimus Deus* to fight against the positions of rationalistic exegesis.

5. However, it became necessary to respond to attacks coming from the supporters of a so-called "mystical" exegesis (n. 552), who sought to have the Magisterium condemn the efforts of scientific exegesis. How did the encyclical respond? It could have limited itself to stressing the usefulness and even the necessity of these efforts for defending the faith, which would have favored a kind of dichotomy between scientific exegesis, intended for external use, and spiritual interpretation, reserved for internal use. In *Divino afflante Spiritu*, Pius XII deliberately avoided this approach. On the contrary, he vindicated the close unity of the two methods, on the one hand emphasizing the "theological" significance of the literal sense, methodically defined (*EB*, n. 251), and on the other, asserting that, to be recognized as the sense of a biblical text, the spiritual sense must offer proof of its authenticity. A merely subjective inspiration is insufficient. One must be able to show that it is a sense "willed by God himself", a spiritual meaning "given by God" to the inspired text (*EB*, nn. 552-553). Determining the spiritual sense then, belongs to the realm of exegetical science.

Thus we note that, despite the great difference in the difficulties they had to face, the two encyclicals are in complete agreement at deepest level. Both of them reject a split between the human and the divine, between scientific research and respect for the faith, between the literal sense and the spiritual sense. They thus appear to be in perfect harmony with the mystery of the incarnation.

## II. The harmony between Catholic exegesis and the mystery of the incarnation

6. The strict relationship uniting the inspired biblical texts with the mystery of the incarnation was expressed by the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* in the following terms: "Just as the substantial Word of God became like men in every respect except sin, so too the words of God, expressed in human languages, became like human language in every respect except error" (*EB*, n. 559). Repeated almost literally by the conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum* (n. 13), this statement sheds light on a parallelism rich in meaning.

It is true that putting God's words into writing, through the charism of scriptural inspiration, was the first step towards the incarnation of the Word of God. These written words, in fact, were an abiding means of communication and communion between the chosen people and their one Lord. On the other hand, it is because of the prophetic aspect of these words that it was possible to recognize the fulfillment of God's plan when "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14). After the heavenly glorification of the humanity of the Word made flesh, it is again due to written words that his stay among us is attested to in an abiding way. Joined to the inspired writings of the first covenant, the inspired writings of the new covenant are a verifiable means of communication and communion between the believing people and God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This mean, certainly can never be separated from the stream of spiritual life that flows from the Heart of Jesus crucified and which spreads through the Church's sacraments. It is nevertheless its own consistency precisely as a written text which verifies it.

7. Consequently, the two encyclicals require that Catholic exegetes remain in full harmony with the mystery of the incarnation, a mystery of the union of the divine and the human in a determinate historical life. The earthly life of Jesus is not defined only by the places and dates at the beginning of the first century in Judea and Galilee, but also by his deep roots in the long history of a small nation of the ancient Middle East, with its weaknesses and its greatness, with its men of God and its sinners, with its slow cultural evolution and its political misadventures, with its defeats and its victories, with its longing for peace and the Reign of God. The Church of Christ takes the realism of the incarnation seriously, and this is why she attaches great importance to the "historico-critical" study of the Bible. Far from condemning it, as those who support "mystical" exegesis would want, my Predecessors vigorously approved. "Artis criticae disciplinam", Leo XIII wrote, "quippe percipiendae penitus hagiographorum sententiae perutilem, *Nobis vehementer probantibus*, nostri (exegetae, scilicet, catholici) excolant" (Apostolic Letter *Vigilantiae*, establishing the Biblical Commission, 30 October 1902, *EB*, n. 142). The same "vehemence" in the approval and the same adverb ("vehementer") are found in *Divino afflante Spiritu* regarding research in textual criticism (cf. *EB*, n. 548).

8. *Divino afflante Spiritu*, we know, particularly recommended that exegetes study the *literary genres* used in the Sacred Books, going so far as to say that Catholic exegesis must "be convinced that this part of its task cannot be neglected without serious harm to Catholic exegesis" (*EB*, n. 560). This recommendation starts from the concern to understand the meaning of the texts with all the accuracy and precision possible and, thus, in their historical, cultural context. A false idea of God and the incarnation presses a certain number of Christians to take the opposite approach. They tend to believe that, since God is the absolute Being, each of his words has an absolute value, independent of all the conditions of human language. Thus, according to them, there is no room for studying these conditions in order to make distinctions that would relativize the significance of the words. However, that is where the illusion occurs and the mysteries of scriptural inspiration and the incarnation are really rejected, by clinging to a false notion of the Absolute. The God of the Bible is not an absolute Being



who, crushing everything he touches, would suppress all differences and all nuances. On the contrary, he is God the Creator, who created the astonishing variety of beings "each according to its kind", as the Genesis account says repeatedly (Gn 1). Far from destroying differences, God respects them and makes use of them (cf. 1 Cor 12:18, 24, 28). Although he expresses himself in human language, he does not give each expression a uniform value, but uses its possible nuances with extreme flexibility and likewise accepts its limitations. That is what makes the task of exegetes so complex, so necessary and so fascinating! None of the human aspects of language can be neglected. The recent progress in linguistic, literary, and hermeneutical research have led biblical exegesis to add many other points of view (rhetorical, narrative, structuralist) to the study of literary genres; other human sciences, such as psychology and sociology, have likewise been employed. To all this one can apply the charge which Leo XIII gave the members of the Biblical Commission: "Let them consider nothing that the diligent research of modern scholars will have newly found as foreign to their realm; quite the contrary, let them be alert to adopt without delay anything useful that each period brings to biblical exegesis" (*Vigilantiae*, EB, n. 140). Studying the human circumstances of the word of God should be pursued with ever renewed interest.

9. Nevertheless, this study is not enough. In order to respect the coherence of the Church's faith and of scriptural inspiration, Catholic exegesis must be careful not to limit itself to the human aspects of the biblical texts. First and foremost, it must help the Christian people to perceive more clearly the word of God in these texts so that they can better accept them in order to live in full communion with God. To this end it is obviously necessary that the exegete himself perceive the divine word in the texts. He can do this only if his intellectual work is sustained by a vigorous spiritual life. Without this support, exegetical research remains incomplete; it loses sight of its main purpose and is confined to secondary tasks. It can even become a sort of escape. Scientific study of the merely human aspects of the texts can make him forget that the word of God invites each person to come out of himself to live in faith and love.

