

# Catholic Biblical Federation

**No. 30**

**1 / 1994**

**Bulletin**

*Dei  
Verbum*

**The Interpretation  
of the Bible in the Church**

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Biblical Pastoral Workshop**

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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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## EDITORIAL

"Look around you, look at the fields; already they are white, ready for harvest!" (Jn 4:35) It is not an exaggeration to recall these words of Jesus when we observe what is happening in the Catholic Church today, 25 years after the foundation of the Catholic Biblical Federation. The structural aspect of this organization can be secondary but the cause represented by it, is already a leaven of renewal for the Church of all continents. This cause is named *biblical apostolate*, *biblical pastoral ministry* or *animation of the pastoral based on the Bible* and is summarized in Chapter VI of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*. At the same time, as one discovers an increasing degradation of living conditions for many people especially in the so-called Third World countries and as the Church recognizes a new challenge in this fact, the awareness is growing in many communities that God continues to speak to his children through Holy Scripture (*Dei Verbum* 21). Therefore, the evangelization should be more inspired from the Scriptures and characterized by a humble presence of the Church, by the capacity of taking every human being into account, by a service of creating new forms of human coexistence.

The recent document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission introduced in this issue by the Catholic Biblical Association of Germany (pgs. 4-5) recognizes values and fosters the efforts done in different continents to put the study and reading of the Bible at the service of spirituality, of "daily life" respecting diverse situations.

The final statement of two continental meetings on biblical pastoral ministry, one in Latin America (pgs. 6-8, 15-16) and the other in Asia (pg 13) and the commentary of Geoffrey King on the Plenary Assembly of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (pgs. 9-12), show how the Christian people find a solid nourishment for faith and orientation for life in the Bible, and how episcopates accompany more and more their people in this quest.

Not only the so-called Third World but also Europe as a continent should take more orientation from Holy Scripture if reorientation is to take place on a solid basis. The overwhelming situation of people, who as a consequence of the political changes during the last few years do not see any future, of massive migration, and of increasing violence requires that the responsible people do not only discuss political and economical solutions. They have to take also in account the communitarian values of which the Bible gives testimony. This is the message of the Symposium of the European Episcopal Conferences, suggested by the Catholic Biblical Federation and held from 16-20 February 1994 in Freising, Germany. Bishop Alberto Ablondi, President of the CBF, makes a balanced assessment of this encounter (pgs. 18-19), which may confirm an old proverb "one sows, another reaps".

# The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church

## A New Vatican Document on the Bible

*The anniversaries of the encyclicals Providentissimus Deus (1893) and Divino afflante Spiritu (1943) should be an occasion for a new document about Sacred Scripture which would confirm and broaden the perspectives opened by the Constitution Dei Verbum. That was the hope of many people in the Church. In fact, however, there has not been a new encyclical, but another document given by the Pontifical Biblical Commission as a gift that broadly responds to the people's hopes. Dated 15 April 1993, this document is entitled "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church". It was a request from the Pope and in a solemn presentation made on 23 April 1993, he featured it as having three characteristics: its spirit of openness, balance and moderation, and it stresses the fact that the biblical word is at work speaking universally to all humanity. In this issue of Bulletin Dei Verbum, we offer a short analysis done by Dr. Franz-Joseph Ortkemper, director of the Catholic Biblical Association of Germany.*

Something joyful to report from Rome: The Pontifical Biblical Commission has published a document titled "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church". The document is characterized by a surprising receptiveness. It stands up for the historical-critical exegesis; however, it also appreciates the many other methodical approaches to the Bible such as the psychological and the feminist.

### Agreeable Receptiveness

The first chapter critically reviews the present-day common methods of Bible interpretation, from the historical-critical method to the feminist approach to

the Bible. Here the endeavor is striking to evaluate positively the respective strength of each individual method. The reader gains the impression that a broad range of interpretation methods and approaches are needed to make the wealth of the biblical texts apparent, to let their importance shine for people today.

### The Historical-Critical Method

Contrary to all fashionable criticism in recent years, the historical-critical method is explicitly defended, "The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts. Holy Scripture, inasmuch as it is the 'Word of God in human language', has been composed by human authors in all its various parts and in all the sources that lie behind them. Because of this, its proper understanding not only admits the use of this method but actually requires it." (p. 34) The document takes up the repeated criticism that at times it is difficult for the historical-critical method to produce theologically relevant results; nevertheless, it is recognized for its limitations as well as for its strong points. "To be sure, the classic use of the historical-critical method reveals its limitations. It restricts itself to a search for the meaning of the biblical text within the historical circumstances that gave rise to it and is not concerned with other possibilities of meaning which have been revealed at later stages of the biblical revelation and history of the Church. Nonetheless, this method has contributed to the production of works of exegesis and of biblical theology which are of great value." (p. 40)

### Semiotic Analysis

The new method of semiotic analysis which because of its intricate language, draws a deep sigh from many of the elderly, is first presented succinctly and then the importance is exposed for a new understanding of the text. However, its

limitations are described not without humor: "When it does not become lost in remote and complex language and when its principle elements are taught in simple terms, semiotic analysis can give Christians a taste for studying the biblical text and discovering certain of its dimensions, without their first having to acquire a great deal of instruction in historical matters relating to the production of the text and its sociocultural world." (p. 50)

### Psychological and Psychoanalytical Approaches

The document points out explicitly that the psychological and psychoanalytical approaches to the Bible bring great enrichment for understanding the semiotics of the biblical text. How these approaches prove their worth in the pastoral ministry is by making it feasible for people to gain a deeper understanding of religious experience. However the danger also is seen that such approaches may put into question the reality of sin and salvation and infringe upon the historical character of the message "which bestows upon it the value of a unique event". (p. 63) This does not mean in any way that the psychological and psychoanalytical approaches are rejected, only their limitations are pointed out. Important is the reference that in these approaches "it is necessary to take good account of competence in the particular field and to recognize that only rarely will one and the same person be fully qualified in both exegesis and one or other of the human sciences". (p. 63)

### The Liberationist Approach

The liberationist approach in particular has an agreeable effect. In this section, the first sentence already draws attention: "The theology of liberation is a complex phenomenon which ought not be oversimplified." (p. 63) This approach to the Bible is described with obvious sympathy. It is founded on important basic principles:

"God is present in the history of his people, bringing them salvation. He is the God of the poor and cannot tolerate oppression or injustice.

It follows that exegesis cannot be neutral, but must, in imitation of God, take sides on behalf of the poor and be engaged in the struggle to liberate the oppressed.

It is precisely participation in this struggle that allows those interpretations to surface which are discovered only when the biblical texts are read in a context of solidarity with the oppressed." (p. 65)

Here too, the risks of Bible reading under the liberationist approach are pointed out, however surprisingly cautiously; cautious because liberation theology is still a very young movement which still is in its embryonic stage. In this section of the document the question is raised as to whether a liberationist approach gives the same attention to all texts of the Bible, whether certain waves of liberation theology have not been permitted to be inspired too uncritically by materialistic doctrines, whether the emphasis - admittedly under the pressure of enormous social problems - was not at times placed too much on earthly eschatology. "Sometimes this has been to the detriment of the more transcendent dimensions of scriptural eschatology." (p. 66)

### Feministic Approach

The feministic approach has been surprisingly well accepted. "A particular cause for satisfaction in our times is the growing number of *women exegetes*; they frequently contribute new and penetrating insights to the interpretation of Scripture and rediscover features which had been forgotten." (p. 100f) Explicitly the desire has been expressed that exegesis should be taught by men and women (p.104). Among the numerous positive contributions of feministic exegesis, above all, is that the understanding of the image of God is highlighted. "With regard to the Old Testament, several studies have striven to come to a better understanding of the image of God. The God of the Bible is not a projection of a patriarchal mentality. He is Father, but also the God of tenderness and maternal love." (p. 68) The text of the last paragraph on the feministic approach was controversial in the Pontifical Biblical Commission which is explicitly annotated. Out of 19 votes cast, the text received 11 in favor, 4 against, and there were 4 abstentions. This openness too creates an agreeable impression.

### Fundamentalistic Interpretation

Fundamentalistic interpretation of the Bible is met solely with condemnation.

"It refuses to admit that the inspired Word of God has been expressed in human language and that this Word has been expressed, under divine inspiration, by human authors possessed of limited capacities and resources. For this reason, it tends to treat the biblical text as if it had been dictated word for word by the Spirit. It fails to recognize that the Word of God has been formulated in language and expression conditioned by various periods." (p. 71) The basic problem of a fundamentalistic interpretation is seen in that the historical character of the biblical revelation is rejected and thus it becomes impossible to fully accept the truth of the incarnation (p. 71). Fundamentalism often historicizes events which from the start never claimed to be historical. "It considers historical everything that is reported or recounted with verbs in the past tense, failing to take the necessary account of the possibility of symbolic or figurative meaning." (p. 71) Fundamentalism is downright dangerous; without saying as much in so many words, it actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide (p. 72).

### Hermeneutical Questions

The second chapter of the document focuses on hermeneutical questions, that is to say the present day human understanding of biblical texts especially as regards historical knowledge. Here too, the field of thought is very much differentiated. For example, Rudolf Bultmann's concern is explicitly stated: he "was particularly anxious to make the reality of which the Bible treats speak to his contemporaries" (p. 73). Yet in my opinion, this second chapter begins to weaken the document. Some things probably cannot be adequately assessed in such short form. In this case, less perhaps would have said more.

