

Catholic Biblical Federation

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Bulletin

*Verbum
Dei*

**CHRISTIAN
DISCIPLESHIP
IN ASIA TODAY:
SERVICE
TO LIFE**

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 alone know my plans for you," says the Lord, "plans for well-being and not misfortune, to give you a future full of hope" (Jer. 29:11). One must be as bold as the prophets in order to offer with such forcefulness, "in the times which are pressing", a future full of hope. This is especially true because the Word make us see the distance between God's plans and human realisations. After listening to these words, can we remain deaf to the cries of suffering, violence and death that continue to spring forth from life and which hold it permanently threatened and muzzled. Would that the Catholic Biblical Federation, in all its members, bestow upon itself the gift of listening in this new year in which God renews his promise and his covenant.

It is the year of a new Plenary Assembly, the fifth in a history of just over twenty-five years. The first Plenary Assembly took place in Vienna in 1972. There the new statutes were approved and a plan of action agreed upon for six years. The echo of the conciliar Constitution, *Dei Verbum*, was heard: "Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful". The second Plenary Assembly, held in Malta in 1978, marked the end of the "infancy" period of the Federation: "It is not so much interpreting the Bible as interpreting life in the light of the Bible". Bangalore was the venue chosen for the third Plenary Assembly in 1984. The theme then was: "Would that all were prophets" (Num. 11:29). We went to Bogotá in 1990, where the fourth, and last to date, Plenary Assembly took place. Surely, there still resounds in the delegates from that time the key text: "Behold I make all things new" (Is. 43:19; Apoc. 21:5). The Bulletins 15, 16 and 19 offer plenty of information about these events. Perhaps it will be an opportune moment, with Hong Kong in view, to think over these.

And to help focus on Hong Kong, this number of the Bulletin concentrates especially on Asia and on its ecclesial, socio-economic, cultural and theological context. The why is not difficult to guess for readers who have heard, on many occasions, that the "text has to be read in its context". The Sub Region of Southern Europe, on its journey from Bogotá to Hong Kong, explains it in the following way: "We want to underline the importance of context in our reading of the Bible, from various points of view, but above all the context of the readers, their life, their situation, their preoccupations, which determine their way of reading the Bible, and the place that this can occupy in their reflection and faith-based discernment".

This is also the spirit that underlies our central pages. We have included the text that John Paul II addressed to the Federation on its 25th anniversary, as like a prayer, which being shared from now on, can bring about the wish of Bishop Ablondi, President of the CBF, of "an Assembly before the Assembly" (BDV 37). We hope that all this serves to encourage and to enlarge the listening horizon of the members of the Federation so that they can be really on top of the theme for the preparation and realisation of the coming event: "The Word of God is the source of abundant life for everyone". It is a good piece of news with which to begin the year.

Pilar de Miguel

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN ASIA TODAY: SERVICE TO LIFE

The disciples of Jesus who live in Asia - how do they regard this life which is springing from the wells of the peoples in Asia, of their histories, their habitats and their cultures? What kind of service can the disciples of Jesus living in Asia render to affirm, to enrich and to promote this life?

Ours is a vision of a life of wholeness, integrity and dignity, a life which is filled with compassion, solidarity and responsible care. At the heart of our vision of life lies the Asian sense of reverence for the mystery and for the sacred (Final Statement of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly: January 10-19, 1995 - Manila, Philippines).

Introduction

1. To our God of love and life, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we give praise and thanks!

In the same city of Manila, where 25 years ago in the inspiring presence of the revered Pope Paul VI, the dream of actualizing the communion of Asian Churches began, we, the bishops-delegate of twenty-one countries and territories, gather in Manila for the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

We are deeply blessed by the active participation in our Assembly of a number of dedicated lay persons, priests, religious sisters and brothers.*

On this occasion a singular grace for us is likewise the moving presence of Pope John Paul II.

With him we not only celebrate the 25th anniversary of the resolution to form a structure that would later become the FABC, but also the 25th year of Radio Veritas Asia, the 400th year of the Archdiocese of Manila and its 3 historic suffragans, Cebu, Caceres, and Nueva Segovia, and especially the 10th World Youth Day.

Indeed these festivities are peak moments of God's grace to the Church in Asia, in communion with one another and with the Holy Father - at the service of life.

2. Remembering with gratitude the beginnings of FABC, we are impressed by the vigour of the creative energies that gave it birth and life.

We also recognize that the history of FABC is but a short chapter in the continuing saga of the Asian Churches' solicitude for life, whose individual and collective stories are about promises already realized, if yet waiting to be fulfilled.

This remembrance of blessings past is both comfort and strength. For we realize that the spring from which FABC draws its vigour is the God who has blessed us in Jesus Christ with every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3). We thank our God in our remembrance (Phil 1:3).

A. 25 years of FABC commitment to life

3. Through its past five plenary assemblies, FABC tried to discern the current "life-context" of the Asian pastoral situations that inevitably consist of death-dealing as well as life-serving realities.

The initial bishops' meeting in Manila in 1970 already indicated the expectations of Asians for "a better and fuller life for themselves and their children" (ABM, 10).

For this reason, the Church in Asia must foster a threefold dialogue: with the many different faiths of Asia, with the cultures of Asia, and with the poor multitudes of Asia.

We believe that fullness of life can be realized "only in and through Christ and his Gospel, and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (FABC I, 1974).

For the Church and its mission in Asia whose peoples are characterized by traditions of deep religiosity, prayer has to be "the river of life".

Prayer is absolutely indispensable if the Christ-life is to indwell Christian participation in life-giving liberation and development (FABC II, 1978).

This inner life of prayer builds the Church into a credible community of faith, rooted in the life of the Trinity and turned resolutely toward the construction of a fully human future for Asian peoples (FABC III, 1982).

This is why the laity must act as an evangelizing and liberating force in the struggle for fullness of life (FABC IV, 1986). Our unique contribution is our vision of Jesus Christ, and our Christian spirituality manifested through dialogue, discernment and deeds.

As Church, we need to walk in compassion and humility, in accompaniment with all the peoples of Asia "as they pray, work, struggle and suffer for a better human life, (in their) search for the meaning of human life and progress" (FABC V, 1990).

Through the years FABC has addressed various concerns that promote social, economic, religious and ecclesial life.

Such concerns are: the promotion of justice and integral development particularly in relation to women, migrant workers and indigenous peoples; the building of basic ecclesial communities

and basic human communities; the promotion of interreligious dialogue, especially the dialogue of life; leadership formation and specialized formation of priestformators, youth chaplains, bishops and lay leaders; the conscientization and organization of basic sectors of society; and a more effective use of media for evangelization.

The overall thrust of activities in recent years has been to motivate the Churches of Asia towards "a new way of being Church", a Church that is committed to becoming "a community of communities" and a credible sign of salvation and liberation.

4. Yet on this the 25th anniversary of *FABC*, we have to confess humbly that the goal of conscientizing the local Churches and building a communion of our Asian Churches is still far from being reached, despite the truly remarkable advances already made in this regard.

We are glad to recall, even if only briefly, the extraordinarily rich story of *FABC*.

It is the story of a listener attentive to the perils of life, to the visions of life, to celebratory songs of life and who wants to share the singular wealth one has, which is the memory of the person named Jesus who is for us the Way, the Truth and the Life.

5. The theme for this Sixth Plenary Assembly of *FABC* is most fitting. We take as our theme "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life", in order that we may recommit ourselves to the promotion of life in Asia.

B. A vision of life amid Asian realities

6. "Life. Vibrant life pulsating from the fecundity of Asia" (*FABC International Theological Colloquium*, 1994).

How do the disciples of Jesus in Asia view this life that is welling up from the depths of Asian peoples, their histories, their habitats and their cultures? What service can the disciples of Jesus in Asia offer to affirm, enhance, defend and promote this life?

Our response begins with a rapid scan of Asian realities not so much to repeat the already substantive analyses that previous *FABC* assemblies and a great number of *FABC* seminars and workshops have done, as simply to situate more clearly the struggle of Asia for life.

7. We turned our attention to whatever threatens, weakens, diminishes and destroys the life of individuals, groups or peoples; whatever devalues human beings, conceived, born, infant, old; whatever socio-cultural, religious, political, economic, or environmental factor that threatens or destroys life in our countries.

We identified some of these forces of death at work in Asia. And we concluded that as promoters of life, we could only denounce them.

We were alarmed at how the global economy is ruled by market forces to the detriment of peoples' real needs.

We considered the insecurity and vulnerability of migrants, refugees, the displaced ethnic and indigenous peoples, and the pain and agonies of exploited workers, especially the child labourers in our countries.

We became more aware of the forces of death depriving women and the girl child of their dignity, freedom, personhood and fuller humanity.

We realized how the same forces undermine the family, the basic cell of society and the Church, through liberalist, anti-life, anti-child, anti-woman, anti-family policies and values and pose many threats to wholeness of life in the area of health care, especially of the poor.

We recognized the growing violence, terrorism, conflicts and nuclear proliferation fuelled by the arms trade and greed for profit, all of which violate people's rights.

They threaten participative democracy, humane governance and adjust and peaceful society. We also noted with pain that our sisters and brothers in some countries are still denied their right to religious freedom.