On this point the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* recalls the special nature of the Sacred Books and their consequent need for interpretation: "The Sacred Books", he said, "cannot be likened to ordinary writings, but, since they have been dictated by the Holy Spirit himself and have extremely serious contents, mysterious and difficult in many respects, we always need, in order to understand and explain them, the coming of the same Holy Spirit, that is, his light and grace which must certainly be sought in humble prayer and preserved by a life of holiness" (EB, n. 89). In a shorter formula, borrowed from St Augustine, *Divino afflante Spiritu* expressed the same requirement: "Orent ut intellegant!" (EB, n. 569).

Indeed, to arrive at a completely valid interpretation of words inspired by the Holy Spirit, one must first be guided by the Holy Spirit, and it is necessary to pray for that, to pray much, to ask in prayer for the interior light of the Spirit and docilely accept that light, to ask for the love that alone enables one to understand the language of God, who "is love" (1 Jn 4:8,16). While engaged in the very work of interpretation, one must remain in the presence of God as much as possible.

10. Docility to the Holy Spirit produces and reinforces another attitude needed for the correct orientation of exegesis: fidelity to the Church. The Catholic exegete does not entertain the individualist illusion leading to the belief that one can better understand the biblical texts outside the community of believers. The contrary is true, for these texts have not been given to individual researchers "to satisfy, their curiosity or provide them with subjects for study and research" (*Divino afflante Spiritu*, EB, n. 566); they have been entrusted to the community of believers, to the Church of Christ, in order to nourish faith and guide the life of charity. Respect for this purpose conditions the validity of the interpretation. *Providentissimus Deus* recalled this basic truth and observed that, far from hampering biblical research, respect for this fact fosters its authentic progress (cf. EB, n. 108-109). It is comforting to note that recent studies in hermeneutical philosophy have confirmed this point of view and that exegetes of various confessions have worked from similar perspectives by stressing, for example, the need to interpret each biblical text as part of the scriptural canon recognized by the Church, or by being more attentive to the contributions of patristic exegesis.

Being faithful to the Church, in fact means resolutely finding one's place in the mainstream of the great Tradition that, under the guidance of the Magisterium, assured of the Holy Spirit's special assistance, has recognized the canonical writings as the word addressed by God to his people and has never ceased meditating on them and discovering their inexhaustible riches. The Second Vatican Council asserted this again: "All that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church, which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the word of God" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 12).

It is nevertheless true —the Council also states this, repeating an assertion of *Providentissimus Deus*—that it "is the task of exegetes to work, according to these rules, towards a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church to form a firmer judgment" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 12; cf. *Providentissimus Deus*, EB, n. 109: "ut, quasi praeparato studio, iudicium Ecclesiae maturetur").

11. In order better to carry out this very important ecclesial task, exegetes will be keen to remain close to the preaching of God's word, both by devoting part of their time to this ministry and by maintaining relations with those who exercise it and helping them with publications of pastoral exegesis (cf. *Divino afflante Spiritu*, EB, n. 551). Thus they will avoid becoming lost in the complexities of abstract scientific research which distances them from the true meaning of the Scriptures. Indeed, this meaning is inseparable from their goal, which is to put believers into a personal relationship with God.

### III. The New Document of the Biblical Commission

12. In these perspectives, *Providentissimus Deus*, stated "a vast field of research is open to the personal work of each exegete" (EB, n. 109). Fifty years later, *Divino afflante Spiritu* again made the same encouraging observation: "There are still many points, some very important, in the discussion and explanation of which the intellectual penetration and talent of Catholic exegetes can and should be freely exercised" (EB, n. 565).



What was true in 1943 remains so even in our day, for advances in research have produced solutions to certain problems and, at the same time, new questions to be studied. In exegesis, as in other sciences, the more one pushes back the limits of the unknown, the more one enlarges the area to be explored. Less than five years after the publication of *Divino afflante Spiritu*, the discovery of the Qumran scrolls shed the light of a new day on a great number of biblical problems and opened up other fields of research. Since then, many discoveries have been made and new methods of investigation and analysis have been perfected.

**13.** It is this changed situation that has made a new examination of the problems necessary. The Pontifical Biblical Commission has worked on this task and today presents the fruit of its work, entitled *L'interprétation de la Bible dans l'Église*.

What is striking on first reading this document is the *spirit of openness* in which it was conceived. The methods, approaches, and interpretations practiced today in exegesis have been examined and, despite occasionally serious reservations which must be stated, one acknowledges in almost every case, the presence of valid elements for an integral interpretation of the biblical text.

For Catholic exegesis does not have its own exclusive method of interpretation, but starting with the historico-critical basis freed from its philosophical presuppositions or those contrary to the truth of our faith, it makes the most of all the current methods by seeking in each of them the "seeds of the Word".

**14.** Another characteristic feature of this synthesis is its *balance and moderation*. In its interpretation of the Bible, it knows how to harmonize the diachronic and the synchronic by recognizing that the two are mutually complementary and indispensable for bringing out all the truth of the text and for satisfying the legitimate demands of the modern reader.

Even more importantly, Catholic exegesis does not focus its attention on only the human aspects of biblical Revelation, which is sometimes the mistake of the historico-critical method, or on only the divine aspects, as fundamentalism would have it; it strives to highlight both of them as they are united in the divine "condescension" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 13), which is the basis of all Scripture.

**15.** Lastly, one will perceive the document's stress on the fact that *the biblical Word is at work speaking universally in time and space*, to all humanity. If "the words of God... are like human language" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 13), it is so that they may be understood by all. They must not remain distant, "too mysterious and remote for you.... For the word is very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out" (Dt 30:11, 14).

This is the aim of biblical interpretation. If the first task of exegesis is to arrive at the authentic sense of the sacred text or even at its different senses, it must then communicate this meaning to the recipient of Sacred Scripture, who is every human person, if possible.

The Bible exercises its influence down the centuries. A constant process of *actualization* adapts the interpretation to the contemporary mentality and language. This concrete, immediate nature of biblical language greatly facilitates this adaptation, but its origin in an ancient culture causes not a few difficulties. Therefore, biblical thought must always be translated anew into contemporary lan-

guage so that it may be expressed in ways suited to its listeners. This translation, however, should be faithful to the original and cannot force the texts in order to accommodate an interpretation or an approach fashionable at a given time. The word of God must appear in all its splendor, even if it is "expressed in human words" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 13). Today the Bible has spread to every continent and every nation; however, in order for it to have a profound effect, there must be *inculturation* according to the genius proper to each people. Perhaps nations less marked by the deviances of modern Western civilization will understand the biblical message more easily than those who are already insensitive as it were to the action of God's word because of secularization and the excesses of demythologization. In our day, a great effort is necessary, not only on the part of scholars and preachers, but also those who popularize biblical thought: they should use every means possible — and there are many today — so that the universal significance of the biblical message may be widely acknowledged and its saving efficacy may be seen everywhere.