### The Task of the Exegete

The exegetes' work is met with high appreciation. "Although their labors did not always receive in the past the encouragement that is given them today, *exegetes* who offer their learning as a service to the Church find that they are part of a rich tradition which stretches from the first centuries, with Origen and Jerome, up to more recent times, with Père Lagrange and others, and continues

right up to our time" (p. 100). It is interesting to read in this context the name of Lagrange who, as everybody knows, had many difficulties with "Rome". This reads almost like a rehabilitation not only of his person. The exegetes' attentions are called to their responsibilities of interpreting Sacred Scripture in a way that makes all its riches available to pastors and the faithful (p. 101). "They arrive at the true goal of their work only when they have explained the meaning of the biblical text as God's word for today." (p. 102)

### Warning Against Antisemitism

The exegete's attention is explicitly directed at a large extent to the wealth of the Jewish Scripture interpretation from which much can be learned (p. 54f). The document exhorts with great insistence to by all means "avoid absolutely any actualization of certain texts of the New Testament which could provoke or reinforce unfavorable attitudes to the Jewish people. The tragic events of the past must, on the contrary, impel all to keep unceasingly in mind that according to the New Testament, the Jews remain 'beloved' of God, 'since the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable' (Rom 11:28-29)." (p. 117) In this context it should briefly be mentioned that the document considers the selection of Old Testament readings for the Sunday services in need of revision (p. 120f).

### A Positive Document

At times, some things might have been neglected, at other times less would have said more; however that is certainly only an opinion and does not reduce my overall impression that here we have a positive and constructive document in hand. It clarifies what the Vatican is able to achieve, namely fostering the international exchange in theology and discovering good and useful theological and pastoral approaches in the different continents thus making them fruitful for the universal Church worldwide. Enough praise for now - read it for yourself!

*Franz-Josef Ortkemper*

Text of the Document:  
*Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*  
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00120 Città del Vaticano

## Third Latin American Biblical Pastoral Workshop

Quito, October 18 - 23, 1993

*In October 1993, three years after the Plenary Assembly of Bogotá, Federation members of Latin America met in Quito to evaluate how the Assembly's recommendations have been implemented. During an intensive one week of work, 76 participants from almost all the Latin American countries reviewed what has been achieved since the Assembly, informed each other about various current programs, and set the margins for the next Plenary Assembly to be held in Hong Kong, in 1996.*

*The workshop participants reflected on 500 years of evangelization in Latin America (the 5th centennial was celebrated in 1992) and the present day general situation which in many aspects reveals a "culture of death", contrary to the Gospel. How can one foster a new evangelization? The general decision was to give greater fidelity to the biblical message and use as a model Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, the disciples of Emmaus, and the foreigners (Samaritans); to encounter in tranquil, progressive dialogue which takes the human, cultural, and religious factors, the situation of women, and the structure of community seriously. The challenges are to denounce the factors of death and develop alternatives of solidarity; to promote cooperation with other Churches and religious groups towards this goal; to promote the small Christian communities who give new face to the Church; to offer formation and biblical training for pastoral animators. The conclusion of the Quito meeting was that the biblical-pastoral ministry is firmly established in the entire continent as a living force of renewal. We present here the final declaration of this meeting.*

### Final Statement

#### Introduction

1. We, the members of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) in Latin America and in Caribbean (FEBIC-LA) met in Quito from October 18th to 23rd 1993, in order to take part in the Third Meeting of Biblical Pastoral Ministry. We studied and shared our experiences concerning Biblical Pastoral Ministry in South America.

2. The main point of the meeting was: our commitment to a faithful reading of the Bible. We discussed our pastoral ministry experience, bearing witness to "...that we have heard; that we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched with our hands..." (1 John 1:1). Christ Jesus himself is present in the Word and in the Eucharist. We ended this meeting with the firm intention of being always more "prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you, to give the reason for the hope that you have". (1 P 3:15)

3. At the close of our meeting, the following verse is a good summary of our feelings: "...Still happier those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28). Indeed, we rejoice because the Lord's Word is the one which creates community, life, and hope in a world marked by the culture of death.

4. We reflected on what we know and live in the biblical pastoral ministry, taking into account the populations of the different countries and the 500 years of evangelization that have passed with their glories and tribulations. For us, one of the first priorities is to read the Bible in the light of the serious problems and deepest feelings of our people. Our work was oriented towards searching criteria for a reading of the Bible which could be faithful to God's plan and to the human needs of Latin America and the Caribbean.

#### I. Looking at Reality

5. The information we received from the representatives and leaders of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry points to the following main positive facts:

6. 1° Since the FEBIC-LA IV General Assembly which was held in Bogotá in 1990, we notice a considerable increase in the development of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry in South America. Among other elements, we note that a full-time subregional coordinator has been appointed, an executive committee has been created for Latin America, and a three-year plan has been worked out for subregional activities. The aim in visiting the coordinators of the different areas was to encourage and to support the Latin American biblical pastoral ministry.

7. 2° In many dioceses, plans in biblical pastoral ministry have been set up to create centers, commissions, groups, and communities, the main reference of which is the Word of God. The same Word has inspired these diocesan plans of pastoral ministry and allowed the renewal of parochial and Christian life in general.

8. 3° It is important to underline the commitment of lay people, especially of women, and of religious too, who set up plans in direct contact with the people. Now, there is a good number for well-prepared pastoral agents.

9. 4° The relationship between the Bishop's Conference and the association in charge of the biblical pastoral ministry centers and groups has become very close and ministers are more and more inspired by the Word of God in their pastoral service, a Word they are learning to spread through many different means.

10. 5° The reading of the Bible has been enriched by new methods, by reading God's Word in a climate of prayer, and also by the *lectio divina*. The result of this atmosphere of faith is a greater peace among the readers and communities, so that every one will be able to assume the challenges of reality in a spirit of hope.

11. 6° The use of communication means has been intensified in the service of God's Word. Various materials have been produced, including the Final Statement of the IV Plenary Assembly in Bogotá.

These numerous productions are exchanged between the different countries, biblical pastoral institutes, and peoples.

12. 7° A growing interest in ecology and its problems, analyzed in the light of God's Word, was noted.

13. 8° Noteworthy attempts have been made to spread the Bible and to reduce its price, so that the Sacred Books may be easily available to underprivileged populations.

14. Looking back on what has been done, we also realized the gaps and negative aspects of our reality; however, these facts, far from provoking discouragement, become rather a challenge for the future which is waiting for us. Among these facts, let us point out:

15. 1° In many places, the biblical pastoral ministry is looked upon as something additional to catechetics; indeed the Word of God is not yet inspiring the conception and preparation of plans and programs for the diocesan or parochial pastoral ministry. This is because we haven't yet succeeded in giving definition to the nature and significance of the biblical pastoral ministry.

16. 2° There are communities and movements which don't manage to integrate their biblical work into the general pastoral ministry, which gives rise to an alternative pastoral ministry and even sometimes to opposition to the diocesan pastoral ministry. Then, this situation generates confusion among the communities and distrust on the ministers' side.

17. 3° We have to publish modern biblical versions adapted to the reality and culture of our Latin American people, especially Catholic translations for the numerous ethnic groups of the continent. The most urgent need is to provide these communities with editions at low cost.

18. 4° In some places, clericalism is still to be found even among lay people. This mentality does not facilitate a sound and harmonious relationship among the agents of biblical pastoral ministry.

19. 5° The ideologically orientated interpretations such as those of the fundamentalists and spiritualists are still doing dishonor to the biblical text and preserving related mentalities among the faithful.

## II. Looking at Jesus Christ

20. The various stages of our Third Biblical Pastoral Ministry Meeting could be summarized in the words of John, chapter 4. Indeed, Jesus' meeting in Samaria and this biblical pastoral meeting have something in common. This biblical text can be presented as a mode and a program for the biblical pastoral ministry and for a faithful reading of the Bible.

21. 1° The description of a geographical, social and religious context and, at the same time, of the historical context constitutes the necessary atmosphere to understand and to live this encounter. (Jn 4:1-6)

22. 2° The encounter in Samaria happens with a real person's fundamental needs, private and family reality, and religious concerns. The encounter with the Samaritan woman, the disciples, and the Samaritans, takes the form of a dialogue full of serenity and simplicity which develops in an open and progressive way.

23. 3° The attention paid to the human, cultural, and religious factors enable them to be developed in a specific way, but at the same time they are relativized so that they will receive a new light. Thus they broaden into other possibilities. For example: Jacob's well, the hostility between Jews and Samaritans, the place of worship, etc...

24. 4° It is easy to perceive the role of the woman and how Jesus treats her in the text of John. Breaking away from the usual customs, Jesus undertakes a dialogue with a Samaritan woman and expresses concern about her life. He guides her to become a messenger of her own experience of him and to be a living witness for her people, in order that they can meet the Messiah and believe in him.

25. 5° Another important element in the text is the part played by the disciples who are so prepared to understand Jesus' pedagogy, his mission and his source of

food and to understand their own mission in all its implications. Consequently, they learn to recognize in the Samaritan woman her full value as a woman. They come near to those who are far from them, they develop the right environment for their own mission by a better understanding of its unselfish nature and of its center: Jesus himself.

