

# DEI VERBUM

**Catholic Biblical Federation**

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## **40 Years of Dei Verbum**

The Rediscovery of the Word of God

## **From the Field**

Bible Week in Costa Rica

## **Pluralism and Biblical Pastoral Ministry**

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**Dear Readers:**

*Follow one, hate none* – the Hindu scholar Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) imparted this bit of advice on the theme of the plurality of religions. Knowing and valuing one’s own religion is the pre-supposition for open dealings with human beings of other faiths or convictions. Knowledge about the way I follow gives me the security I need

to enter into a prejudice-free dialogue with those who have chosen another way. A dialogue in which no effort is made to deny either the sincerity of their faith or its rightness.

With globalization on the increase, the question of pluralism has become a theme that preoccupies us almost on a daily basis. The plurality that confronts us in terms of the great variety of existing lifestyles, cultures, societal forms and faith persuasions has become a normality. Globalization means, for one thing, that the world is becoming a goldfish bowl, largely thanks to extensive sources of information and possibilities of communication. But globalization also means that my little goldfish bowl is becoming a vast and uncontrollable world. The profusion of information and the limitless possibilities that are now available are often perceived as overwhelming; the vast array of things that are on offer in terms of technical, cultural or religious options evokes in many people a hitherto unknown feeling of insecurity and anxiety. Possible responses to such anxieties can be aggressively defensive reactions, the temptation to adopt a simplified, one-dimensional worldview or to escape into relativism, syncretism or intolerance.

Not without reason, therefore, did we place the article by Fr. Emmanuel Fianu, svd, on the question of religious pluralism in the present issue, which follows an issue devoted to the theme of fundamentalism (BDV 70/71). For pluralism, taken in a positive sense, can very well be a response to the intolerant narrowing of the world that is effected by fundamentalism. Pluralism, not in the sense of relativism or indifference, but in the sense of “openness, dialogue and good relations”, as our author writes. Pluralism that takes its clue from the advice of Paul to the Thessalonians: “Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil” (1 Thess 5:21-22).

After the theme of religious pluralism you will find in this issue another crucial concern. For more than two years now – since the October 11, 2002 to be precise – a whole series of 40<sup>th</sup> anniversaries have either already been celebrated or have been announced in the Catholic world: the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Gaudium et Spes*, to name but a few. They are all being celebrated for the same reason: that epochal event that was announced by Pope John XXIII on January 25, 1959 and that was held in Rome, after intensive preparatory work, from October 11, 1962 to December 8, 1965: the Second Vatican Council.

On November 18, 2005 another conciliar text will follow suit in celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary: the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*. For a long time this text lived a somewhat shadowy existence. Unjustly so, because among other things *Dei Verbum* performed the invaluable service of restoring awareness of the central importance of Holy Scripture for the life of the Church and offered important incentives and directives regarding how the Bible is to be employed. In the coming issues we will be following this Jubilee and publishing articles on the significance of *Dei Verbum* from the perspective of the different regions of the CBF. We begin in the present issue with a more historically oriented article, which is devoted above all to the origin and reception of *Dei Verbum*. The actual “birthday celebration” of the Dogmatic Constitution will take the form of an International Congress which will be organized in conjunction with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and will be held in Rome in September of 2005.

*Test everything. Hold on to the good...* With this in mind, we hope you will read these articles with interest and, of course, also the usual reports from the life of the Federation, as well as the materials for the Bible week in Costa Rica.

Claudio Ettl



# The Rediscovery of the Word of God

## The Second Vatican Council and the *Dei Verbum*

Claudio Ettl

It is one of the central and decisive events in the history of Israel: On Sinai, in the very presence of God, Moses receives from the mouth of Yahweh the Ten Commandments, the divine teaching, which is then sealed by the renewed covenant promise. But anyone who expects, after this phenomenal peak experience on the mountain, that Israel's journey will continue at the high level of a lasting euphoria that would enable God's people to find itself in a better world at a single stroke will be disappointed: the revelation at the peak is followed immediately by the sobering descent into the lowlands of the everyday; the highlight on the mountain is followed by the low point in the valley, symbolized in the argument over the golden calf and its punitive consequences. And yet – Israel does ultimately make it into the Promised Land. But in spite of the extraordinary Sinai event, this road to Canaan is hardly a straight pathway; rather it is a road full of bends and twists, obstacles and challenges.

Revelations need to be absorbed. Revelations need to be received, thought through and translated into concrete action. This is not always easy and the process is usually accompanied by setbacks and conflicts. Revelations have their concrete occasions and their concrete times. And yet they transcend their concrete “back then” and exert their influence on later times as well, in ever new and often unexpected ways. Revelations do not simply cause deserts to become Promised Land overnight; rather they are signs that have the capacity to point the way forward to that distant goal.



To compare the Second Vatican Council with the Sinai event may seem something of a stretch, and it is hardly my intention to establish an equation here. There is, however, *one* point of comparison that is fairly obvious: it can be said of the Council, too, that it is one of the distinctive and central events in the life of the Church (as Sinai was in the life of Israel). And as for its remarkable vision and achievements, one could also say: they do not disclose their transformative potential all at once; rather they need to be absorbed, worked out and implemented in particular circumstances – precisely in the everyday of ecclesial reality, after the “summit accomplishment” in Rome.