Thanks to this document, the interpretation of the Bible in the Church will be able to obtain new vigor for the good of the whole world, so that the truth may shine forth and stir up charity on the threshold of the third millennium.

### Conclusion

**16.** Finally, I have the joy of being able, as were my Predecessors, Leo XIII and Pius XII, to offer to Catholic exegetes, and in particular, to you, the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, both my thanks and encouragement.

I cordially thank you for the excellent work you have accomplished in service to the word of God and the People of God: a work of research, teaching and publication; an aid to theology, to the liturgy of the word, and to the ministry of preaching; initiatives fostering ecumenism and good relations between Christians and Jews; involvement in the Church's efforts to respond to the aspirations and difficulties of the modern world.

To this I add warm encouragement for the next step to be taken. The increasing complexity of the task requires everyone's effort and a broad interdisciplinary cooperation. In a world where scientific research is taking on greater importance in many domains, it is indispensable for exegetical science to find its place at a comparable level. It is one of the aspects of inculturating the faith which is part of the Church's mission in connection with accepting the mystery of the incarnation.

May you be guided in your research by Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, who opened the minds of his disciples to the understanding of the Scriptures (cf Lk 24:45). May the Virgin Mary serve as a model for you not only by her generous docility to the word of God, but also and especially by her way of accepting what was said to her! St. Luke tells us that Mary reflected in her heart on the divine words and the events that took place, "symbállousa en tê kardía autês" (Lk 2:19). By welcoming the Word she is the model and mother of disciples (cf. Jn 19:27); therefore, may she teach you fully to accept the word of God, not only in intellectual research but also with your whole life!

In order that your work and your activity may make the light of the Scriptures shine ever more brightly, I wholeheartedly give you my Apostolic Blessing.

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message was presented."<sup>8</sup> In this way, he recalls the orientations which Pope Leo XIII presented in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, which Pope Pius XII further developed in *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, and which the Second Vatican Council reiterated in *Dei Verbum* (§ 12).<sup>9</sup>

**§ 4.12** But the biblical text is not to be considered solely as an historical document from the distant past; in continuity with the entire Judeo-Christian tradition, it is to be understood as the living Word which God addresses to his people in every new period of human life, calling for an ever renewed response.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, it is clear that the biblical word is not primarily destined for individual or private devotion; on the contrary, listening to this word always takes place within the context of the Christian community which, as such, is responsible for its interpretation and for its realization. It is the Christian community which is called to hear the biblical word, to make it its own, and to put it into practice. This "incarnation" of the word in our world presupposes that the situation of men and women of our time, with their joys and their sorrows, be taken very seriously. If we desire that the Word of God become "Good News", liberating our modern society from its demons and sicknesses, then the Christian community must undertake the difficult task of analyzing and understanding this society and its real issues, on the one hand, and of discovering the concrete commitments to which it is called, on the other. The process of "incarnation" or of application to one's life is an integral part of the ecclesial reading of the Bible.

#### **§ 4.2 From the Bible to life, from life to the Bible**

Luke's Gospel and the Acts have drawn our attention to the fact that, in biblical pastoral work, it is possible to proceed from the biblical text to real-life situations or to begin with concrete life situations and seek out the biblical message. While permitting a dialogue between the text and life, between life and the text, biblical pastoral ministry can make use of many starting points and employ a variety of approaches or methods.<sup>11</sup> This multiplicity of approaches can facilitate a receptivity to the richness of both the text and life. We might be aware of the situation and the composition of the text, not only of an author's theological and stylistic options, but also of the text's social function within the relationship between the author and the contemporaneous community; we might also be aware of the basic symbols of human psychology which go beyond the limits of a specific period in history or of a theological message which at a certain period in the history of the Church becomes a reference point for the creed ....

Likewise, the biblical text resonates in various manners according to the different life situations and conditions of those reading the Bible. Indeed, it is as individuals or as particular Christian communities that we hear the Word, and biblical pastoral ministry must take this into account. We seek direction and orientation in the Bible on the basis of our personal, family, or professional interrogations. In the same way, we look for landmarks in the biblical message in our search for answers to the prob-

lems of our society: economical questions, the just distribution of wealth, the environment, the return of old and the rising of new racisms, the non-respect of the fundamental human rights of all men and women, the anguish in view of a future without hope .... To respect real life; to allow the biblical word to come truly into contact with this life, like salt which brings out the savour of life or like light which illuminates the different facets of human existence; to be tolerant with regard to personal itineraries in the contact between concrete life and the Word; to accept that in our world the Bible is only one reference point amidst many others. These are some of the fundamental attitudes of biblical pastoral ministry.

#### **§ 4.3 Three unacceptable approaches to the reading of the Bible**

Among the different methods of reading the Bible actually in use, many facilitate an in-depth encounter between the biblical message and concrete life. Nonetheless, three approaches seem to respect neither the original meaning of the text nor the concrete situation of men and women today: the moralizing approach, the fundamentalist approach, and the spiritualizing approach. In the extreme form of the *moralizing approach*, a "preacher" reduces the biblical text to its moral message and, placing himself above the complex situations and problems of everyday life, exhorts his listeners to a precise and preconceived conduct which must be adopted if they wish to avoid the consequences of divine punishment. Thus, this approach transforms "good news" (in German, *Frohbotschaft*) into "menacing news" (*Drohbotschaft*), converting the biblical text into an instrument of anguish and repression. The *fundamentalist approach* imposes a literal understanding of the text, respecting neither the different forms of biblical language and the original meaning of the text, nor the personal freedom of those who attempt to discover a meaningful way of life in our so complex world of the 20th century. On the contrary, this approach promotes dependence on persons or institutions claiming to be the sole guardians of the truth and desiring to manipulate their followers. The *spiritualizing approach* reduces the reading of the Bible to a form of individualistic piety which draws back from all real contact with the world and refuses real involvement in the world.