26. 6° Also, the decisive role of the community, which is clearly brought to light, can be discovered in this text. On the woman's side, it is a question of her own family community, the local community of her town, and her ethnicity with the Samaritan people. On Jesus' side, it is a question of his basic community, that is of his disciples, and of his national community and ethnicity with the Jewish people as a whole. And for both of them, we find the same community of worship and community of faith, the fathers: Jacob and Joseph.

27. 7° A certain relationship between the peoples and an ecumenical dimension are present in this text thanks to Jesus' mediation. Divisions, religious and historical prejudices, as well as those concerning the place of worship, are all assumed, reinterpreted and in some way relativized and resolved, thanks to the concrete attitudes of Jesus, the woman, the disciples, and the Samaritans themselves.

28. 8° Conversion and a questioning of the customs, convictions, attitudes, and relations of all the protagonists appear to be clear. Indeed, this conversion is deep because it takes place within the level of their standards, way of life, and point of view, specifically as regards to woman, worship, and history. It even takes place within their specific conception of God, the Messiah, and the role of peoples.

29. 9° Religious attitudes and popular traditions are dealt with and interpreted by Jesus himself; therefore, this attitude means a reformulation and a calling into question based on Jesus' thought: worship in spirit and in truth. This is what gives it a universal dimension.

30. 10° Festive celebration plays an essential role in John 4: in fact, we find, as something necessary to evangelization, the following elements: invitation, hospitality, friendly conversation at home,

family atmosphere, the active presence of the whole community.

**31. 11°** Education in faith and revelation also play a significant part in this key text. Starting with something basic, material, human, and going into that which is personal and religious, this education leads to a deep and definitive confession of faith. The process starts with the man Jesus, a man who gives living water and is discovered to be the prophet, the Messiah, the messenger, the sower, the Saviour of the World and then our Saviour.

**32. 12°** Regions and lands with their names, peoples, and circumstances even have their place in Jesus' mind: Judea, Jerusalem, and Galilee (the village of Cana). But now it is a question of creating a great family, of preparing earth without boundaries and nationalisms. Then, all the limits break up of their own accord.

**33. 13°** The atmosphere where this encounter takes place can be described in terms of incarnation and communion. The real presence of Jesus, with all the specific marks of his personality, is precisely the revelation of his incarnation. This produces many kinds of communion with the aid of dialogue and inquiry.

**34.** To summarize, the Holy Scriptures in themselves provide us with a model for biblical pastoral ministry and faithful reading of the Bible which shows us the way.

**35.** If one were to compose a model schematically, it could appear like this:

\* *to start* with the concrete and specific situation (Jn 4:1-6)

\* *to meet* for a simple dialogue on the basis of essential needs (7-15),

\* *to progress* by means of a confidential dialogue about the life situation (16-19),

\* *to deepen* this basic dialogue through religious concerns (20-26),

\* *to unite* the disciples in ecclesial, missionary, and universal dialogue (27:31-38),

\* *to project* himself into the local community in a dialogue of living testimony (39),

\* *to celebrate* with joy the salvific encounter (40-41),

\* *to confess* (to acknowledge and accept) Jesus as the Saviour of the world and our Saviour (42),

\* *to go back* to daily life but inwardly renewed (43ff).

**36.** We discovered too this Jesus who comes near to us and knows our experiences and transforms our lives, families, social relationships, regional or national differences, and religious practices.

**37.** Today, we realize that the one who speaks to us is not only the Messiah but is the Saviour of the World. So, we proclaim Jesus Christ "the same today as he was yesterday, and as he will be for ever." (Heb 13:8). Like the Samaritans, we utter with our mouth and our heart Jesus' name, and we repeat that he is our only choice, our beginning, guide, hope, goal, light, our only truth and master.

### III. Looking at ourselves in Jesus Christ: Criteria

**38.** In the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, when she asks Jesus about salvation, he answers clearly and without hesitation: "salvation comes from the Jews", but immediately he reveals one more point: "...you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...".

**39.** Here, Jesus teaches us an invaluable criterion for interpreting the Scripture. The Bible has eternal and untouchable elements which correspond to God's plan of salvation. It also has elements which depend on circumstances and which must be applied according to the conditions of place and time but in keeping with the "spirit and truth" of the inspired texts. We formulate this in the following way:

**40. 1°** Considering that the Word of God has been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which means a first step towards the incarnation of the Word, this Word needs to be interpreted according to the law of incarnation which unites the human and divine elements, the temporal and eternal ones. This marvelous unity

was called by the Church Fathers "divine condescension" (Dei Verbum 13). In this way, the unilateral insistence on the divine element which we find in the fundamentalist approach, and the exclusive attention to the human elements of the biblical revelation which typifies some historical-critical methods, as well as the sociological and ideological ones, can be overcome.

**41.** Jesus brings to the Samaritan woman's attention that the Messiah and the salvation he offers to her come from the religious tradition of Israel. So, Jesus wants to be understood ie, acknowledged and accepted as belonging to a nation and a community which is the bearer of salvation. The people and the community to whom salvation belongs and by whom it is offered now is the Church, the new Israel. Consequently, the following principle may be deduced:

**42. 2°** Holy Scripture must be read within the community of salvation which starts with Jesus and the apostles, and which is called divine tradition and the magisterium. The Bible readings of the numerous small communities will have salvific value only as far as the interpretations keep the link of faith and communion with the Church of Jesus Christ. Communion is present and active in every particular church, that is in every diocese. It is a vain illusion to claim that the biblical texts are better understood outside the believing community, the Church, which is charged to sustain people's faith and to maintain a perfect life of communion among the faithful.

**43.** In the biblical dialogue, Jesus asks for the faith of the Samaritan woman: "Believe me woman...". Here, Jesus points out that without faith, it is impossible to approach him and to understand his Word; therefore, it is possible to establish the following standards:

**44. 3°** Holy Scripture must be read in the spirit in which it was written. To do so, it is not sufficient to only study the texts. Faith is required, which is found in the expression of prayer, for only the Spirit of truth can make us discover and understand the divine wisdom in the sacred books, and only the Holy Spirit who is love can make us live in love. That is why reading the Scriptures in a climate of prayer and *lectio divina* are especially recommended.

## Follow-up to the Bogotá Assembly

### The Final Statement of Bogotá and the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)

#### Convergences and Consequences

*The Final Statement of Bogotá has provided inspiration for the deliberations of bishops in many countries. What part can the Church play to answer today's challenges? How can she grasp the evangelization and make it more dynamic? In this quest, Sacred Scripture wins from day to day more importance, and the orientations given by the Plenary Assembly attract always more attention. Geoffrey King explained during the Biblical Pastoral Meeting of Asia, in Pattaya, that during the last three years the bishops of Asia have made essential points of the Bogotá Final Statement their own. Coincidental? Any direct influence? The convergences are undeniable. The Federation seems to be a step closer to fulfilling its original objective: to serve the bishops in their pastoral responsibilities.*

Let me begin with a text that may seem to have little to do with the title of this paper, but which (I hope to show) captures much of its content. It is from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 15, verses 21-28: "Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Then out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Sir, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he answered her not a word. And his disciples went and pleaded with him. 'Give her what she wants,' they said 'because she is shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel'. But the woman had come up and was kneeling at his feet. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs'. She retorted, 'Ah yes, sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table'. Then Jesus

answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again."

Soon after the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) Plenary Assembly in Bogotá, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) held its own plenary assembly in Bandung, Indonesia. The final statements of the two assemblies show, I believe, a remarkable convergence in theological and pastoral perspective. One might be tempted to see some direct influence here. But much more important is the fact that the two statements reflect major theological and pastoral emphases, shared by the local churches of different continents. They challenge us to form genuinely Word-centered communities.

These emphases can be summarized briefly as follows:

- 1) Theology and pastoral practice should be contextual;
- 2) The Church is called to be a communion of communities;
- 3) These communities must be participatory and inclusive;
- 4) The theological perspectives for these imperatives are those of the Incarnation and of the Reign of God.

I will concentrate first on the teachings of the FABC, and towards the end I will illustrate convergence between Bogotá and Bandung.

#### *From Crisis of Community to Communion of Communities*

The 1990 Bandung statement of the FABC contains two references to biblical pastoral ministry<sup>1</sup>. It recommends (7.3.1, FAPA 285) that a commission for the biblical apostolate be set up in every

episcopal conference "to promote an understanding and a love of the Scriptures among our people". More importantly, I think, in the same paragraph it urges "that integral catechesis and the promotion of Bible study and reflection toward the building of Word-centered communities be undertaken".

The document does not define "integral catechesis", but it is clear enough from other FABC statements that it is thinking of a catechesis that does not confine itself to narrowly religious matters but that takes account of the situation of the world and recognizes that work for justice is integral to evangelization. Already in 1970 (FAPA 6) the Asian bishops had spoken of commitment to the "total development of our peoples - we believe that man's humanity is God's gift in the making, and its promotion a task and duty that is laid on all of us by him." As evidence of the continuing nature of this commitment, we need look no farther than the opening section of the document titled "Challenges and Hopes". This section too gives us a clue to the meaning of the "Word-centered communities" that the bishops are urging upon us.

The "Challenges and Hopes" section reviews the all-too familiar difficulties facing Asian societies - poverty, unemployment, discrimination against women, violations of human rights, destruction of natural resources, the plight of refugees and migrant workers, fundamentalisms. In particular, it notes the breakdown of community at various levels. Nation states are threatened (for good or ill) by "secessionist" movements and, tragically, by ethnic and communal conflict and violence. (Such threats have all too obviously increased since 1990.) Modernization (and especially urbanization, the "flight to the city") often leads to social and cultural dislocation, disrupting family structures, and calling into question traditional values and attitudes. The assembly's workshop on fundamentalism cited this dislocation and loss of community as a major reason for the attraction of fundamentalism.

