

Catholic Biblical Federation

No. 36

3 / 1995

Bulletin

*Dei
Verbum*

**'Behold I make all things
new'** * * *

Hong Kong 1996:

**"He is not God of the
dead, but of the living"**

* * *

Life of the Federation:

Experiences * *

News * * *

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

«I have made all things new. And he added: Write this, that these words are trustworthy and true» (Apoc. 21:5).

A Mossi (Africa) proverb says: *«Your word is like water. Once it has gone forth from your mouth, it cannot return there again. It is the same with water: it can destroy or make fruitful».*

Regular readers of this Bulletin will know that the first part of the text from the Apocalypse was the motto of the last Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation which took place in Bogotá (Colombia) in 1990. Much was said in the Final Declaration of that meeting about the «new» and «novelty». What did it wish to say and what did it say?

Some years later the members of the Federation recall *«the words»* that were said and that, at that time, they wanted them to be *«worthy of trust and confidence»*. Fortunately, and happily, it is proved that they have made not a few fields fertile. However, some others, of great importance, they have left somewhat arid, a little neglected.

This reflection comes at a providential moment for the Federation, since it is actively preparing its next Plenary Assembly, which will take place in Hong Kong in 1996. It is important because it helps to evaluate what has been said and lived during these last few years, that is to say, to take responsibility for the *«words»* that issued from its mouth. And also because it points out and indicates ways for the future.

This is the spirit that encourages us to reproduce in its entirety the article of professor Teresa Okure, that appeared in the review Concilium, in the February number, 1995, entitled: *«The Bible as a cultural Legacy»*. In this way, we join together sections that we usually devote to the theme of the present and to reflection.

In the centre pages we offer part of the fruits of this active preparation by members of the CBF which we mentioned above. The team of the Casa de la Biblia of Madrid (Spain) has prepared a working document, which can serve in other places, in view of Hong Kong 96: *«He is not God of the dead, but of the living»* (Mark 12:27).

The section Life of the Federation is always interesting because of the activities of the various members. In this number you can read of the experience of the Congregation of the Claretians, who decided to place the Word of God at the centre of all their effort of renewal. Likewise, you will encounter other activities on the various continents. All this bears witness to the truth of the words.

Pilar de Miguel

'BEHOLD I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW':

The Final Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation

Teresa Okure, Academic Dean of the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), Nigeria, and professor of exegesis. After her term of office as Executive Secretary of EATWOT she is today a member of the Board of Consultors of CONCILIUM, as well as a member of the Executive Committee of the International Society of Mission Studies and of the EATWOT Commission for Theological Studies.

(SCM Press Ltd./London)

The Catholic Biblical Federation held its fourth plenary, six-yearly, assembly in Bogota, Colombia, in 1990. The theme of the assembly was 'The Bible and the New Evangelization'. The key biblical text adopted for the assembly was 'Behold, I make all things new' (Isa. 43.19; Rev. 21.5). The Final Statement of the assembly mapped out the course which the Catholic Biblical Federation was to follow after the assembly in order to carry out the aims of its twenty-one years of existence, namely, 'to serve the bishops in their pastoral responsibilities concerning the wider use and knowledge of the Bible', in particular, to 'implement the very important goals set forth in chapter VI of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on Divine Revelation'. As the Final Statement notes, 'the Plenary Assembly coincided with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the promulgation of Dei Verbum, the Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation', a document which inspired the formation of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

This article offers an extensive review and critical evaluation of the Final Statement. It also highlights other implications of the key biblical text which the Catholic Biblical Federation chose for the theme of its assembly. It comes within the general framework of the concern to highlight the mutual influence between cultures and the Bible with special focus on how the Bible should advance pastoral ministries in multi-cultural and cross-cultural contexts.

Content of the Final Statement

The final Statement, a 21-page document, has five parts, with an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction gives the date, venue, theme and number of participants

at the assembly. An impressive number of 140 participants, including delegates and observers from 70 countries and 5 continents, took part in it (1.1). This gives an average of 2 and 28 participants from each of the participating countries and continents, respectively.

Part One: The Call for a new Evangelization.

The impetus for the theme of the Assembly, 'The Bible and the New Evangelization', is located in the call of Pope John Paul II for a 'new evangelization in the whole world as we move into the third millennium' (2.1). The Bible plays a key role in this task. The Assembly noted 'the great changes and newness' which are currently taking place in the world and in the church (2.2, a-g). All these changes in areas such as science and technology, media and computer revolution, ecology, the re-emergence of ancient and 'Third World' cultures, women's issues, the phenomenon of fundamentalism and the politics of new Eastern Europe, are said to cause 'the emergence of a totally new world order which is beyond our expectations' (2.2).

The church, whose primary task is evangelization, finds 'herself in the midst of this newness, challenged to a new evangelization in response to the newness around her'. This call for a new evangelization is traced back to the Second Vatican Council, which, in the vision of John XXIII, is described as 'the new Pentecost ... in the Church of our days', and to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) of Paul VI, which first spoke of the 'new era of evangelization' (2.3). While there is this emphasis on new evangelization, the Final Statement rightly admits that this 'newness' is inherent in evangelization itself, because 'it is the

saving work of the Lord Jesus himself' in whom 'God has made all things new'. Because Christian evangelization 'is always [and by nature] new', the newness for us today, as for past and future generations, consists in discovering 'anew the newness of the Gospel message' (2.4) as it applies to our own contexts.

Next, the Final Statement addresses the Latin American context in which the assembly took place. The 500th anniversary of Christian evangelization in this continent gives a composite picture of the good and the bad in evangelization. 'The good lies in the faith and self-sacrifice of genuine missionaries who gave authentic witness to the love of Christ in their proclamation of the gospel. The bad lies in the way in which some Christians compromised their testimony by 'political and economic interests', 'through their unjust exploitations of the riches of this land as well as through their lack of respect for the human rights of the people who lived there for centuries' (3.1; 3.2).

Section 4 discusses the relation between the new evangelization (4.1) and the biblical apostolate (4.2) and highlights the role of the Catholic Biblical Federation in the new evangelization (4.3). The new evangelization is a task which belongs to 'the whole Church; from the head to the members, at both the universal and local levels'. The task also touches upon every aspect of the church's life: 'kerygmatic proclamation, catechesis, liturgical celebration, service to the world, theological reflection, pastoral practice and institutional structures'.

As an important aspect of the new evangelization, biblical apostolate seeks to ensure that «'All the preaching of the Church, like the Christian religion itself» is «'nourished and directed by the Holy Scriptures» (DV 21)' (4.2). The basic concern of the Catholic Biblical Federation, then, is 'to make sure that the Bible takes its rightful place in this project of the universal Church at different levels and in different regions, to identify how the Bible can best be used to promote it, and what Federation can do to act to promote and support such endeavours'. The journey of the Catholic Biblical Federation in its plenary assemblies from Vienna (1972) though Malta (1978) and Bangalore (1984) to Bogota (1990) is seen as 'a

gradual build-up under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of an organized biblical-pastoral response to the challenges of the new evangelization' (4.3).

Part Two: What Is Understood by the New Evangelization.

The understanding of the new evangelization is now rooted in a trinitarian framework: 'God is present in life, in nature and in history (Pss. 8.1-10; 19.2-7), since everything was created in Christ and for Christ (Col. 1.15-18). The Spirit of Christ is at work in all humanity, leading it towards Christ through different paths and gifts (cf. John 14.2).' This awareness demands that 'we listen to the living Word that God speaks in order to be able to proclaim it (DV 1)' (5.1).

This affirmation is followed by the recognition that like the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35), we 'sometimes still do not perceive the presence of Christ, who walks with us (Luke 24.16)', and that unlike Paul, 'we are not always able to recognize within them [the history of peoples] the presence of Christ'. This recognition calls for an evangelization that will be 'new' in its ardour, its methods, and its expressions (5.2; 5.3).

This 'newness' in methods and expressions of evangelization requires that the evangelizers first allow themselves to be evangelized, that is, 'feel the challenge and the crises of the newness', 'go through the darkness and the experience of not knowing', and 'experience the temptation of following other paths'. Through this 'radical obedience' they come 'in a new and gratuitous way', to experience 'the friendly face of God who makes life arise from death' and 'that Jesus is the Lord' (5.4). This new experience of God gives the evangelizers 'new eyes' to understand God's action in the past, and with this insight they are able to 'discern the signs of the Reign of God which is coming about in the life and history of our peoples' (5.5). The evangelized evangelizers then become open to the Spirit of God who enables them to understand the Word which God addresses to them, and who equips them to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, and to evangelize as the first disciples did in the Acts of Apostles: such as Peter (Acts 2.14-36; 3.11-26), Philip (8.26-49), Paul (17. 22-31; Eph. 1.9-19; 1 Cor. 15.28), and the community

at Antioch (Acts 11.19-26). It will include denouncing 'like Paul before Peter what is wrong in the Church itself (Gal. 2.14)'. The whole undertaking aims at enabling all to 'have life, and have it to the full' (John 10.10), in a system where God is all in all (1 Cor. 15.25) (5.6).

This 'new experience of God in Jesus Christ' also gives birth to a new courage which leads the evangelizer to speak out boldly and choose to obey God rather than human beings (Acts 4.19-20). 'The new ardour becomes 'a force and a light that will help us be the leaven of a new humanity (Matt. 13.33)', 'the guarantee of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65.17)'. It forces the evangelizer to 'announce the Good News of the Reign of God in the same way as Jesus did on the way to Emmaus' (5.7).

Section 5.8-16 explores as a paradigm the pedagogy which Jesus uses in proclaiming the message to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35). Central to this pedagogy is that Jesus listens to the disciples in what they believe to be a hopeless situation (5.8); he accompanies them as a friend and dialogues with them (5.9). This listening, dialoguing attitude is seen as the first step in the new evangelization, one which also led Jesus to spend thirty years in the humble home in Nazareth 'in order to learn what to announce during the three years of public life' (5.10).