#### **§ 4.4 Criteria for a Christian reading of the Bible which is faithful and responsible in the contemporary world, and consequent challenges for the biblical pastoral ministry**

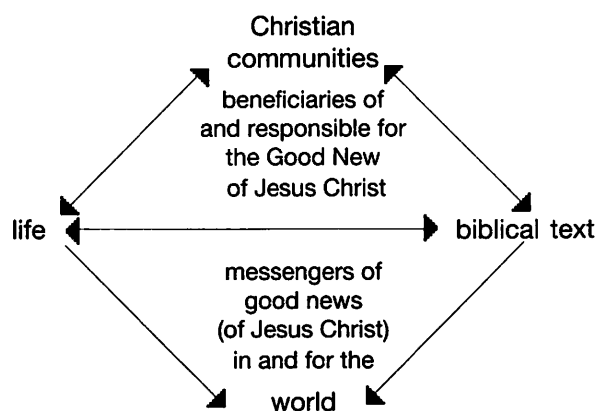
On the basis of the preceding reflections, we may now attempt to formulate certain criteria for a Christian approach to the reading of the Bible which must be both faithful and responsible in today's world. These criteria may be organized around three main points:

- 1) the "subject" of the reading, the ecclesial community under its two forms: the local Church and the universal Church;
- 2) the reading, the understanding, and the appropriation of the biblical message and the discovery of God's

Word for the contemporary world within the dialectic between life and the text;

3) the announcing of the "Good News of Jesus Christ" within the Christian community which is both a beneficiary of and responsible for this Good News; the proclamation of "good news (of Jesus Christ)" in the world through the transformation of this world and through witness.

These three points may be presented in the following schema:



**§ 4.41** *The Christian community as a whole and each of its members are beneficiaries and messengers of this Word, without being its exclusive proprietors.* Without wishing to deny the importance of personal spirituality, we must situate biblical pastoral ministry primarily within the context of the ecclesial community, at the level of the local Churches, and at the level of the universal Church. The image of the Church as the "people of God on the way" throughout history is significant for biblical pastoral work: Christian communities seek to understand the signs of the times with reference to the biblical message and in view of discovering concrete orientations for their journey within the world. In this respect, the story of the wise men who read the signs of the times (the star) and understood them with assistance from the Scriptures in order to reach the goal of their search (Mt 2) is full of implications for our work.

**§ 4.42** *The ecclesial community is responsible for the Word within the community,* in its basic missions of announcing the Gospel or bearing witness in word and in action, of service between brothers and sisters, and of liturgical celebration. In this domain, as is also the case in the social doctrine of the Church, one should apply the subsidiarity principle in determining the respective responsibilities. Three levels are to be distinguished: the parochial community or a small group formed on the basis of common interest or concern (the faithful together with those who have been entrusted with a particular pastoral mission); the Christian communities of a diocese regrouped around their bishop; all the local Churches regrouped around the college of bishops together with the Pope. At each level, the Christian community and all of its members assume the responsibility of listening to the biblical word and to the concrete situation of men and women in their neighborhood in order to discover God's

Word in and for that situation. Additionally, they discover the possibilities for its personal and community appropriation and application, and this in view of the incarnation or realization of the Word in the contemporary world. Those persons who have been entrusted with particular pastoral tasks at these different levels nurture the intense desire to build up these communities within the unity of the Christian faith, while respecting the legitimate diversity of life options and commitments (1 Cor 12) and while guiding the process of discernment without becoming an obstacle to the work of the Spirit (1 Th 5:19).

Biblical pastoral ministry must be directed to the building up of these Christian communities, in which each member participates according to the gifts he or she has received, in mutual respect of the brothers and sisters of Jesus. Biblical animation teams should reflect, as much as possible, the composition of this community (women and men, young and old, lay persons and clergy, different social milieus and levels of education), in which each person exercises his part of responsibility in a collegial manner.

**§ 4.43** These local Catholic Christian communities must nurture contact with their Catholic sister communities; in addition, they should seek ever more to intensify their relations with Christians of other confessions. The experience of the ecumenical encounters of Basel and Seoul and the commitment of Christians on the local level to the "conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation" merit the full collaboration of the entire Catholic Church.

Biblical animation as a field of concrete *ecumenical collaboration* must become a priority in the hope that our common responsibility for the Word might one day heal the divisions which separate us from our Christian brothers and sisters.

**§ 4.44** The Christian community is also responsible for this Word beyond its own borders in its *active commitments within the world* of which it is also a part. It must work at the construction of a society which is oriented towards justice for all, desirous of commonly shared peace, and involved in the preservation of the Earth and its resources for future generations.

**§ 4.45** Biblical pastoral ministry must seriously take into account the *mission of healing and of liberation* which Jesus entrusted to his disciples, letting itself be inspired by a dynamic vision of the human person. In this respect, this ministry must:

- respect the specificity of each human being, of each woman, of each man, of each child, without imprisoning them within stereotypes (for example, not "the role of woman", but "the roles of concrete women"),
- profoundly respect human liberty, as it develops in various personal life options,
- help people find *their* way in life, *their* language in which they may express themselves in confidence,
- promote personal, adult responsibility,

- accompany men and women in *their* search for meaning in their lives,
- permit those who are rejected by the society and its institutions or even by religious institutions to return to their personal, family, professional, and religious commitments as responsible adults ...

Within this process, Jesus' "pedagogy" in the Gospels might provide a model for biblical animation and a source of key texts in view of the healing of "sicknesses" which cripple men and women, or in view of their liberation from everything which enslaves them in our 20th century society.

**§ 4.46** The experience of the Word being actively present in our everyday lives might lead us to *open ourselves to the One who is the source of this Word* and his action in favor of men and women during every period of our history.

Giving thanks for the divine favor towards us, sharing his Word, in diverse liturgical celebrations or in prayer assemblies, constitute a possible and desirable fruit of long term biblical pastoral ministry within the Christian community. But if we do not want the liturgy to remain without effect on our lives, then we must accept the challenge of seeking forms and a language capable of integrating the concrete history of the merciful God with his people, in the present as in the past, in order to celebrate God and his favorable action in our regard.

It is possible, nonetheless, that the recognition of God's presence in the world does not go beyond the form of a simple question: Why do Christians live like they do: solidarity rather than "everyone for themselves", sharing rather than accumulation of the goods of the earth, respect for one another rather than intolerance ...? Real commitment for the life of the world may provoke astonishment and questions which might possibly lead further. But here too, the various life options of men and women in our world must be respected, and Christians might also be called to live their faith anonymously.

## **§ 5. Propositions for a Concrete Pastoral Realization**

The foregoing reflections constitute the basic orientations which the members from the southern European subregion of the Catholic Biblical Federation consider to be priorities in the biblical pastoral ministry for the coming years. In order to proceed to the level of concrete realizations, we need adequate structures, well conceived formation programs, and an open and dynamic pastoral plan at the community and inter-community level. It is in this regard that we express the following needs and requests.