Yet, the bishops also see among the signs of hope precisely the emergence of

<sup>1</sup> The Bandung statement is published along with other FABC statements in G. Rosales & C. G. Arevalo (eds) *For All the Peoples of Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992). Hereafter this book is referred to as FAPA.

new kinds of community. They speak of a desire for community which is at its best a desire for inclusive community, community which seeks to cross boundaries, to break down walls rather than artificially strengthening itself by building barriers (2.3.2, FAPA 277). There is a recognition here of a constant human temptation - we feel that we will strengthen our community by treating others as foreign, by excluding them, even by treating them as enemies. Against this, the bishops are happy to note a growing desire for solidarity and a growing sense of solidarity which cross national, ethnic, and class boundaries, boundaries of religion and sex - indeed the boundary between the human and the rest of creation, in other words, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, the ecological movement, women's movements.

The bishops go on to make this global vision more locally specific (2.3.6, FAPA 278). The desire for community is seen in the growth of Basic Ecclesial Communities, of neighborhood groups, of groups that come together to defend human rights, or that come together for prayer or Bible sharing. Of course, these groups overlap and interlock. In part, they are motivated by a healthy reaction to the breakdown of traditional structures of community. And more positively, they stem from a concern with human persons rather than with impersonal structures, a concern above all with those who are small, neglected, or despised.

Thus the bishops say that the Church in Asia:

will have to be a *communion of communities*, where laity, religious, and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers. *They are called together by the Word of God which, regarded as quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form small Christian communities* [my emphasis] (e.g., neighborhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities and "covenant" communities). There they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are "in one mind and heart". (8.1.1, FAPA 287)

Hence, I believe, the challenge that the bishops are throwing down to us as members of the Catholic Biblical Federation is to help form around the Word of God precisely such inclusive communities, so

that the Church is a communion of communities.

### **Context, Incarnation, Reign of God**

Let me try to set this in the larger context of FABC teaching and of the theological tradition. At its first plenary assembly in Taipei in 1974, the FABC called for a dialogue with cultures, with the religions of Asia, with the people, especially the poor. It spoke of a "dialogue of life", of "a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue ... with all the life realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own." (FAPA 14)

A momentary digression is in order here. The three-fold dialogue implies a particular and profound notion of inculturation. Sometimes inculturation is thought of mainly in terms of symbols and rituals. We are thought to be inculturated if priests wear prayer shawls rather than chasubles, if we use incense sticks or *aroti*, if we enthrone the Bible amidst bird of paradise feathers, if we use Asian rather than western musical forms and play indigenous instruments. None of this is to be despised, indeed most of these developments are splendid, but it touches only the surface of inculturation. Inculturation comes about when Christians are involved in the everyday life struggles of the people of their region, especially with the struggle for human freedom and dignity. When this happens we do not have to search for suitable symbols. Inculturation takes place as it were automatically.

But to return to the main theme, the three-fold dialogue implies also a CONTEXTUAL approach, a discerning of God's presence and action in the context of Asian peoples, societies, cultures, and religions. To say that is also to take an INCARNATIONAL approach, and thus to insert oneself into two major theological traditions/ both central to the life and preaching of Jesus - that of incarnation and that of the Reign of God.

*First INCARNATION* In 1974 the bishops justified their call for dialogue with the "life-realities of the people" by reference to God's Son assuming the totality of our human condition (FAPA 14). The theme is taken up again at Bandung:

... mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a being with the people, as was Jesus: "The

Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). Therefore, mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing, and word. Mission will mean a dialogue with Asia's poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions (3.1.2, FAPA 280).

Let me point out immediately the idea of evangelization ("mission") which that paragraph contains. Evangelization is not primarily about bringing more people into the church. Rather it is about enabling the Gospel to become a living reality in the world. To put it in other terms and to anticipate a little later discussion, it is about building up the Reign of God, not primarily about building up the Church.

At this point one can begin to see the convergence between Bandung and Bogotá. Bogotá spoke of the result of the new evangelization as the transformation of reality, "...creating new ways of human living together." (Final Statement of Bogotá, 5.17). Or as Pope John Paul II has often stressed, the building up of the *humanum* in a divinizing of the world (as quoted for instance by the assembly in 1.4, FAPA 275).

This is itself, of course, an incarnational insight - God present in human reality. Bandung had already taken up this theme when reflecting on signs of hope:

We live in Asia, the home of great contemplative traditions. The Catholic Church is often perceived as not sharing in these contemplative traditions, as being primarily concerned with the external, with rituals and festivals. Central, however, to the Catholic tradition is incarnation, sacramentality. And genuine sacramentality is the antithesis of empty ritualism. It is about finding the mystery of the Divine in everyday reality - a deeply contemplative task - and then celebrating that mystery. At the heart of the ecological movement, likewise, can be found a theology of creation, or better a spirituality of creation - as the divine handiwork and the peace of the divine presence (2.3.4, FAPA 278).

Or again, "when the truly human is discovered and deeply contemplated, it reveals to us the mystery of the Divine ..." (2.3.9).

I turn now to the theological tradition of the REIGN of GOD. Mission, we have seen spoken of as a witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing, and word (3.1.2). Implicit here is the placing of God's Reign, not the Church, at the center. The Church has the immense privilege and task of being the servant and sacrament of that Reign.

It is in this spirit that the bishops at Bandung spoke of the spirituality to which we are called:

For the spirituality of the new way of being Church is the spirituality of those who place the complete trust in the Lord. It is the spirituality of the powerless, of the *anawim*.

Renunciation and simplicity, compassion for, and solidarity with all, especially with the poor, and meekness and humility - virtues promoted by active nonviolence - are some of the significant features of the spirituality we need, and these Gospel values resonate deeply with the cultures of Asia. It is a spirituality of harmony. It expresses our intimate communion with God, our docility to his Spirit, our following of Jesus, as we challenge the disharmonies of our Asian world. *It moves us away from images of exterior organization, power or mere secular effectiveness to images of simplicity, humble presence, and service* (9.5, FAPA 288, emphasis mine).

Central to Jesus' living of the message of the Reign of God is, of course, the creation of inclusive community. We know well how Jesus' life was characterized by reaching out to the excluded ones - the prostitutes and tax collectors. His parables are so often about the lost who are found, the last who become first, the uninvited who are invited. The healing of a leper is not merely an act of physical healing, important as that is, but the restoration to the community and to its worshiping life of an outcast. Perhaps we are less quick to realize that the same is true of the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage - that flow of blood was not only physically distressing but also it rendered her ritually unclean. Think too of the Gerasene demoniac whom no one could go near.

The links between inclusive community ("discipleship of equals"), incarnation, and Reign of God have been most

succinctly and eloquently drawn by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza:

The Jesus movement in Palestine ... offers an alternative interpretation of [Temple and Torah] by focusing on the people itself as the locus of God's power and presence. ... Human holiness must express human wholeness, cultic practice must not be set over and against humanizing praxis. Wholeness spells holiness and holiness manifests itself precisely in human wholeness. Everyday life must not be measured by sacred holiness of the Temple and Torah, but Temple and Torah praxis must be measured and evaluated by whether or not they are inclusive of every person in Israel and whether they engender the wholeness of every human being. Everydayness, therefore, can become revelatory, and the presence and power of God's sacred wholeness can be experienced in *every* human being.

Since the reality of the *basileia* for Jesus spells not primarily holiness but wholeness, the salvation of God's *basileia* is present and experientially available whenever Jesus casts out demons (Luke 11:20), heals the sick and the ritually unclean, tells stories about the lost who are found, of the uninvited who are invited, or of the last who will be first. {*In Memory of Her*, (London: SCM, 1983)120-121}

#### ***The Bishops' Institute on Interreligious Affairs IV/12 Statement***

The Asian bishops take up these themes from a different perspective at the Bishops' Institute on Interreligious Affairs held in Thailand in 1991 (BIRA IV/12). They do not much use the terminology of the Reign of God, but use a suggestive equivalent "God's dream for the world". Jesus' mission, they say, "was to share the Good News of God's dream for the world. He spoke of that dream through the image of God's Reign and described it in parables, parables often of life and growth or of reconciliation. We may describe the dream as one of people and communities fully alive. That fullness of life is ultimately communion of life among individuals, among communities and with God." (FAPA 326-7).

The "life" metaphor functions of course in the Fourth Gospel in much the same way that the image of God's Reign functions in the Synoptics. The bishops' in-

stitute chose it in the interreligious context precisely because they saw threats to life as the impelling motive for cooperation and dialogue:

In the face of these threats to life, human persons and communities are called to stand together in solidarity. Our very survival demands a transcending of social, ethnic, and indeed religious boundaries. Those of different faiths are summoned to live and work together for a more human world. In other words, they are summoned to a dialogue of life, a dialogue in the context of ordinary life which is in the fullest sense for life (FAPA 328).

Again, then, the emphasis is on inclusive community, and on incarnation (in the references to God's desire for a more human world, in the valuing of "ordinary life"), with all this in the context of "God's dream for the world".