The second step in the new pedagogy is to help the disciples, in a process of guided discovery, to read events with new eyes. By going through what they already know, namely their scriptures, Jesus helps them to reinterpret these known scriptures 'in the light of his Resurrection' and thus 'clarifies the situation in which the disciples found themselves' (5.11). The wisdom of the pedagogy lies in that 'the new' which Jesus proclaims 'is not totally new', but is 'an ancient newness that is found in the history and in the hope of the people'. By reading the scriptures thus, Jesus 'breaks the erroneous vision of the dominant ideology and helps the disciples to discover the presence of God' (5.12). Moreover, by placing 'the event, the cross, within the broader perspective of God's design', he helps them to 'discover that they are not lost' and that 'the history of the world continues in the hands of God' (5.13).

In sum, Jesus interprets the scriptures by starting with 'the concrete problem of the disciples, and discovers in the situation new criteria for listening to the texts'. He uses the scriptures to give 'light to the situation' and open 'a horizon of hope'. In the process he helps the disciples to 'perceive the mistakes and calls for conversion' (5.14).

It is noted that 'the scriptures by themselves do not necessarily give new sight'. They 'barely make our hearts burn inside (Luke 24.32)'. 'The 'new eyes' is given in the third step of new evangelization, namely, in 'the concrete gesture of sharing (Luke 24.31)' that makes one perceive the presence of the risen Christ (Luke 24.31). This gesture of sharing gives birth to a community in which 'Christians have all in common (Acts 2.44-45; 4.32-35)'. 'The eucharist constitutes 'the highest expression of this communion' and 'reveals the sacramental dimension of the Word of God' (5.15). By discovering the presence of the risen Christ within community, the disciples themselves 'are risen and are reborn'; they discover in cross and death the 'sign of life and hope' and the 'root of freedom and courage' (5.16). In short, the new pedagogy of which the episode of Emmaus forms a paradigm leads to the experience of true 'conversion which is transforming reality, creating new ways of human living together' (5.17).

Part Three: How the New Evangelization Becomes Good News.

This section of the Final Statement underlines that for the new evangelization to become good news it needs to become aware of the 'different and specific life contexts' of peoples as the loci where they are to experience salvation. The specific contexts listed and commented upon include the context of cultural pluralism (6.1), the context of socio-political and economic situation (6.2), the contexts of ecological imbalances (6.3), of multireligious situations (6.4), of people emerging from totalitarian systems (6.5), of the new awakening of marginalized peoples on the basis of ethnic, linguistic, economic, social, sexist or political reasons (6.6), of ecumenism (6.7), and of Christian communities (6.8).

Each of these contexts calls for its own distinctive approach to evangelization

That of cultural pluralism, for instance, calls for the approach of inculturation, while that of ecological imbalances calls for a 'balanced view' where current 'human greed' will give way to 'human need' in the use of earth's resources, and where all will join forces with the young and women in caring for creation instead of exploiting it. It also requires a critical re-reading of Gen 1-11 alongside other biblical texts (Job 38-39; Ps. 104; Prov. 8.22-31) which give a decentralized view of human beings in God's plan. The context of multi-religious situations where people reclaim their right to practise their religion often in a fundamentalist way calls for a move by Christians from apologetics to dialogue, while safeguarding their own right to proclaim the gospel and to criticize tendencies in religions to violate human rights and human values. It also leads to efforts to build the world together, even if it is impossible to have a community of faith.

Aware that not all the current ways of reading the Bible are equally apt, the Final Statement spells out new ways of reading the Bible to meet the needs of the different contexts. Significantly, the Final Statement recommends beginning with the actual living situation as the place where God speaks the word through the Bible, the church and the human situation. In this way one learns to see God concretely, rather than philosophically, present in human lives (7.2). Prayerful reading opens us to God's self-communication in love which is the main purpose of his speaking to us (7.2). The reading should also seek to discover the true content of the Bible and should eschew all ideological or political readings which are a betrayal of the message (7.3). To avoid the danger of fundamentalism, the Bible is to be read in the context of the believing community and within its own socio-historical contexts. Note is to be taken of the progressive nature of biblical revelation which culminates in Christ, and the existence of the many literary forms is to be recognized (7.4). This new reading thus gives rise to a new biblical apostolate (7.5).

Part Four: Practical Recommendations.

The Final Statement ends with practical recommendations aimed at promoting the required and desired biblical apostolate in order 'to ensure that the Bible is

not only possessed and read but also believed and lived' (8). These recommendations are directed to 'the whole Church' (8.1, 1-2), to the Catholic Biblical Foundation (8.2, 1-3), and to its members (8.3, 1-6), each with its own sub-sections. Some of the most innovative aspects as well as the greatest weaknesses of the Final Statement appear in this section. The recommendations are very extensive, clearly set out, but somewhat ambitious. For practical reasons, I shall discuss some of them in the next part of this article, while is the evaluation of the document.

Critical evaluation of the Final Statement

When the Final Statement appeared four years ago, it was in many ways an innovative document of the church. Here I can only highlight some of its high and weak points. On the positive side, its contents convey very well the conviction of the Federation that the Bible should be made to address every aspect of human life: religious, political, ecumenical, interfaith, ecological, economic, social and so forth. This arises from the firm belief in the inherent power of the Bible as the Word of God to address, challenge and transform these human situations. The Bible is seen as 'the book for the world', which cannot be understood 'without the human reality in need of salvation, nor can we understand the human reality without the Bible' (6.2). This is because the same God who speaks in the Bible and decisively through Christ (Heb. 1.1-2), through whom God created all things and to whom the scriptures bear witness (John 5.39), is also present and active in the lives of peoples and their cultures. Because of this truth, it needs to be added that we cannot fully understand the mystery of Jesus himself, the Word made flesh, without the human reality in need of salvation. Not only the Bible, then, but also the whole of theology and christology need to be grounded in the human reality for their authentic and proper comprehension.

Another laudable aspect of the Final Statement is the call for a new approach or orientation in the interpretation of scripture. This interpretation is to be put at the service of the pastoral ministry of the church, that is, at the service of concrete lives of peoples in their different social and cultural locations and existential situations. This is why 'inculturation

of the gospel message' is seen as the 'necessary condition for any meaningful ministry of the Word', because among other things, it helps to 'unfold the riches of the gospel' (6.1). The use of the story of Jesus' encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus offers a good example of the kind of re-reading which the document advocates.

A corollary of this is the assertion that the actual situation in which peoples live should furnish the criteria for the interpretation of scripture. This means, too, that each of the different contexts of peoples of the world listed in Section 6 should furnish its own criteria for interpreting the Bible. This is in keeping with the method which Jesus himself used in proclaiming the reign of God. His many parables, for instance, testify to his ability to adapt his teaching to his different audiences, using their common traditions and particular human situations. This insight of the document means that as the Bible enriches people's life-situations by shedding light on them, challenging them and bringing transforming hope, even so the Bible itself is enriched by these multi-cultural contexts in which it is interpreted. This, as I have noted elsewhere, is one of the rich blessings which inculturation brings to the proclamation of the gospel and to the entire life of the church. Similar blessings come from listening to the gospel which the poor and 'oppressed peoples preach to us' (6.6).

The Final Statement is also in stating that not all current methods of interpretation of the bible are equally apt. This position finds strong support in the recent publication of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of Scripture in the Church*. This new document gives a panoramic description and critical assessment of current methods of interpreting the bible. It has, for instance, the same strong reservation as does the Final Statement, about the fundamentalist interpretation of scripture which both documents describe as 'dangerous'. Both the Final Statement and *The Interpretation of Scripture* agree on the importance of allowing the Bible to address the concrete situations in which people live. The influence of 'Third World' theologies is clearly manifest in this stance of both documents.

Another important feature of the Final Statement worth noting is the emphasis on
(Cont. on pg. 15)

HONGKONG

Preparation for the Plenary Assembly

Bible Week

«He is not God of the dead, but of the living» (Mk 12:27)

Questionnaire

The following questionnaire is intended to create a channel of communication so that the above-mentioned experiences reach the representatives of each country. At the end of the Bible Week the participants and/or groups may be asked to fill it in, indicating how they want to address it.

Dear friends: In July 1996 the Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation will be held in Hong Kong on the theme «*The Word of God as source of life*». We want this meeting to be a period for communicating experiences. In one particular way all the members of the Federation have been invited to bring with them concrete experiences of how the Word of God is a source of life for our communities and groups throughout the world. So we ask you to fill in the following questionnaire and send it to the address indicated below.

1. The reply is

- personal
- from a group of ... persons

What sort of persons make up the group?

2. Is the Word of God a source of life for you?

3. What signs of life has the Word of God generated?

- at the personal level
- at the community level (ecclesial)
- at the social level (district, city, etc.)

4. Can you recount any concrete experience in which the Word of God has been clearly a source of life for you or for the group?

Presentation

The Theme

This material is offered as a contribution to the preparation of the Plenary Assembly, the theme of which will be «*The Word of God as the source of life*». We propose two complementary activities:

- a) contemplating the situation in which we living seen from God's view of life, whence Scripture speaks to us;
- b) reflecting upon and communicating to others how the Word of God has been a source of life for us. The Bible Week which we are proposing pursues the first objective, whilst the questionnaire is intended to achieve the second.

During the Preparation of these Bible weeks we have looked for texts which God appears as the God of life which he favours and encourages. There were many texts proposed during the preparatory meetings, but we had to choose one for each of the four sessions. The rest are offered in a list with very brief indications as to whether, in some cases, it would be preferable to read other passages. We have borne in mind very diverse situations, but it is evident that the proposal we have made will have to be modified and adapted to the sensibilities proper to each place, with songs, symbolic gestures, etc.