**§ 5.1** We need a "*center for biblical pastoral ministry*" in each diocese which is entrusted particularly with the promotion and coordination of biblical animation in the local Church. Its primary objectives can be formulated as follows:

- promote a better knowledge of the Bible and its message for our world;

- promote the reading of the Bible within Christian communities and the common search for meaning and faith in today's world, and more particularly:

- ° elaborate and make available methods of a "simple" or popular reading of the Bible, which do not depend directly on biblical exegesis (the results of which are still limited to a certain intellectual milieu) nor on a "catechism" which represents a systematic presentation of doctrine to be simply repeated; these methods should help to create a situation in which God's Word and the words of the faithful might encounter each other in a dialogue between life and faith within the unity of the Church;

- ° elaborate simple formation programs which go beyond the fragmentary reading of the Bible and which offer a global initiation to the two Testaments, situated within their historical contexts, and to the multiple expressions of faith and forms of faith communities;

- identify and respond to the needs of continuing education of ministers of the Word, in its broadest sense (cf. Dei Verbum § 25).

- promote on the national level or by language region the publication and distribution of editions of the Bible adapted to the needs and capacities of our contemporaries (cf. Dei Verbum § 22);<sup>12</sup>

- taking into account these aspects, elaborate, together with the bishop or with the bishops' conference and in consultation with the local communities, a plan of biblical pastoral ministry adapted to the needs and to the situation of the diocese.

We respectfully ask the bishops to create such biblical pastoral ministry centers in every diocese and provide these centers with the personnel and financial means necessary to accomplish their tasks. The staff as well as the animation teams should be composed of and reflect, as much as possible, the diversity and richness of the People of God (women and men, lay persons and clergy, people who have diverse life experiences and are capable of using different approaches to the reading of the Bible).

**§ 5.2** At the level of *theological and pastoral reflection*, we propose the following priorities in support of biblical pastoral ministry:

- to open biblical studies, at the institutional level for theological formation and to offer interdisciplinary study (historical-critical, structural, psychological, sociological, pedagogical approaches) which takes into consideration the different levels of meaning of the texts for contemporary men and women;

- to reflect interdisciplinarily on hermeneutical questions: In which sense is the Bible "the Word of God"? In what way does the Bible have authority for Christian faith and life? What is the respective value of the different reading methods of the Bible? How does the dialogue between the biblical text, situated in its original historical context, and the life of men and women today function, and how does this dialogue permit the discovery of God's Word in and for today's world?

- to present the richness and dynamic nature of the expressions of faith, and the forms of community life and commitment within Judaism and early Christianity;
- to elaborate biblical approaches to the fundamental questions of contemporary life, not to offer ready made solutions but to provoke responsible reflection and commitment on the part of Christian communities and to make possible and credible dialogue with all men and women of good will;
- to analyze honestly and in-depth the phenomenon of sects and new religious movements, especially with regard to their use of the Bible, the "salvation" they offer and the welcome they receive; to discuss the eventual readjustments in a way of life within Christian communities;
- to publish and make available to a broad audience the results of these reflections.

For the realization of these studies, we request the active collaboration of biblical scholars and theologians.

**§ 5.3** We ask those who are entrusted with the elaboration and implementation of *biblical formation* programs at all levels to take into consideration the two-fold historical situation of the biblical message: its original meaning and its significance for our world. In particular, the integration of the following basic elements within formation programs is a first priority:

- an historical-critical initiation to the biblical text,
- an initiation to different methods of reading the Bible,
- an initiation to the reading of the contemporary signs of the times (with a strong interest in concrete life, in the major questions and problems of our society, in the forms of language and symbols, etc.),
- an initiation to methods in the confrontation of the twofold historical situations of the biblical message which respects the diverse life options and the various forms of Christian communities,
- an initiation to team ministry and to techniques of the animation of groups,
- personal experience in team ministry and in biblical animation with groups, with accompanying psychological supervision.

**§ 5.4** The Second Vatican Council's constitution on the liturgy has greatly insisted on the importance of *the Bible in the liturgy*. The liturgical reform has foreseen an abundance of Scripture texts for the different liturgical forms. In this context, several observations may be made:

- The high quantity of biblical readings prescribed for the table of the Word provokes not so much of an in-depth contact with the biblical message but risks a certain indigestion, a saturation of texts which do not come into contact with people's lives and which often pass unheard. In some situations it might be better to reduce the quantity of texts in the liturgy in order to

allow a more in-depth contact between the biblical message and everyday life.

- The formation of lectors should foresee training in diction, in order to facilitate the reception of the text and the understanding of its meaning and in the preparation of short introductions in order to capture the interest of those present and motivate their discernment.

- The announcement of the Good News, which helps men and women live today, should be a primary objective of the homily, fully respect the diverse language and life experience, and manifest Christ's healing and liberating action through the Bible and the sacraments of the Christian community.

- The homily should be prepared and prolonged as much as possible in dialogue with the members of the Christian community in order that the Word might re-sound the life of the community and take root in this life.

\* \* \* \*

The final report of the special synod of bishops in 1985, within the context of its reflections on the reception of the Second Vatican Council, noted that the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* has perhaps been "too neglected". The present document reflects the desire of those who have received a particular mission in the area of biblical pastoral ministry to take seriously the orientations of *Dei Verbum* and even more fundamentally the mission which Jesus has entrusted to his Church. Not only the theological and pastoral reflections, the general orientations, and the concrete propositions which we have elaborated but also our concrete work in the field of biblical animation bear witness to our commitment as "servants of the Word". Nonetheless, we are not the only ones concerned with the work of biblical pastoral ministry; we are convinced that these reflections and commitments are of vital interest to the entire Church and deserve to be further developed in open and honest dialogue on the level of local and regional Christian communities as well as on the level of the universal Church.

Luxembourg, April 14, 1993 (translated from the French)  
Thomas P. Osborne, 52, rue Jules Wilhelm L-2728 Luxembourg