This opens up into an understanding of spirituality, which is incarnational, trinitarian, and transformative:

... Christian spirituality is a response in the Spirit to the call of God which comes to us through the Word ... This dialogue begins in the very moment of creation (Gn 1:1-3), and has its enfleshed and decisive expression in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (Jn 1:1-3:14). It thus lays the foundation or unity between God and humankind. And so, Christian spirituality is both incarnational and trinitarian.

Our response to the Word in the Spirit should be open to the presence of the Word in all creation and particularly in the different cultural and religious traditions ...

Such openness demands a *kenosis* modeled after that of Jesus. Christian spirituality is a *spirituality of kenosis* - of powerlessness, of continual purification from self-centeredness, of growing more and more in openness to our partners in dialogue. *Kenosis* implies death and resurrection, that dying to self which brings fullness of life (Phil 2:6-11). Hence, it is communitarian...

Spirituality of dialogue is *transformative spirituality*. Transforming our life, conforming it more and more to the image of Christ, it realizes gradually the transformation of society, giving birth to the new humanity in Christ (FAPA 331).

The implications of all this for the Church are drawn in the final section of

the BIRA IV/12 document (FAPA 332-333). Let me quote this section at some length, since it captures much of what I have presented in this paper so far:

- 1) The Church is therefore called to be a community of dialogue. This dialogical model is in fact a new way of being Church.
- 2) Such a Church is never centered on itself but on the coming true of God's dream for the world. It seeks not to exclude others, but to be truly Catholic in its concerns, in its appreciation of the gifts of others, in its readiness to work with others for a world at once more human and more divine.
- 3) A Church that stands with sisters and brothers of other faiths in confronting issues of life and death will necessarily be transformed in the process. In other words, it will become inculturated - at a level which includes but goes deeper than changes in ritual and symbol. Such a Church may at last become a Church of Asia not simply a Church in Asia. It may then be perceived as no longer an alien presence.
- 4) In this model of Church, dialogue, liberation, inculturation, and proclamation are but different aspects of the one reality....
- 5) This change of consciousness is likely to happen only in a Church which is dialogical in its internal life and structures. At present, the life of some Church communities is characterized by monologue. In particular, young people, women, and the poor remain often voiceless within the Church. Unless these people, who constitute the majority of humankind, can find their true voice, dialogue beyond the Church's boundaries will remain deeply flawed.
- 6) A truly participative Church, on the other hand, can participate creatively in the dialogue of life and faith. It can work with believers and believing communities for a world where people and communities are fully alive, for a communion of all life, for the final coming true of God's dream.

### **Bandung and Bogotá**

Let me now suggest some of the convergencies between Bandung and Bogotá. In the first place, Bogotá insisted on a contextual reading of the Bible. In section 6 of the Final Statement it went on to speak of those contexts - cultural pluralism, sociopolitical and economic situa-

tions, ecological imbalances, multi-religious situations, people emerging from totalitarian systems, the new awakening of marginalized groups, ecumenism, and Christian communities. Not only are most of these contexts also spoken about by the Asian bishops, but more importantly the whole methodology of the Asian bishops is contextual. The three-fold dialogue - with the poor, with religions, with cultures - recognizes the need of the Church to listen to and respond to the major realities of the Asian context. The theologian Felix Wilfred offers an apposite comment: "Just as one would fall into biblical fundamentalism if the Bible is not interpreted, similarly there is a danger that one could fall into a kind of missionary fundamentalism if mission loses its vital relationship to and interaction with the context." {*Sunset in the East?* (Madras: 1991) 301}.

The Final Statement of Bogotá (7.5) spoke of a series of "thrusts" as a new way of reading the Bible.

*From the book to the word* Bandung recognizes that the word is larger than the text of the biblical books. It sees that word enfolded in the Asian world. BIRA IV/12 speaks of our response to the Word being open to "the presence of the Word in all creation and particularly in the different cultural and religious traditions" (FAPA 331).

*From institution to creative presence* I need only quote again one sentence from Bandung. [The spirituality of the new way of being Church] "moves us away from images of exterior organization, power or mere secular effectiveness to images of simplicity, humble presence, and service".

*From clergy to laity* BIRA IV/12 spoke of the need for moving from monologue to dialogue within the Church. Bandung characterized the way of being church in Asia in the 1990's as, among other things, "a *participatory* Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful - lay, religious and cleric alike - are recognized and activated ..." (8.1.2, FAPA 287).

*From a private reading to a transforming presence in the world* All that I have quoted about spirituality in this paper speaks of a transforming spirituality ("transforming our life, conforming it more and more to the image of Christ, it realizes gradually the transformation of society, giving birth to the new humanity in Christ"). One which changes the

disharmonies of the Asian world which leads to service, a "worldly" spirituality not a private one.

*And finally, from the Church to the Reign of God* I need hardly repeat that this thrust is precisely the theological context in which the Asian bishops are reflecting and writing.

To put it in other words, the spirit of Bogotá was captured to a significant degree by the final words I quoted from BIRA IV/12:

A truly participative Church, on the other hand, can participate creatively in the dialogue of life and faith. It can work with believers and believing communities for a world where people and communities are fully alive for a communion of all life, for the final coming true of God's dream.

Finally, I return to Mt 15:21-28. I believe that this text contains much of the message of Bogotá and Bandung. But to show this I have to indicate how I read the pericope. A common interpretation, based on the presupposition of Jesus' omniscience, sees him as testing the Canaanite woman's faith by his refusal to heal her daughter. Surely this puts Jesus in a most unpleasant light - he is playing games with a person in deep need and distress. Indeed, he deeply insults her with the reference to the "house-dogs". Rather, I see Jesus as really believing that he was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to those outside. This woman, by her faith and persistence and wit, manages to broaden Jesus' vision, to make it more inclusive, more (if I may say so) catholic. Both she and Jesus are thus evangelizers, bringers of Good News.

Hence, we have a dialogue of life, in a matter which deeply affects the life of the woman and her daughter. Jesus is changed by the dialogue. He is evangelized by one who is needy, by a person of another culture, by an unexpected person (this foreign woman).

The Word-centered communities to which the Asian bishops challenge us are communities capable of being evangelized by any of their members, even the apparently insignificant ones. They exclude no one; no one is an outsider. They are communities too that are able to enter into the dialogue of life with those beyond themselves, able to be evangelized even as they evangelize.

*Geoffrey King, Manila*

## Third Asian Biblical Pastoral Workshop

*Pattaya, Thailand 10 - 15th November, 1993*

*The conclusions of this Biblical Pastoral Workshop are meant to be "a testimony of how powerful and effective the Word of God is in Asia". This final statement drafted by participants from 16 Asian countries seems to be taken from the Acts of the Apostles. There is no doubt, that the coming back to the written Word of God eliminates boundaries even between the continents. The points of coincidence between this document and that of the members of the Federation in Latin America are striking. The points express anxiety about today's problems as well as suggest how to respond to the problems.*

### Final Statement

1. "Responding to God's Word in Asia Today" was the theme of the Third Asian Biblical Pastoral Workshop attended by members of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) and held at the Redemptorist Center, Pattaya, Thailand from November 10 to 15, 1993.

Guided by the text of Micah 6:8, "...to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.", we, fifty-five delegates and participants from Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Macau, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Australia, Germany, and Italy listened to the Word of God and reflected on issues facing its proclamation in Asia today, taking as its starting point the Final Statement of the Fourth CBF Plenary Assembly held in Bogota (1990) and the meeting of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in Bandung (1990).

2. Through the reports of the subregional coordinators and the testimony of many participants, of whom nineteen were laity, we listened to how powerful and effective

that Word of God is in Asia. It is encouraging to see how more and more faithful feel the need for God's Word in their lives, and, on the other hand, how many people, especially lay women and youth, are involved in the biblical pastoral ministry. And it was with special joy and happiness that we heard of the progress being made by the proclamation and living of the Word in mainland China.

3. Yet we also listened to the difficulties and challenges facing our societies, challenges which can be met by a faithful and powerful incarnation of the Word of God in Asia today. This then is the task which faces all the members of the Church, in particular our bishops who have a very special role in this area, and more specifically those involved in promoting the Word of God through the biblical pastoral ministry. Thus, the Word of God must continue to incarnate itself concretely in the lives of all, and especially our own, so that in the words of the Apostle Paul, we become "a letter from Christ...written... with the Spirit of the living God..." (2 Co 3:2-3).

This means that God still speaks to his friends in the Scriptures (DV 21), guides them through their concrete lives, through the challenges they are confronted with, through the signs of the times. Accordingly, we may say that our lives, and the lives of all those transformed by the Word of God become the "fifth gospel", and so are part of the biblical text, a text which confronts and challenges.

4. These challenges have already been identified and discussed at the First Asian Workshop in Hong Kong (1985), the Second Asian Workshop in Singapore (1988), and the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá (1990). However, we also realize that, in the current Asian context, certain specific issues remain prominent. These are:

- sharing of resources between countries by those involved in the biblical pastoral ministry;
- the need for the adequate biblical pastoral formation of lay leaders;

- concern for the youth of the region;
- the exploitation of women;
- the need for interreligious dialogue;
- issues of justice arising out of the socio-political situations in many countries. In this regard we draw specific attention to violation of human rights, continued poverty, lack of job opportunities, and institutionalized violence in all its aspects.