The Itinerary of the Reading

The itinerary that we are proposing follows basically the three steps of *lectio divina* (reading, meditation, prayer), preceded by a brief look at our experience which prepares us for listening. The steps are as follows:

- a) **Starting from life:** each reading session is introduced with a motivation (a moment of silence, a hymn, etc.) and with a question which makes reference to a life experience related to the text to be meditated. This first step deals explicitly with the life experience of the participants, which afterwards will be illuminated by the Word.
- b) **Reading the Text:** We offer some guidelines for making a thorough reading, taking into account, the literary sources and the message of the text we are reading. What we are looking for in this reading is the experience of God that our ancestors in the faith left reflected in the texts. The explanations offered are illustrative and should be developed by those who are carrying out the explanation, above all, when these materials are being used in a Bible Week.
- c) **Revolving on Life:** In this third step a dialogue is established between our experience of life and the experience of God which we have discovered in the text. We allow the experience of God we have discovered in the text to interpellate and illuminate our own life experience.
- d) **Praying and Celebrating:** As the dialogue advances the reading and the meditation are transformed into prayer and celebration. This is a moment of meeting with God who has spoken to us through his Word and with the brothers and sisters who have helped us to discover his voice in it and in our lives.

How to make use of these materials

The materials we are offering contain four guides and one celebration. They were intended, initially, for the celebration of a Bible Week, but they can be used also for bible groups.

- If used in a *bible week* time should be set aside for small groups among those who participate in the whole assembly:

- Orientation: the whole assembly.
 - Starting from life: personal responses in small groups.
 - Proclamation and explanation of the Word: the whole assembly.
 - Focusing back on life: personal responses in small groups, and perhaps some time to offer contributions from the groups to the assembly.
 - Prayer: the whole assembly, with spontaneous contributions.
- It is necessary to prepare some persons beforehand to lead the groups, readers, singers and also those who will give a brief explanation of the text to the whole assembly.

- If the material is used in a *bible group* the whole process is carried out in the small group. In that case the animator has to prepare it.

- It is also possible to *combine the two modes*: the first day all come together to present the theme and the method; and afterwards there are three sessions for groups, which can be either in the same week or in successive weeks after the manner of a «Bible Month». The celebration is carried out all together.

Materials

Day 1

Five Women in favour of Life (Exod. 1:8-10.15-2:10)

Orientation. Hymn/song

1. Life experience: we look at our life.

- Do you know cases in which life may be threatened?

2. Proclamation of the Word (Exod. 1:8-10.15-2:10).

Then a new king ascended the throne of Egypt, one who knew nothing of Joseph. He said to his people, 'These Israelites have become too many and too strong for us. We must take precautions to see that they do not increase any further; or we shall find that, if war breaks out, they will join the enemy and fight against us, and they will become masters of the country.'

Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah. 'When you are attending the Hebrew women in childbirth,' he told them, 'watch as the child is delivered and if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live.' But they were God-fearing women. They did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do, but let the boys live. So he summoned those Hebrew midwives and asked them why they had done this and let the boys live. They told Pharaoh that Hebrew women were not like Egyptian women. When they were in labour they gave birth before the midwife could get to them. So God made the midwives prosper, and the people increased in numbers and in strength. God gave the midwives

homes and families of their own, because they feared him. Pharaoh then ordered all his people to throw every new-born Hebrew boy into the Nile, but to let the girls live.

A descendant of Levi married a Levite woman who conceived and bore a son. When she saw what a fine child he was, she hid him for three months, but she could conceal him no longer. So she got a rush basket for him, made it watertight with clay and tar, laid him in it, and put it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. The child's sister took her stand at a distance to see what would happen to him. Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river, while her ladies-in-waiting walked along the bank. She noticed the basket among the reeds and sent her slave-girl for it. She took it from her and when she opened it, she saw the child. It was crying, and she was filled with pity for it. 'Why,' she said, 'it is a little Hebrew boy.' Thereupon the sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and fetch one of the Hebrew women as a wet-nurse to suckle the child for you?' Pharaoh's daughter told her to go; so the girl went and called the baby's mother. Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Here is the child, suckle him for me, and I will pay you for it myself.' So the woman took the child and suckled him. When the child was old enough, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him and called him Moses, 'because', she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'

2. Aids to understanding the text

Exodus is for the Old Testament what the resurrection of Christ is for the New: it is the great saving intervention of God, the great liberation by God, who is living and near, of a people which finds itself enslaved and deprived of a life of freedom.

In the account we have heard two forces confront each other. On the one side, Pharaoh, who represents oppressive and inhuman power and, without doubt, uses any means whatever to maintain his dominion, even though it may destroy the future (= all the children of Israel; see also Mt 2:13-23). On the other side, the God of Israel. A God who comes to human beings and history so-called and announces his plan (Gen 12:3); a God who makes promises and carries them out because he is Lord of history. But the forces are not equal; the power of Pharaoh and his plans to destroy life from the moment of its birth are set against the apparent weakness of God and his people. It is the reality that we ourselves sometimes experience: evil appears to be more powerful than good and threatens to devour it.

However, the Lord has committed himself to his people. He has his ways, sometimes surprising ones. Now he leaves everything in the hands of five women, in order to manifest his strength in the midst of weakness:

- The midwives Siphrah (= beauty) and Puah (= young girl). Their refusal to obey Pharaoh has its origin in the «fear of God» (Exod 1:21). Actually they show themselves to be capable of responding to him with rational arguments. Their action is an illustration of Prov 14:27: «The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, so that one may avoid the snares of death».

- The mother of Moses, who, unable to hide him any longer, decides to abandon him to divine providence. And God responds: she is repaid by suckling her own son!

- The sister of Moses, who keeps watch and knows when to say the opportune word: «Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?» (Exod 2:7).

- The daughter of Pharaoh, who, moved with compassion (Exod 2:6), decides to rescue a life from death, and thus is changed, without knowing it, into a collaborator in the divine plan.

- In this way, in the midst of difficulties despite appearances, life goes on because God protects it. It is happening today also: the God of life is carrying forward the future of the new humanity, our future. We are moving between the impotency and insanity of humanity and the silent power of the Lord. Frequently we see ourselves in the ranks of the weak, like the five women about whom we have been speaking, but we know that God carries out his plans by making use of weakness.

3. Reflection. The Word of God enlightens our life.

- Do you know of any cases where someone may have refused to commit an outrage against life?
- Are we capable of discovering the action of God and his concern for life in situations in which death seems to dominate?

4. Prayer

Day 2

The God of life has compassion for all peoples (Jonah 4:1-11)

Orientation. Hymn/song.

1. Life experience. We look at our life:

People say: «You pay for what you do».

- Do you know any concrete cases in which someone operates in this way?

2. Proclamation of the Word (Jonah 4:1-11).

Jonah was greatly displeased and angry, and he prayed to the Lord: 'This, o Lord, is what I feared when I was in my own country, and to forestall it I tried to escape to Tarshish; I knew that thou art "a god gracious and compassionate, long-suffering and ever constant, and always willing to repent of the disaster". And now, Lord, take my life: I should be better dead than alive.' 'Are you so angry?' said the Lord. Jonah went out and sat down on the east of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat in its shade, waiting to see what would happen in the city. Then the Lord God ordained that a climbing gourd should grow up over his head to throw its shade over him and relieve his distress, and Jonah was grateful for the gourd. But at dawn the next day God ordained that a worm should attack the gourd, and it withered; and at sunrise God ordained that a scorching wind should blow up from east. The sun beat down on Jonah's head till he grew faint. Then he prayed for death and said, 'I should be better dead than alive.' At this God said to Jonah, 'Are you so angry over the gourd?' 'Yes,' he answered, 'mortally angry.' The Lord said, 'You are sorry for the gourd, though you did not have the trouble of growing it, a plant which came up in a night and withered in a night. And should not I be sorry for the great city of Nineveh, with its hundred and twenty thousand who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and cattle without number?'

Aids to understanding the text

(Before the reading)

Today we are going to read the end of the book of Jonah. The story which this book tells is well known. The Lord orders Jonah to go to Nineveh to speak on his behalf to the inhabitants. Jonah tries to flee in the opposite

direction but God unleashes a tempest and the sailors in the boat throw Jonah into the sea. A great fish swallows Jonah but he invokes the Lord from the belly of the fish and in the end God saves him. The Jonah goes to Nineveh and goes through the whole city preaching that they must be converted. Everybody listens to his preaching and are converted with great signs of repentance. God, seeing how they have been converted, pardons them. The last chapter recounts Jonah's reaction to God's mercy. Listen to what he says.

(After the reading)

The book of Jonah is not an historical account but a parable that recounts an exemplary case in order to make those who listen to it reflect. This parable seeks to express, on the one hand, the mercy of God for all peoples and, on the other, the mean and shabby attitude of Jonah. Like the gospel parables of «the good father and the two brothers» (Lk 15:11-32) or «the good master and the labourers in the vineyard» (Mt 20:1-16), the one about Jonah is directed at people who do not understand how God could love and pardon all. This is what some Jews were thinking in the epoch after the exile: they believed that God was intolerant and strictly just like them, and, furthermore, they believed that they only were good.

Jonah is annoyed that God has not carried out his announcement to punish the inhabitants of Nineveh. In all his interventions he shows himself to be intolerant and capricious. He does not understand the sense of the conversation and it even seems to him bad that God might be «merciful, compassionate, patient, forgiving».

The image that Jonah has of God is that of a God of death. That he did not wish to punish the Ninevites, killing both men and animals, provokes so that he wants to quit this life: «And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live» (Jonah 4:3), and he repeats it further on: «It is better for me to die than to live» (Jonah 4:8).

The Lord wants to make him reflect. He makes a castor-oil plant grow to shade him, and this brings about what follows. The capricious Jonah gets angry again because of the castor-oil plant. Then the Lord. Then the Lord makes use of this to explain to him that he is compassionate and merciful to all, because all peoples are very important to him. He is the God of life who pardons and knows how to wait in hope.

Did Jonah understand the lesson? The book does not tell us, because, in reality, this lesson is not directed at Jonah, but at all those who are intolerant, who divide the world into good and bad, between those who must be punished and those who ought to be rewarded... and God is not like that.

3. Reflection. The Word of God enlightens our life:

- What is this God like in whom we believe: strictly just or merciful?
- What have we learned from the story of Jonah for our life?

