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Inheritance and Mission



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The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is an "International Catholic Organisation of a public character" according to Canon Law (CIC, can. 312,§1, n. 1).



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

This year the Catholic Biblical Federation is commemorating its thirtieth anniversary. Thirty years is not a particularly long time for an institution of the Catholic Church, which looks back on a two thousand-year history. But the last decades have brought a great variety of changes to the Catholic Church itself. The Catholic Biblical Federation has been an active participant in the dynamics of this time – indeed, it owes its origin to this very dynamic.

In April, 1969, the CBF was called into existence in the wake of the Second Vatican Council in Rome. In its sixth chapter, the conciliar document *Dei Verbum* insists on "easy access to the Word of God for all". After a long a period of abstinence, the faithful are invited to rediscover the Bible. The Word of God is once again to take a central place in life – in liturgy, but also in personal and community Bible readings; the Bible must once again be discovered and unlocked as a source of life. At its founding, the Catholic Biblical Federation dedicated itself to fostering this kind of vital contact with the Bible – around the world.

In May, 1999 – again in Rome – the birth of the CBF and its short but eventful history were commemorated. The members of the executive committee and the coordinators of the CBF who were in Rome at the time took part in the celebration, as did also representatives of the Roman member institutions and numerous friends. During the

celebration, more attention was paid to the future than to the past. Coordinators of the CBF gave lectures, in the form of vision-statements on their experiences with the Federation and their vision for the future. A survey appropriate to these topics had been sent out ahead of time to all federation members. In his lecture on the theme of *Lectio divina* today – challenges for the pastoral ministry, Enzo Bianchi stressed how urgent a need there is for sources of spiritual nourishment in our time and in our Church, and how enormously significant the role of *Lectio divina* can be in this connection.

These and other texts that deal with the past, the present and the future of the CBF are found in the present bulletin. We hope that in this issue we have not only assembled the documentation of an anniversary event, but that likewise, and above all, we are submitting an interesting collection of good ideas, thought-provoking pointers for the future and forward-looking visions that encourage and inspire. The future lies in all our hands, but above all in God's hands. And this is truly encouraging.

Alexander M. Schweitzer



Easy Access to Sacred Scripture for All

30 Years of the Catholic Biblical Federation

DANIEL KOSCH

In a festive celebration in Rome on May 9, 1999, the Catholic Biblical Federation commemorated the 30th anniversary of its foundation. The celebration took place in the presence of several bishops and men and women responsible for the biblical-pastoral ministry across all continents. On this occasion, the future General Secretary of the Federation, Clara María Díaz from Colombia, was presented to the public for the first time. Next year she will replace the current General Secretary, Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, svd.

Dr. Daniel Kosch is the Director of the Biblical-Pastoral Service of the Swiss Catholic Biblical Association and from 1996-2002 Moderator of the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

The Catholic Biblical Federation is an international association of all institutions committed to enabling as many people as possi-

ble to obtain easy and life-related access to Sacred Scripture. Thus it puts into practice the important postulates of the 2nd Vatican Council: the

Bible as "soul of theology" and basic orientation for the life of the Church, the collaboration of bishops, priests and lay people in the pastoral ministry, the active participation of all of God's people as well as realignment towards the "world", i.e. the economic and social life of people of today and the reality of religious and ideological pluralism.

30 years vital and manifold life of the CBF

The celebration in the Benedictine Abbey Sant' Anselmo very impressively showed the multiplicity and vitality of the international Federation: it linked a simple liturgical celebration with reports from all continents and a reflection on "Lectio divina today – challenges to the biblical-pastoral ministry" – presented by Enzo Bianchi, the founder and prior of the contemplative ecumenical community of Bose, Italy. The Bible is not only to be read and to be explained scientifically or in the homily, it is to be celebrated and lived as well. It is not only a book for "experts", but a book to which all should find "easy access". Speakers during the celebration were not only bishops and theologians, but also an Indonesian Sister who founded and directs a Biblical Center as well as a lay woman from Latin America committed to the biblical-pastoral ministry. The chant of the Schola Gregoriana Bonn recalled that the great spiritual traditions were also deeply inspired by the Bible.

Encouragement through Pope John Paul II

In his message to the Federation, Pope John Paul II encouraged the Federation to continue its good work and underlined the basic importance of the Bible in all areas of life of the Church: prayer, proclamation of the Word and also theology are founded in listening to Scripture. The work of the Federation therefore "stands not in the margins of the Church's pastoral life but at its very heart". Connec-



ted with the acknowledgement of its important task is the encouragement "to continue to foster the ecumenical dialogue which follows when Scripture is studied and shared by people of different religious allegiances".

Collaboration across continents

On the occasion of the Federation's 30th anniversary, those responsible

The dialogue cultivated in the Catholic Biblical Federation serves the simultaneous purpose of learning from others, discovering in variety what is common, less common and even peculiar to one

for the Federation, the Executive Committee and Coordinators, met for a study week near Rome. Since 1996 the Executive Committee has been moderated for the first time by a lay man, the Swiss theologian Daniel Korsch; members are the President of the Federation, Bishop Wilhelm Egger of Bozen-Brixen (Italy), a representative of the Holy See, bishops from Africa, Asia and Latin America, a religious sister from Costa Rica and a lay woman from the Philippines. They represent the 307 member organizations in 126 countries.

In the first years of the Federation's establishment, questions of translation and distribution of the Bible as well as the handing on of basic information about the Bible were at the center of its work. In the course of

the last few years, exchanging information on the many forms of dealing with the Bible has become ever more important: whereas in Europe and in North America the historical-critical reading has marked the understanding of the Bible, approaches were developed in Latin America, the strength of which consists in the inclusion of today's socio-political and economic context. The cultural heritage Africa can contribute exists in the cultivation of oral-narrative transmission and the actualization of the Word in celebration. From Asia come important impeti for a meditative-silent dealing with the Bible as well as for the dialogue with other religions. Of course, these "accents" are not to be understood as exclusive distinguishing marks – in Latin America the Word is also being celebrated, just as in Europe there are mystical traditions, from Africa there are impeti for mediating between Christianity and other religions, and in Asia there are socio-politically committed biblical-pastoral ministries. The dialogue cultivated in the Catholic Biblical Federation serves the simultaneous purpose of learning from others, discovering and further developing in diversity what is common, less common and even peculiar to one. These endeavours precisely justify the expression "catholic" for the Federation – not only in the confessional, but in its original sense as universal reference to all.

For the countries of Western Europe, where the translation and distribution of the Bible are no longer to be found among top priorities and where there is quite an abundance in the field of biblical-pastoral ministry, the Federation is not of primary importance for executing or sponsoring its own activities (as opposed to Latin America and East Asia for example). The central issue at present is showing solidarity with those who carry out their mission under difficult conditions on the one hand and, on the other, the Federation could become – for this continent which is still strongly marked by Christianity as the only

true and numerically absolutely dominant religion – a place for learning how to live life pluralistically in the spirit of Jesus.