In the area of religious pluralism, we reflected on the growing fundamentalist extremism and fanaticism discriminating and excluding people who belong to other religious traditions, thus destroying the harmony of peoples' lives and their solidarity already witnessed to in a dialogue of life.

As we reflected on these negative areas, we could not ignore the immense damage to the ecosystem of our planet which offends justice and the rights of people.

We say "no" to these death-dealing forces.

8. In this scenario of shadows, we were also encouraged by areas of light. We became aware of the many signs of hope in the histories and cultures of our peoples, as seen in peoples' movements and the initiatives of groups, peoples, and the Churches in Asia for the service of life.

We identified with great joy these expressions of life powerfully at work in Asia. We resolved to affirm them, encourage them, celebrate them, and unite our efforts to them.

Noteworthy among them are the growing consciousness regarding human dignity and empowerment of the poor, the growing voices of groups and peoples for humanized development, and the cries of the marginalized groups for participatory and democratic governance.

We dwelt also on the movements for the protection of the environment and ecosystem linked to justice, and the solidarity of committed groups and peoples in the struggle for the rights of women, children, especially the girl child, and those of indigenous peoples.

Truly remarkable is the increasing number of young people moving towards solidarity and community, and seeking a deeper spirituality. We were consoled by efforts of many groups to foster dialogue with people of other faiths.

We did not miss the value of the discovery of mass media for the promotion of values and support of peoples' movements and rights.

To these life-giving forces, we give a resounding "yes".

9. From the dynamic forces at work within Asian realities a basic vision of life emerges.

In the living heritage of cultures and religious traditions of Asia we discern values and their expressions in symbols, stories and art forms, that embody a vision of life; while we are critically aware of the distortions that have entered into these traditions.

In these cultural and religious traditions we also discover the responses to life given by past generations of Asian peoples, which in turn become resources for our contemporary response.

We Asians are searching not simply for the meaning of life but for life itself. We are striving and struggling for life because it is a task and a challenge.

But life is a gift too, a mystery, because our efforts to achieve it are far too short of the ultimate value of life. We speak of life as a *becoming* - a growing into, a journeying to life and to the source of life.

10. So what might this vision be?

In the rich diversity of ancient Asian cultures and faiths is a vision of *unity in diversity, a communion of life* among diverse peoples. In this context we seek to become persons of dialogue.

Ours is a vision of holistic life, life that is achieved and entrusted to every person and every community of persons, regardless of gender, creed or culture, class or colour.

It is the fruit of integral development, the authentic development of the whole person and of every person.

We envision a life *with integrity and dignity, a life of compassion* for the multitudes, especially for the poor and the needy.

It is a life of *solidarity* with every form of life and of *sensitive care* for all the earth.

It is thus a life that unites us Asians among ourselves and with the whole of creation into one community of life.

For us to live is to live with integrity and dignity, in peace and justice, in freedom and participation, in mutuality and complementarity. It is to live in simplicity and friendship.

At the heart of our vision of life is the *Asian reverential sense of mystery and of the sacred*, a spirituality that regards life as sacred and discovers the Transcendent and its gifts even in mundane affairs, in tragedy or victory, in brokenness or wholeness.

This deep interiority draws people to experience *harmony and inner peace* and infuses ethics into all of creation.

11. Such is a broad sketch of an Asian vision of life. With the eyes of the heart, with our faith, we need to understand it as the work of the creative Spirit of the God of Life, who in all things and among every people is healing, renewing, and recreating in ever new, ever mysterious ways.

What can we, and how can we, as disciples of Jesus, contribute to the shaping and achieving of such a vision of life in Asia, with our Asian peoples and for Asian peoples.

How can the Churches of Asia participate, as Churches and as Asian, in the common global search for life? What does Christian discipleship in Asia mean, if it is to truly serve life?

Our response leads us to Jesus, the Life whom we are following and whom we share with others.

C. To life in the footsteps of Jesus

12. All life is related to the active presence of the Creator Spirit. No wonder Jesus, confessed as Messiah and Lord, is Spirit-filled. He who is The Life is dependent on the Spirit.

Conceived in the virgin's womb by the Spirit's power (Lk 1:35, Mt 1:20), anointed by the Spirit at his baptism in

the Jordan (Mk 1:10), driven to the wilderness by the Spirit to be prepared for his mission (Mt 4:1), sent to preach the good news of salvation by the Spirit's action (Lk 4:18-19), Jesus ushers in the new creation, the fullness of life in God.

As the Risen One, he breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples (Jn 20:22 ff), making them partakers of his life and mission.

What vision of life emerges from the Spirit-filled Jesus?

13. Jesus and the Kingdom of the god of life. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). With these simple words, Jesus describes his mission.

But it is also depicted as the mission of announcing and inaugurating the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:15), the hope of subjugated Israel for the fullness of life in God. Jesus teaches what life in the Kingdom consists in.

13.1. *Communion with Abba*. Jesus identifies the ultimate source of life, the God whom he intimately calls Abba. In Abba Jesus finds his whole life. "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (Jn 14:11).

In Abba he finds the resting place of his life's journey. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46). Who Jesus is, what he does, where he ends up, are all found in a passion for communion with Abba.

13.2. *Liberating and Recreating Communion among Neighbours*. In compassionate Love, Jesus makes his own the struggles and aspirations of Israel for life.

Assuming their humanity, he incarnates Abba's life-giving actions of old: creation of all the living out of sheer love, liberation of the chosen people from the bondage of Egypt, mutual belonging within the covenant. Like Abba, Jesus brings life through a new creation, a radical liberation and a renewed communion.

At his word, demons flee, sinners are liberated. At his touch, the sick are healed.

He frees the victims of society from the evil and sin that shackle them. He restores them to communion.

He breaks down barriers set up by greed, pride, discrimination, lopsided social norms and even religious distortions. Outcasts become sisters and brothers. Sinners are worthy of compassion. The hungry, the thirsty, the prisoners, the naked bear the divine presence. And God is our Father.

In the freedom and communion that Jesus offers, a new creation dawns. The human community is reborn.

Indeed the time of fulfilment has come. Life in abundance is in our midst. The Kingdom is here (Lk 17:21).

13.3. *Death for the Life of the Many.* In his passion for life, Jesus courageously confronts death. But like all defenders of life, he catches the wrath of the “friends of death” and suffers humiliating death.

In the meal he shares with his friends before being crucified, he portrays his death as an act of self-giving for the life of others: “my body is given for you” (Lk 22:19), “my blood is to be poured out for the many” (Mk 14:24).

And he commands his disciples to remember this supreme act of love. On the cross, Jesus unites himself with every person seeking life.

On the cross, life is poured out from the love and strength that dare to be weak for Abba and neighbours. On the cross, Jesus wins life by offering his own life in death.

13.4. *The Risen One Conquers Death.* Jesus’ rising from the dead the whole of humanity and creation that God is the Master of life.

In the resurrection of Jesus, death has been stripped of its definitive role in shaping history. History belongs to life! The whole of creation is propelled by life!

God offers hope to the whole world and its teeming millions searching and struggling for life through the Risen One,

Word of Life, the Bread of Life, the Author of Life.

13.5. *The Gift of the Spirit of Life.* Jesus promises and gives the Spirit, “the Lord, the Giver of Life”. The Spirit that enable the community of disciples to remember him, to follow him, to participate in his life.

The followers of Christ, individually and corporately, are to be comforted and rejuvenated in their following of Jesus by the Spirit of Life.

This image of Jesus - man of the creative Spirit, friend of God, person of interiority, bringer of harmony, lover of the poor, healer and liberator, bold prophet, suffering companion, victor over death, sharer of his Spirit - resonates with the Asian peoples’ vision of life.

14. *Discipleship in the Spirit of Life.* It is the Spirit of Jesus that creates the disciple-community. And it is in the power of the Spirit that we believe in him (1 Jn 4:2f), remember him (Jn 14:26), communicate him (Acts 8:39) and live by him (2 Cor 12:13).

Discipleship is living by the Spirit of the Risen Lord and by the demands of the Kingdom of Life. The peoples of Asia will be drawn to Jesus if his disciples abide in his life (Jn 15:4).

14.1. “Solidarity” with God. As Jesus immersed himself into the depth of Abba’s life and love, so the disciple-community has to immerse itself totally in the life of the Tribune God and live by communion with God.

Through this communion, the disciple-community, can more credibly share the love and life of God with others and more effectively bring the forces of God’s Kingdom of Life to bear on the death-dealing realities of Asia.

To be in solidarity with God, prayer is indispensable. Prayer expresses our inner spirit and impels us towards ever deeper communion and intimacy with God.

This communion is at the core of life-giving spirituality. In Jesus’ own example,

mission and service draws their energy and power, their very life, from solidarity with Abba and leads back to this solidarity.

If the disciples of Christ are steeped in prayerful encounter with and service of Abba, they will strike a chord in the heart of Asia where traditions of spirituality and prayer abound.

14.2. *Liberating and Recreating Communion Among Neighbours.* Like Jesus, we have to “pitch our tents” in the midst of all humanity building a better world, but especially among the suffering and the poor, the marginalized and the down-trodden of Asia.