4. Prayer

Day 3

Faith in Jesus gives life where there is death (Mark 5:21-43)

Orientation. Hymn/song.

1. Life experience. We look at our life.

- Have you lived close to experiences of infirmity or death?
- How have you reacted to these experiences?

2. Proclamation of the word (Mark 5:21-43).

As soon as Jesus had returned by boat to the other shore, a great crowd once more gathered round him. While he was by the lake-side, the president of one of the synagogues came up, Jairus by name, and, when he saw him, threw himself down at his feet and pleaded with him. 'My little daughter', he said, 'is at death's door. I beg you to come and lay your hands on her to cure her and save her life.' So Jesus went with him, accompanied by a great crowd which pressed upon him.

Among them was a woman who had suffered from haemorrhages for twelve years; and in spite of long treatment by many doctors, on which she had spent all she had, there had been no improvement; on the contrary, she had grown worse. She had heard what people were saying about Jesus, so she came up from behind in the crowd and touched his cloak; for she said to herself, 'If I touch even his clothes, I shall be cured.' And there and then the source of her haemorrhages dried up and she knew in herself that she was cured of her trouble. At the same time Jesus, aware that power had gone out of him, turned round in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' His disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing upon you and yet you ask, "Who touched me?"' Meanwhile he was looking round to see who had done it. And the woman, trembling with fear when she grasped what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'My daughter, your faith has cured you. Go in peace, free for ever from this trouble.'

While he was still speaking, a message came from the president's house, 'Your daughter is dead; why trouble the Rabbi further?' But Jesus, overhearing the message as it was delivered, said to the president of the synagogue, 'Do not be afraid; only have faith.' After this he allowed no one to accompany him except Peter and James and James's brother John. They came to the president's house, where he found a great commotion, with loud crying and wailing. So he went in and said to them, 'Why this crying and commotion? The child is not dead: she is asleep'; and they only laughed at him. But after turning all the others out, he took the child's father and mother and his own companions and went in where the child was lying. Then, taking hold of her hand, he said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Get up, my child.' Immediately the girl got up and walked about - she was twelve years old. At that they were beside themselves with amazement. He gave them strict orders to let no one hear about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

Aids to understanding the text

In this passage the gospel of Mark presents Jesus as the fount of life since, not only can he cure sickness, but he can also revive the dead. In order to describe him, let us establish ourselves gently in the situation of the persons who appear in the account before and after their encountering Jesus.

Before encountering Jesus: Jairus is a religious man and has a good social position, since he is a leader of the synagogue; however, he is sad and there are many tears in his family. His house is full of people who are weeping and lamenting. His ten-year old daughter, who should be enjoying vitality and vigour, is dying. And so he decides to go and seek out Jesus. When both are going to Jairus' house, another person appears on the scene: a woman sick in the very depth of her being: «blood is life» (Deut. 12:23). The Law (Lev. 15:25) says that this situation has made her impure and she cannot even be touched. Neither money nor doctors have been able to cure her sickness. In the same scene there are many people, and some of his disciples, who are seeing at every step signs of life in Jesus. Without Jesus there is lamentation, marginalization and death.

The encounter with Jesus: Both Jairus and the sick woman approach Jesus with faith, because they know that he has power to give life and to cure. Jairus draws near to Jesus and manifests his faith in Jesus in the act of prostrating himself before him and asking him to go and cure his daughter. The woman, however, only touches «his garments» secretly, but with the same certainty that she will be cured. Both approach Jesus with faith. There are others who scoff, like those who were mourning the child.

After the encounter with Jesus: The encounter with Jesus changes everything. The impure woman (Lev. 15:19) touches him, and «immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease». When Jesus arrives at the house he takes the dead child by the hand (Num. 5:2), and «immediately the girl got up». The woman and the child were healthy thanks to Jesus. The funeral laments and the anxiety of the incurably sick disappeared. Jesus was for them the source of life and salvation, and, therefore, of happiness and peace.

We know that Jesus, risen from the dead, is the source of life, and that he has full power over death. And we know also that when we approach him with faith, death retreats and the path to life is opened up.

3. Reflection. The Word of God enlightens our life.

- In what situations has Jesus been the source of life for each one of us?
- How do we approach him?

4. Prayer

Day 4

Four horses that ride in history (Apoc. 6:1-8)

Orientation. Hymn/song.

1. Life experience. We look at our life.

- What forces today threaten life in our world?
- Do you think that they are stronger than the forces that favour life?

2. Proclamation of the word. (Apoc. 6:1-8).

Then I watched as the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, 'Come!' And there before my eyes was a white horse, and its rider held a bow. He was given a crown, and he rode forth, conquering and to conquer.

When the lamb broke the second seal, I heard the second creature say, 'Come!' And out came another horse, all red. To its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and make men slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.

When he broke the third seal, I heard the third creature say, 'Come!' And there, as I looked, was a black horse; and its rider held in his hand a pair of scales. And I heard what sounded like a voice from the midst of the living creatures, which said, 'A whole day's wage for a quart of flour, a whole day's wage for three quarts of barley-meal! But spare the olive and the vine.'

When he broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth creature say, 'Come!' And there, as I looked, was another horse, sickly pale; and its rider's name was Death, and Hades came close behind. To him was

given power over a quarter of the earth, with the right to kill by sword and by famine, by pestilence and wild beasts.

Aids to understanding the text

The Apocalypse is a book that, at first sight, appears enigmatic and mysterious, full of symbols difficult to interpret. However, it was not written to provoke fear, but to console and to encourage the hope of the first Christian communities, who were, at times, living in situations of persecution. Its principal message is this: the final victory will not be by the forces that threaten life, but by the risen Christ.

The history of humankind appears in the Apocalypse as a book closed with seven seals (Apoc. 5). It is a book whose deep meaning only Christ knows and only he can reveal. On the breaking of the first four seals there appear on the scene, symbolized by four horses, the forces that confront human history. The majority of them are forces that threaten life. They are represented by:

- the red horse, the colour of blood. The mission of the one who rides it is «to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another». It is war, violence, destruction.
- the black horse, which represents social injustice. Its rider carries in his hand a deceptive and fraudulent pair of scales which is certainly not a sign of fairness, but which capriciously insists on exorbitant prices for necessary food. Its victims, as always, are the poorest.
- The pale green horse. This is death, the radical enemy of life, which imposes itself through many different means: war, hunger, sickness.
- But the final victory is not with these, but with the one riding the white horse. Its rider is the risen Christ, the bowman of life, wearing the crown of triumph because he «he came out to conquer» in this battle against the forces hostile to Life (Apoc. 19:11-16).

By means of this expressive image the author of the book of the Apocalypse directs a message of hope to us also. He helps us to understand situations in which very powerful forces threaten life, and reveals to us that these forces do not have the last word, that their power is transitory and that the final victory is always with the Risen One.

3. Reflection. The Word of God enlightens our life.

- Do the horses of the Apocalypse continue riding today? What forces threaten life? What defend it?
- In the struggle for life do you have your «warhorse». In whom do you put your hope?

4. Prayer

Celebration of life

1. Preparation

On the front wall of the room, in big letters, there will be displayed the phrase: «I am the resurrection and the life».

From the beginning of the celebration we will create a festive atmosphere. The Bible, the Paschal Candle and a large vase of flowers will preside over the meeting.

We will end the celebration with a song that can be accompanied by bodily expression, and we will hand out a flower to each one of the participants. The meeting will continue with a festive banquet. Four panels or niches should be prepared symbolic of what we are going to celebrate which we will situate in four corners of the room. We will place four unlighted candles at the foot of each panel.

First Panel (Exod. 1:15-2:10)

On one side appears the phrase: «They employ intelligence, imagination and guile in order to *SUSTAIN LIFE*». On the opposite side are placed photographs of women from the five continents doing tasks that favour life. At the foot of the panel, a jar of reeds and a wickerwork basket.

Second Panel (Apoc. 6:1-8)

The panel is divided into three parts coloured red, black and pale green. In the centre there is placed a large, white circle. Over the colours there are superimposed symbols of the text or actual symbols (red: war; black: hunger; green: drugs, *AIDS*, etc.). In the white centre of the panel there is a crown with the phrase: «Life conquers death».

Third Panel (Mark 5:21-43)

On this panel is written the phrase: «Do not be afraid; it is enough that you have faith». Below is a sign of the resurrection: a flowering branch, a green bud, etc.

Fourth Panel (John 4)

On the upper part, and in large letters is written the phrase: «God backs life for all peoples». Underneath, in smaller letters, with the phrase heavily crossed out: «No salvation for foreigners». The lower part of the panel is covered with a multitude of faces from all races.

2. Development of the celebration

• Entry Introduction:

These days we have savoured the Word of God. A word which has brought us life. We have listened, we have reflected, we have prayed, we have sung of God's backing life. Today we have gathered in the various panels that decorate the room the Word that has nourished us this week. Today, in front of the various niches, we are going to hear also the word of men and women, who, like Jesus, have opted for life.

• Song:

• Before the first panel (Exod. 1:15-2:10)

In the world of today many women stand up for life. They are women of bite, of longing, of grace, who allowed the passion for fraternity to slip away from them. One of them is Maria Miguel, from a community of ordinary people in Sao Paulo. Listen to what she says:

«I am a woman,
 I was at the tomb of my people one day and I saw.
 I had life to proclaim:
 I am mother...I give life.
 I am wife, I am companion.
 I am woman, I am people.
 I am love...announcement.
 My name is liberation.
 I am peace, I am hope.
 I am equality.
 My name is *FRATERNITY*,
 I am hardly Maria Miguel.

Allow me to add: «Do not mention ever again, friend, sister. All those you meet on your way, in the squares and in the streets, in the fields and in the shanty towns, in the train and in the bus, in the syndicate and in the factory, in the community. Repeat to them your name *FRATERNITY*. Show them by your presence, by your work, that you are sister to all.