Next Plenary Assembly in Lebanon (2002)

In this sense the next Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation in the year 2002 should be of special interest. It is to take place on "biblical soil", in Lebanon, where Christianity, Judaism and Islam meet and where, thematically, the question is to be studied as to what the biblical-pastoral ministry and the formation of people responsible for this ministry should look like, in order to maintain dialogue in a pluralistic world. The following provisional title has been chosen: "A blessing for all nations. Journeying together with the Word of God in a pluralistic world." Centering around this should be texts from the Acts of the Apostles which narrate how the first Christian communities witnessed their faith in Jesus Christ in a multi-cultural and multi-religious world. □



Address by the President

BISHOP WILHELM EGGER

(EXCERPT)

After mentioning some of the highlights of the past 30 years in his address to the participants of the commemoration celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Catholic Biblical Federation, Bishop Wilhelm Egger gave special emphasis to the pastoral orientation of the Federation.

"It has become apparent while preparing for and carrying out conferences and meetings that the Federation has brought attention to the new readers of the Word, thereby presenting the people of God with the Bible anew. People are realizing more and more that the Church is a community in which many people listen to the Word of God together, interpret it for one another and live by it with each other.

At the same time, it becomes ever more apparent to the members of the Federation that they themselves can promote the intercontinental dialogue concerning the Scriptures. Each continent stresses its own accents in Bible-reading: Latin America emphasizes the social context of the Bible, Asians find access to the Word in si-

lence and meditation; Africa, on the other hand, celebrates the Word in vivid and joyful liturgies, and Europe and other countries in the West feel particularly committed to historical-critical biblical research. All of these many forms of reading and living Scripture enrich the Church and the result of all these regional contributions is a deeper understanding of Holy Scripture. Thus the Federation is at the service of these various regions and, at the same time, is at the service of the World Church which requires this dialogue.

May the Holy Spirit lead us to the truth (cf. John 16,13) and enable us to read the Word of God attentively while enabling us to bring the message of the Word to the world."

(Transl.: K. Donnet-Poorman)





Message of the Holy Father

**To the Most Reverend Wilhelm Egger,
President of the Catholic Biblical
Federation,**

In the love of the Lord Jesus, I greet the Members of the Executive Committee, the Administrative Board and the Subregional Coordinators of the Catholic Biblical Federation as you gather in Rome to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Federation. This is an opportunity to thank God for all that the Federation has done to implement the vision of the Second Vatican Council that "easy access to Sacred Scripture be provided for all the faithful" (Dei Verbum, 22).

Indeed, one of the many fruits of the Council has been a growth in knowledge and love of the Bible among Catholic people, bringing with it a deeper sense of the divine presence in their lives. It is my fervent hope that you and your colleagues will continue to do all you can to ensure that the inexhaustible riches of God's Word are made ever more available to Christ's faithful, that they may be better prepared for the challenges that engage their faith.

Receiving the founding members of the Federation thirty years ago, Pope Paul VI made clear that the Bishops have the prime responsibility to help the faithful achieve a sound understanding of the Scriptures. He stressed how good and necessary it is that organizations such as yours come forward to help the Bishops in this task. What my revered predecessor said then is no less true now.

Without a sound understanding of Scripture, there will not be that fullness of Christian prayer which begins with the experience of listening to God's Word. Nor will there be that powerful Christian preaching which rises from the experience of hearing God's Word and opens the ear of

the faithful to hear what the preacher himself has heard first. Nor will there be a Christian theology which speaks the great truth of God's Word rather than the uncertainties of human opinion. In helping the Bishops to teach the way of truly biblical prayer, preaching and theology, the Federation stands not in the margins of the Church's pastoral life but at its very heart; and that is a reason for great gratitude.

I also encourage you to continue to foster the ecumenical dialogue which follows when Scripture is studied and shared by people of different religious allegiances. It is vital now for all Christians to explore more deeply the shared resource of the Bible in the search for the unity which the Lord clearly wills and the world so urgently needs if it is to believe.

Entrusting you to Mary, Mother of the Word made flesh, and invoking upon the Federation a fresh outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit who breathes through the sacred text, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 1 May 1999

John Paul II

Excerpt from: Osservatore Romano □



Lectio Divina Today – Challenge for the Biblical Pastoral Ministry

ENZO BIANCHI

The signs of the times are actually very favourable now following Vatican Council II and Dei Verbum: after century-long alienation the Catholic faithful are now being invited to rediscover the Bible. However, this turning towards the Word of God is bearing fruit only very gradually; in the liturgy where Scripture and Eucharist are unified and, more hesitatingly, in personal and communal Bible-reading. We are often far from experiencing the Word of God as a sacrament or as a personal encounter with God.

Yet life today thirsts for spiritual sources, for religion not only characterized by social and/or charitable dimensions but also empowering people to enter into a personal relationship with God. This is where the personal and, even more so, the communal lectio divina is of fundamental importance: the future of the Church depends on zealous reading of the Scriptures.

The author, Enzo Bianchi, is prior of a religious community in Bose, Northern Italy. He is renowned for his many publications on biblical and biblical-pastoral issues, in particular lectio divina.

I thank the Secretary General, Dr. Feldkämper, and to all of you I express my joy at being present on the occasion of this celebration in memorial of the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Catholic Biblical Federation. In this short paper I will attempt not so much to develop the overall theme of *lectio* as to highlight a few problems that present themselves today regarding *lectio divina* and the challenges they pose for the biblical ministry.

Introductory remarks

Today we are in a position to observe and, to some extent, even to measure and evaluate the centrality that has been restored to Sacred Scripture in the life of the Catholic Church: after a century of exile we are now assisting at a rediscovery of the Bible on the part of believing Catholics who in the recent past were no longer practicing direct contact with it and for whom the Bible was therefore unable to serve as daily nourishment for their lives of faith and for their witness in the world. The Catholic Church never ceased, of course, to live on the "Word of God", above all in the liturgy, but, even for reasons of language, it had no longer been the word of God heard, celebrated, meditated on and guarded, that could nourish the faith of individuals and of communities. But with its new position at the center of ecclesial life, the Bible now continues to trigger a process that had remained somewhat dormant for centuries and had even begun to atrophy. Through continuous contact with the Scriptures, the Christian nourishes his faith, discerns and evaluates his proper place in the company of humankind, and above all inserts himself into that process of "epignosis", of super-knowledge of Christ, and hence of the mystery of God, which leads to the faith of a mature believer, a *teleios*. Today preaching, which is present in the liturgy through the homily, almost always draws on the Holy Scriptures and normally helps to make God's



word resound in the Christian community. Indeed, "the Word of God is on the run" (cf. 2 Thess 3:1: "pray that the word of the Lord may speed on.."; *proseuchesthe hina ho logos tou Kyriou treche!* And it is certainly true that there continues to be a demand, a hunger, a profound desire for God's word, above all in the Latin countries.

I am convinced that among all the fruits of Vatican Council II it is precisely this restoration of the Word to the People of God that has been the most significant¹. However, at a distance of forty years now from the end of the Council, there are things that still urgently need to be done, and a more aware approach to the serious study of Scripture remains a necessity. In a brief paper like this, I can do no more than mention a number of problems to which, by the way, I have already devoted attention and research in many writings².