In profound “solidarity with suffering humanity” and led by the Spirit of life, we need to immerse ourselves in Asia’s cultures of poverty and deprivation, from whose depths the aspirations for love and life are most poignant and compelling.

Serving life demands communion with every woman and man seeking and struggling for life, in the way of Jesus’ solidarity with humanity.

Our solidarity requires a resolve to work with our Asian sisters and brothers in liberating our societies from whatever oppresses and degrades human life and creation, most especially from sin.

We offer the radical freedom of life in Christ. In a special way, we will follow Jesus in his “preferential journey” with the poor and will assist in the liberation of the materially poor, of indigenous peoples, displaced persons, victims of misguided economic and political development, victims of wars and divisions, victims of sex tourism.

We will more actively assist in the integral development of women, children and the youth, who cry out for liberation from many dehumanizing and oppressive situations and for their rightful place in society and in the Church’s mission to serve life.

With our Asian sisters and brothers, we will strive to foster communion among Asian peoples who are threatened by

glaring economic, social and political imbalances.

With them we will explore ways of utilizing the gifts of our diverse religions, cultures and languages to achieve a richer and deeper Asian unity.

We will build bridges of solidarity and reconciliation with peoples of other faiths and will join hands with everyone in Asia in forming a true community of creation.

14.3. Dying for the Many. Immersion in Asia's cultures of poverty is a dying to ourselves so that we may live for God and for others.

It is a dimension of the spirituality that stems from Jesus himself for whom the giving of life to others happens in the giving of the very self.

That is why the love of the Father, Son and Spirit, the self-giving of God to all humanity, especially on behalf of the poor, is at the heart of all genuine service to life.

It is this love that impels us as the disciple-community of Jesus to confront and act against death-dealing realities, oppression and injustice, discrimination and exploitation, the destruction of ecosystems, the tampering with life.

As disciples we cannot serve both life and death! Just as Jesus worked as a prophet of new life and dies to usher it in, so we in Asia today must prophesy on behalf of the God of life.

Refusal to prophesy and speak against the forces of death is to fail in serving life!

We may hesitate because we are minority group. Indeed we are a little flock in Asia. But it is from this position of weakness that God's gift of divine life in Jesus Crucified, the power and wisdom of God, is most significant.

Triumphalism and displays of pomp and human power do not witness to the abnegation of Jesus on the Cross. It is often from our weakness that God's love as life-giving grace is more clearly made manifest.

We memorialize Jesus' total self-gift around the Eucharistic table. We partake of the very life of Jesus, the Bread of Life broken and shared.

We drink of the Cup of the new covenant with God. We join Jesus in serving life by washing the feet of our neighbours.

We celebrate the new creation when simple fruits of the earth and work of human hands become the presence of Jesus in our midst.

We look to that promised banquet where all will sit as brothers and sisters around the God of Life.

14.4. Living in the Risen One. Faith in the Risen One demands that his disciples in Asia be symbols of hope.

Because Jesus is risen, we realize that the promise of life is not empty. Our common search will not end in senselessness but in life.

The resurrected life, proclaimed in word, deeds, presence, community and service by the disciples of Christ, can help assure Asians that in the various arenas of death, life still pulsates and flows, life is a promise that is being realized and will be fulfilled in Jesus and His Spirit.

14.5. Walking by the Spirit of Life. The gift of the life-giving Spirit makes men and women disciples of Jesus. "Living by the Spirit, walking by the Spirit," (Gal 5:25) is concretely seen in a life marked by the fruits of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22f).

These values, which are opposed to the "fruits of the flesh", need to be infused into the Church's lifestyle, policies, programs and communal life.

The Spirit is the powerful breath animating the mission of the disciples of Christ.

Whether in explicit proclamation of the Gospel or in the silence of prayer, whether in the warmth of personal contact or the burden of liberative action, the Spirit of life guides, sanctifies and unifies the

disciple-community for the world and humanity.

The deepest communication of the Church to Asia is its Spirit-filled and multiform mission of sharing Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

14.6. Our reflection on discipleship cannot be complete without invoking Mary, the woman who gave Jesus to the world.

She who is the Mother of Life is also the foremost disciple of Life. Her example teaches us that discipleship involves attentive listening to the word of God and the freedom to respond to it (Lk 1:26-38).

She regards herself a servant in solidarity with her people Israel, celebrating God's mercy for the lowly and the hungry (Lk 1:46-55).

She courageously suffers with her Son at the foot of the cross and from that wood of life becomes the mother of us all (Jn 19:25-27).

With the early disciple-community, she prays, awaiting the promised Spirit of Life (Acts 1:12-14).

Now with her son in glory, she enlivens the hope of all for eternal life. In Mary we find not only a mother but also a model and companion in our pilgrimage to life.

14.7. In the final analysis to the question that we have asked about our Christian contribution to the struggle for full life in Asia, our answer is brief, but profoundly committed.

Our answer is Jesus and his Gospel of Life. Our answer is the sharing of *Abba's* liberating and reconciling life and love with others.

Our answer is authentic discipleship in the creative Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Life.

15. Major Pastoral areas of discipleship. The above reflection on a theologico-pastoral basis of discipleship leads us to its concrete implications to our pastoral mission.

(Cont. on pg. 13)

HONG KONG 1996

The Biblical-Pastoral Apostolate as a Response to Questions Raised by Contemporary Life

Dr. Daniel Kosch has for the past three years been the Director of the Swiss Catholic Biblical Association's central office in Zürich. He shares and offers for reflection the following "contextual reading" from the countries of the Subregion Central Europe (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mitteleuropäischer Bibelwerke).

Anyone who knows the Bible and the effects that it has produced down through the centuries, will be wary of measuring the value of any document solely on the grounds of its successful implementation. Judged from this point of view, the Bible would not emerge particularly well.

To mention only one example - the importance of the commandment to love one's neighbour is in no way diminished by our admission that we have failed to live up to it.

If I, therefore, take a somewhat critical view of the way in which the final document from Bogota and its practical recommendations have been but into effect - at least in those areas of Europe of which I have some knowledge - this is not in any way commenting on the value of this text; although, in view of the approaching plenary session of the CBF in Hong Kong, it may well be that restraint is called for in issuing any further document which would contain even more, far-reaching demands.

A huge load of papers, ideas and imperatives tends to lead to resignation rather than to courageous and decisive progress.

A listing of all the recommendations shows that altogether in the 30 sections dealing with individual themes, over 60 comments were given in response to requests and special concerns.

This was a summary overview, but a real and detailed survey (even if it was confined to Switzerland or to the sub-region of Central Europe) would take up a lot of time.

Therefore, I refer to relevant surveys and opinion polls documented in the Bulletin (cf. DV 32, pp. 11f.).

In my considerations I shall concentrate on some fundamental questions which (marked by my personal experience of the ecclesiastical and biblical-pastoral situation in the German-speaking countries) seem to me to be especially important.

1. The Fundamental Concern

The practical recommendations of the final document emerge very consistently from the structure and dynamic of the paper as a whole.

In the introduction to Ch. 8 it is presumed (probably as something distinct from one

of the important mainstays of the work of the Bible societies) that the point at issue is not only the owning and reading of a bible, but also believing it and living it.

In the most detailed part of the recommendations to the members this is given concrete expression in 8.3.5.

To comply with this request, it is of fundamental importance to take proper account of these matters and to analyse them.

To that end, this excerpt (8.3.5), not to mention other parts of the document (e.g. Ch. 6), gives important advice, advice which I should like to highlight as we glance at our specific context.

1.1 The Emergence of a new religious awareness

In the German speaking countries at least, the development of religious awareness into a form which is strongly geared to the individual and often marked by its syncretism, has continued to increase since 1990.

Everywhere there is the longing for spirituality and interiority, for a sense of personal direction, for the experience of wholeness, for integration into some cosmic pattern.

What we in the biblical-pastoral apostolate offer, by way of courses, opportunities for reflection or publications, must take this development seriously.

However we must not accept it uncritically, but rather in the spirit of 1 Thess. 5:21. Our attention in the process must be focused on tendencies to individualise or to flee from the world.

Like the author of 1 John we must insist on the impossibility of separating love of God from solidarity with our fellow human beings, or mysticism from politics.

As for the tendency to forget the misery of the Third World in favour of searching for new energy-currents or the power of

positive thinking through meditation courses, in this regard 1 John 3,17 assumes a fresh relevance.

How can those with wealth or power at their disposal, who see a brother or sister in need and shut their heart to him or her, have the love of God dwelling in them?

1.2 The danger of new forms of nationalism and racism

At a time when politicians are continually talking about it, and where the traces of national Socialism, as well as totalitarianism, should have left a deep impression on people's memories, we still accept the war in former Yugoslavia - not to mention the continual and raging violence against the homes of asylum-seekers, xenophobic bands of thugs and anti-Semitic attacks - with eloquent protests, to be sure, but more or less helplessly and passively.

The advance of nationalist and chauvinist parties and political parties give us something to think about, but because some of their supporters understand each other, pay their church taxes and sometimes even dress up their concerns in religious terminology, the separation of Christianity from these other ideologies, which we should have hoped for, fails to materialise here too.