<sup>1</sup> The documents of the Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe have been published in the following collections: Les Evêques d'Europe et la nouvelle évangélisation / Conseil des Conférences épiscopales d'Europe; documents rassemblés et présentés par Hervé Legrand; préface du Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini. - Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1991. - (Documents des Eglises); and: Die europäischen Bischöfe und die Neu-Evangelisierung Europas / Rat der europäischen Bischofskonferenzen (CEE). - Bonn: Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz; St. Gallen: CEE Sekretariat, 1991. - (Stimmen der Weltkirche, Europa; 32). More recently: Pour que nous soyons témoins du Christ qui nous a libérés: déclaration finale du Synode des évêques d'Europe. - Documentation catholique n° 2043 (2 février 1992), 123-132. For a general and sometimes critical presentation, one might consult the following publications: Bischöfe - kollegial für Europa: Der Rat der Europäischen Bischofskonferenzen im Dienst einer soziaethisch



konkretisierten Evangelisierung / Christian Thiede. - Münster: Aschendorff, 1991. - (Schriften des Instituts für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster; Bd. 22). *Le rêve de Compostelle: vers la restauration d'une Europe chrétienne? / sous la direction de René Luneau; avec la collaboration de Paul Ladrière.* - Paris: Centurion, 1989. The Catholic Biblical Federation devoted its plenary assembly in Bogotá in 1990 to the place of the Bible in evangelization. The final document and the contribution of Carlos Mesters have been published in various languages; for the German edition: *Schlußdokument der 4. Vollversammlung der Katholischen Bibelföderation: Bogotá, Kolumbien, 27. Juni bis 6. Juli 1990.* - *Bibel und Kirche* 46 (1991), H. 1, 23-35; cf. also Carlos Mesters, „Seht, ich mache alles neu“: Die Bibel in der Neuevangelisierung. - *Bibel und Kirche* 46 (1991), H. 1, 2-22.

<sup>2</sup> For a general, historical presentation of the biblical movement in the Roman Catholic Church, cf. Paul-Gerhard Müller, *Die Römisch-Katholische Bibelbewegung und ihre Vorgeschichte.* - *Bis an die Enden der Erde: ökumenische Erfahrungen mit der Bibel / herausgegeben von Teresa Berger und Erich Geldbach.* - Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1992. - (Ökumene konkret; 1). - S. 38-69. - Also published in: *Programmvorschau 1993 / Diözesanstelle für Bibelarbeit Trier.* - Trier: Diözesanstelle für Bibelarbeit, 1993. - S. 27-56.

<sup>3</sup> Inspired from the analysis of Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Nouvelles religiosités et foi chrétienne: un défi pour l'évangélisation.* - *Revue de l'Institut Catholique de Paris*; n° 43 (juillet-septembre 1992), 58-78.

<sup>4</sup> See, however, the nuanced position of Paul-Gerhard Müller, *Die Römisch-Katholische Bibelbewegung*, cited above.

<sup>5</sup> An adequate classification of these groups is practically impossible: there are territorial groups (linked to a parish) and categorial groups (women, men, intellectuals, workers, ...), groups characterized by a particular spirituality (charismatic renewal, Focolari, prayer groups, ecumenical) and groups which utilize a particular method for reading the Bible (the so-called Kigali, Lumko, Västerås, Bludesch, lectio divina, social-political analysis, popular methods ...), etc.

<sup>6</sup> The conciliar decree on the missions *Ad gentes* (§ 10-15) describes a typical sequence of five steps in evangelization: a respectful and deep contact with the non-Christians and sharing of their situation, gratuitous service based upon Christian charity, a preaching of the Gospel which respects the other's freedom, catechumenate, formation of a new community. Similarly, Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) recalls the essential aspects of evangelization: transformation and renewal of humanity, inculturation, witness

of life, explicit announcing of the Gospel, personal and community adherence, new apostolate (§ 17-24).

<sup>7</sup> Marcel Dumais writes: "Jesus evangelizes not only the poor, but also the rich. Evangelizing the rich means, especially, bringing them to the awareness that their riches easily close them to God and to others. They are invited to consider their possessions not as an absolute value, but as a simple means for personal and collective human growth. Evangelization reminds Christians that in the logic of their communion with Christ and with others, they are called to share with the most unfortunate and to tend towards a society in which everyone can make use of material goods according to his or her needs." Marcel Dumais, *L'évangélisation des pauvres dans l'oeuvre de Luc.* - *Science et esprit* 36 (1984), n. 3, 297-321, p. 318.

<sup>8</sup> Pope John Paul II's address to the members of the new executive committee of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate on April 7, 1986. - *AAS* 78 (1986), 1217-1219; for the French text, cf. *Documentation catholique* n° 1918 (18 mai 1986), 491-492.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also: *Sancta Mater Ecclesia: Instruction on the historical truth of the Gospels* (April 21, 1964); for the French translation, cf. *La vérité historique des Evangiles: instruction de la Commission pontificale pour les études bibliques*, *Documentation catholique* 61 (1964), 711-718, with Cardinal Bea's commentary; *L'historicité des Evangiles synoptiques*, *Documentation catholique* 61 (1964), 771-788; *Le caractère historique des Evangiles synoptiques, oeuvres inspirées*, *Documentation catholique* 61 (1964), 825-842.

<sup>10</sup> The history of the reception of the biblical texts (in German, *Wirkungsgeschichte*) is of utmost interest for the understanding of this process.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. e.g., *Handbuch der Bibelarbeit / herausgegeben von Wolfgang Langer; Redaktion: Johannes Thiele.* - München: Kösel, 1987. *Zugänge zur Bibel für Gruppen: Methodische Hilfen für die Bibelarbeit / Anneliese Hecht.* - Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, [1990]. *Ein Wort wie Feuer: Wege lebendiger Bibelauslegung / Horst Klaus Berg.* - München: Kösel; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Concrete needs vary greatly from one country to the other; for example, the German-speaking countries have expressed the following necessities: an extensive revision of the „Einheitsübersetzung“ (too imprecise, a too exclusively masculine language), the edition of an „Arbeitsbibel“, with notes giving the findings of historical-critical exegesis and possibilities for application in today's life, the edition of a Bible for young people; in Hungary, there is a great need for a scientific translation of the Bible and for inexpensive copies, etc.

### Working Document

"Orientations for Biblical Pastoral Ministry at the end of the 20th Century" is a product of the Southern Europe subregion and serves as a basis and welcome for similar reflections that may come from each subregion and region of the Federation or even from any country affiliated with the Federation. The following suggested questions may offer a first orientation for such a reflection:

- Which points of the document correspond best to the preoccupations of your subregion, region, or country?
- Which points must be adapted, developed, or added so they correspond to the local situation?

- What strategy should be adopted to alert the responsible pastoral leaders to the needs of the biblical pastoral ministry in your subregion, region, or country?

- In what ways could this reflection change or improve the effectiveness of the various organizations in your area that serve the biblical pastoral ministry?

The general secretariat in Stuttgart is very interested in your reflections on the document and responses to the given questions so that we may possibly share them with Federation members via *BULLETIN DEI VERBUM*. We would be truly grateful for your cooperation.