Word and Eucharist

The intimate connection between Word and Eucharist, rooted as it is in the Scriptural witness, attested by the Fathers of the Church from the time

by Vatican Council II in a number of texts (SC 48.51.56; DV 21.26; AG 6.15; PO 18; PC 6). Statements like *Corpus Christi intellegitur etiam Scriptura Dei, Corpus Christi puto Evangelium*, or like the perhaps less well-known phrase: "to nourish oneself on the flesh and blood of Christ not only in the mystery of the altar, but also in the reading of scripture", or "the bread of Christ and his flesh are the Word of God" — ideas attested to and reformulated in various ways by the great Catholic tradition⁴, have today returned to catechesis. However, there remains a certain timidity that causes hesitation in affirming that between Scripture and Eucharist there is an intrinsic relationship, a kind of pericoresis. Too often the Word is thought of as a mere prelude to the celebration of the sacrament, and also too often people fail to recognize that the Word has the power to establish covenant, the power to enable the believer to enter into a life-giving relationship with God. The idea persists, to some degree, that it is the sacrament that gives grace, while the biblical word is there simply to supply instruction or to explain the sacrament.

This seems to me to be a crucial point that requires a more profound reception of the spirit of the *Dei Verbum*. The reception of this text will remain partial and incomplete until greater depth has been reached in theological, spiritual and liturgical understanding of the intimate connection that exists between Word and Eucharist. The Word ought to be lived within the sacramental economy to the point of being understood as a sacrament, as the transmission of power and of grace, not merely as the communication of a truth, of doctrine and of ethical precept. The task before us, then, is to help Christian consciousness to mature with respect to the sacramental character of Scripture itself, because to the extent that it becomes Word of God through epiclesis, Scripture appears capable of effecting an encounter between the

listener and God, becoming a kind of celebration of the covenant⁵.

The Christian's assiduous reading of Scripture

If, in spite of inadequacies and conflicts, Scripture has acquired a certain centrality in the various spheres of ecclesial life (liturgy, ministry, catechesis) it must nevertheless be admitted that we are far from having achieved the goal of personal and daily regularity of the individual Catholic in the practice of reading Holy Scripture. Clerics, religious, a few of the faithful who are more sensitive to the Bible, because better prepared culturally, and a number of ecclesial movements know and indeed practice a certain regularity in reading Scripture, but the majority of the faithful have no personal contact with the Bible. In spite of the fact that virtually every family has a Bible at home, it seems that more often than not it remains little more than an ornamental fixture. Rather rarely does it become an instrument for hearing of the Word of God and for prayer. There is a certain diffidence regarding such a regular practice and many even tend to regard it as foreign to the Catholic tradition. We must reckon with the fact that it will take decades before the practice of regular reading of scripture becomes widespread. Moreover, such a practice is often hindered by the fact that pastors themselves are poorly prepared, which translates into inadequate initiation and a lack of invitation on their part with respect to the faithful. However, the conditions of today's society make the adoption of this practice of assiduous reading of Scripture all the more urgent. In the context of a pluralistic, complex, multi-religious and multi-ethnic society, in which the solidity of the Christian community appears ever more deficient and the diaspora condition of Christians ever more apparent, the faith needs solid and profound roots, which can be given to it precisely through regular, personal encounter with the living fountain of spiritual life.

Among all the fruits of Vatican Council II it is precisely this restoration of the Word to the People of God that has been the most significant

of Ignatius of Antioch, reiterated by the Cistercian and Victorian authors in the Middle Ages³, was reaffirmed



Everywhere we witness a decline in participation in daily Eucharist; consequently, the individual believer must find nourishment for his or her

The Word ought to be understood as a sacrament, as the transmission of power and of grace, not merely as the communication of a truth, of doctrine and of ethical precept

faith in a direct hearing of the Scripture. There is no longer an intense parish life that can form the faith and standing of an individual as a Christian in the world; rather, it will be above all the Word of God present in Holy Scripture that will nourish faith, inspire activity, give one the ability to discern the signs of the times, and become a constitutive part of prayer.

Here I would like to say a couple of words about the younger generation who are experiencing difficulty with respect to their spiritual life in a Catholic ambience. The Catholic ministry is experiencing ever more a situation of disjunction from the spiritual life. *Thé churchification of faith and the moral reduction of the Gospel* have spawned the idea that the Christian life consists in a vague social engagement, in a style of life that is altruistic and that follows norms such as honesty, tolerance, generosity, rather than in access to a personal relationship with God through Christ. Instead of being the God revealed by Jesus Christ, and known through Scripture, the Christian God has been reduced

to a kind of symbol expressing altruistic behavior. The ecclesial space no longer seems capable of introducing people to the spiritual life and in any case it appears far more interested in the charitable ministries, for whose objectives it employs elaborate means and spends enormous energies, rather than devoting its attention to growth in the faith and in the way of holiness. Why is it that many young people (especially in France and in Switzerland), in their search for spirituality, for meditation and for contemplation turn to the Orthodox East and even to the far East? Is this phenomenon not due in part to the lack of initiation to the spiritual life within the ecclesial sphere? Where is the challenge of hearing and meditating on Scripture being issued to a generation that understands prayer much more as a form of listening and reflection than as a speaking with God? This point is of crucial import for the transmission of the faith to the future generations. The history of Judaism has shown that in the diaspora the faith was preserved and transmitted thanks to personal regularity in the reading of Scripture and to the observance of Sabbath that went with it. Cardinal Ratzinger, in a memorable speech to the Council of the European Episcopal Conferences, stated forcefully that, above all today, the *sensus fidei* derives from regular and attentive reading of Scripture. His words are as follows: "I am convinced that *lectio divina* is the fundamental element in the formation of the *sensus fidei* and it is consequently the most important of the Church's tasks"⁶.

"Divina eloquia cum legente crescunt"

The Word of God that resounds in the community awakens, renews and sustains the *fides ex auditu* (Rom 10:17), but tends also to bring the hearers to the obedience of faith (*oboeditio fidei*: Rom 1:5) through the workings of the Holy Spirit who always accompanies the Word and

draws the faithful to a spiritual growth. The Word of the Lord, then, builds up the community by building up the individual believer; indeed, we can say with Luke that "the Word of God increases while the disciples grow more numerous" (cf. Acts 6:7), or that "the Word of God increases while it spreads" (cf. Acts 12:24). The growth of the community means the growth of the Word, because the community is the fruit of the efficacious Word of God, but also the place of witness of this Word: if it is true that *Scripturae faciunt christianos*⁷ it is also true that *divina eloquia cum legente crescunt*,⁸ that is, that the Word of God grows with the very act of its being read in the Church and with the living exegesis that takes place within the ecclesial life. We know well the words of Gregory the Great: "Many things in Sacred Scripture that I was unable to understand by myself I came to understand as I stood before my brothers" (*coram fratribus meis positus intellexi*)...I became aware that understanding was granted to me because of them"⁹. This is why the assiduous reading of Scripture, above all in the form of *lectio divina*, should take place personally and communally, in parishes and in church groups and not only, as is often the case, in religious communities. Consider how meaningful a community *lectio divina* might be that would prepare for the Sunday Eucharistic celebration — a *lectio* that would make the homily an act generated from within the community itself! The spread of the practice of community *lectio divina* is therefore important and desirable, though unfortunately such a thing is all too rare today. A great effort is required, as is a certain amount of courage in order to establish practices that are novel and can prove to be abundantly fruitful.