Not only what we offer in our biblical-pastoral apostolate, but also the positions that we adopt, or our collaboration in the financing of biblical-pastoral projects, ought to make it abundantly clear that neither Rev 21,5 nor Jn 10,10, which we will meditate on in Hong Kong, are compatible with discrimination which is ethnic, racist or anything of the sort.

I am perfectly aware that declarations are insufficient here and that our power is slight but, despite that, we must not keep silent and become resigned.

We cannot tolerate such thinking in our own circles without placing on ourselves a heavy burden of guilt.

On the contrary, our task is to help the healing and purifying power of the gospel to emerge (cf. Message to the CCEE-

Meeting in Freising 1.1. - 1.3, DV 32, pp. 7-8).

1.3. The church's loss of credibility

A third challenge which I should like to mention, and one to which we have to respond in our biblical-pastoral work, is the Church's loss of credibility.

Polarising episcopal appointments, scandals in the episcopate and the Vatican's positions, particularly in the area of sexual morals, as well as its rigid adherence to the law of celibacy and refusal to ordain women with no convincing arguments to support its position, are just some of the key points which indicate that this loss of credibility is to be attributed not only to the weakening of all authority, but that it has its roots within the church.

The church, however, can only give what people are asking of it, if it strengthens anew and regains its credibility.

I see our task in the biblical apostolate on several levels: against the governing body of the church we must draw attention to the fact that biblical findings and exegetical research lead us to discoveries, which clearly keep open more avenues for decision than ecclesiastical statements.

And because women especially are very often collaborators in our work, we must both take into account as comprehensively as possible their concerns, and formulate them in an appropriate way.

Those who read our publications and take part in our courses ought to be made aware of the variety of ways in which bible speaks to us, as well as confidently empowered to make decisions according to their consciences and to grow in maturity.

Finally, we will continually make clear to ourselves the fact that there are things which endure more lastingly than ecclesiastical structures and instructions: faith in the church does not exclude but rather includes its potential for change; hope in the church is always a protest against despair and resignation; love for the church does not exhaust itself in diplo-

matic or polite talk with church authorities, but must - above all else - include those people who are suffering intensely today because of the church.

I am quite conscious of the fact, that this selection of "challenges of contemporary life" and my own attempts to come up with answers - are provocative and will arouse opposition.

But a contextual reading of the Bible, as recommended to us by the Bogota document, will not produce a clear profile in which such arguments do not figure.

In a briefer and more summary fashion I turn now, after this reflection on the fundamental concern, to the concrete recommendations.

2. Recommendations to the whole Church

At the centre of these recommendations (8.1) there is, on the one hand, the implementation of the Dogmatic Constitution and, on the other hand, the re-evaluation of the biblical apostolate by means of specific measures - at the level of the universal church, a synod of bishops; at the level of dioceses and bishops' conferences, biblical-pastoral projects and campaigns.

In this connection, despite the fact that the desired synod of bishops has not yet become a reality, the Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1993 (at the level of the universal church), and the biblical-pastoral meeting of the European bishops of 1994 (at the European level) have to be understood as signs of hope and steps in the right direction.

A rough comparison of the Bogota report with that of the Pontifical Biblical Commission - allowing for numerous points of agreement - leads to two observations:

2.1 Contextual Bible Reading

The Bogota document is essentially more interested in the Dogmatic Constitution (Chapter 6) and its significance for the reading of the Bible.

As a result of that it gives way to the demands which are also raised by the Roman document and presents a clearer profile.

2.2. Pluralism of approaches and methods

The document of the Biblical Commission takes the pluralism of the Bible extremely seriously (Ch. 1), thereby opening up both for exegesis and biblical pastoral work a freedom for variety and lively discussion which must be used.

In this regard the document of the Biblical Commission goes beyond not only other Roman documents but also the Bogota paper, and opens up new perspectives.

3. Recommendations to the Catholic Biblical Federation

The encouragement of collaboration, support and exchange on a regional and sub-regional level is without a doubt significant also for Europe. In that regard I shall allow myself two - quite self-critical - observations.

3.1 Collaboration in the Sub-Region of Central Europe

In its meetings the sub-region (formerly known as *AMB*) concerned itself - and always most vigorously - with the question of financing biblical-pastoral work in Eastern Europe, or rather in the countries of the Reformation and organised its structures to deal with this problem.

Joint reflection work on options and methods, together with necessary discussions about separate opinions and differing positions, used to, and still does, fare badly.

All the same a change in thinking has begun, and I hope that this will intensify.

3.2 Exchange with Latin Europe

With significantly more modest resources and in places without any attachment to

the institution, there is in the Latin countries of Europe a biblical apostolate which in some places is flourishing, and the contributions of those responsible for that sub-region have shown at the meeting of the bishops at Freising that there, too, the reception and furthering of the Bogota document have obviously taken on clearer outlines than in our region.

A better exchange in the form of meetings (not just papers) can perhaps give fresh impetus to our sub-region.

4. Recommendations to Members

It is not my task to ask other countries, as I ask my own, which of the recommendations to members (8.3) have taken priority and which have perhaps long since been realised. So I limit myself to two formal points of information:

4.1 Getting the Emphasis Right

The very range of individual sections gives us the first clue as to where the document puts the emphasis; those of 8.3.5 and the instructions about 8.3.4 take up the most room.

In stark contrast the headings of 8.3.1 and 8.3.2 are handled with extreme conciseness.

I do not want to devalue in any way books, newspapers and other practical aids, nor biblical-pastoral centres and institutions, but I do, however, wish to point out that their establishment and upkeep particularly in the German-speaking countries have probably been overvalued the importance attached to them in the subregion are both probably overvalued.

Bogota, as well as the meeting of the bishops in Freising, truly lead in another direction.

"The biblical-pastoral apostolate should not be one specialist area among others, but should lead to pastoral planning and practice being rooted in the message of the bible.

To that end we must check again and again at all levels, from lay people in local churches to ecclesiastical authorities, to see whether our pastoral activities are directed towards the gospel." (Message of the *CCCE*-Meeting in Freising 4.2, *DV* 23, p.8)

In the very middle of the five sections of recommendations to members is 8.3.3, and in fact education for and enablement for the service of the Word plays a central role in the document.

For that reason I am delighted to note that biblical-pastoral courses are arousing great interest in the countries of the Reformation, and I am just as encouraged to hear the positive response to extended courses in personal formation in the German-speaking countries.

Despite that there still remains much to be done.

4.2 Setting out Clear Priorities

The biblical work and biblical-pastoral institutes in the subregion of Central Europe, the *AMB*-office and finally the structures of the Catholic Biblical Federation are modest, have few employees, little financial support and exert a very limited influence on the what is happening in the church or indeed in society.

We must acknowledge this reality quite soberly and without any self-pity, but without underestimating ourselves either.

The fact that by and large we are relatively insignificant (though - thanks to our simple and clear structures - we are also quite agile-minded and know each other well), and that the bible is not at the centre of the Church's interest, gives us quite a degree of freedom - both locally where we live and work and also throughout Europe and the world.

We use this freedom meaningfully if we do not want to be "everything to everybody", and do not want to have "everything at once", but decide on the basis of our recognition of "challenges of contemporary life" (= to see) which options and tasks are the most important in the

light of the gospel message (= to judge), and direct our work stubbornly to these priorities (= to act).

Texts:

Catholic Biblical Federation, "The Bible and Modern Evangelisation", final document of the 4th Plenary Session (1990)

Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" (1993)

"The Bible in Europe's Church Today and Tomorrow". The biblical-pastoral meeting of the bishops of Europe in Freising, near Munich (= Dei Verbum 32, March, 1994)

Message from the Pope to the Catholic Biblical Federation for the 25 years of the foundation

*To His Excellency, Alberto Ablondi, Bishop of Livorno
President of the Catholic Biblical Federation*

It gives me great joy to greet Your Excellency and the Catholic Biblical Federation on the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of its foundation.

The Second Vatican Council called for a greater awareness and appreciation among all the faithful of the Sacred Scriptures in order to deepen the knowledge and love of God our Father and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This has been the chief goal of the efforts of the Catholic Biblical Federation during the last quarter of a century.

The Church has always understood the Scriptures to present God's own word to his people. "In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them" (cf. Dei Verbum, No. 21). The sacred books are therefore "food for the soul, and a pure and unfailing fount of spiritual life" (ibid.). Nourished by this word, Christians are renewed in spirit, live the Gospel message and go out to announce it joyfully to others.

Today, the "new evangelization" demands that the Gospel be preached afresh to all humanity. As the Church approaches the Third Millennium of Christianity, the

Questions for Further Discussion

1. Where do we see the "challenges of contemporary life" to which our biblical-pastoral engagement has to provide answers?
2. Where were and are the documents and initiatives of the CBF, the Pontifical Biblical Commission a help or a hindrance for our work?
3. Which tasks in particular should the Subregion of Central Europe be aware of?
4. What are the most urgent priorities for our work on the spot?

Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Federation has rightly emphasized that the biblical apostolate is an important aspect of the "new evangelization" needed in these last years of the twentieth century.

The Holy Spirit's call to spread the Gospel in this decade of evangelization is being taken up by many Christians and, in this regard, I am happy to acknowledge the collaboration between the Federation and the United Bible Societies.