## Life of the Federation

### "Year with the Bible 1992"

*Austria and Germany celebrated 1992 as a "Year with the Bible". Both the Catholic and Protestant Churches of these countries used the Year with the Bible for numerous biblical initiatives. On January 31, 1993, during a press conference at the conclusion of the event, Bishop Karl Lehmann, president of the German Bishops' Conference, stated, "An important effect of the 'Year with the Bible' was the deepening of ecumenical mutuality among Christians. Therefore I would like to place this more comprehensive and, at the same time, deepening mutuality on the basis and in consequence of this approach to the Bible at the top of all the 'results'... Bible Year has intensified the ecumenical contacts in many places or often caused them to be established respectively. This is true for the diocesan level as well as for the community level i.e. joint study groups of Christian Churches (Arbeitsgemeinschaften Christlicher Kirchen, ACK) as well as for the local level. In 110 cities, Christians from both churches gathered and often for the first time organized and implemented common projects... What counts now is that Bible Year does not become nonexistent. We must reflect on how the many impulses can be carried on into the very routine life of the Church."*

*Here are two reports from the directors of the Catholic Biblical Association of Austria and Germany, Dr. Höslinger and Dr. Ort Kemper respectively, on some of the more memorable events they had the opportunity to experience during Bible Year and their personal comments on how these events have affected the Catholic Church in the two countries.*

#### Austria

**1. "Year with the Bible 1992"** A positive assessment of the "Year with the Bible" was drawn by the director of the Catholic Biblical Association of Austria (Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, ÖKB), Dr. Norbert Höslinger. The initiatives and activities of Bible Year have left traces and given impulses which will only be measurable on the long run. At the moment, the effect is still in the preliminary stage; however, the following innovations can clearly be observed: an intensified interest with the "Book of Books"; an erratically increased participation in biblical pilgrimages to the Holy Land. The ÖKB also offers this biblical journey and has already made a new record in 1992 with more than 2000 travelers.

Bible year was to serve several purposes: to open the Bible to those who have had little or no exposure to it; to offer a deeper and more knowledgeable experience to those who are already reading the Bible; to accent ecumenism; to mark the Bible's importance in culture and society. The media especially the Austrian Radio and Television played a decisive role in reaching those who have had little exposure to the Bible. Due to numerous initiatives of the main department of religion in radio and television, ample prime time was granted to the "Year with the Bible".

The plan to deepen the knowledge of those who read the Bible, according to Höslinger, was the most successful. Many parish communities and dioceses initiated and developed an immense number of activities, for example: "Bible in the knapsack" - During a hike, immediate impressions were compared with the message of Holy Scripture; "Bible parties"

- Young people talked about the Bible in a more relaxed atmosphere.

A criterion for a growing interest in deepening Bible knowledge may also be seen in the increasing sales of specialized biblical literature; however, the sales of Bibles have hardly increased over the past year. An exception to this is Bible sales to the former eastern bloc countries. "Pleading Letters" requesting Bibles for people in these countries have been met with great enthusiasm.

The exhibit "Bible Future" enjoyed consistent popularity. Seven exhibits crisscrossed all over Austria. From among the mass rallies, Dr. Höslinger made special mention of the "Bible Festival of Linz" and two events in Burgenland under the themes of "The Bible and the New Evangelization" and "More than a Book".

**2. "Biblical Stumbling Blocks"** In Vienna, for many years, there has been very constructive cooperation between the Catholic Adult Education Center, the Vienna Theological Courses for laity, and the Catholic Biblical Association. The two year course "Learn to read the Bible" is a fruit of this enterprise. This year, as a sign of good ecumenical cooperation, the Protestant Adult Education Center also officially participated.

Last year, a study series geared for Bible readers in Vienna and in the vicinity thereof was offered and spread out over a period of four evenings. The evening program was somewhat different. First there was a 20 minute presentation on each the Old and the New Testament. Then, during a 15 minute break, the participants had the option to submit their questions in writing and/or look at literature that was for sale. The questions were briefly answered by the topic specialists. The advantage of this procedure was that there were no lengthy lectures addressing each question which often become empirically boring for the participants and distract from the essential issues.

The aim of the study was to clarify reoccurring difficulties, and in order to do this, one of the following four topics was discussed each evening:

**a.** The widespread prejudice that contrasts the revengeful God of the OT with the merciful God of the NT. This prejudice was removed by showing the traditions in the OT which describe God as father, mother, shepherd, bridegroom, and under many other positive attributes. The talk about the war-faring God must be viewed in accordance with the described political situation.

**b.** The hope in the resurrection can be found only in the younger texts of the OT. During the second evening, it was clarified that resurrection does not mean reviving the dead, but taking up of body and soul into the realm of God. All attempts of reading a doctrine of rebirth into the Bible must be rejected.

**c.** "Miracles". The speakers clarified that the miracle stories in the OT and NT are in part very similar, and that in the Jesus tradition the miracles surpass the doings of the prophets so that the importance of Jesus was to become evident. There remains no doubt that historically, miracles have happened and continue to happen even though a fundamentalistic view according to how Jesus performed every miracle in the described manner is not tenable because the differences in the gospels as well as the respective literary forms of the individual accounts must be taken into consideration.

**d.** The relationship between Jews and Christians. During the last evening, a decidedly hot iron was at stake: *Are Jews and Christians adversaries or brothers/sisters?* The two speakers unanimously agreed that from the standpoint of the Bible this question can only be answered in the second sense. Antisemitism in the ethnical and national sense is alien from the NT even though it is true that these texts portray an emotional confrontation regarding Christianity and the importance it attributes to Jesus of Nazareth.

The four evening study took place in the St. Nepomuk parish, centrally located in the second district of Vienna. The location contributed to the fact that the study experienced an overwhelming response, some 100 people attended each of the four evenings.

### Germany

**Bible Year has passed - the Concern of the Bible goes on**  
**There was a surprisingly great resonance!** In spite of all the skeptical Cassandra cries - resonance upon Bible Year was surprisingly great. In the beginning one could have felt somewhat annoyed by the way the heads, for example, the pastoral offices were reacting to the idea of Bible Year: Just one more thematic year! What else should we do.... But the common people thought differently, especially those in the parish communities and deaneries; Bible Year was received in an exceptional manner. Their reaction meant they deeply desired to seek spiritual depth and spiritual impulse. As a result of the initial phase, many bishops and diocesan offices have made the idea their own and have conveyed it to their dioceses.

Many contributed to the success of Bible Year. Many university faculties offered a series of lectures; Church academies and institutes for continuing education dedicated more time than usual to the Bible on their calendars; biblical events experienced an overwhelming response, much more than expected; new Bible groups were founded in many communities; training courses for biblical animators were in high attendance; Bible exhibits were too numerous to count.