- The first candle is lighted. Brief silence.
- Song: one verse of the entrance song.
- Before the second panel: (Apoc. 6:1-8)

Red of spilled blood.
 Men and women who flee or are killed.
 India. Rivers of death.
 Faces of different dress in pain,
 with eyes steeped in bitterness.
 Hindu and Muslim who, by their land,
 are set against each other and separated.
 Red veil of violent death
 which spreads out in Ruanda.
 families and friendships broken, twisted.
 Races decimated by hate,
 crushed by the struggle for power,
 by unjust exploitation,
 in the interest of others .
 Red, the red of blood.

Black is the death
 of those who suffer hunger.
 The faces of deformed children.
 Mothers without milk, and without strength,
 with their children dead in their lap.
 Men who live with the shame
 of being unable to use their arms.
 Impotence before the dry land.

Anxious to get the donated flour,
 shameful charity of a world
 that is incapable of saying «enough».
 Black, the black of hunger and of death.
 Green of the sickly, emaciated faces.
 The phantom of *AIDS* that hovers.
 Men and women in their struggle with death,
 separated from friends and family.
 Without the support of a society
 that hides them to go untroubled.
 Green is the way to death.
 Hostile nature that reveals itself.
 Earthquakes that lay waste with warning
 the lands of Japan and Colombia.
 Without house, without family, without origin,
 they must begin life from zero.
 Green, the green of fear and of death.

But *WHITE!*

White is the banner of peace
 which a Saviour raises.
 White the bread, which, delivered,
 will make of the world a family.
 White the sheets of yarn.
 White. Brightness of hope,
 of God who acts in our history,
 and accompanies closely and in silence
 the indecisive and tremulous steps
 towards a new and joyful humanity.

(Támara Murillo)

- The second candle is lighted. Brief silence.
- Song: A verse of the entrance song.
- Before the third panel (Mark 5:21-43)

A voluntary worker in a hospital tells us: «After being closely concerned with pain, life does not go on in the same way. I was able to confirm this in the hospital. From the early days I felt that I was going to live rather differently. To accompany people when they are suffering is a complete way of reciprocal humanization and of *LIFE*. Of life, yes, because in the midst of pain vital questions bubble up, of solidarity and sympathy more or less hidden, of a painful but vivifying dedication. There one can live moments of profound life, of the silent passage of God. Each time one enters a room, a personal and irreplaceable mystery opens up. Mentally I take off my sandals to approach that person, to appear at the threshold of their life, and to hope, with deep respect, that an encounter could happen, the encounter that he or she would wish or would be able to live. Thus I would live each day as it comes: accompanying a person who was an invalid, in their process of adaptation to a new life, in which he or she assumes a radical dependence upon others; stimulating a two-year old child to acquire the reflexes proper to a baby of two months,

because he had lived in a hospital since birth and did not know what it was like to rest trustingly in someone's arms; staying, without more ado, at the bedside of an old woman who silently asks herself if her next operation will be the last, if death will come with it; listening to a single mother at the bedside of her recently born child dying of asphyxia at our side, how she had struggled to keep him... They were moments of dense presence in which I felt pressed to live at a deep level. All these faces make me take my own life up again, and draw me close to Jesus, the Suffering One, the Living One, in another way, in order to live the pain, be it one's own or someone else's, seeking life and getting it.

- the third candle is lighted. Brief silence.
- Song: A verse from the entrance song.
- Before the fourth panel (John 4)

«*The man who resembles you*»

He knocked at your door
He called at your heart
to get welcomed, to get warm
Why push me away?
Look at me brother..!
Why do you ask me
if I am from Africa
if I am from America
if I am from Asia
if I am from Europe?
Look at me brother..!
Why do you call me *sudaca*
why do you call me *moro*
why do you call me *color*
why do you call me *chinito*
Call me by my name!
I am not black
I am not yellow
I am not white.
I am just a human being.
Look at me brother...!
Open your door to me
Open your heart to me.
For I am a man.
But above all
Look at me brother..!

(MASABO, Damase)

- The fourth candle is lighted. Brief silence.
- Song: Alleluia
- The Paschal Candle is lighted

- From the centre of the room John 11:17-27 is proclaimed
- Silence

Echoes that stir up the Word within us
(Participation by the assembly)

- Final Prayer
We give you thanks Lord
because the midwives in Egypt backed life
because the sister of Moses backed life
because the white horseman of the Apocalypse backed life
because you are God of the living
because you have told us that whoever believes in you will never die.

Help us, Lord,
to put hope in painful situations
to put life where there is destruction or death
to put a welcome in every instance of intolerance.
Make us know how to announce to the world
that you were the first to pass from death to life.
May we all be resurrected in you.
We ask you this who live and reign for ever and ever.

- Final Song:

(Choose a rhythmical song that the assembly can accompany with dancing or hand-clapping)

- At the recession:

Hand a flower to each participant in the celebration.

- Fraternal feast and fiesta

Other biblical texts

- Gen. 4:10-15: «*And the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.*» God protects life, and impedes vengeance, even though it was the same Cain who unleashed violence by killing his brother.

- Gen. 21:9-20: «*And God heard the voice of the boy.*» Mixed together in the account are the anxiety of a mother who does not wish to see her son die and the manifestation that survival depends upon God. He not only prevents the child from dying, but, thanks to the assistance of that same God, many peoples will be born to the child.

- Jos. 2:1-21: «*Go toward the hill country, so that the pursuers may not come upon you.*» At time the defence of life arises when we do not expect it: in marginal areas (the Canaanite zone) and marginalized persons (Rahab the prostitute).

- 1 Sam. 24 and 26: «*The Lord forbid that I should raise my hand against the Lord's anointed.*» Saul is within reach of David but David spares his life. This suggests sparing one's enemy in war. Such conduct

produces a change: Saul renounces his evil intention (24:17-20) and proclaims David as future king (24:21-23).

- 2 Macc. 7:1-39: «*God, Creator of the universe, who made the human race and created everything that exists will in his mercy give you back breath and life.*» Let us underline the courage, the audacity and the fidelity of her own conscience in defence of a faith that the mother of the Maccabees maintains as the source of life.

- Ezek. 37:1-14: «*O dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord.*» In a context of despair (Ezekiel is addressing a group of exiles), the Lord shows how God who brought to birth life from death with the image of the dry bones to which he gives a vital new force.

- Cant. 1:1-4; 2:8-10; 5:10-16: «*How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful you are!*» Let us take pleasure in and enjoy the life that we possess and what it has to offer us.

- Mark 7:24-37: «*...even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.*» This text is a hinge in Mark between the two multiplications of loaves. The pagan woman, with her insistence, proposes to Jesus that life, symbolized by the bread, is not for Israel alone. It should come to all people.

- Luke 24:1-12: «*Why are you looking among the dead for him who is alive?*» God, in Jesus, has shown himself to be the Living One, present in the Church and in the world.

- Apoc. 12: «*Then the Dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour the child as soon as it was born.*» An image of the woman who defends life against the dragon. This can represent the power that threatens humankind: war, injustice, death... However, this power is incomplete.

- Acts 3:1-11: «*I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you: in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, stand up and walk.*» The apostle continues the task of giving life that was initiated by Jesus, and continues to make present the signs of life.

More texts

Gen. 1:1-31; Gen. 9:8-17; Gen. 22:109; Exod. 3:7-10; Deut. 30:15-20; 1 Sam. 2:1-10; 1 Sam. 19:1-7; 1 Sam. 25; 1 Kgs 17-19; 1 Kgs 17:17-24; 1 Kgs 19:1-8; Is. 52:13-53:12; Is. 65: 6b-25; Ruth 1:1-17; Qoh. 3:1-13; John 3:14-15 = Num. 21:6-9; Acts 5:35-39; Acts 9:36.

- Gen. 1:1-31: God, Creator of the world, of nature and of humanity, creates all things good. He gives dignity to the human person, makes them participate in his sovereignty over creation, and gives them the capacity to love, live and give life.

- Gen. 9:8-17: «*This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.*» This manifests the face of a God, near and merciful, who is determined to save humankind, always to begin again a new project of salvation in spite of sin.

- Gen. 22:1-9: «*Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him.*» The God of life rejects human sacrifices, whatever might be the face of those carrying them out in the various historical epochs.

- Exod. 3:7-10: «*I have seen the misery of my people, I have heard their cry... and I know their sufferings. And I have come down to deliver them.*» God, who is near, knows and responds to the needs of his people. He is voluntarily bound to its history of salvation and determined to carry it through.

- Deut. 30:15-20: «*See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity... Choose life so that you may live.*» A person can choose. Life is an option. For the believer life is nearness to God, communion with him, keeping his commandments.

- Jos. 2:1-21: «*Go toward the hill country, so that the pursuers may not come upon you.*» At times the defence of life springs up where we do not expect it: in marginal areas (the Canaanite zone) and marginalised persons (Rahab the harlot).

- 1 Sam 2:1-10: «*The Lord gives death and life, brings down to Sheol and raises up.*» God, Master of the universe, Lord of life, protects the weak, the hungry, the barren, and the poor.

- 1 Sam. 19:1-7: «*Jonathan, Saul's son, held David in great affection.*» The close friendship that united Jonathan and David saved David from death.

- 1 Sam. 25: The rapid and intuitive intervention of Abigail averted a massacre: «*Unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there would not have been left to Nabal so much as one male*» (25:34).

- 1 Kgs 17-19: «*The Lord is God! The Lord is God!*» Elijah denounces the idolatry of Ahab. His actions are directed at demonstrating what his name anticipates. We emphasize the symbolism: idolatry-drought (17:1; 18: 20-29); lack of life (17:17-18); lack of oil-flour (17:7-12); recognition of the Lord-rain (18:30-46); life (17:19-24); food in abundance (17:15-16).

- 1 Kgs 17:17-24: «*Now I know that you are a man of God.*» Elijah shows himself to be at one with the pain of the widow over the loss of her son. The God of Elijah pursues salvation and life. We should trust in the life-giving Word of God.

- 1 Kgs 19:1-8: «*It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life.*» Get up and eat. Elijah, overcome by fear and depression, wants to die. A messenger from God offers him food and courage.