It is through the faithful preaching of the Gospel that Jesus Christ wishes his people to increase by the action of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, No. 2). May your work in union with the Societies help to bring about an ever greater respect and fellowship among those who bear the name of Christian.

Commending the Catholic Biblical Federation to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Word Incarnate, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in Jesus Christ our Lord.

From the Vatican, 15 March 1994

John Paul II.

All my sources are in you

(from *Reseña Bíblica*, No. 4/1994)

*All my sources are in you,
Christ, Risen Lord.*

*In you the source of my searching,
In you the source of my happiness,
In you the source of my love.*

*Because you have vanquished Death,
All my sources are in you.
Because you loved to the end,
All my sources are in you.
Because you have wished to remain with us
Until the end of time,
All my sources are in you.*

*In you also is the source
Of my weeping and of my defiance;
In you, who teach us to be nonconformists,
To live facing the new heavens
and the new earth, inhabited by justice.*

*If you do not teach me to live,
I shall never know what it is to live,
If you do not give me your affection,
My heart will die in the harshest dryness.
If you do not tell me who I am,
I will go wandering all over the place,
Without finding myself.*

*What could I say to the world
If you were not the Word that
that lays me bare?
What could I sing for the rest
If you were not the melody
that inspires me?
What could I create among the living
If you do not recreate me
With your continuous presence?*

*All my sources are in you,
Jesus, faithful lover,
Loving unto death,
And even beyond death.
All my sources are in you!
And in them
I am a river, a living current
That flows through hills and valleys,
Finding its reason for being
In pouring out, in blending
With all the thirsty earth
Without looking back.*

Antonio López Baeza

(Cont. from pg. 8)

Many, indeed, are our pastoral concerns: dialogue with peoples of other faiths, dialogue with the poor, dialogue with the cultures of Asia; justice and integral development mediated by the social teachings of the Church, formation and education, the apostolate of the media and the arts.

We have deliberated on all these very important and interconnected concerns. The results will be published.

But in the light of our faith-reflection, we believe that five concerns require special pastoral focus:

15.1. *The Asian family* is a microcosm of Asian society.

It is bombarded on all sides by anti-family forces of dehumanization and disintegration, ranging from material and moral poverty to secularistic values and external pressures leading to anti-life types of bioethics and practices of abortion and contraception.

Children, as in many other areas of life, become the unwilling and innocent victims.

Young girls and boys are also exploited through illegal labour practices and sex tourism. Discipleship in Asia then has to denounce such anti-life and anti-family pressures, policies, and practices and foster bioethics that is in accord with God's law and the Church's teachings in order to promote the family as a "sanctuary of life" and a school of life.

15.2. The complex issue of *women and the girl child* in Asia has to be one of the major concerns. already our Fourth Plenary Assembly, in Tokyo, 1986, raised the issue to the level of the whole Asian Church.

We cannot effectively promote our Christian vision of full life unless the Church as a communion of communities will credibly expend its moral and spiritual energies to the conversion of mentalities, the transformation of structures, and the eradication of practices that deny women and the girl child in Asia their God-given dignity.

An urgent pastoral imperative is for women to exercise their right to corresponsibility and mutuality with men - in society and in the Church.

15.3. On the occasion of the 10th World Youth Day, the Church likewise confronts the reality of Asia as the continent of *the youth*.

As in other FABC forums, we stand in solidarity with their struggles for authentic life.

We share their concern and alarm in the face of misguided policies and structures that are already laying the foundations of their future.

We wonder with them if the earth will still be preserved for them and their children at the rate it is being misused now.

We commit ourselves to accompany their life-giving movement in their aspiration to transform themselves and our society towards fuller life.

15.4. *Ecology* is once again brought to our pastoral attention. And urgently so, since we see in the countries of Asia the continuing and unabated destruction of our environment - waters, forests, plant and animal life, air - and the support systems of all created life.

Life, especially in a Third World setting, is sacrificed at the altar of short term economic gains.

The Lord, the Giver of Life, calls our discipleship in Asia into question on the time bomb issue of ecology.

Choosing life requires our discipleship to discern and act with other faiths and groups against the forces of ecological destruction.

15.5. Special attention is given to *the displaced* in our societies: political and ecological refugees and migrant workers.

They are marginalized and exploited by the system, denied of their place in society and must go elsewhere to seek a dignified life.

In welcoming them we expose the causes of their displacement, work toward conditions for a more human living in community, experience the universal dimension of the Kingdom (Gal 3:28) and appreciate new opportunities for evangelization and intercultural dialogue.

Though our pastoral directives for action touch on many issues of concern, we appeal for a particular pastoral focus on these five major challenges.

Conclusion

16. As we end our deliberations, we do so as we began - with a prayer of thanks, hope, and commitment.

Prayer of Service to Life in Asia

Loving and life-giving God, at the beginning you called us in Asia into life, enriched us with an astonishing variety of cultures, ways of living, believing, and worshipping. As sisters and brothers in your one Asian family, we thank you and praise you.

Among us are the poorest of the poor, the poor with their many faces of misery and pain, millions who seek not only a better life but the full Life that only you can give.

We hear your call to serve them, the way your Son Jesus served others in total love, in utter selflessness, eucharistically.

Send us your Spirit of Life, that together with other communities, we may respond to the anguish of our sisters and brothers with courageous and generous love, and with them come to the Life that never ends.

May our Mother, Mary, the voice and Mother of the Poor, who announced the liberation of the lowly, be our companion. May she as the mother and model of all disciples lead us to the Way, the Truth, and the Life in your Kingdom forever and ever. Amen. ◆

* We note with pain the absence of delegates from some countries. We hope for the day when conditions would allow them to celebrate with us our ecclesial communion in a fuller way.

FOR REFLECTION

Jesus in Asia

*John R. Levison and Priscilla Pope-Levison are members of the academic community of The Divinity School, Duke University (Durham, North Carolina). Priscilla is assistant professor for the practice of evangelism, and John is a research scholar in residence. They have co-authored *Jesus in Global Contexts* (Westminster/John Knox Press 1992) which contains in far greater detail the substance of this series of articles.*

In Indonesia, faithful Muslims turn toward Mecca, kneel, and pray five times daily. In the high-rise apartments of Tokyo, families worship at the shrines of their ancestors. Many Christian theologians in Asia attempt to answer the question, «What images of Jesus can take root in these contexts?»

The Asian Situation

Although Christianity was founded in Asia (Palestine), it left very early and returned to a continent where other great scripture religions had already taken root - Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism, to name just a few. Despite the presence of Christian missionaries for four centuries, Christianity has not taken root in Asia, and only two or three of every hundred Asians are Christians.

In Bangkok, women are sold as prostitutes to support the tourist industry. In Calcutta, Mother Teresa rescues the dying poor from an undignified death in the gutters of littered streets. With a few exceptions, such as Japan and South Korea, many Asian nations are immersed in poverty. Many Christian theologians in Asia attempt to answer the question, «What images of Jesus can bring hope and health to the multitudes of Asians living in poverty?»

These two issues, religiosity and poverty, shape the contours of Asian portraits of Jesus. Some theologians deal with only one issue or the other by presenting Jesus

either as a cosmic Christ who can be found at the depths of other religions or as the author of a new humanity which brings dignity to the masses of Asia. Still other theologians develop portraits of Jesus which address both issues of poverty and religiosity: the cosmic Lord of history and Jesus' double baptism.

The Cosmic Christ

Some Asian theologians seek the meeting-point between Asia and Christianity in the realm of the religious. In *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, the Roman Catholic theologian Raimundo Panikkar reflects on the context of Asian religions when he tries to discern the unity between Christianity and Hinduism without mitigating the differences between them. He discovers their meeting point, not in doctrinal formulations or creeds, but at the deepest experience of mystery which adherents of both religions can share.

This mystery is known both to Hindus and Christians, although the former call it Isvara, and the latter Christ. The New Testament basis for this view he discovers in a variety of verses, such as Acts 17:23, «What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you,» and John 1:9, «The true light, which enlightens everyone.»

Although Christ and Isvara are the same at the deepest level of mystery, according to Panikkar, differences between Hinduism and Christianity remain. Christians

identify the cosmic Christ-Isvara with Jesus of Galilee. Hindus can only respect, without sharing, this identification which Christians make between the cosmic Christ and the historical Jesus.

Jesus and the New Humanity

The life of this historical Jesus is central to theologians, such as Samuel Kappen of India, whose goal is a liberation which results in «a new and full humanity.» This new humanity is characterized by a total human development which includes human dignity, human rights, human sufferings. In essence, everything that comprises human life requires liberation.

The dominant image of the new humanity is Jesus' sitting at a table with the marginalized of society. By eating with social outcasts, Jesus demonstrated tangibly that they belonged to Jewish society and, even more, that they had a right to commune in God's presence during the prayers that preceded and followed the meal. This new humanity encircles the one who is «a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners» (Matt 11:19; Mark 2:15-17).

Jesus understood that the establishment of the new humanity required the elimination of dehumanizing institutions which prevented the full establishment of the new humanity. In his teaching he opposed these oppressive institutions. He refused to interpret the Torah in a way which constrained goodness.