5. At this Third Asian Workshop, our different subregions have set the following specific goals to address some of the issues raised:

- for the subregion of *North-East Asia*:
  - 1) to work towards networking by establishing effective structures and strengthening existing ones;
  - 2) to promote the role of families in evangelization (Bible and family).
- for the subregion of *South Asia*:
  - 1) to make the Bible available to every Catholic family;
  - 2) to provide access to the Word of God through the media in its many different forms;
  - 3) to share personnel and material resources within the subregion.
- for the subregion of *South-East Asia*:
  - 1) to provide greater subregional coordination;
  - 2) to promote lay participation in the biblical pastoral ministry through the formation of lay leaders;
  - 3) to cooperate in interreligious dialogue;
  - 4) to focus on particular issues of social concern for the region.

6. In setting these goals, we also draw attention to the recommendations of the previous workshops to assist in meeting these difficulties and challenges. We are confident that, with the Word of God incarnate in our lives, the biblical pastoral ministry will continue to be truly effective in Asia today and, as the theme of the Bogotá Plenary Assembly states, "make all things new".

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## History and Theology of "Dance and Movement" in the Church of India

*Evangelization does not only entail "proclaiming" the Gospel, as if this had already been formulated in a definitive way. Evangelization is first of all the struggle to understand the Gospel in the diverse cultural and social contexts in which it has to be announced. The use of "Dance and Movement" in the Church of India aims primarily at "understanding" the Gospel. The role of "proclaiming" it is only supplementary. This is the central assertion of Fr. Barboza in this article with which he introduced a performance of "Dance and Movement" during the Third Asian Biblical Pastoral Workshop in Pattaya.*

The primary purpose and aim of Dance and Movement in the Church of India according to a survey and a questionnaire conducted by me, is for proclaiming the Gospel, preaching, adoption, inculturation, etc. Some use phrases like, "Presenting the Gospel through dance forms". Others proudly talk about promoting the use of indigenous art-forms. This idea is somehow in contrast to the earlier dance forms of the Christians. Margamkali, Parisumuttukali, Natakams, etc. were developed in the Christian community to understand, experience, and comprehend the Christian message. But the present trend tends to be utilitarian, using art-forms merely for delivering Christ's message.

Years ago, when I started to learn dance (Bharata Natyam) one of the well-known exponents of Bharata Natyam, a dedicated theosophist and a respected lady, asked me, "Why are you, a Christian, learning Bharata Natyam?" Later in 1979, when I ventured to have Christian themes in my recitals, there was vehement opposition from many corners of the Church. Needless to say none of these critics had witnessed my recitals prior to asking questions and making sweeping statements. Now, when I look back and analyze, I can clearly see that either these critics were ignorant of the significance of dance in India or did not exactly understand my aim. "What's wrong with the ways of Christianity in India?", they

asked. On the face of it, there was nothing wrong with Christianity in the garb of western culture, except that it cut us off from the indigenous cultural cord and defeated the incarnational aspect of the Word which became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14).

Before Vatican II, everything in the Indian Christian's life was dominantly in western mode and taste. Rites, feasts, fine arts, etc. Indian art-forms were not even taken into consideration in worship or in the teachings of Christ. Vatican II marked a new chapter in the life of the Church. It kindled an interest in indigenous art forms.

Vatican II clearly states: "In certain parts of the world, especially mission lands, there are peoples who have their own musical traditions, and these play a great part in their religious and social life. For this reason, due importance is to be attached to their music and a suitable place is to be given to it, not only by way of forming their attitude toward religion, but also when there is question of adapting worship to their native genius. Therefore, when missionaries are being given training in music, every effort should be made to see that they become competent in promoting the traditional music of these peoples, both in school and in sacred services, as far as may be practical." (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 119)

The Pastoral Instruction states: "This ancient interest in the theater should be maintained by Christians today and full use to be made of its possibilities. Playwrites should be encouraged and helped to set humankind's religious preoccupation on the public stage. This is often the first step in much wider diffusion made possible by the communication media." (Communio et Progressio, 161)

At present, the Church uses terms like, "adaptation", "adoption", "accommodation", "inculturation", etc. The use of indigenous art-forms is advocated for the proclamation of the Gospel. Underlying

all these expressions, one can find a sort of utilitarian attitude, that is, using other peoples arts and cultures for delivering Christ's message. The lady who questioned my motive in learning dance must have thought similarly. Further, this sort of attitude also gives the impression that the Gospel is a ready-made product, neatly bound and packaged.

When art-forms like dance are used for Christian salesmanship, the traditional terms used for this are "proclamation" or preaching. Rev. P. Nirmal says: "Art-forms are not primarily meant to propagate, proclaim, or communicate a static and well formulated Gospel. Their primary value lies in the fact that they enable us to understand and grasp the Gospel in a new way. They offer us fresh, new insights into the Gospels. Art and art-forms unfold new Gospel mysteries, dimensions, and facts. Art, art-forms, and culture are not merely means and media for proclaiming and communicating the Gospel; rather, they are an integral part of that process through which the Gospel is understood, comprehended, appropriated, and realized in every new way." (Keynote address on the festival of performing arts, Jabalpur, Oct. 1982)

In this context, we must speak about the cultural Christ rather than just relate Him to be the culture. There are many versions of this cultural Christ within the New Testament. St. Paul's Christ is the "Lord". St. John's Christ is a "Friend" and "Logos". The Christ of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is the "High Priest". In a pastoral perspective, St. John's Christ is the "Lamb", the "Shepherd", the "Door" through which a flock of sheep go, a curious mixture of metaphors indeed. The Latin American Christ is the "Liberator". Raja Ram Mohan Roy's Christ is an "Advaitin". The point is that culture and its artistic expressions, literature, and language are ways of comprehending Christ and His Gospel. We should begin to speak in terms of a culture comprehension and realization of Christ and His Gospel, rather than "propagation", "proclamation", and "communication" of the Gospel through indigenous art and art-forms. That kind of language betrays an exploitative use of arts and art-forms.

In the light of this, an artist should place stress on the aspect of comprehending, understanding, and realizing

Christ's message in Indian classical dance. It is only then that he can give or share that God-experience with others. Here the communication goes much deeper than just imparting Christ's teachings on a superficial level as is done in most cases. Once, the famous ballet dancer Anna Pavlova was asked the meaning of a particular dance. "If I could tell you, I would not dance", she replied.

Many people working in this field of dance, put the cart in front of the horse. They want to communicate a ready-made didactic Gospel. This is self-defeating in its approach both in relation to the Gospel, which should be dynamic, moving, and life giving, and to Indian Classical Dance which speaks for itself as regards its origin, nature, and goals.

Like the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, dance is also a kenosis, a samadhi, a self emptying or giving of

oneself in love. A dancer gives himself and his most personal experience and visions to others, through the medium of his artistic object or form. An essential quality of his art is also koinonia, sharing with the community, which is the very basic principle of Christian life. In this dynamic art form, the dancer shares his personal feelings, his insights, understanding, realizations, comprehensions, experience, and very life itself. As Francis Delsarte puts it beautifully, "to every manifestation of the body there corresponds an interior manifestation of the Spirit."

All those engaged in the field of indigenous art-forms should ask ourselves this question: Has our work helped God's people to dance, to attain the blissful state and experience "anubhava" in which the Divine is comprehended, contemplated, and realized? Or have we been proclaiming the teachings of Christ without even understanding or realizing them

in our own culture and art-forms? Is our Christ living, dynamic, growing, and incarnate or is it a dead, ready-made, static, dormant, and abstract entity? Is our Christ experience personal and first hand or impersonal and borrowed? In other words, are we spiritual or commercial in giving and sharing our Christ experience with others?

Indian classical dance, especially Bharayta Natyam, puts the emphasis on understanding, comprehending, realizing, contemplating, and living the Word of God. Sharing or giving that God experience could be considered the result of this activity. More than just media of expression, artistic forms should be viewed as an integral part of a dynamic life giving experience.

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(cont. from pg. 8)

**45.** The Samaritan woman, talking with Jesus, appeals to her rich religious and cultural tradition. Jesus doesn't deny or reject it; rather, he takes up all its values and, starting with them, he proclaims salvation to her. This allows us to deduce another principle:

**46. 4°** The biblical revelation is orientated towards the whole of humanity; but, it needs to be constantly adapted to the various persons and situations. In a more specific way it needs the cultural adaptation of its message to each people and culture. When "the Word became flesh", in some ways the Word of God made himself the culture and standard for the whole of humanity and for all cultures. This cultural adaptation will be achieved in the light of the three great salvation mysteries: incarnation, which assumes the human element; Easter which purifies and raises all the cultures; and Pentecost which gives a universal significance.

#### **IV. Looking at our Reality in order to take Action: Challenges**

**47.** In the same attitude of mind which allows Jesus to assume the challenge of

the encounter with the Samaritan woman, opening up new ways for the proclamation of the Kingdom, we too want, in each of our countries, to accept the challenges posed by the realities we confront, challenges which have had so great an impact on us during these days.

**48.** Like Jesus, in this stage of new evangelization, we want to deepen and make new plans and ways of working in order to allow a reading and proclamation of God's Word which will be in harmony with the sound tradition of the Church. Day after day, it will lead us to discover more of God's plan for today and to answer effectively the sufferings, the fears, the hopes we have in our own countries of Latin America and the Caribbean {cf. Final Statement of Bogotá, 1990, no. 7 and of Santo Domingo (SD) no. 49}

**49.** So, as Pope John Paul II suggested at Santo Domingo, we will continue to develop the biblical pastoral ministry audaciously and enthusiastically in order that "the Holy Scripture might nurture even more the life of the faithful, taking account of the living tradition of the

whole Church and the analogy of the faith" (Pope John Paul II opening message in Santo Domingo)

**50.** Inspired and prompted by these basic orientations, we want to emphasize some of the challenges and solutions we have discovered and have to take into account preferentially in our biblical pastoral ministry in the years to come.