A document of this Council, which for a long time led a shadowy existence, is the Constitution on Divine Revelation, the *Dei Verbum*. It is certainly no exaggeration to describe the *Dei Verbum* as a milestone on the journey of the Catholic Church from the 20<sup>th</sup> into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Milestones are directional markers; they offer orientation regarding one's present location, but at the same time they are pointers for the way that still lies ahead.

The following contribution is intended to be primarily the first of these: orientation, i.e. a general description of where we are today. It will first offer a brief overview on the origin and a few of the central theses of the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation”, as the document is officially called. (It will normally be cited here in the conventional way, by its first words in the Latin text: *Dei Verbum*.) A second section will highlight a few important developments and results that were inspired and influenced by the *Dei Verbum* in the decades that followed. We will conclude with a short survey of what lies ahead.

### I. The Second Vatican Council and the *Dei Verbum*

#### 1. “Hoc schema mihi non placet”: On the genesis of *Dei Verbum*

It belongs to the enduring achievements of Vatican II that this Council contributed to the rediscovery of the central significance of Holy Scripture for the life of the Catholic Church and the lives of all believers. The need for a biblical animation of the pastoral life of the Church comes to expression in many places within the total of 16 official documents of the Council. The most important com-



ments on this topic are, however, found in the *Dei Verbum*, and there especially in Chapter VI. In that chapter, the Holy Scripture is referred to as the “soul of theology” (cf. DV 24).

Conciliar texts do not just fall “from the sky”, any more than did the texts of Holy Scripture itself; rather, they are the result of a more or less lengthy and complicated process of origination. In the case of the *Dei Verbum* one can say that this drafting process was particularly long, particularly complicated and also particularly controversial. A couple of highlights will illustrate this.

### 1.1 Scriptural interpretation in the Catholic Church in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The relationship of the Catholic Church, or the Magisterium to Sacred Scripture, and especially to the question of its interpretation, has not always been easy to define or entirely free of tensions. By at least the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the growing significance of historical and scientific-critical questions raised in the interpretation of biblical texts was beginning to cause restlessness and unease for many in the Catholic sphere and restrictive counter-reactions on the part of the Magisterium.

However, positive developments were also simultaneously in progress. One of the clearest indications of this was the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*, “On Promoting biblical Studies”, issued by Pope Pius XII on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1943. This encyclical committed Catholic Biblical scholarship to scientific research. Despite the dated character of this text and some backward steps that were taken in the years that followed its release, it is almost impossible to overestimate the significance of *Divino afflante Spiritu*. Thanks to its “revolutionary impact” (R.B. Robinson)<sup>1</sup>, the Bible received growing attention in the time following its publication not only among Catholic biblical scholars, but also in the Church’s pastoral ministry.

In spite of its initial positive reception, questions of biblical interpretation nevertheless continued to be debated and discussed. Precisely in the period between the announcing of the Council by Pope John XXIII, in January 1959, and its opening on October 11, 1962 the ongoing discussions were particularly intensive.

Shortly before the beginning of the Council, in 1961, and with the consent of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the Holy Office (whose name was changed to “Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith” in 1965) published a Monitum entitled *De germana veritate historica et obiectiva s. Scripturae* (“On the genuine, historical and objective truth of Holy Scripture”). This single-page document amounted to an attempt to back away from or at least to severely limit the marked openness to the raising of historical questions that had existed already for years in the Catholic sphere. Although it con-

tains a few positive remarks on the newly awakening interest in the Bible in Catholic circles, this document primarily warns of the negative consequences of a too historically orientated approach to the life and activity of Jesus. This could lead, said the document, to confusion and a weakening of faith among the faithful. Although it was merely a short document and of very general scope, the text was interpreted as more regressive than progressive in overall effect. Other occurrences of the time – such as among other things the withdrawal of teaching permits (restored following the Council) from two professors of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome – strengthened this impression.

Even during the Council, between the third and fourth sessions, there appeared on 21 April 1964 an Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled: *De historica evangeliorum veritate* (“On the historical truth of the Gospels”). In contrast to the Monitum of 1961 this document laid strong emphasis on the value and utility of the historical-critical approach to biblical texts. Citing *Divino*



Pope John XIII

*Afflante Spiritu* it explicitly urged Catholic Scripture scholars to employ such methods. Moreover, this document developed a three-level model for understanding Gospel origins, one that made a clear distinction between the time of the earthly Jesus, the time of the post-Easter community and the time when the earlier traditions were put into fixed form in the Gospels. Side

by side with this type of comment one also finds a few somewhat more reserved and cautious passages that warn of uncritical and immoderate use of historical methods. In the main section of the text, however, positive expressions predominate in this instruction – which for this reason should be understood as a clear and decisive clarification in the already yearlong dispute over the meaning of the document on Divine Revelation of Vatican II.