- Is. 52:13-53:12: «*My servant shall bring salvation to many; he shall bear their iniquities.*» This fourth poem presents the image of the «*servant*» of the Lord who accepts voluntarily great sufferings in order to cure, forgive and save. He gives his life so that others may have life.

- Is. 65: 16b-25: «*...I am going to create a new heaven and a new earth.*» A song of hope in the face of the new creation, the work of God; the possibility of living where they are planted; a life abundant and fruitful...

- Ruth 1:1-17: Ruth renounces immediate security to follow her mother-in-law Naomi. This disposition on Ruth's part shows generosity and disinterested care for life. This will bring her to an encounter with Boaz. And life continues...

- Qoh. 3:1-13: Take pleasure in and enjoy the life you possess (Ecclus. 30:21-25; 10:26-11:1).

- John 3:14-15 = Num. 21:6-9: «*And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*» Jesus is the conqueror of death and the giver of life for all those who believe in him.

- Acts 5:35-39: Gamaliel defends the apostles by preventing innocents being condemned, even when he was not a follower of Jesus.

- Acts 9:36: Tabitha is symbol of disciples who, secretly, «*do good works and acts of charity*». God gives them the gift of life.

(Cont. from pg. 6)

the need for the evangelizers themselves to become evangelized or converted, and the open admission of past mistakes as a necessary condition for becoming effective agents of the Good News to others. Equally noteworthy is the recognition of the need for courage and boldness on the part of the evangelizers not only to proclaim the word fearlessly as the apostles did (Acts 4.19-20; Final Statement 5.7) and denounce what is wrong in peoples' religions and cultures (Acts 7.1-54; 14.11-18; Final Statement 5.5) but to challenge and denounce what is wrong within the church itself, with regard to its structures and practices, following the example of Paul vis-à-vis Peter at Antioch (Gal. 2.14; Final Statement 5.5).

On the weak side, the Final Statement as a document is very expansive, somewhat repetitive and generally difficult to follow. One example of the diffuseness which generates confusion is in the use of the term 'new'. The goal envisaged by the Final Statement is the establishment of the 'new heaven and new earth'. All its statements and recommendations aim at this. Hence the document frequently speaks of 'new' and 'newness' in a variety of ways: 'new eyes', 'new ways', 'new challenges', 'new paths', 'new methods', 'new experience of God', 'new evangelization', 'newness around us'. But the meanings of 'newness' in each of these references do not function at the same level. For instance, it is doubtful that 'the great newness and changes' mentioned in 2.1, 2.2 are necessarily evidence of the coming of the 'new heaven and new earth' (Final Statement 5.7) which is the goal of the biblical-pastoral apostolate of the Catholic Biblical Federation. The key biblical texts cited in the Final Statement, Isa. 43.19; 65.17; Rev. 21.5, need to be read in their own socio-historical contexts for an accurate assessment of the value of these 'newness and changes' which are taking place in the church in the world.

It is obvious that the Catholic Biblical Federation considers this Final Statement to be a very important document because of the cosmic nature of the issues raised in it and the scope of activities involved. One of the greatest challenges of the document is that of implementation. Several issues of the *Bulletin Dei Verbum* appeared which appeared after the Bogota assembly give account of how the mem-

bers of the Federation are implementing the decisions of the assembly in their different countries. Yet four years after the assembly, most people outside the membership of Catholic Biblical Federation do not know of the existence of the document, as I found out in trying to locate it for the purposes of this study. The challenge of implementation is closely linked with that of circulation. For the document to achieve maximum success, it will need to be made available to as many as possible of the envisaged agents of implementation, e.g. theological institutions, houses of formation and seminaries, not just to bishops and the members of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

The Final Statement also contains a certain ambivalence worth noting. On the one hand it emphasizes that the 'new evangelization' is the task and concern of 'the whole church' (4.1), and that the new thrust of the biblical-pastoral apostolate should be 'a thrust from institutional structure to creative presence' and from 'clergy to laity' (7.5.2-3). Yet the first set of recommendations made 'to the whole Church' (8.1.1-3) is addressed only to 'Bishops and Bishops' Conferences'. Understandably, this is the body that can appoint the recommended 'Bible Sundays, weeks, months or even a Bible year' (8.1.2), or ask that a Synod of Bishops be dedicated to the 'Biblical-Pastoral Ministry' (8.1.2). Still, this section leaves one with the impression that 'the whole Church' is synonymous with bishops and episcopal conferences. This is clearly not true in the biblical/gospel perspective and in that of *Lumen Gentium* (especially chapter 2).

Another aspect of the ambivalence is that in mentioning changes in the world, the Final Statement says very little, if anything, about actual changes in the church itself. One gets the impression that the changes are happening mostly around the church, which finds itself 'in the midst of the changes and newness' and so is challenged to respond with a new evangelization. But great renewal by the Spirit is taking place among the people of God at the grass roots: charismatic groups, prayer ministries and basic Christian or ecclesial communities. Moreover, there already exists in the church a significant, even if still relatively small, number of lay men and women theologians and

Bible scholars whose presence and contributions the Final Statement might have cited to support its call for the promotion of the laity in 8.3.3.2.

The same applies to the need to recognize women's contributions in the proclamation of the gospel from the grass roots and the existence of outstanding women biblical scholars. Simply to state that 'women are going to share an important role in the life of the Church, but (8.3.5.6, emphasis mine) is to imply that they are not already doing so. The issue is not that women are not playing an important role in the church, but that their roles are often not recognized or considered important. This observation is made without prejudice to the fact that the church needs to be open to the full participation of women in all aspects of its life, as is called for in the rest of this section of the Final Statement.

Another important but weakly treated section in the Final Statement concerns the socio-political context (6.2). While the document notes awareness of the widening economic gap between the North and South and the rich and the poor, what it proposes as a means of redressing this imbalance 'in this deformed world' (6.2) is rather vague and greatly inadequate: it speaks of the need to 'discover and destroy the idols' and 'dispel the shadows' that prevent human beings from walking in the light of God. The recommendations for this section (8.3.5.4) emphasize in particular preaching the gospel to the poor, writing commentaries that highlight the socio-political issues, joining in movements 'that are in favour of justice, peace and solidarity with the oppressed', and in collaboration with other churches and religious groups 'to urge governments to announce a biblical sabbath, or a jubilee year, before the year 2000' as a way of cancelling the 'foreign debts of the poorest nations of the world'.

But to bring about a truly new creation in the manner envisaged by Revelation and the Isaiah texts, it is not enough to preach the gospel mainly to the poor while the rich continue to operate as though the God-given riches of the world belonged to them and it is for them to decide how much to share with the poor. Moreover, the debt of the so-called rich nations towards the poorer ones whom they have exploited in the past through the slave

trade and colonialism and whom they continue to exploit in many open and clandestine ways today needs to be addressed. This other debt which takes the form of cultural, spiritual, economic and ecological exploitation and dehumanization of whole nations and their heritage is far greater than that of billions of dollars or pounds said to be owed by the so-called poor nations to the rich ones. This real 'deformity of the world' requires a radically new solution such as is envisaged in the key biblical texts quoted in the Final Statement. This last observation brings us to the final section of this study.

Concluding remarks

In the whole the Final Statement holds a great challenge for those who wish to engage in the biblical-pastoral ministry today. The document is worth studying carefully along with The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church mentioned earlier in this study, as two historical documents on the interpretation of the Bible which are not directly written by the hierarchy. To the comments already made on the different sections of the Final Statement is to be added that the creation of a new heaven and a new earth in both Isaiah (43.19; 65.17) and Revelation (21.5) are the work of God, or of 'the One sitting on the throne' (Rev. 20.11; 21.5) and the Lamb who becomes the pastor. In each case, the establishment of the new heaven and earth or the making of all things new requires the destruction of the current systems. In the case of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, there is the establishment of a brand new world political order where God uses the Pagan Cyrus as his 'anointed servant'. In Revelation, the complete destruction of the order and reality of this present cosmos, including 'death and Hades' (Rev. 20.14; 21.4).

The new world order that comes into existence is one where the lion can lie down with the lamb, with a little child leading them (cf. Isa. 11.6-9); this is seen as happening in real life, not in a circus. It is one where people of every tribe, language and nation become truly God's people (Rev. 5.9-10); where everyone is accorded his/her dignity and rights as the first born child of God and a citizen of heaven on earth (Heb. 12.22-23); and where no one is regarded as an alien or a

stranger. For this to happen, certain categories of people must cease to exist: 'fools', 'idolaters' and 'murderers', that is, those who pretend that there is no God (Ps. 14.1), who store up the riches of the world for themselves, and who practise all kind of falsehood and deceit in their personal, national and international dealings with other human beings and with God.

The biblical-pastoral apostolate is growing and spreading like wildfire. Wildfire here has the quality of the burning bush. People like Moses can go to see and admire the wonders which God is doing (Ex. 3.1-6), but when the time comes for action and commitment to the meaning of the vision and the wonders, we can and often do say like Moses, 'If it please you, my Lord, send someone else' (Ex. 4.13). So the greatest challenge posed by the Final Statement is not simply the multiplication and distribution of Bibles, even though this is also important. The saying of St. Jerome that 'ignorance of the Bible is ignorance of Christ' has become a commonplace. But it is also possible to know the scriptures very well and yet not know Christ (John 5.39-39); Matt. 7.21-28). The greatest challenge is on the one hand that of commitment or conversion, allowing the Spirit of God to bring about in one's heart and attitude that 'spiritual revolution' which enables one to become in deed and in truth 'a new creation' (II Cor. 5.17) on the personal, communal, national and global levels; and on the other, that of empowering people to take

up their lives and live in a spirit of mutual respect and co-responsibility for common tenantry of the earth.

The first Pentecost resulted in the establishment of a brand new social order among the group of believers (Acts 2.42-47; 4.32-47). It cost them to do so. Jews, for instance, had to learn to call pagans brothers and sisters and eat or share communion fellowship with them, contrary to their previous religious and cultural beliefs and upbringing (Acts 10-11). In our times, it will not be possible to participate in God's activity of 'making all things new' unless we address with all honesty and integrity the issue of racism in all its many subtle forms. For racism is an endemic evil which has undermined and continues to undermine all efforts to proclaim the gospel or to advance the biblical-pastoral apostolate by the Catholic Biblical Federation and the universal church.