**51. 1°** *To denounce and search for alternatives of solidarity*

This would place us one step ahead of the neoliberal policy which is predominant in Latin America and in the Caribbean and which generates situations of death and "impoverishment of millions among our brothers, a situation which has reached intolerable limits of poverty" (SD no. 179). We must look for an economic basis for establishing a real and efficient solidarity because we can not be indifferent when nobody is taking care of the interests of the poor.

**52.** We reaffirm and renew the proposition of the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá: "We also ask those who are

working in the biblical pastoral ministry and the whole Church, in collaboration with other Churches and religious groups, to urge governments to announce a biblical shabbat, or Jubilee year, before the year 2000, so that the foreign debts of the poorest nations of the world will be cancelled instead of becoming an eternal debt." (Final Statement of Bogotá 8.3.5.4)

### 53. 2° To give the Church a new face

As a result of living by and proclaiming the Word in perfect faithfulness, we want to continue with building up "the Christian communities as living cells of ecclesial life" (SD 55). They lead us to define and to embody the new image of a living and dynamic Church, which necessarily involves a new way of being a priest, of being a bishop, and finally of being members of God's people (SD 54).

### 54. 3° To give pastoral agents biblical training

For the next few years, it is of fundamental importance to continue, to deepen, and to

increase the training and qualification of specific biblical pastoral agents, who provide the fruitful, indispensable presence of the Bible in the pastoral ministry. More particularly, we must attempt to ensure that at a diocesan and national level, pastoral planning is specifically inspired by the Bible, and ensures a continuity between knowledge and experience based on the Word of God.

55. Work plans and suggestions made by the different countries are numerous. In fact, it is a question of real experiences or plans to be realized, for example the establishment of Bible groups, biblical schools, institutes, radio-programs, video-publications.

56. One has insisted also on the importance of the presence of God's Word in the seminaries during the training time of future priests. Moreover, it is impossible to forget the need of ongoing formation for bishops, priests, deacons, religious, teachers... (SD 69)

### 57. 4° To further the participation of the laity

Indeed, we notice an important presence of lay people, especially women, in all biblical pastoral ministries. We want to foster this participation, paying special attention to young people in order that they may become "a renewing force within the Church, and the hope of the World" (SD 293).

## Conclusion

58. Before we finish this Third Biblical Pastoral Ministry Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean, we want to thank God for all that we have shared and experienced. We thank him for the power of his Word in the life of our peoples. We go back to our own countries with the same attitude as Mary - in the Magnificat -, so that by living and proclaiming Jesus Christ, we will be able to watch and to resist the culture of death and continue building up a just society on the basis of solidarity and fraternity.

## Criteria for a faithful reading of the Bible

*Elaborated by the participants of the Third FEBIC-LA meeting of biblical pastoral ministry.*

Since God is good and omniscient, he wanted to reveal himself and make his will known; therefore, he spoke to humankind in various ways like a friend. In these last days, he has spoken to us through Jesus Christ. Those who listen to God's Word become his disciples, building up the Church and living as a Church. It is the task of the Church to incarnate the Word into the reality of the world, beginning with what poor and simple people hope. These people today in Latin America are suffering from the attacks of fundamentalist ways and are living in utmost poverty and injustice because of the oppressive economic neo-liberalisms. It is the task of the Church to serve as a sign of unity by developing an open relationship with all humankind and cultures.

For a faithful reading of the Bible, we suggest the following criteria:

1. To take into account the global scope of God's plan for all humanity, for the community, for the society, and for the whole of creation.
2. To keep in mind that the revelation is fulfilled in Jesus and that he is the key of interpretation.
3. To recognize that the Holy Spirit is present in different kinds of charisma, of service and of work; may the Spirit convert all the members of the community into faithful readers of the Bible.
4. To read the Bible in a prophetic way, from the historical context in view of a personal, social, ecclesial transformation.
5. To consider the community like the context in which the Word arose and as a historical subject that reads, celebrates, and lives this Word; the Word from which this community comes to birth and is strengthened.
6. To read the Bible as the preferential option for the poor.
7. To look for an inculturated reading, taking into account the different perspectives (women, people of other races, natives, young people, etc.) as complementary points of view.
8. To read the Bible as Mary did, with a faithful attitude. To listen and answer as she did in prayer and action.
9. To read the Bible in an ecumenical way with a true Christian discerning spirit, open to all the seeds of the Word present in other groups even if they don't share the same faith.
10. To work in order that the Bible support and strengthen the entire pastoral action of the Church in its mission for a new evangelization.

Quito, 23 October 1993

## In the Service of God's Word A Team experience

*In BULLETIN DEI VERBUM no. 29, we published an article on the difficulties of translating the Bible into a language that has totally different concepts and culture from the Greek, Hebrew, and Christian worlds. Such a case involved a region in Cambodia with cultural Buddhist background. The Bible Societies which are aware of these many translation problems provide guidance to translators in the review, "The Bible Translator, Technical Paper and Practical Papers", which has been in publication for more than 40 years. There are several other publications available to Catholics for this purpose. The experience of a Catholic team in Vietnam translating the New Testament is described here as a process the team followed which may serve as an example for other cultures.*

On August 13, 1994, the Vietnamese translation of the New Testament carried out by the team called "Liturgy of Hours" will be published in Hô Chi Minh-City. The translation, from the Greek original, includes an introduction and foot-notes and is exactly 300 pages in length, 21.5 x 16 centimeters in size. The text is followed with a chronological table, biblical references of the texts used for Sunday and weekday masses, and a 132 keyword translation of La Bible de Liturgie for French speaking countries.

### To Work as a Team

Without any exaggeration we can say that publishing this translation is a special event in the life of the Catholic Church in Vietnam. Of course, it is not the first Vietnamese translation of the New Testament. There have been many others; however, this is the first one in the Church of Vietnam that has been done not by an individual but by a team. It is very fundamental. Becoming familiar with the team will allow us to understand, immediately, how truly original the work is.

### The "Liturgy of Hours" Team

The name may be surprising; however, an explanation is simple. In 1971, the team set an objective to translate the Liturgy of Hours. Because of this work which would take many years to complete, the team was known under this name in Catholic circles and continues to be known under this name for sake of convenience.

Since 1994, the team has been composed of 14 members: a layperson, a sister, and twelve who are either religious or belong to an institute. Considering the responsibilities they have within their own religious communities, team members work between 2 to 5 days a week. With regards to the members' qualifications, there are five who come from all different sectors: liturgy, sacred music, catechetics, literature, etc. and nine biblicists, four of whom received their training in Vietnam. Because all the priests are either curates or parish priests, they all have pastoral experience. Four of the team members are professors of Holy Scripture at a religious inter-order seminary, recently opened; one teaches liturgy, and one teaches sacramental theology.

Since 1987, at the request of the president of the Bishops' Committee on Liturgy, eight team members have collaborated with this Committee composed of 16 members.

### Real Teamwork

We began perhaps with the most difficult part to be translated: the Psalms. So doing, we discovered that it was impossible for a single person to carry out such a project. One of the biblicists prepared a rough draft translation which was then discussed by the entire team and compared to various other translations (apart from the original text the team had Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Chinese and, of course Vietnamese translations to work with; in French alone,

there were approximately 10 translations of the Psalms to work with). Once the meaning was determined, it was a matter of rendering it into Vietnamese, being cautious not to offend Vietnamese mentality and also to recover the poetic savor. Furthermore, because the psalms (and other similar biblical texts) are meant for reciting or proclaiming, the team had to take into account the factor of music. The Vietnamese language is of exceptional musical quality. Once the team agreed upon a translation, it was scrutinized which often meant corrections. This lengthy procedure explains why the team needed 10 years minimum to translate just the Psalms. It took a long time; but, once the Psalms were translated the team gained a lot of experience which enabled them to continue with the rest of the New Testament without too much apprehension.

### Twenty-three Years' Work

In 1991, the Bishops' Committee on Liturgy published the team's translation of the "Liturgy of Hours" which is recognized as the official version. In 1994, the archdiocese of Hô Chi Minh-City will publish the translation of the New Testament. The translation of the Old Testament was already completed in 1993; but, time is still needed to write the introductions and foot-notes. The team is currently preparing the Prophetic Books, which hopefully will be completed by the end of this year and published in 1995. They are hopeful that the whole translated edition of the Bible will be completed before the end of the century. The team is eager to finish the translations in order to be able to undertake another type of work, just as urgent: that which entails the biblical pastoral ministry.

### Conclusion

What is essential for the whole team is the team experience. Certainly to work with others is an enriching sacrifice. It is helpful that most of the team members are religious or sisters, for community life allows them to perceive the abilities and limitations of others. To know how to accept one another enables the members to overcome any difficulties and to carry out that which would be impossible to do alone.