Instead, he put the Torah at the disposal of humans rather than burdening them with its laws. For instance, by healing on the Sabbath, a day on which work was forbidden, he showed that people were free to bring health and well-being, for this is the true work of God (Mark 2:23-3:6).

Jesus placed the Temple at the disposal of all people by re-establishing its court of the Gentiles as a place of prayer «for all the nations» (Mark 11:17). He placed the meal table at the disposal of the poorest and most marginalized of Israel (Mark 2:13-17).

The three great institutions of Judaism - Torah, Temple, table - Jesus made accessible to the least in human society. In

short, he placed the kingdom of God at the disposal of «the tax collectors and the prostitutes» (Matt 21:31).

The Cosmic Lord of History

The convictions that lie behind these views of Jesus as the cosmic Christ and the inaugurator of a new humanity merge in the portrait of Jesus as cosmic Lord of history. This christology recognizes the presence of Christ in all struggles for justice, whether Christian or not. Equally, it discerns the presence of Christ in any spirituality, whether Christian or not, that inspires struggles for justice.

According to the Indian theologians M. M. Thomas and Stanley Samartha, Christians and adherents of all faiths meet the cosmic Lord of history when they join together in the quest for social justice. As Samartha phrases it, co-operation between religions in the struggle against injustice may also mean sharing the pilgrimage to the mountain of peace.

The conviction that Christ as Lord shapes all histories - including and apart from Christians - is based upon biblical texts, such as Ephesians 1:9-10, which affirm that all of earthly existence will be brought eventually under the direct sway of God.

The description of Christ in Colossians 1:15-20 has also deeply influenced this christology, providing a basis from which to understand Christ's universal presence in non-Christian religions. Colossians 1:15-20 emphasizes the unity of the entire cosmos in Christ.

Christ is the origin of creation: «All things have been created through him and for him» (1:16). He is the sustainer of creation: «in him all things hold together» (1:17). And he is the fulfillment of creation: «and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things» (1:20).

Prior to religious confession, all people find their origin in Christ. All people are sustained by Christ, although they may not consciously confess him. Finally, adherents of all religions have been reconciled in Christ and, therefore, will find their true destiny in Christ.

There remain no exceptions to the universal fulfillment of «all things» in Christ.

The words «all things» punctuate Colossians 1:15-20 to emphasize this point. Humankind is united by cosmic solidarity in Christ and cannot be divided by religious confession, economic opportunity, or political loyalties.

Therefore, Christians meet the cosmic Lord of history, not only within the Church, but also alongside the adherents of all religions who join with the Asian people's struggle to realize their full humanity.

Jesus' Double Baptism

Another portrait of Jesus which addresses both poverty and religiosity can be traced not only to Colossians 1 but also to the Synoptic Gospels. In these Gospels Aloysius Pieris of Sri Lanka discovers Jesus' double baptism into the Jordan of Asian religions and the Calvary of Asian poverty.

When Jesus was baptized by John, suggests Pieris, he symbolically aligned himself with two sorts of people. On the one hand, his baptism by John symbolized his acceptance of the Baptist's prophetic asceticism; John lived in the desert, with nature, eating locusts and honey. Jesus too renounced the world and followed the Baptist's way in the wilderness.

On the other hand, Jesus' baptism signalled his solidarity with the rural poor who were drawn to John the Baptist's message. Theirs was a world-affirming religion which espoused the values of the countryside.

As time passed the religiosity of the poor exerted more of an influence on Jesus, and his own religious ideals became more positive than John the Baptist's. For example, John cursed religious leaders and demanded radical repentance.

To this Jesus added blessings and promises offered to the marginalized poor and ostracized sinners. John the Baptist preached bad news about the coming judgement, but Jesus had good news to give about imminent liberation.

The two commitments Jesus made at his baptism at the Jordan river led him inevitably to a second baptism - on the cross outside of Jerusalem. He took a

prophetic stance in which he denounced the accumulation of wealth and worked to make the poor aware of their unique liberative role in the new order which God would bring about.

This prophetic stance threatened the wealthy and powerful, who responded in rage and with death threats. In the end, they brought in the Romans, a vast colonialist power, to crucify him. This is where the journey, begun at Jordan, ended. The cross represents, therefore, Jesus' second baptism on the Calvary of poverty.

Asian Baptism

This view of Jesus is particularly pertinent given the association of the Christian Church with Asia's oppressive colonial past, as can be seen in a description of Vasco da Gama's arrival in India in 1498: «The captaingeneral's ship flew at its mast a flag on which was painted a large cross of Christ and also carried cannons, symbols of the new power entering the East.»

For Pieris, the Church of Asia must begin to emulate Jesus' double baptism, because, while the Church exists in Asia, it is not yet a Church of Asia. The Church must be baptized into Asian religiosity by working alongside other Asian religions for mutual collaboration on Asian issues.

The Church must also be baptized into Asian poverty by allowing itself to be shaped by the religiosity of the poor. The doubly-baptized Church of Asia will be a community of Christians and non-Christians who form communities with the poor, sharing the common heritage of spirituality which poverty generates.

In the West, where Christianity is the majority religion, there has been little need to look for Christ beyond the Church's boundaries. But in Asia, where Christianity is a small minority religion, the struggle for justice and the quest for spirituality occur in large measure beyond the Church's borders. In this context, many Asian theologians are encouraging the Church not to isolate itself in a Christian enclave but to become immersed in the two basic realities of Asia: its poverty and its religiosity. ◆

LIFE OF THE FEDERATION

Experiences

Subregion of Southern Europe:

The direction of our reflections since the Bogotá Assembly

We want to underline the importance of context in our reading of the Bible, from various points of view, but above all the context of the readers, their life, their situation, their preoccupations, which determine their way of reading the Bible, and the place that this can occupy in their reflection and faith-based discernment.

1. Our Contribution to Bogotá

Since its creation in 1987, the group of representatives from the sub region of Southern Europe has devoted an important part of its annual meetings to reflecting upon projects, criteria and concrete realisations of activities concerned with biblical animation.

The first fruits of this reflection were presented at the Plenary Assembly in Bogotá in the form of concrete proposals. We insisted then on the importance of biblical animators and their being prepared not only as regards biblical formation but also as regards pedagogical training. This incentive was picked up explicitly in the final conclusions (8.3.3.1), although without any detailed explanation of the requirements in this capacity.

Since the last General Assembly our group has met regularly, and, within the framework of these meetings, we have continued our reflection and discussion. This we would like to share with the rest of the members of the Federation, in the hope that our deliberations on the themes upon which we have reflected may provoke in others new ideas or suggestions with a view to the next General Assembly.

2. Lectio Divina

Our first meeting took place in Milan (1991). In it we proposed continuing to

get to know the activities that were being carried out in each of our countries, and, above all, to get to know more closely the Italian situation and the concrete experiences of the biblical animation that Cardinal Martini had promoted in the diocese that was hosting our meeting. We had occasion to learn more about the pastoral dynamic that has sprung up around the «School of the Word», which has as its basis the practice of «Lectio Divina».

That was when we began to discover the importance of finding a satisfactory way for making a faith-based reading of the Bible accessible to all. «Lectio Divina» was a good starting point, but we discovered that there were other possible ways, and that, in some of our countries, we had already begun to work on the «adaptation» of this and other possible ways.

At this meeting we also discovered that it was important to reflect critically upon our methods of biblical animation. We decided, therefore, to dedicate the next meeting to sharing the evaluation of one of these methods in each country, with the help of a suitable questionnaire.

3. The Biblical Animation of Pastoral Ministry

The following year (1992) the meeting took place in Malta. The discussion pro-

voked by the results of the evaluation of our methods of biblical animation led us to discover two important things: that not all the activities which are done with or stemming from the Bible can be properly called «biblical»; and that, it is necessary to move from «biblical pastoral ministry» to the «biblical animation of pastoral ministry».

This last reflection supposed an important change in the perspective of our work. The fundamental intuition gave birth to the discovery of the centrality of the Word of God in the life of the Church. If the Word of God is the source and culmination of the life of the Church, of its announcement of the Gospel, of its celebrations, etc., then reading and getting to know the Bible cannot be just one more activity joined to others, but must be established at the centre of all these dimensions and activities.

Consequently it is necessary to abandon the model of «biblical pastoral ministry» as one of a series of activities parallel to other «pastoral ministries», and to move to the «biblical animation of the whole of pastoral ministry», in such a way that the Bible can recover its true place in the life of the Church.

In this context we come back to the problem of the faith-based reading of the Bible, of the keys which must inspire it, of the ways that can guide such a reading. This would be the central theme of our coming meetings.

4. Meeting of the European Bishops

This meeting was devoted to giving notice that the Council of the European Episcopal Conferences, in collaboration with the CBF, was thinking of organising a meeting of European Bishops on the theme of «The Bible in the Life of the Church in Europe Today and Tomorrow».