On the other hand, the community is inseparable from Scripture, because the book without the community is nothing, and the community cannot subsist without the book because in that book it finds its identity and its



vocation. The principle of *sola Scriptura* is an impossibility, and this impossibility is grounded in the church, the community. *Liber et speculum* is

The coming decades will show the powerful influence and impact of the *Dei Verbum*. This assiduous reading of Scripture is called for by the new diaspora situation of Christians, the confrontation with other religions, and the need to give prayer an increasingly meditative form, one more centered on hearing

the formula by which Saint Bernard defines the community as a mirror of the book and the book as the mirror of the community.¹⁰

Word and History

Finally, the relationship between Word of God and history remains problematic, above all with respect to the correct approach to adopt. Here, one could give a pathology of readings by outlining three temptations.

1) The fundamentalist temptation which claims to reach the Word of God without the effort and patience of study, of commitment, of historical critical analysis, without employing the various exegetical methods and without a hermeneutic of the Spirit. It might be useful to recall the judgment

on fundamentalism expressed by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*: "without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide".¹¹

2) The spiritualistic temptation which imagines it can reach the message without the effort of direct impact with the letter, with the hard shell of the human word. This creates a serious danger of manipulating the Word, of subjectivism, of psychological or emotional reduction of the letter of the biblical text.

3) The temptation to stop at history, at the analysis of what is written without reaching the message. The risk here is that of separating the biblical reading from the problem of its overall sense. These temptations are active above all where there has been a failure to hold together the two alternative pathways: from Scripture to life (cf. Lk 4:16-30) and from life to Scripture (cf. Lk 24:13-35). The pathway from Scripture to life enjoys, to be sure, a privileged place in Christian communities. And rightly so. To acknowledge this primacy means that one has allowed God's Word to hold sway over the community, such that it inspires, calls to obedience, calls forth faith. However, the path that goes in the other direction is also a necessary one, the path that requires listening to history, entering the movement of history in search for a call, a sign of the places and of the times. To be sure, there is a danger here of instrumentalizing God's Word, of making it bolster a preconceived ideology, such that it is no longer the Word that serves as a criterion for discerning the signs of the times, but, instead, the Word itself becomes illuminated in certain respects. In this case the danger is that the reading will be reductive and ideological.

Conclusion

I have articulated a number of problems regarding the regular and atten-

tive reading of Scripture and *lectio divina*, but there is no question that in spite of these conflicts and difficulties, the future of the Church will be characterized by the spread of this practice. If the second millennium was marked by a certain diffidence with respect to Scripture, the coming decades, at the beginning of the third millennium, will continue to show instead the powerful influence and impact of the *Dei Verbum*. This assiduous reading of Scripture is called for by the new diaspora situation of Christians, the confrontation with other religions, and the need to give prayer an increasingly meditative form, one more centered on hearing.

To be sure, the essential goal of this real space accorded to the Word of God in the life of individual Christians and communities, is that the true *sequela sancti evangelii* may become ever more the life of believers: it is their very lives that must become a living exegesis of Scripture, a Word made flesh in the world and in history, among men and women!

(Transl.: L. Maluf)





¹ E. Bianchi, *La centralità della Parola di Dio*, in *Il Vaticano e la Chiesa*, a cura di G. Alberigo and J. -P. Jossua, Paideia, Brescia 1985, pp. 159-187.

² Cf. E. Bianchi, *La lettura spirituale della Bibbia*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1998; Idem, *L'essere povero come condizione essenziale per leggere la Bibbia*, Qiqajon, Bose 1991; Idem, *Dall'ascolto della Parola alla preghiera liturgica*, Qiqajon, Bose 1990; Idem, *Lectio divina e vita religiosa oggi*, Qiqajon, Bose 1995.

³ Y.M.-J. Congar, *Les deux formes du pain de vie dans l'évangile et dans la tradition*, in AAVV, *Parole de Dieu et sacerdoce, Mélanges Weber*, Desclée & Cie, Paris-Tournai-Rome-New York 1962, pp. 21-58; E. Lipinski, *La Parole et le Pain*, in Idem, *Essais sur la révélation et la Bible*, Cerf, Paris 1970, pp. 65-90; W. Vogels, *La parole de Dieu comme nourriture*, in *La Pâque du Christ Mystère de salut*. Mélanges offerts au P. F.-X. Durwell pour son 70e anniversaire, Cerf, Paris 1982, pp. 33-50. An historical-theological perspective

is contained in A. Milano, *La Parola nella Eucaristia*, Dehoniana Roma 1990.

⁴ References and citations in E. Bianchi, *La lettura spirituale della Bibbia*, op. cit., pp. 42-64.

⁵ On the theme of the efficacy and power of the Word, see: I. de la Potterie, *L'efficacité de la Parole de Dieu*, in *Lumen Vitae* 10 (1955), pp. 57-62; F.L. Moriarty, *Word as Power in the Ancient Near East*, in *A Light unto My Past*, Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers, eds. H.N. Bream, R.D. Heim, C.A. Moore, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1974, pp. 345-362; A.C. Thiselton, *The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974), pp. 283-299; F.E. Crowe, *The Power of Scriptures: An Attempt at Analysis*, in *Word and Spirit*, Essays in Honor of David Michael Stanley on His 60th Birthday, ed. J. Plevnik, Regis College Press, Willowdale (Ontario), 1975, pp. 323-347.

⁶ Cited in E. Bianchi, *Ai presbiteri*, Qiqajon, Bose 1999, p.6.

⁷ So J. Caillot, paraphrasing Augustine: J. Caillot, *L'évangile de la communication*, Cerf, Paris 1989, p. 162.

⁸ Gregory the Great, Hom. in *Hiezechielem* 17,8. Cf. P.C. Bori, *L'interpretazione infinita. L'ermeneutica cristiana antica e le sue trasformazioni*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1987.

⁹ Hom. in *Hiezechielem* II, 1.

¹⁰ Cf. E. Bianchi, *La parola costruisce la comunità*, Qiqajon Bose 1993. On the relationship hearing-community cf. the interesting observations of Gh. Lafont, *God, Time, and Being*, tr. L. Maluf, Saint Bede's Publications, Petersham, MA, 1992, p. 121f and passim.

¹¹ The Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Pauline Books and Media, Boston, MA, p. 75. The document was published on 18 November 1993.