When this demon with its legion companions is cast out in all its forms, humanity will gain new eyes and new energy to see and participate in God's project of making all things new. Humanity might then return to that state of unity and solidarity which it had before Babel (Gen. 11.1-9), and which has now been more eminently restored in Christ. Then the biblical-pastoral apostolate of the Catholic Biblical Federation will achieve its goal in proclaiming the Good News that in Christ, God has indeed made all things new here on this our earth, and that believers are living witnesses to it.

LIFE OF THE FEDERATION

Experiences

Rome: A project for missionary renewal

D. Josep M. Abella, cmf, Prefect General of Apostolate and Coordinator of the project WORD-MISSION, recounts the vicissitudes of an engaged religious Congregation in which the Word of God may be the source of renewed vitality.

The Congregation of Claretian Missionaries (2,950 members from 53 nationalities) are planning a project for «vocational reading» of the Bible which we are calling *WORD-MISSION (THE WAY OF EMMAUS)*. It concerns a proposal made to all the Claretians to begin, both at the personal and the community level, a process of reading the whole Bible, seeking in it, once again, the inspiration

that may give a new vitality to the life and missionary action of the Congregation. The project originated from a reflection on evangelization. It wished to draw attention to the urgent and oft repeated call by the Pope, to proclaim the gospel among those people where the Church's presence is minimal, and to the «new evangelization». The response to these insistent calls by the Pope demand a change: one

has to recreate a new subject of evangelization, and, for that, we must allow ourselves to be remodelled by the Word of God. It is an invitation to listen to the Word of God, because we are sure that in it we are going to encounter the force that will launch all the members of the Congregation into a more radical commitment to the cause of the Kingdom and the proclamation of its arrival. We know that when the Word does not live in us, as in the case of the disciples from Emmaus, we enter a situation of demission. Only when we allow the Lord to make us discover his Word will our hearts burn, we will acquire a deep sense of the Eucharist and we will enter once more into a reunited community around Jesus, disposed for the journey and the boldness that the fulfilment of the mission requires.

At the same time, this project is intended to recover a practice of the Founder, St Anthony Mary Claret, who would read two chapters of the Bible each day, and four during the seasons of Advent and Lent. He began this practice while still a seminarian (1830) in obedience to the then bishop of Vic (Spain), Dr Pablo de Jesús Corcuera. St Anthony Mary Claret, according to his autobiography, discovered in reading the Word of God both his vocation and the concrete way in which he would realize it. He encountered in it, also, the light that illumines historical reality and provides a judgment upon it. In the Word of God he always encountered the inspiration of his life and ministry. So, to return to the origins, to initiate oneself into the charismatic experience, demands of the Claretian a return to the Word of God.

The project was set up as a great biblical catechesis to which are invited all the members of the Congregation. They are charged with the task of making a concrete proposal that will allow this congregational aspiration to get underway.

The commission, made up of Claretians (biblicists, experts in Claretian spirituality, pastoralists) from different parts of the world, met, for the first time, in February 1993. After defining the objectives of the project more clearly and making the initial motivation explicit, the commission organized the process for the reading (it would be done over five years) and began to prepare some aids to help all Claretians in the vocational reading of the Bible to which they had been invited.

The first problem was how to distribute the Bible reading during this period of time. Various solutions seemed viable: to follow the liturgical year; to adapt the rhythm of the proposed reading to the liturgy of the hours; to focus each year on the reading of a Gospel and from that to incorporate the books of the Old Testament. All these proposals had their advantages and disadvantages. Finally, they opted for a reading of the Bible in the order given to us by the Church: beginning with Genesis and ending with the Apocalypse. In the same way, they opted for a hermeneutic that would facilitate for us a «missionary reading», that would make us deeply aware of God's plan of salvation, and would move us irresistibly to place ourselves at his service with a view to proclaiming and realizing it. It was not a theoretical course, but a process to help us to reconstruct our own personal and community identity from the Word.

The distribution of the reading goes as follows:

First year: *PENTATEUCH*, the reality of humankind.

Second year: *PROPHETS*, the reality of the people.

Third year: *SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND ACTS*, the Christian reality.

Fourth year: *PAUL*, the missionary reality.

Fifth year: *GOSPEL OF JOHN AND THE APOCALYPSE*, reality of vigilance and permanent conversion.

The rest of the books of the Bible would be integrated into community celebrations which would be programmed for each of the themes or within them.

From here work was begun on some aids that would help this vocational reading of the Bible using four keys:

Biblical key: this endeavours to help towards a faithful understanding of the message of the text. It is structured on three levels:

The literary level: which addresses the text proposed for the reading;

The historical level: what the text was saying at the time it was proclaimed or written;

The theological level: what God is saying to us through the text. This is intended to help us to seize upon the permanent religious message of the text.

Claretian key: this is intended to help us to catch the resonance that the Bible, and, in particular, the various texts or themes proposed, encountered in the spiritual experience and missionary action of St Anthony Mary Claret, founder of the Congregation. From here one can recover one's own disposition for situating oneself before the message of the Word, as well as some criteria which orientate the «Claretian response» to it.

Situational key: this offers some suggestions or ways to locate the reading of the Word of God in space and time. It has a double purpose:

- to throw light on the reality of the Word so that we may grasp the word which God directs at us in the former;

- to «situate» the reading of the Word of God in our historical period in order to be able to discover the message that it has for us today.

Existential key: this offers some suggestions for helping us to welcome the Word into our own life, and for discerning the attitudes required for this or the actions to be taken.

The work that the project involves is proposed at a double level: personal and community. Serious personal work is fundamental to the outcome of the project. It demands, first of all, an attentive reading of the biblical texts proposed for each theme. Next, a second reading, with the help of the aids prepared by the commission. A third stage, of capital importance, is a prayerful re-reading of the text. This is the moment when we must place ourselves before God who speaks to us, and ask for the gift of his Spirit to be able to obtain all the richness of the Word that God directs towards us. This is the moment also when we discern those movements that arise in our hearts and which we have to translate into concrete responses in our life and missionary action. On the basis of this personal work the community encounter makes sense and substance of what is being asked by each of the themes. The community is reunited around the Word of God; it shares what

the Lord has said to each one, who is enlightened and urged on by this Word, and discerns the missionary response that it should give to the challenges of the historical reality of today.

We Claretians hope that this process will equip us as suitable ministers of the Word, and transform our hearts so that we may feel truly «free» to offer to the world of today an apostolic action that is faithful to our charism.

The project has received a positive enough response in the Congregation. The majority of Claretians have received it with pleasure and have begun to put it into practice. We felt the necessity of building our life and apostolic action on its foundation: the Word of God. Actually, the starting of this project has been the occasion for the creation of some pastoral initiatives, like the «Popular Biblical Centres» that have been set up in some provinces. Especially positive has been making this bible reading itinerary together with some groups of seculars with whom we share various pastoral responsibilities. They bring a new richness to the reading of the Word of God in the context of today's world.

There are those who have not accepted the project in a positive way. A number of reasons have been given: different sensibility, distinct theological formation, inability of the community to create an ambience which allows the sharing of the faith experience of each one, disagreement over the exegetical approaches of the aids produced by the commission, lack of time, etc. Sometimes it is simply a question of a certain spiritual apathy that dampens enthusiasm even before it begins.

An element that has been seen to be very important for the realization of the project is the task of the animator of the group. First of all, he has to immerse himself in the project. Next he has to find a way to facilitate to the maximum the personal and community journey, so that all feel motivated for the effort that is demanded.

The aids for each year are published in pamphlets or books which are distributed to all members of the Congregation and are shared with the seculars who have joined in this project. Up to now aids have appeared for the first two years:

Pentateuch and prophets. They have been published in Spanish (Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid, Spain), English (Claretian Publications, Quezon City, Philippines), Italian (Missionari Claretiani - Provincia Italia, Rome), French (Curia Generalizia dei Missionari Claretiani, Rome), German (Provincialat der Claretiner, Würzburg, Germany). Editions are being prepared in Polish (Palabra, Warsaw, Poland), and Portuguese (Editora Ave Maria, Sao Paulo, Brazil).

It is an effort in which the whole Congregation is engaged. Opinions are coming in of different communities trying to improve the contents and methodology of the aids. It is a work of solidarity which endeavours to contribute to the growth of each one of the Claretians and to the Congregation as a whole. There is a deep conviction underlying this process: the Word of God never returns to itself empty. We believe that it is going to be efficacious in us.

News

Africa

Harare (Zimbabwe)

The inter-regional Conference of Bishops of South Africa (IMBISA) has planned a first course, *Dei Verbum*, taking into account the style of that of Nemi (Rome). IMBISA includes Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe.

It will take place from 5th January to 14th February, 1996.

The location will be the Major National Seminary Chishawasha (Harare/Zimbabwe), and laity, priests and religious will be invited to participate. The following conditions will be required: that one can follow the course in English; that one be committed to biblical pastoral ministry; that one be sent by a diocese or by one's respective superiors. For more information contact: D. Ignatius Chidavaenzi, 28 Dublin Rd. Emerald Hill, P. O. Box 1171 Harare/Zimbabwe. Tel. (263) (4) 399997, Fax. (263) (4) 72 4971.

America

Ecuador

The Episcopal Conference of Ecuador committed itself to having an annual Bible Week and is now preparing the Third national Bible Week which will take place from 26th November - 3rd December 1995. The central theme of this week will be the Prophets.

The press of the Vicaría del Sur de Quito, El Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias and el Centro Bíblico Verbo Divino assumed the task of editing and distributing the Review *RIBLA* for Latin America.

RIBLA is a biblical review that is ecumenical in character. It offers an interpretation of life situations and the expectations of the people of Latin America. To subscribe, write to *RIBLA* Ecuador, Apdo 17-03-252.