Pascal NGUYEN NGOC TINH, ofm

## Symposium of the European Episcopal Conferences on the Biblical Apostolate

*At the suggestion of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) and the invitation of the European Episcopal Conferences, a symposium was held at Freising, near Munich, from the 16th to the 22nd of February on the subject of the Biblical Apostolate in Europe. About 50 participants attended representing 20 nations, the majority coming from Central and Eastern Europe.*

*The theme of the symposium was "Holy Scripture in the Life of the Church in Europe Today and Tomorrow". Initial input was provided by Cardinal Carlo Martini on, "The Word of God in the Metropolis", and by Cardinal Vlk, archbishop of Prague, on, "The Word of God as Accompaniment on the Way to Freedom".*

*There were also important contributions by Don Cesare Bissoli on, "The Bible in different ambiances of the Church", and by Fr. Ludger Feldkämper on the work of the CBF. Monsignor William Egger, Bishop of Bressanone/Brixen was secretary and moderator. Monsignor Alberto Ablondi, President of the CBF was given the task of synthesizing the results of the Symposium, which are as follows:*

At the end of the Symposium and as we prepare to celebrate twenty-five years of the CBF it seems to me that the two experiences come together into one mutual confirmation. I believe that the ways ahead indicated by the Symposium for the future of Europe can be realized

through the work of the CBF. At the same time the CBF can receive from the Symposium new experiences, suggestions, and orientations. This confirmation is a consequence of both the pastoral motivation which they have responded to and the very force itself of the Word of God. Both elements are common to the CBF and the Symposium.

1. As regards the pastoral motivation, the criterion for both the CBF and the Symposium is to emphasize regional (that is, continental) interest. Following the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá (1990) the CBF has been concerned with organizing and strengthening its regional centers so that the work can respond to the environmental demands and needs for inculturation in each region. The Symposium was also characterized by a regional preoccupation, not only because it is the first European Symposium but also because nations participated from Central and Eastern Europe which have only recently emerged from totalitarian regimes. I believe that the biblical experiences of the nations from Central and Eastern Europe should not be neglected; indeed, they should be used to the advantage of the biblical pastoral ministry, using personal freedom as a structural base as well as giving special value to good formation, because the future outcome will depend upon this.

2. A particularly important pastoral demand is "communication", which is a necessary factor for "communion" in the Church. The Symposium has been a great occasion for communication between churches of different nations that were not familiar with one another, between areas of Europe that have lived more than 60 years without becoming familiar with one another. This sharing of experiences, reflection, and initiatives, which enriches

the churches is just as fundamental for the structure and action of the CBF. Not only can it give information about experiences in each region, it can also evaluate them, thanks to reports received from every continent, and place these experiences at the service of all the members through Bulletin Dei Verbum. This is a great service for the sharing of cultures, prospects, and fulfillments.

3. Another common trait is the concern with *overcoming divisions*. In effect, the Word of God cannot be announced in an environment characterized by the scandal of divisions. The message of the Bible is important, but not less than that those who announce it are above discord. The CBF tries to carry out this requirement above all through interconfessional collaboration with the Bible Societies and by supporting ecumenical initiatives. In this it is continually aware that the Word of God can foster unity among European Christians, alongside the political unity that they seek, and that they need, above all, a profound communion of life that Sacred Scripture offers.

4. Finally, common to the CBF and the Symposium, is their inability to give obligatory direction and orientation to local churches. Nevertheless, both draw strength from the same source, which has value for the whole Church: the Constitution "Dei Verbum" of the Second Vatican Council. Precisely to avoid "Dei Verbum" being "notably overlooked", as the Holy Father observed, neither the Symposium nor the CBF has the intention of offering new structures or of creating new forms of pastoral apostolate. They are not even seeking to be a new "service", although, with time, services establish forms and become new institutions. The

CBF and the Symposium wish only to be the instrument whereby all aspects of pastoral ministry, be it in a parish, a diocese, or a local community, may be shown to be truly orientated by the Word of God.

To these considerations, based upon pastoral motivation, it is fitting to add some reflections starting from the dynamic of the Word of God. It is also possible to discover from here a coincidence between the objectives of the CBF and those of the Symposium.

\* The first thing that should be kept in mind is that the Word of God is an *event*, which, as regards both God and humankind, goes beyond what it says and has influence in life. This law acknowledged by the CBF and taken into account during the Symposium, must stir up in each church the necessity of having the Word of God as an instrument of communication with other Churches so that the value of the Word may be more effective in all these Churches. The Word must not be left in the Church but must be announced to the world. It is precisely for this reason that Christ entrusted his teaching to the Church. But the Word of God follows a process that must be respected. It usually works through human words, historical situations, and "signs of the times" that, with the written

Word as a criterion, may be judged as other words of God. By this means the Word of God in the Bible can acquire new dimensions which one must know how to discover.

\* Another characteristic of the Word is that it is *always new*. But a Word of God, always new, destined for a new world, has equally to find new ways of being expressed. Conscious of this fact both the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá and the Symposium in Freising insisted greatly on the formation of suitable ministers, who, in addition to communication skills, would also have an official mandate from the Church. This new requirement demands a continual renewal in biblical formation, beginning with the bishops and including priests, especially in the delicate ministry of the homily. It also leads to new forms of participation by the laity as regards the ministry of the Word.

\* Finally, the Word is characterized by its relation to the *present moment*. In spite of its focus on the future, both the CBF and the Symposium are fully conscious of being a gift of God for the present moment of the Church and the world. In the face of the past when the Word was announced and the future which the Word must enlighten one cannot lose sight of the present. On this point Cardinal Ratzinger has said rightly, "The Word of

God has its origin in the past, but it is not any past; it is part of the eternity of God, which includes past, present, and future".

\* One last point, which may seem somewhat formal, but is in fact substantial, is the *community* character. "Federation" in itself means, "the meeting of many to reach a common objective"; "symposium" expresses the same idea. So, too, the Word of God needs this community action since it is the Word of a God not addressing those in isolation but those who know how to bear witness "together". Jesus himself, prayed that his Word may become fruitful through the joint sign: "...may they be one in us... so that the world may believe..." (John 17: 21). In this spirit it is both fitting and encouraging to note that the Symposium in these few days, and the CBF in its 25 years have been a testimony of joint action, a testimony of the Word that builds up ecclesial communion. This ecclesial communion becomes the leaven of unity for all humankind.

The Symposium of the Churches in Europe about the Word of God, suggested by the Catholic Biblical Federation, was then a service to the unity of this continent and certainly a sign of hope.

**Alberto Ablondi**  
Bishop of Livorno  
President of the CBF,  
Vice President of the Bible Societies

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# 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Catholic Biblical Federation

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) celebrates twenty-five years since its foundation, in Rome on 16 April 1969.

Its general secretariat was initially the office of the Pontifical Secretariat for Christian Unity. In 1972, the CBF general secretariat was transferred from Rome to Stuttgart, Germany. It was Pope John Paul VI who determined the objectives of the CBF in his address on the date the CBF was founded: "to serve the bishops in the pastoral responsibilities concerning wider use and knowledge of the Bible" and especially "to find ways of implementing the very important goals spelled out in Chapter Six of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on Divine Revelation". This task was designed first as biblical apostolate; later some people preferred to speak about biblical pastoral ministry. Both of these expressions mean a series of activities which could be described as animation of the whole pastoral ministry based on the Bible. Officially the CBF is defined as "an international Catholic organization of a public character to further the pastoral implementation of Dei Verbum, Chapter 6" (*Ecumenical Directory, 1993, no. 184*).

The general secretariat placed the 25th Anniversary under the slogan "Hearing the Word of God with reverence and proclaiming it confidently..." (Dei Verbum 1) which expresses the character of the CBF and celebrates the anniversary in different modest ways.

First of all, the secretariat published under the title, *Audiens et Proclamans*, a commemorative book of 175 pages. The articles are published in their original languages, either English, French, German, or Spanish and supplemented with summaries of the other three languages. Seventeen organizations, members of the CBF, offer an overview of the variety of biblical pastoral ministry practiced worldwide. The programs are introduced and described by the persons who initiated them and/or who actually direct them. Furthermore, the anniversary video, 35 minutes in length, presents some of the contributors to the book who give further insight, from their own experiences for biblical pastoral work in groups.

On Saturday, 9 April 1994, the CBF 25th Anniversary celebration took place in Stuttgart. Some of the dignitaries present were Bishop Dr. Walter Kasper,

Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart; Dr. Manfred Rommel, Lord Mayor of Stuttgart; Dr. Siegfried Meurer, United Bible Societies. Representatives from the Catholic Funding Agencies, whose help has been essential for the work of the CBF, were also present. Cardinal Johannes C. Willebrands, who presided the act of foundation in Rome, recalled the beginnings of the CBF and what it represents for the universal Church after the Second Vatican Council.

In connection with this celebration, the members of the CBF Executive Committee held a joint meeting in Stuttgart-Hohenheim with the subregional coordinators from 6 to 13 April. Members reported about the biblical pastoral ministry from their respective regions/subregions.

The foundation of the CBF was due to the initiative of Cardinal Augustin Bea, who passed away in 1968. In addition to the celebration, the Executive Committee and the subregional coordinators traveled to Riedböhringen, Germany on 10 April and visited Cardinal Bea's birthplace and celebrated the Eucharist in the parish church, where he is buried. With this visit, the members of the Federation wanted to express their gratitude to the Cardinal and hope to gain new enthusiasm to continue the work of diffusing the Word of God for "the Word of our God remains forever" (Is. 40:8; Dei Verbum 26)

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