Co-operation in the *Bulletin Dei Verbum* (BDV)

One and a half years ago an Editorial Board for *Bulletin Dei Verbum* was called into existence. The members of this Board meet twice annually at the office of the General Secretariat; they advise the editorial staff on contents and form of the Bulletin and also provide their own contributions. Members of the Editorial Board are: Dr. Ludger Feldkämper and Alexander M. Schweitzer (editorial staff), Dr. Bettina Eltrop and Dr. Juan Peter Miranda of the German Catholic Biblical Association, Sr. Gabriele Hölzer of the Netherlands, editor of several publications of the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit and the Divine Missionaries. Dr. Thomas Osborne, Director of the Service Biblique Diocésain in Luxemburg and subregional co-ordinator of Latin-Europe, and Fr. Joseph Stricher, director of *Evangelie et Vie* in Paris, France.

Besides the close co-operation with the above mentioned, we can also count on the involvement of many of our members spread over various regions and continents. The first fruits of the harvest of this co-operation are already apparent – as we are frequently informed. Thank you all!



Globalization of Hope

Challenges for the Catholic Biblical Federation

VITAL J. G. WILDERINK

Long before the word "globalization" became a world-wide concept, the CBF itself had set a globalization of hope in motion, creating structures for sharing, communicating and solidarity – regardless of the separating borders between cultures. This globalization of hope is also creating a network of life and activities spreading over many countries and continents. However, there are still other areas sparsely populated and less developed in the sense of globalization of hope. Here new and unknown lands are awaiting the CBF.

The author, Bishop Vital Wilderink, Emeritus Bishop of Itaguai, Brazil represented the Full Members of America in the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation from 1996 to 1998. He now leads the life of a hermit Carmelite in Brazil.

The Catholic Biblical Federation is celebrating its thirtieth Jubilee in 1999. This is an opportunity to mentally retrace the path traveled by the Federation. Others will be able to do this more competently than I, who have just come on board at one of the last stops. However, on the basis of my travel experiences since the late 80's, I can only hope that the Federation will continue its journey into the future. A future that will lead into yet unknown lands. For the ongoing construction of lines, the Federation will surely need material for new tracks that can guide it effectively to its still valid goal: to give world-wide expression to the ministry of the Word in the Church.

When I think of the CBF, the word *globalization* comes to mind. This concept has in the last years reached the status of a magical formula. The process of globalization shows us, however, in spite of all the ambivalence of its achievements and consequences, that no-one lives for himself alone and that our lives and actions are all closely interwoven. In this sense, the CBF set in motion a true globalization, even before the catchword was invented.

The starting point was the Constitution *Dei Verbum* with its fruitful vision of the Bible, the diffusion of which is the task the Federation has set for itself. The result was a process of sharing that became ever more intense the more the conciliar document succeeded in motivating the faithful to read the Bible. The Plenary Assemblies, which were held each time in a different continent, strengthened the now inevitable contact between the Word of God and the different social and cultural contexts. How necessary and fruitful this contact is became clear already in the discussions on the interpretation of the Bible. Without this continuous questioning it is difficult to open oneself to God's Word and its interpretation in the tradition of the Church.

The Word of God has no culture of its own. It points beyond every cul-



ture. In spite of the frailty of the cultures before the Word that reveals God's mysteries, cultures and their bearers, that is to say human beings, are as historical subjects simultaneously receptacles for this Word of salvation. The CBF is in itself not an apostolate nor even a doctrinaire establishment that prescribes norms for the inculturation of the Word. On the other hand, it cannot withdraw from its supportive role in evangelization, to carry God's Word to the ends of the earth. Hence, the importance of a structure that cultivates sharing, communicating, solidarity. The division into regions and subregions doubtless helps to meet this challenge. The Plenary Assemblies, too, represent an invaluable richness in this sense, even though conducting them results in great financial difficulties. On this point, the globalization

that the Federation is striving for encounters obstacles that are occasioned by the other, the unilaterally economical globalization.

We gratefully note that the Catholic Biblical Federation has been very strongly engaged in the Third World. In general, we can also say that the results of these efforts have been positive. But how do things stand with the tasks the Federation has set itself in the countries of Europe and North America? If we can observe on the one hand a flourishing scientific activity, the absence of the Bible's influence in the lives of the majority of people is also quite noteworthy. We are aware that the context is entirely different in these countries; comparisons would therefore be out of order. Many utopian dreams and hopes have been shattered, and there are

third millennium expectations that have not yet been born. Transition periods are not normally conducive to great successes. Which in no way justifies simply waiting around for better times. I do think that in these countries or continents the CBF can also contribute to a globalization of hope. Perhaps the task is not so much quantitative as it is qualitative in nature. In a spiritual wasteland, the starting-point for an inculturation process is anything but optimal. Perhaps an important step along the way would include educational measures for individuals and groups. There are today numerous alternative Christian groups. To what extent can these groups become bearers of hope, to what extent can they open up new spaces for life? Perhaps the Federation should reflect on its role in the light of these challenges.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)

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At the approach of the memorial celebration for the 30th anniversary of the Catholic Biblical Federation, the members were requested to put in writing, in the form of a 'vision-statement', their experiences, observations and desires regarding the Catholic Biblical Federation. This would contribute to exchanges and reflections on the task and role of the Federation, for today and for the future, in the various regions of the world. The sub-regional coordinators from South-East Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and IMBISA/South Africa prepared short papers on the subject, which they read during the memorial celebration at Sant'Anselmo, in Rome, on May 9, 1999. In the following pages, you will find these four articles from the subregions, as well as a summary of the most important points that emerged from the 'vision-statement' surveys.

The Significance of the Federation for Southeast Asia

EMMANUEL GUNANTO, OSU, INDONESIA

In thirty years the Federation has grown in number and influence. The subregion of Southeast Asia has 7 full members and 22 associate members in the following countries: Cambodia (1), Indonesia (6), Malaysia (4), Myanmar (2), Philippines (12), Thailand (2), and Vietnam (2). From the full members, the Philippines

came in first in 1969, and Vietnam came in last in 1995.

I see the CBF as a military basis or a home for biblical-pastoral ministers of the Word, scholars and field workers alike. Each has different functions and roles, but contributes for the good of all. We gather from time to time for training, for exchanging views

and for making strategies to make the Word incarnate in the world today, to preserve the life of humanity that is heading towards destruction, and to serve life in a dying world. The CBF is a worldwide community. The General Secretariat functions extremely well, maintaining contact with all the members all over the world by send-



ing circular and personal letters, and not less our Bulletin DEI VERBUM. Networking among the members is greatly encouraged and facilitated. Plenary Assemblies are held once in six years, and subregional meetings once in three years.

The first subregional meeting of Southeast Asia was held in Cisarua, West Java, Indonesia, in 1995, to implement the Bogota Final Statement on youth and the laity. The second was held in Manila as a further realization of the Hong Kong theme on the Word of God – Source of life, which became "Word of God, serving life in Asia." Those were times we came together to be enriched by new ideas and endeavors.

"The Bible in the New Evangelization", presented by Fr. Carlos Mesters from Brazil in the Plenary Assembly in Bogota in 1990, had far reaching effects in our respective countries. "Reading the Bible in the Asian Context", contributed by Sr. Maria Ko, a Hong Kong born biblical scholar, in our Plenary Assembly in Hong Kong in 1996, had great influence in Asian countries and, I believe, in other parts of the world as well.