Mexico

The Institute of Sacred Scripture of Mexico continued its normal activities during 1994, which was the 28th consecutive year of its work.

A group of forty-two students completed correspondence courses this year. Two degrees were granted and five diplomas to students who had completed six basic subjects and the twenty courses that the programme demands.

The Bible Week was also celebrated with the presentation of the document «Interpretation of Sacred Scripture» by D. Carlos Junco G.

A biblical pastoral course was integrated into the Programme of Studies, which makes known the situation of the above-mentioned biblical pastoral ministry in our country.

Among the activities of the Institute is to help Dioceses who ask it with a four-year course to prepare qualified workers who can collaborate with the Bible School of the Diocese. This year this experience

was carried out in the Diocese of Huajuapán, León, Oax. Sixteen diplomas were gained.

In collaboration with the Episcopal Commission for Biblical Pastoral Ministry, a correspondence course, Initiation Course in Sacred Scripture, began and is being very well received. Some challenges are: to augment the number of regular students; to establish a system of scholarships for those who need them; to initiate a summer course, and to develop the library.

Asia/Oceania

Philippines

FABC (Federation of the Bishops' Conferences of Asia) held its sixth Plenary Assembly in the Philippines from 10th-19th of January.

The **FABC** commemorated its silver jubilee with special pastoral care: At the service of life. In its final declaration it referred especially to five great areas of preoccupation: the Asiatic family; women and children; youth; ecology; and displaced persons.

Indonesia

With the conclusion of the translation of the Deuterocanonical Books, and ecumenical project has been completed of publishing the Bible in Karones, about 75,000 Karo-Bataks will be able to read the Bible in their own language. North Sumatra (the Archdiocese of Medan). For more information contact: Fr. Kleopas van Laarhoven, OFM Cap. Jln. Silbolga 21. Pematangsiantar 21122 Sumut. Indonesia.

Southeast Asia

CBF First Southeast Asian Workshop, 01-06 June 1995, Cisarua, Bogor, Indonesia

The Final Statement

1. We, 38 delegates from Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, came together for the Catholic Biblical Federation's (**CBF**)

First Southeast Asian Workshop for the biblical Apostolate at Cisarua, Bogor, Indonesia from 1st to 6th June 1995. We shared, reflected, and discovered ways and means of realizing the theme: *EMPOWERING THE LAITY, ESPECIALLY THE YOUTH, TO LIVE AND SHARE GOD'S WORD*. Joel's prophecy, quoted in Acts 2:17, inspired us in the workshop: *"I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams."*

Our understanding of "empowerment" came from the conviction that each person has been gifted by the Spirit. Each one needs to be led to recognize these gifts and to find ways of using them for service. Empowerment means the releasing of this power of the Spirit. Likewise the Word of God is a powerful Word, a source of life. *"The force and power in the word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons [and daughters], the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life"* (DV '21). Empowerment involves seeking ways to liberate and to channel that power, so that the life-giving potential may become actual.

2. We shared as witnesses of the Incarnate Word-among-us and looked at the widening contexts of our experiences in the biblical-pastoral ministry. First, we shared our involvements: multi-media evangelization; integral lay formation; Bible-based communities, centers and families; women empowerment; and Bible promotion/distribution. But our personal involvements were just houses in a whole neighbourhood. We needed to look out the window and view our immediate environment, the institutions of which we are a part.

And so second, we shared our institutions' various thrusts: inculturation, wholistic transformation, ecological consciousness, ecumenism, community renewal, and empowerment of marginalized groups like women, youth and the poor. And then third, we needed to go out the door to see an even bigger world as we shared on how these thrusts ran parallel to the contexts of the New Evangelization discussed in **CBF's** 4th Plenary Assembly in Bogota, 1990.

3. We then reflected on our journey. We went back, as did Bogota, to the Emmaus story - a life-giving encounter, involving listening, dialogue which enabled the Scriptures to touch the new evangelization, an evangelization which brings new life. Essential to this life-situation, dialogue which enables us to see both the familiar texts and our own contexts in a new light. Emmaus is also, of course, about life coming out of death. The service of life to which the Word calls us may mean for us death to several of our old ways. But precisely from such death arises empowerment.

And so our journey will take us on to the 1996 Plenary Assembly in Hongkong, with its theme "God's Word as the Source of Life". This journey can be seen as a journey not just from Bogota to Hongkong but from Emmaus to Sychar, from Jesus' dialogue with the disciples on the road to his dialogue with the woman at the well, to the promise of life-giving water (Jn 4).

4. Empowerment, we discovered as we shared, is an on-going process of becoming a community of believers fully aware of the realities they are in, reflecting on these realities in the light of God's Word, and transforming - renewing - those same realities into God's kingdom, just as Christ, the Word, incarnates in them in unconditional love. In this workshop, we discovered that this entails a process by which the laity, especially the youth, may learn how to read the bible.

As in the story of Philip and the eunuch, the laity, especially the youth, need someone to lead them and explain the bible to them (Acts 8:26-40), so that they may share the Word with one another and collaborate in the effort of building up the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21:1). The empowered youth and laity, therefore, are neither just receivers nor givers of service to life but more so givers and receivers of life itself. For they hold the secret to power and glory. The Lord is with them! (Col. 1:27).

5. Focusing on the laity, we reflected on our doubts and fears, time constraints, and need to work to change entrenched "clericalist" attitudes, attitudes held not just by many priests and religious, but by many lay people as well. We also reflected on our need for influences of the mass media. And so we discovered a greater

need for community with the laity and the clergy, a need for genuine commitment to His Word leading to genuine responsibility which means full use of our ability to respond - to God, to others, to our selves.

6. We further reflected on our experiences specifically with the formation of animators for the youth and on our experiences with the youth themselves, who make up 65 % of Asia, "the continent of youth", as our bishops said (Final Statement, 6th FABC Plenary Assembly, Manila Philippines, #15:3). We discovered ways to help them become more reflective and thus empowered. Empowering youth to live and share the Word is the responsibility of the entire Christian community. The Christian community has to respond to the needs of young people and get them to share their unique gifts with the larger community. The Christian community needs to have a special ministry to empower youth to live and share the Word. This ministry has to be *TO* youth, *WITH* youth, *BY* youth and *FOR* youth.

7. In the light of all our sharing, reflections and discoveries, we came up with some commitments, although we are fully aware that no one of us can do all these things. Our particular commitment will depend on our particular situation with its own needs and opportunities. We commit ourselves to:

Community Building

1. build faith-filled small Christian communities nourished by God's Word, growing into a communion of communities living and sharing God's Word;

2. promote the Family Biblical Apostolate for and with the youth;

3. promote ongoing biblical formation for animators and ministers of the Word, especially for the youth;

4. foster wider participation and greater co-responsibility among the laity and the youth in the biblical-pastoral ministry;

Media and Culture

5. make more use of mass and group media to promote the biblical apostolate;

6. stress the importance of culture in the biblical-pastoral ministry;

The Diocese/Parish

7. promote the biblical apostolate in every parish of our respective dioceses, offering programs and services in the biblical-pastoral ministry as part of over-all diocesan programs in collaboration with the existing commissions, structures, organizations and movements of both the laity and the youth.

Seminary Formation

8. include courses on the biblical-pastoral ministry in the formation of seminarians while emphasizing chapter 4 of "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church"; and involve the seminarians in bible sharing with the laity and with the youth, not as facilitators but as participants.

Networking

9. network among ourselves in the Southeast Asian sub-region in terms of sharing materials, content and methodology, and resource persons;

We hope to make life truly alive in the Southeast Asian sub-region through the biblical-pastoral ministry.

Europe/Middle East

London

In our previous Bulletin we gave an account of the work done by *Housetop* and its director John Wijngaards. In this number we congratulate them on obtaining the Grand Prix in Varsovia (18th-23rd May, 1995). The tenth festival of international catholic cinema decided to give them the prize for their film for TV *Journey to the Centre of Love*. Mention was made of «the profound description of the process whereby persons of different cultures and nations discover the Christian faith and how they draw close to God and to his Son, Jesus Christ». The film, which is screened in three, fifty-minute episodes, narrates the way of faith of two young people, one young man in London and a young Chinese woman in Taipei. The backdrop is the search for God in a secular world. *For more information: Housetop, 39 Homer St, London W1H 1HL. Tel. 0171 402 9679. Fax. 0171 723 2668.*

Paris

The Catholic service *Evangile et Vie* (full member of the CBF) and the Protestant service *Equipes de Recherche Biblique* organized a Biblical Congress on the theme: «*Lire la Bible*» for animators of biblical groups on April 29th-30th in Paris.

The structure of the congress was in two parts, *Atheoretical* part, which was dedicated to the explanation and evaluation of different methods of reading and interpreting the Bible and was done through papers read to the full assembly (200 participants). The papers were by Professors D. Daniel Marguerat (Lausanne): *The Narrative method*; D. Alain Marchadour (Toulouse): *The Relation between the Two Testaments*; and D. Jacques Briand (Paris, and member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission): *The Historico-Critical method*.

The *practical* part was dedicated to studying and working in small groups according to a method previously decided.

It concluded with a «round table» where the professors answered questions which the different groups had prepared. There was also time for spontaneous discussion.

The presentation of the «*Narrative Method*» aroused great interest, perhaps because of its greater novelty. The humility of the method (one among others) was highlighted, and the accessibility of this method to every type of person, and for the biblical pastoral ministry in general. Sample documents of this pedagogical type aroused much interest, as did the invitation to continue exercising oneself in this method in future courses in St Maurice (Switzerland, 26th-30th June), a service of the *Animation Biblique Oecuménique Romande* (Evangile et Culture, and, Centre Catholique Romand de Formation Permanente, an associate member of the CBF).

All the contributions were enormously interesting and of great liveliness and current importance. The participants experienced satisfaction, humour, and interesting work. *For more information: BIB (Bulletin d'information biblique) nr. 44 (June 1995). Évangile et Vie/8, rue Jean Bart/75006 Paris/Tel: (1) 422203-89.*