The principal objective of this meeting would be to look once again at the practical application of the sixth chapter of Dei Verbum. Our group decided to contribute to this meeting by preparing a survey in order to evaluate how the above orientations were being received in the different countries (the resume of this survey was published in Dei Verbum No. 34 (1994), pp. 9-10), and to draw up a preparatory document which would gather together our reflections on biblical

animation. One of the members of the group was charged with drawing up the first draft of a document, which, afterwards, would be revised by the rest of the members, and published in the Bulletin Dei Verbum.

5. Reading the Bible from Life

In the meeting of the following year (1993, in Toulouse) a large group of associate members and other persons or institutions interested in the subject participated. The meeting had two objectives: a) to put people who were working in the area of biblical animation in our different countries into contact; and b) to share the various ways of reading the Bible that we had already put into practice.

The contributions of the various participants confirmed the validity of the terminology that we had agreed to use the preceding year. Also, it seemed to them better to speak about the «biblical animation of pastoral ministry», and to situate our work in a more fully «ecclesial» perspective.

The various methods of reading which the participants contributed and placed at our mutual disposal revolved around two poles: the Bible, and Life. It appeared clearly that the reference to Life was a constitutive element of our reading of the Bible, since, without it, Sacred Scripture remained a text of the past. It is in the dialogue between the Bible and Life, which consists in a continuous coming and going between the one and the other, that the word of the Bible is transformed into the Word of God for us today.

Of the various methods proposed, the one most common amongst us, was that which started from reading and studying the Bible in order to throw light on life, although some of the participants identified more with another method that goes from life to life via the Bible.

Reflection upon the various methods of reading the Bible raised more profound questions about the context, the text, the group of readers, the Church and the society of which they form part, etc. Within this framework of reflection about the keys for reading the document, «Orientations of biblical pastoral ministry at the end of the 20th century», was stu-

died, which had appeared in the Bulletin Dei Verbum, n° 28 (1993) pp. 4-8 and 13-17, and which all the participants had read previously with the help of the questionnaire. The observations were gathered together by the speaker, although they could not be included in the document already published.

6. The Bible in the Life of the Church

In April 1994, the above mentioned meeting of bishops took place, in the preparation of which our sub-region had actively participated. A good number of the representatives of our group participated in the meeting, and took the occasion to make known our reflections to the bishops.

The preparatory documents, the papers and the final document of this meeting were published as a monograph in the Bulletin Dei Verbum (n° 32, 1994), which was sent to all the Episcopal Conferences of Europe. Members of our sub-region were entrusted with three of these papers (pp. 16-22).

One of the more positively valued experiences of this meeting was the space given to the reading of the Bible in groups. This was a new experience for many of the bishops who were able to get an idea of what the diffusion of this kind of Bible reading might produce.

After the meeting we had a follow-up to see whether the «recommendations» of the final document (Dei Verbum n° 32 (1994), pp. 7-8) had been adopted by the various Episcopal Conferences. The result of this follow-up has been very disappointing because we do not see any signs that the message and the suggestions of that meeting have had any real influence, neither at the organisational level (more backing for the structures of biblical animation), nor at the level of recommendations (a greater presence of the Bible in the various areas of life in our churches).

7. A new Christian reading of the Bible

In the next meeting, which took place in Barcelona (1994), our group continued to reflect upon the keys and ways of a

faith-based (popular, close, accessible to all) reading of the Bible. We analysed and put into practice two concrete methods: the «lecture familial» proposed by *Evangile et Vie* (Paris), and the «lecture communautaire» proposed by the Team for Ecumenical Biblical Animation of francophone Switzerland.

After analysing the theory and practice of these two methods we returned to reflecting upon the hermeneutical implications of these readings. The discussions centred upon the following questions: what kind of study or knowledge should accompany such reading? How does one encounter in the text the experience of faith that comes after? Who is the subject of the interpretation, the individual or the community? What are the requisites of a truly community reading? How should one arrive at applying the text?

The answer to these questions appeared to us to be an essential requirement for analysing the various methods and concrete steps, and for determining what kind of reading of the Bible we are doing and what we want to do.

8. Our contribution to Hong Kong

Finally, the meeting this year (Saint Maurice, 1995) centred on elaborating our contribution to the Plenary Assembly. In the first place, there was a review of the journey covered so far, underlining the advances and also the new questions posited, which we sought to collect together in relation to what had preceded.

Secondly, some suggestions were made about the development and organization of the plenary Assembly to be passed on to the preparatory committee. Finally, we worked on the outline of a message and a poster which gathered together the essential elements of our reflection during these years as a means of presenting to the Assembly the work of our group during these years and making our message known to it.

We want to underline the importance of context in our reading of the Bible, from various points of view, but above all the context of the readers, their life, their situation, their preoccupations, which determine their way of reading the Bible, and the place that this can occupy in their reflection and faith-based discernment. ♦

Hong Kong

Population of the territory

The organisers of the next Plenary Assembly have sent us some information from Hong Kong about the overall situation of the place. It is of great interest for all readers of the Bulletin, but especially for the delegates from all over the world who are preparing already for their journey. The text has to be understood in its context.

1) According to government statistics, at the end of 1994 there were an estimated 6,149,100 in Hong Kong, an increase of 13.2 percent over the figure of 5,430,900 of ten years ago. This represents an average annual growth of 1.2%, largely due to immigration. There are about 108.3 males for every 100.0 women, which reflects a history of predominantly male inflow of immigrants from China. Selectively aborting unborn girls in favour of sons following an ultrasound test may occur on a small scale, but it is not the huge problem in Hong Kong as it is across the border in China.

With a long life expectancy (75.4 years for men, 81.0 for women) and a low birth rate (12 per 1000, like in Germany and Hungary), the population is ageing. The percentage under 15 has dropped from 23.8 in 1984 to 19.4 in 1994, while those 65 and over now compose 9.3 per cent, up from 7.2 per cent. Since the infirm elderly cannot accompany their children and grandchildren who emigrate overseas, a new human and social problem is arising.

Despite recent landfills, Hong Kong only has an area of 1,084 square kilometres, four-fifths of which is too steep for economical large-scale comprehensive development. With an overall population density of 5,790 persons per square kilometre in 1994, Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated places in the world. To alleviate this, new public housing estates have been built in the New Territories, which now hold 45.1 per cent of the population, compared to 32.8 per cent for Kowloon and only 21.8 per cent for Hong Kong Island. This shift has affected church life.

One pastor in the New Territories reports that his parishioners are tired after their long daily commute to downtown and return home with neither the time nor the

energy to take part in parish activities on weeknights.

Despite the influx of 150,000 maids from the Philippines, Chinese still constitute 96 per cent of the population. Most were born in Hong Kong; the rest originated from South China, especially Guangdong Province.

People of other nationalities is 5% of the population.

At the end of 1994, the number of Vietnamese migrants (boat people, refugees), number 16,273 (8,814 males and 7,459 females). This number has declined in recent years as the policy is to repatriate all of them to Vietnam by the end of 1995.

2) Civil Administration

Hong Kong is administered by the Hong Kong Government, and its administration has developed from the basic pattern applied in all British-governed territories overseas. The head of the Hong Kong Government is the Governor. Under the terms of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong, signed on 19 December 1984, Hong Kong will become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China, effective 1 July 1997.

The governor has the ultimate responsibility for the direction of the administration of Hong Kong. He is advised on the development of policy and other matters by an Executive Council (Exco). Legislation is enacted and funds provided by Legislative Council (Legco), the members which also debate policy and question the administration but their decisions are only consultative, rather than deliberative.

There are two municipal councils, the Urban Council and the Regional Council, which have a statutory responsibility to

provide public health, cultural and recreational services in the areas for which they are responsible. In addition, 18 District Boards cover the territory. They advise on the implementation of policies at district level and provide an effective forum for public consultation.

Religious Data

1) Catholic Population

The Catholic Church came to Hong Kong in 1841, one year before Hong Kong became a British colony. Starting with a small Irish unit in the British army and a Swiss priest, the church is now the largest religious organization in the territory, and also numerically the largest Chinese Catholic Diocese in the world.

As of 31 August 1994, the official number of Catholics was listed as 257,457 or 4.19 per cent of the total population. Over 97 per cent of these are Chinese; the rest belong to different nationalities. With 150,000 Filipinos, 90% of whom are Catholics, most of whom are not registered, there are approximately 400,000 Catholics in Hong Kong or 6.5% of the total population.

In our 1989 report, we feared a continued drop in the Catholic population, with a low birth rate, families emigrating to Canada, Australia, and the USA and students going overseas for further studies. There were 3911 baptisms during the year ending on 31 August 1994, about three times the number of deaths. What no one foresaw in 1990 was that a good number of emigrants would return to work in Hong Kong after first gaining permanent resident status overseas. This may account for the Catholic population holding steady.

2) Protestant Population

The Protestant Community has grown to 260,000 among 950 congregations belonging to 50 denominations. The largest denomination here is Baptist, followed by Lutheran. Other major denominations are the Adventist, the Anglican, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Church of Christ in China, the Methodist and the Pentecostal. The Eastern Orthodox community is so small that they have just received their first resident priest.

3) Non-Christian Religious

Buddhism and Taoism

Buddhism and Taoism are the leading Chinese religions in Hong Kong and maintain a strong hold on the population, especially among older folks, making their followers the vast majority of non-Christian believers.