The Second Bishops' Institute for the Biblical Apostolate, held in Malaysia from 1-5 March this year, strongly emphasized the Asian approach in

reading the Bible for biblical formation of seminarians and lay people.

Our assemblies and workshops are highly valued, and the members try hard to take part, though it is not always easy for countries like Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia to participate, both for political and economical reasons. Those gatherings, held in different countries, allow us to be enriched by different cultures. We experience the biblical hospitality of the host countries. Each opens wide its doors and hearts to allow CBF members to have access to what they themselves have achieved in the biblical apostolate. For example, we were very much impressed by what the Church of Hong Kong is doing for the Church in Mainland China, and how they did it. In our journeying together, there is not only a sharing of joys and sorrows, of spiritual wealth, but also a sharing of goods. We feel that in the Federation no one is excluded because of financial problems. Financial support is extended on general, regional and subregional and on national level. This is both strengthening and consoling.

The Federation, by its Final Statements and final resolutions, brings to attention the important areas of the biblical apostolate, such as empowering the laity, women and youth, dialogue with other scriptures, the chal-

lenge of ecological problems. I experienced the surprise of a youth leader when I proposed our bible youth club to start studying the Qur'an. "Yes, why not," I said, "it has been recommended by CBF."

The CBF gives us a sense of belonging to a greater entity. Two delegates from Cambodia who participated in our subregional meeting in Manila last year, returned to their country with great enthusiasm and new zeal for the biblical apostolate. The priest who sent them commented, "Now they are aware that they belong to a wider Church." We were very touched when at the end of the meeting they suggested Cambodia as the venue for the following meeting. "We are poor; we do not have much to offer. But at least we have something you do not have... Guess what? Clean air!"

Yes, the CBF unites all who work in the biblical ministry, so that the Bible becomes ever new and interesting. It reminds us not to stay with the letter, but to read beyond the words, and meet the risen Lord who is present whenever we read the Word as Word of God, Word of Life, with faith and humility. Thus we journey together towards the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God, indeed, heaven on earth!

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The Federation as seen from the Middle East

PAUL FÉGHALY, LEBANON

The first time I heard talk of the Federation, or something like it, was when we were doing a translation of the Bible with the Bible Societies. The translation of the Deutero-Canonical Books had to be financed, but the name meant nothing to me. It was at the call for the first congress of Larnaca, in 1985, that I began to understand, that I allowed myself to be swept up by this great Catholic biblical movement, that my whole life and my apostolate were transformed, that the subregion took on a new look. After fifteen years of biblical apostolate in the Middle East, things are no longer as they were before. We are no longer the poor relative trying to make the point that the Bible can be read in the face of other confessions. And our reading of the Bible has taken on a new look. It must reach the people of God in the language of the people of God. Specialists who had arrived from Europe were advocating an "academic" instruction in the Bible, where the latest theories would be represented, complete with Hebrew and Greek words, etc. But since they have entered the Federation, they have fallen into step. This does not mean that serious studies are not being done. But the biblical apostolate will be a very important dimension even for those who are doing research. There has been a great conversion on the part of biblical scholars, corresponding to an immense thirst on the part of the people of God. We are now more than twenty scholars in Lebanon and we are still not adequate to the task that is before us. This is because beyond Lebanon there is Syria, Iraq, Egypt, the Sudan, Iran...

Without the Federation, there would not have been any general meetings

where "biblicists" can make each other's acquaintance, help and enrich each other, arrive at a consensus on questions that provoke their reflection. It is not a matter of copying the past of the orient just because it is "venerable", nor of simply repeating what one has learned in university, but of offering a word that would be a source of life for the people of God. This is the conversion of which I was just speaking. We have been helped in this endeavor by the presence of the Federation (General Secretary, office members). We have been helped morally by all the encouraging words. We have been put in touch with experiments that are taking place here and there. And above all, we have been supported materially thanks to the funding agencies. Even poor countries can come together, because those who have much gave generously to those who had little, so that a kind of equality existed. People left their countries for the first time, met with other people, were able to conduct drives of various kinds. For with the poverty of our countries, there was also war. And here, too, we felt we were not alone. Every time we were forced to give ground, we were able to recover our courage. And the forward progress continued, thanks be to God.

Without the Federation, publications that have come out especially in the last eight years would have been impossible. There would have been no plan, no purpose... Why write? Why publish? For whom? With the Federation, there has been a veritable explosion, like what happened at Pentecost. And it is important to see who have been the beneficiaries of the biblical apostolate. It has not simply been a few "biblicists" who were

able to study in Rome, Paris or elsewhere... It has been, as the prophet Joel put it, our sons and daughters, the young and the old... And all with a practical goal, in view of the sects that are proliferating, in view of certain confessions that engage in cheap proselytism.

Veritable biblical literature has been born within the Federation - Middle East subregion. A synopsis, a substantial commentary on the four Gospels, or even on the whole New Testament. Not to mention the other means of communication. A weekly television program takes place on Sunday; it lasts two hours and it introduces the liturgical texts of the Sunday. Questions are asked of the Federation, which is really becoming a moral instance. A biblical journal has been launched which will appear every two months in sixteen countries. The Federation is there for us. A whole life-line has been created, a whole network that did not exist before.

The result is that we no longer feel alone, no longer feel isolated, above all where Christians are swamped by an immense Muslim majority. People are there in each and every country with a common biblical formation. This happens in Syria with the annual meetings. And in Lebanon, with more than twenty centers of formation in this small country.

And from country to country as at the time of Saint Paul, from church to church... and attention is paid to the Jerusalem Church as well: all of this at the subregional level. More and more we are able to count on one another, in terms of articles, books, conferences, sessions; and finally, the presence of the subregion at the



level of the Federation, whether through the General Secretary, or through the Executive Committee, or

through the funding agencies. And finally in terms of the Plenary Assemblies which replenish our resources

so that we can continue to function, through our lives and our apostolate, as a "word of life".

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The Role of the Federation in Africa

IGNATIUS CHIDAVAENZI, ZIMBABWE

From the African point of view the world is a big family of the human race. Continents, countries, the Church and the various religions are, as it were, the extended families within this big family. Companies, firms, political parties, religious orders, charismatic movements, federations, small Christian communities, parishes and dioceses are, as it were, the nucleus families. However, families, whether extended or nucleus, are not homogeneous. They have their own unique thrust, beliefs, objectives or lines of action which help society and at the same time give the family a means of livelihood. Thus, to us, the Federation is a family with God's Word as its main thrust. It presents it to the world, to the Church as something to live on or live by ("It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'.") [Mt 4,4]

In this family, we, the Africans, have some things which help us to participate in the CBF. We, in Africa, have a keen sense of God's presence wherever we are. We sense that God's eye is seeing us. To help us appreciate

the structure of the CBF, we have the hierarchical structure of the family and strong family ties. Thus, the crime one commits affects the clan, affects the immediate and the extended family.