From the events of Bible Year, it became apparent that there was and still is a dire need for methodical training. During the last years, a Bible sharing course called the Seven-Step-Method has spread like wildfire; however, now some of these groups have reached a point where they feel like they are going around in a circle. There is a dire need not only for methodical training but for exegetical training as well.

**The Women's Union** The Catholic Women's Union of Germany, (Katholische Frauengemeinschaft Deutschlands (kfd)), reported that Bible work has greatly increased. Almost in every diocesan organization, study days on the Bible have been offered; however, because there was not a request for it, a purely scientific exegetical study was not offered. In these studies, creative experience-oriented methods have proven to be helpful. An observation on the ecumenical Bible work with women was interesting: The Protestant women were much more at ease and had an independent approach to biblical

texts; however, they had a stronger inclination to interpret the texts through association. For the Catholic women, the Bible is still rather new territory; therefore, a great inquisitiveness still exists. One has found that there are not rarely reservations in the Protestant Church: The Bible is taken by "rightist" groups and occupied by the "pious". In the Catholic Church the situation is quite different: The women who are more aware and critical are the ones who gather for Bible circles. Perhaps this is not a full picture but I suspect the advancement of fundamentalistic Bible interpretation will most likely cause some headache in the coming years.

**Broken Relation to Public Relations Work?** I myself have chuckled at many of the Protestant and Free-Church initiatives: Bible boat, Bible bus, Bible train.... In this regard, I was not alone. The Catholics ruled at first with great reservation for these kinds of initiatives; however, we have learned our lesson! It became apparent that these actions which fell somewhat out of the usual frame gained very strong publicity, and they appealed to many people who might not have otherwise come into contact with the Bible or the Church altogether.

The Bible bus (same applies for the boat and train) was successful especially wherever it was incorporated into already existing activities of the local community. In the inactive communities, the event achieved nothing ("Let the bus come!"). Protestant communities received much more out of the event than the Catholic communities which lagged noticeably behind. We as Catholics have still not yet understood that today it does not suffice to remain within the community circle and keep the status quo. Today, the faith must work in a missionary spirit. In this regard we have a lot yet to learn.

A boat? A bus? A train? This sounds like a vacation, traveling, a way of expanding one's horizons... Is it surprising that here the Church should be present? The media have picked up on these activities with enthusiasm. This is all the more reason to consider this approach especially since the Church is otherwise presented unattractively by the media.

The joint media project poster "Do you know my love story?" caused an uproar in the Church. In the beginning, I too rejected it very strongly, but then I changed my way of thinking. By the secular media audience, the poster was received extremely positively. Just another example of how far the inner churchly consciousness has drifted away from that of the rest of society. Here, too, we have to do some rethinking.

*What would be worthwhile to continue?*

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**Bible Exhibitions** In the course of Bible Year, I was asked to open many Bible exhibits with an address. As an incentive, I would like to share some of these experiences with you.

a) In Ochsenhausen, a small town approximately 40 miles from Stuttgart, the community made use of a traveling Bible exhibit. The community and people in the neighboring towns and villages were asked to add their own personal Bibles and other biblical literature to the exhibit. It was amazing what came together! This type of exhibit has been used in many places. Before the opening of the exhibit in Ochsenhausen, the church communities did extensive advertising. On the evening of the opening, some 400 people streamed through the doors of the wonderful monastery chapel to where the exhibit was displayed. The local high school choir performed musical compositions of Psalms from the various centuries. Last but not least the young people's hearts were possibly opened up to the Bible. Additionally, all the neighboring schools and church groups had been invited so for its entire duration, the exhibit was viewed by bus loads of curious visitors.

b) In Mühlacker, a mid-size city also in the vicinity of Stuttgart, the Churches challenged all the local schools to a great biblical painting contest. All the accomplished pieces of art were displayed in the foyer of the adult education center (Volkshochschule). Contests of a similar nature have occurred in many other areas. For me it was astonishing how creative the children, the youth, and teachers were. In Stadtlohn, for example, in one such Bible exhibit I saw a piece in the form of a proper scroll that portrayed the book of Ruth, adorned with many paintings. It was done in a very smart manner so that it could be moved forward and backward. People were constantly crowding around it. Painting contests pose great possibilities to awaken new interest for biblical themes and texts not only in children and youth but also in adults. Many parents also attended the exhibition in great numbers so they could see what their children had achieved... This method of spreading the Word is a way to reach out to many generations that the Church may otherwise have difficulties to reach.

c) In Neukirchen-Vluyn, a Bible exhibition took place in the County Bank. At first I thought this was somewhat strange; but later, it became apparent to me: Since the director of the County Bank had personally invited everyone to the opening, anyone who held a high social position in the small town felt somewhat obliged to attend. The many people who for years had not seen the inside of a church were confronted once again with biblical themes and texts. What first seemed strange and

even somewhat unsuitable to me, in the aftermath proved to be outright appropriate.

d) In Kirchheim/Teck, a Bible exhibition was displayed in the County hospital. The community's Catholic parish priest who organized it initially wanted to have the exhibit in his parish center, but then he thought: Only those people who attend church anyhow will attend. He decided the exhibit must be somewhere else where many people pass by. He contacted the Lutheran nurses of the County hospital, and the Bible exhibit took place immediately at the entrance in the large reception hall. For the opening ceremony, many patients dressed in their hospital gowns curiously took notice. During the following days hundreds of visitors and patients streamed through the hospital corridors and actually found themselves detained at the Bible exhibit. Again, many people who had not paid any attention to biblical themes were exposed to them once again. *All of these effective projects are urgently being recommended for imitation!*

**The Bible Boat** The idea of the Bible boat has proven to be successful as shown on the Lake of Constance. The Bible boat was ready for its first launch at the beginning of the tourist season. Most of the time, it was overcrowded with passengers. During the time it took to complete the cruise, people could drink their coffee and if they wished, participate in Bible circles, view a Bible exhibit, leaf through biblical literature... People seem to be more approachable and open for something new during vacation time. It would be worthwhile to continue a similar adventure under the patronage of the dioceses and state Churches. We have hardly ever taken the opportunity to interest people anew with religious themes during their vacation time.

**Bible for Non-Christians** The adult education center in Freckenhorst, in the middle of the Münster region, extended an invitation to four Bible Sundays "for Non-Christians and people of good will". It was addressed particularly to people between the ages of 20 and 40 years. Daily papers and radio served as media to publicize the campaign. The resulting audience was enormous. Up to 400 people came to each of the four Sundays! This was a sure sign that even this generation which the Church otherwise has such difficulties to reach can be aroused, and that the need for religious orientation is much stronger than once commonly thought. On the whole, Bible Year stirred up many things. Many things will and are definitely worthwhile to continue!

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