Together they have more than 360 temples dedicated to deities or to deified mortals and are spread all over the territory. Most of them are open to the public, and they are crowded with worshippers at Lunar New Years and the Autumn Moon festival, as well as during the numerous other traditional Chinese festivals.

Many people, particularly the younger generation, however, view such religious practices as little more than a family tradition with minimal impact on their daily life. The government estimates that 650,000 to 700,000 people are active Buddhists.

Muslims

There are about 50,000 Muslims in Hong Kong. More than half of them are Chinese, with the rest being either locally born non-Chinese or believers from Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Middle East and Africa. Four principal mosques are used daily for prayers.

There is a co-ordinating body for all Islamic affairs, the Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong, which is responsible for organizing the celebration of Muslim festivals and other religious events. Charitable work is conducted through various local Muslim organizations.

Hinduism

The Hindu community has a membership of about 12,000 in Hong Kong. They have only one Temple on Hong Kong Island. Apart from religious activities, the Temple is also used as the centre of social activities. It is frequently visited by swamis and learned men from overseas who give spiritual lectures to the community.

Sikh

The Sikhs - distinguished by their stylized turbans and unshorn hair - first came to Hong Kong from the Punjab in India as part of the British Armed Forces during the 19th century. Because of their ge-

nerally strong physique, they also comprised a large segment of the Royal Hong Kong Police Force before World War II.

Today, members of the community are engaged in a variety of occupations. The size of their community is about 5,000. The centre of their religious and cultural life is a Sikh Temple which is located on Hong Kong Island. They form a very small but compact community.

Judaism

The Jewish community numbers a little over 1000, and comprises families from various part of the world. They have a

synagogue on Hong Kong Island in which they worship on Friday evenings, Saturday mornings and Jewish holy days. The same compound has a residence for the Rabbi, a school, as well as a recreational club. It is a closely knit, well-to-do and influential community for its relatively small number.

Other

Palm reading, astrology, and «fung shui» (geomancy) are taken seriously by a sizeable segment of the total population, Catholics included. A New Age bookstore has recently opened, patronized largely by Westerners.



News



Africa

Zaire

Porfirio PINTO has finished the translation of the Basic Bible Seminar (SBB) into Portuguese. African countries like Mozambique and Angola will profit especially from it.

Material corresponding to this methodological model of approach to the Bible is available in French, English, Portuguese, Lingala and Kikonga.

For more information contact: Verbum Bible, B.P.7463 Kin1, Zaire, or, Centre pour l'Apostolat Biblique, C.A.B., B.P.246, Bandundu.

America

Quebec

The Faculty of Theology of the University of Laval is offering a new course which provides reflection on facets of Biblical Pastoral Ministry. It is also studying seven organisations that are dedicated to Biblical Pastoral Ministry and which have developed their own methods and styles in the diffusion, interpretation and use of the Bible. SOCABI, a member of the CBF, is one of the organisations chosen. We are especially happy about the news and hope that the example of this faculty of theology will spread. It is a good way to approach exegesis and biblical pastoral ministry and to make them mutually fruit-

ful. Perhaps this is a matter still to be resolved? It would seem so.

Santafé de Bogotá

The Latin American Episcopal Council, in its last two general assemblies, held in Caracas in 1993 and in Mexico in 1995, issued the following recommendations to the Department of Catechesis (DECAT), which is the organisation of CELAM responsible for Biblical Pastoral Ministry:

1. To organise a section of DECAT which is expressly in charge of Biblical Pastoral Ministry.
2. To make Biblical Pastoral Ministry a priority issue in the work of DECAT.
3. To promote the annual celebration of a National Week of the Bible and Biblical Pastoral Ministry on the whole continent.

Through all this and to make more effective the collaboration that has been going on for some years between DECAT-CELAM and the CBF in the development of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Latin America and the Caribbean, it was decided to petition the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation that the affiliation become a Full Member through the Department of Catechesis (DECAT) which has been entrusted with the service of Biblical Pastoral Ministry of this Latin American Episcopal Council. The Publications of CELAM have published, *Plan Global del CELAM en la aurora del III Milenio (1995-1999)* whose title is, *Jesucristo, Vida Plena para Todos.*

Asia/Oceania

Hong Kong

The Studium Biblicum OFM celebrated its 50th anniversary. Among its other activities we want to draw attention to the Conferences given by the Professors "who came from Jerusalem" for the event. Stanislao Loffreda, Frédéric Manns and Aviero Niccacci spoke about *Archaeology and the Gospel; The Jerusalem Temple and Jesus; New Archaeological Discoveries in Jerusalem; The Passion according to John; The Development of Wisdom from the Old Testament to its Fulfilment; The "Pater Noster" in Jesus' Roots; Women in the Gospel of John*. Also Professor Allegra spoke about, *The Bible and Chinese Culture*.

Europe/Middle East

Barcelona

On the occasion of the Congress "The Bible and the Mediterranean", held in Barcelona from 18th to 21st of September, 1995 (more information in the last number of BDV), the annual meeting of the representatives of the Biblical Associations of Southern Europe took place. Representatives from ABE, ABI, ACFEB, ABC and CBF exchanged their points of view

on how to deepen this collaboration already begun. It was proposed that a joint Congress be held within some years and they underlined the necessity of encouraging exegesis from this cultural area. The Secretary general of the CBF expressed his satisfaction with this type of meeting which was already beginning to bear fruit. He also revealed the preoccupation of the Federation with the relationship between exegesis and Biblical Pastoral Ministry and asked the Biblical Associations to reflect upon this theme, and offered the infrastructure of the Federation to help them carry it through. The participants showed interest in this collaboration. They agreed that the next meetings would coincide with the national meetings of ABI (1996 in Rome) and of the ACFEB (1997 in Lille).

Budapest

The Saint Jerome Biblical Association celebrated its fifth anniversary in 1995. It has 1,298 members. It has published various materials: an Introduction to the New Testament; an Hebrew-Hungarian Dictionary, and other biblical pastoral themes. The number of participants at its seminars grows year by year (from 191 in the first year to 465 this last year). It also organises conferences, expositions on the Bible, and helps Hungarians resident in neighbouring countries. At the centre in

Budapest they offer a monthly Bible School.

For more information contact: *Szent Jeromos Bibliatársulat, Szívú.51.sz., H-1063 Budapest, tel.: 36(0)1 -112 77 73, 132 22 60.*

Rome

Professor Luis Alonso Schökel is finishing his activity as professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute. In his last conference, *In the Footsteps of Moses*, he gave a little history-biography of his activity. To much happiness and much fruit he added a couple of frustrations which we intend to highlight. The first of these concerns the little interest that exegetes have in general, in his judgment, in the poetic dimension of the Bible. He includes in this lack the latest Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, which is otherwise of great value. The second frustration or dissatisfaction is "a sharp pain ... because we suffer it as injustice"; he is referring to the systematic discrimination towards so much that is published in Spanish and Italian, "with some welcome exceptions".

Curiously, this same complaint, as regards Spanish, was expressed by D. Lorenzo Albacete, Bishop and Theologian in Washington, in a conference on faith and culture given to Hispanics in San Antonio (Texas) on the 24th June, 1995. "It is not too long ago," said Monsignor Albacete, "that Spanish was hardly considered an adequate language, like a foreign language, for students of theology; and this is still the case in some education centres." His reflection is very thought provoking.

We hope that, thanks to exegetes of the stature of Professor Alonso Schökel and many others that this "pain experienced as an injustice" is going to be rectified. We remember, in passing, the recent Spanish translation of the Bible called *la Biblia del Peregrino*, published by Ega-Mensajero (Bilbao, Spain) and edited by the above mentioned professor. ◆

Courses of Biblical Interest

Training Ministers of the Word

The East Asian Pastoral Institute offers a four-month course (1 July - 16 October 1996) for men and women, clergy and laity, actively engaged in the biblical pastoral ministry or assigned to it in the near future.

The objectives of the program are to deepen the participants' understanding of the content and ways of interpretation of the Old and New Testament. Training in the pastoral use of the Bible:

- various methods of Bible sharing for use in basic ecclesial communities, neighbourhood gospel groups and the like;
- a systematic and disciplined method of Bible study called *Joy of Discovery in Bible Study*. Participants will be trained in teaching others this method;
- training for effective preaching of the Word;
- introduction to central themes of the Old and New Testament.

The course is developed within the context of the Catholic Church's approach to Scripture as follows:

- (a) understanding the relationship of revelation, tradition, scripture and the magisterium;
- (b) study of the 1994 Statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on Interpretation of the Bible;
- (c) study of the 1990 statement of the Bogota Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation on Bible and Evangelization.

Further information: EAPI, P.O. Box 221, 1101 U.P. Campus, Q.C. Philippines. Telephone: (63 2) 924 0561; Telefax: (63 2) 924 4359.

Neustift Biblical Center is offering, among other activities, biblical formation for all those interested and from a beginners level. The next course will begin in January, 1996, and will be given on one evening a month for the whole year. The theme will be: *Men and Women of the Bible: Witnesses of Faith*.

For more information contact: *Bibelzentrum Neustift, Stiftstraße 1. 39040 Vahrn/Neustift (Italy). Tel. 0472 832325.*