We, in Africa, are very conscious, too, of the Bible as the Word which is coming from the mouth of God our Father. We are people of the word. We love the stories told around the African cooking pot. The Bible recounted as story and discussed in this setup, becomes alive, fresh and powerful. All over Africa, what the prophet Amos predicted seems to happen in a dramatic way, namely, "The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the LORD" (Amos 8,11). When it was decreed by Vatican II that the Bible should return into the hands of the faithful in the languages they can understand, in spite of the great numbers printed for Africa, there is always a shortage of Bibles. We feel very much edified and encouraged by God's Word (2 Tim 3,16), but, "Often we live in a world that gives little rea-

son for hope: AIDS, crime, unemployment, political and economic instability", says one African exegete, Luke Mlilo.

Added to this and unfortunately, from the very start, Africa received a wounded Christianity, a fragmented Christianity of the many denominations stemming from the aftermath of the Reformation. Christianity, a lovely way of life, a life of love, of breaking the bread together, a life of friendship, of sharing (Acts 4,32-35), a life of a new creation (2 Cor 5,17) was, contrary to Jesus' prayer (Jn 17,21), divided, wounded and pieced by the division of the Church into denominations, sects, fellowships, and upper room ministries which all purport to be churches. Unfortunately, too, we have even learnt to form many more little churches and sects like these for the sake of fame or gain.

God's Word is indeed the source of life, but the very source of life is precisely the very thing which has been used as the main weapon of dividing Christians into many opposing factions and churches and sects. We believe that it is the biblical spirituality based on the powerful Word of God



that can unite us again and correct the aberrations of fundamentalism and many other 'isms' in this area. As Fr. Mlilo says: "No prophet ever believed that all was lost. Though the infidelities of the people were serious, and though they saw a great disaster looming, they maintained hope and became a source of renewed strength for the people. In difficult times, their mere presence was a reassuring sign for the people. The prophets often proclaimed the restoration of the people and salvation for all nations." To us in Africa, such is the role of the Federation, such is the role played by the biblical-pastoral ministry.

Speaking about studying the Sacred Scripture, Vatican II says: "This task should be done in such a way that as many ministers of the Divine Word as possible will be able to effectively provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the People of God, thereby enlightening their minds, strengthening their wills, and setting men's hearts on fire with the love of God." (Dei Verbum No. 23). This we have been able to put into effect through

the Dei Verbum Course which we have organized in Zimbabwe and Angola for the last four years for both the English- and the Portuguese-speaking people respectively. This Course has indeed been successful and very effective in producing convinced Ministers of the Word. This was in addition to the very effective programs of LUMKO, which are known worldwide, and the recently established Catholic Biblical Foundation, founded by Bishop Verstraete, OMI, targeted mainly toward the youth of our IMBISA area. These and the national programs have been our response to the Council and put into effect the aim and purpose of the constitution of the Federation.

It is very gratifying that the bishops of IMBISA decided to choose a biblical theme for their Plenary Assembly in Swaziland last year as a backing to our effort in their area. It was, to their surprise, very successfully centered on the theme "The Powerful Word of God". It was even more gratifying when they came up with the following preamble to their recommendations, copies of which are

available: It says, "We, the bishops of Southern African Region, at our Plenary Assembly in Swaziland, from the 7th to the 12th of June 1998, have reflected on the Powerful Word of God. We have seen the Ethiopian Eunuch in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8) as a symbol of us Africans in search of God in the Scriptures. We have recognized the centrality of the Scriptures in all our pastoral efforts aimed at satisfying the hunger and thirst for the Word of God. We therefore recommend the following ..."

May I take this opportunity to thank the General Secretary of the CBF, Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, SVD, for his support, especially in the Dei Verbum Course which he attended personally every year giving his input, and for his presence at the IMBISA Plenary Assembly in Swaziland where his input turned out to be central to the Plenary Assembly and where he could witness for himself the effect of the Powerful Word of God on the bishops. Our profound gratitude to him and many thanks to you for listening to me.

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A Vision of the Federation from the Subregion of Latin America and the Caribbean

CLARA MARÍA DÍAZ C., COLOMBIA

My vision of the Catholic Biblical Federation is conditioned by my identity as a lay woman, profoundly marked by the reality of Latin America and by a personal experience of faith in the Word of God, but also by years of very interesting and positive contact and work with the Federation. These are the main aspects that I would like to bring out in this presentation:

The Federation was born in the very heart of the Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*. Accordingly, it exists to work for the fulfillment of the recommendations made by this Constitution in its sixth chapter, but also, as I see it, to help keep alive the spirit that inspired the Conciliar Fathers to highlight so effectively the centrality of the Word of God in the evangelizing mission of the Church.

The Federation is an association of entities, of various forms, committed to the biblical apostolate. In my view, this means that the vitality and the thrust of the Federation depend as much on the work done by its mem-

bers, pursuing their own options, as on their feeling of belonging to the institution. In fact, the statutes and the structure of the Federation clearly reflect its intention to make God's Word accessible to all the faithful, through a common and cooperative service.

Our time is marked by extraordinary scientific and technological advances that appear to signal common directions for humanity; but it is likewise marked by the tragedy of heartrending injustice, which is tending more and more to divide the marginalized peoples from the more powerful minorities. In this context, it is clear to me that the Federation has committed itself to listening to the Word of God and to proclaiming it as a source of life and of hope.

I would like to present the Federation as a privileged locus for communication among its members, and among those who are eager to listen to God's Word and to put it into practice, throughout our vast world. This communication involves an ex-

change of experiences, reading materials, ideas...; it involves sharing reflections, anxieties, accomplishments...; it involves mutual support...; it involves working together under the impulse of the same spirit. But, at the same time, this communication can help us to engage in fruitful dialogue, to marvel at the richness of diversity, to respect differences, to engage in a joint search for the truth..

My vision of the Federation also has to do with the future. In this respect, I would like to see us applying imagination and creativity in search for new areas of sharing and of communication among the members; courageously confronting the challenge of formation, at every level and by all available means, in matters that pertain to the field of the biblical apostolate; working, with ever growing commitment, to continue the shaping of the Federation as an entity that can better serve and contribute to the diffusion and the radiance of God's Word (cf. *Dei Verbum* 26), while remaining faithful to the principles that define and sustain it.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)

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The CBF – a 'World Wide Web' for Biblical Pastoral Ministry

The Federation from the point of view of its members

In the last general survey among members of the Catholic Biblical Federation, a 'vision-statement' was requested, a description of the tasks of the Federation in the different regions and sub-regions and its future role. The most important and the most frequently recurring observations that came out of this survey are assembled here. This collection does not systematically distinguish between the situation that is and the situation that should be. There is much that has already been realized and is already functioning; there is much that must still be intensified, adjusted and improved.

'World Wide Web' and home base

The CBF is a place of exchange. Here, members receive information, inspiration, ideas. In this sense the CBF offers the possibilities of a WWW (World Wide Web), as a member puts it, and indeed not just virtual ones. Very concrete exchanges take place, among other things, at the plenary assemblies, in regional meetings, and through CBF publications. The central significance of these kinds of exchange is brought out in many of the statements. The CBF is a WWW of people who read the Bible in various life contexts, and who attempt to live what they have read. It is a network of individuals who exchange their experiences in the sphere of biblical ministry and who strive to maintain and to ground anew the tradition of biblical pastoral ministry in the spirit of the *Dei Verbum*. The CBF is a WWW of biblical pastoral ministry.

The stimulation that results from the publications and briefings of the Federation, and often too from personal contacts that extend even to the exchange of "resource persons", is viewed by many members as an invaluable help for their work in biblical pastoral ministry. The most noteworthy indication of this is the mutual support and the mutual learning that takes place within the web of the Federation.

Some members go further and express themselves in still more emotional terms. They not only see the CBF as a useful network, but even experience it as a kind of "home base" – a home base for people who are engaged in biblical pastoral ministry in different places and at different levels. In their various functions they meet together from time to time in order to continue their education, to share experiences, to mutually enrich one another, to plan strategies, to contribute, both through their corporate witness and each in his own



place, to the incarnation of God's Word in the world.

Universality of the CBF

For many of its members, belonging to the CBF means a feeling of solidarity with sisters and brothers throughout the world. Such a setting provides not only stimulation and ideas but is above all a source of encouragement. It is precisely at this level that the plenary meeting takes on an important role. Hardly an event or a publication offers such a compelling and powerful experience of the universality of the CBF and of the Church as does the plenary assembly. No less powerful are the impetus and motivation that the various participants take back with them into their daily lives from such meetings. This experience of togetherness also gives rise to solidarity.

The universality is also expressed in the concrete variety of the individual members; this is perceived and valued as a source of inspiration, as a pool for exchange of experiences. What unites all members is the universal commitment to the spread of the Word of God as a source of life and of hope.

In the view of many of its members, the CBF takes on, in its own sphere, the function of a spokesperson for the universal Church.

Ecumenical dialogue

The significance of the Bible, and therefore of the Catholic Biblical Federation, for ecumenical dialogue appears as a key point in the responses of members of numerous regions. The CBF is praised as a "source of unity among Christians". Through the CBF ecumenical dialogue is concretely fostered in many places.

"Love for the Bible", personal access to the Bible, which stand at the heart of the activities of the CBF, are bearing fruit in ecumenical, and to some extent even in interreligious dialogue; certainly, the influence of this or-

ganization is being felt beyond the borders of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, Catholics are learning things about the Bible and biblical apostolate from fellow Christians of other confessions.

Biblical Spirituality

The fostering of a biblical spirituality is seen as an important task of the Catholic Biblical Federation. The CBF is an effective as well as an official agency of the Catholic Church that seeks to correct a too one-sided emphasis on a scientific-academic approach to the Bible in the Church in favor of a more pastoral biblical approach.

If the Word of God is to become fruitful for personal and community life, if it is to be a form of spiritual nourishment, we cannot stop at the scientific analysis of the texts. *Lectio divina* is a form of biblical spirituality that has a rich tradition behind it.

The Word of God is the foundation of every Christian's spiritual life. Its propagation in the various languages of mankind, and above all the efforts made in the direction of a spiritual approach to Scripture in the various contexts, is a central concern of the CBF. Primary and continuing education in the area of biblical pastoral ministry at the various levels become in this regard a mission of the highest priority.

Dialogue with the Bishops

More than once the comments also mentioned how important it is for the CBF, on the basis of its experiences at different levels and in different contexts, to have an impact on various levels of ecclesial life, but above all on bishops and bishops' conferences. The importance given to biblical pastoral ministry often leaves something to be desired precisely in this regard.

Suggestions and praise

Many of the comments of members contain suggestions and wishes.

These include the wish for still more mutual exchange, for still more information on the daily routines of individual members and for more concrete examples of practical, on the spot engagement. These are suggestions that must be taken up at various levels of the Federation.

A majority of the responses – beyond the suggestions offered for the future – show a deep appreciation of the CBF's existing value, its significance for the concrete work of its fellow-members. The principal assets of the Federation in the view of its members are the way it functions as a network, a home base and a World Wide Web of biblical pastoral ministry, as an institution of the universal Church that is also firmly rooted in the local Church, and the significance of the Federation for ecumenical dialogue. Such an appreciation is heartening, but at the same time it amounts to a challenge for the future!

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(Transl.: L. Maluf)





Towards the VI Plenary Assembly

One of the main items on the agenda of the combined Meeting of the CBF Executive Committee and Coordinators on May 5-13, 1999 were the first steps to be taken in preparation of the next Plenary Assembly of the Federation.

The time

In accordance with the six year rhythm of the Federation's Plenary Assemblies, the Executive Committee decided that the VI Plenary Assembly will be held in early September 2002 for seven to nine days. It will be the first Plenary Assembly in the new millennium, soon after we have recalled and celebrated the historic event of the "Word made flesh ... that all may have life in abundance" as formulated in the motto of the V Plenary Assembly of Hong Kong.

The venue

Mindful of the closeness of the time of the Assembly to the celebration of the Incarnate Word, the Executive Committee opted for Beirut, Lebanon.

Hence, the Plenary Assembly will be held:

- in one of the lands of the Bible (the word *Bible* derives from the ancient Lebanon town of Byblos!);

- in the lands of Abraham, a "wandering Aramean" who has been called to become

a blessing to all nations, who is venerated as their father in faith by Jews, Christians and Muslims – all of whom claim the lands of the Bible as their home;

- in the lands from which the Word, the fulfilment of the promise of blessing for all nations, has set out on its journey throughout a diversified and pluralistic world – then and now.

The theme

Inspired by the venue, the theme and motto of the Assembly have been tentatively formulated by the Executive Committee on the basis of the following two ideas:

- "A blessing for all nations.

- Journeying together with the Word of God in a pluralistic world."

The biblical background of the theme will be provided by the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

After a consultation of all members, the theme and motto will be finalized by a preparatory committee and the Executive Committee.

Under this rubric we will keep our readers informed about the process of preparation.

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The Catholic Biblical Federation (*CBF*) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to ministry to the Word of God. At the present time, the *CBF* membership includes 90 full members and 217 associate members coming from a total of 126 countries.

The activities of these organizations include the preparation of Catholic and interconfessional Bible translations, the propagation of Bibles and in general the promotion of a deeper understanding of the Holy Scripture.

The *CBF* promotes the biblical pastoral activities of these organizations, provides a forum for the world-wide sharing of experiences in the field, searches for new ways of bringing the joy of God's Word to the faithful throughout the world. The Federation seeks collaboration with the representatives of biblical scholarship as well as with Bible Societies of various confessions.

In particular, the *CBF* works toward the promotion of the reading of the Bible within the context of concrete life situations and the training of ministers of the Word in this direction.

The ministry to the Word of God is ministry to the unity of and communication between human beings. A world which grows together with the help of modern communications and yet continues to show signs of hate and destruction needs more than ever words of peace and of fellowship with God and with each other.

Wilhelm Egger, Bishop of Bozen-Brixen, President of the CBF