Thus far, a short look at events from the perimeters of the Council that focused primarily on the question of the justification (as well as the dangers) of an historically orientated biblical interpretation. But there were other important developments in the field of the biblical apostolate, or ministry before or during the Council that also had a formative influence on the *Dei Verbum*. Among these should be mentioned the birth of the biblical-liturgical movement with its rediscovery of the Bible, the founding of Biblical Associations on the Catholic side, the substantial increase of communication between Catholic and Protestant scholars, etc.

### 1.2 The debates on the contents and the direction of the *Dei Verbum*

On November 18, 1965 the Council released the “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation”, the *Dei*



*Verbum*. The formal designation “Dogmatic Constitution” shows the importance that was ascribed to this text. Though it did not quite amount to a dogmatic definition, it nevertheless amounted to an expression of the highest teaching office of the Catholic Church.

The *Dei Verbum* was perhaps one of the most strongly debated texts of the Council and as such it had an exciting and complex pre-history. In the preparatory commission, circles of a more traditional bent managed to put



Cardinal Achille Liénart

forward a draft that was very conservative in its orientation and that would have turned back the wheel of history. Very quickly, however, it became clear that the majority of the council fathers disapproved of this draft. When on November 14, 1962 it was first proposed for discussion at a meeting marked by heated debates, it encountered heavy criticism. Cardinal Liénart of Lille expressed the opinion of many

of the Council fathers when he uttered the now famous and often cited words: *Hoc schema mihi non placet* (“I don’t like this draft”).

In spite of all the criticism, a complete rejection of the draft is defeated in the next council vote. However, in order to avoid a still more heated debate, John XXIII decides during the night to withdraw the schema on his own authority. The Pope appoints a new coordinating commission, which is endowed in equal proportions with representatives of the conservative and the progressive wings, with a commission to work out a new draft. One of its two chairmen is Cardinal Augustin Bea, who in the 1930s had been rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute. Since that time, he had been significantly contributing to the positive developments just mentioned in the relationship of the Church to biblical interpretation. In the end, however, it was to be three full years, till the last period of council sessions, before the Constitution on Revelation could finally be brought to a vote. After lengthy preparatory work, which demanded compromises from both sides, the Constitution was finally accepted on November 18, 1965 with 2,344 yes-votes and only 6 no-votes. It was solemnly proclaimed on the very same day.

In the light of this pre-history it is no surprise that the *Dei Verbum* comes across in part as a typical compromise text. The “ambiguity” encountered in many places in the text – which one could alternatively describe in more positive terms as “openness” of expression – for the most part affect those passages which have to do with doctrinal issues, such as the precise nature of revelation, the relationship between Scripture and tradition or the relationship of Scripture and magisterium. But the statements made by the *Dei Verbum* on the significance of Holy Scripture for the life of the Church and on the impor-

tance of a biblical interpretation appropriate for our time are indisputably positive and unambiguous.

## 2. “Magna Charta”: Essential contents of the *Dei Verbum*

Of the many substantive elements of the *Dei Verbum* only three will be highlighted here, all of which are of significance especially for the realm of the interpretation of the Bible in the Church.

### 2.1 Exegesis

For defining the relationship between biblical scholarship and the teaching office of the Church and for the question of the value and significance of scientific exegesis, articles 11–13 of the *Dei Verbum* (Chapter III) are of particular importance.

In article 12 the fundamental principles of historical criticism are quite clearly laid out, for the first time in the context of a conciliar document. Moreover, these principles are explicitly endorsed and acknowledged as necessary. The historical character of revelation and the human form of its transmission are emphasized, as is the important role a Magisterium. It is hardly surprising therefore that for many Catholic biblical scholars this very article 12 of the *Dei Verbum* represented something like the “Magna Charta” for their exegetical work.

The fact that Catholic biblical scholars have been able to move about freely for a long time now in the wide field of biblical interpretation, employing all the reasonable aids and methods, and that they are able to do so with considerable self-confidence – all of this they attribute in no small way to the Second Vatican Council and above all to the *Dei Verbum*.

The historical-critical methods, which at the time of the Council were still the storm center of debates regarding the task and the goal of Catholic biblical interpretation, have since been the subject of further developments, and the soft spots and limitations of the approach have long since been recognized. Nevertheless, that biblical texts have their histories, that they arose in a concrete historical and religious context and that the knowledge of this context is of importance even for a contemporary understanding and interpretation of these texts – that these central principles of biblical interpretation have become irrevocably anchored in the consciousness of the Church – all of this is due in no small part to the *Dei Verbum*. The scientific study of the Bible in Catholic circles has long since ceased to be dominated by the “classical” historical-critical questions (as was often the case in the years immediately following the Council). In the meantime, the repertory of exegetical methods has been considerably expanded. New approaches to the Bible continued and continue to be opened up, such as methods based on the dynamics of communication between



a text and its readers or those that adopt a canonical approach to the Bible, to mention just two of the more recent trends.

All of this attests to the fact that the *Dei Verbum* offered important impulses for the further development of a scientifically grounded biblical interpretation. To be honest, however, it should be mentioned that the implementation of the major lines of direction as well as the goals of the Constitution was by no means an entirely smooth process. Central pillars of the existing relationship between Holy Scripture, ecclesiastical teaching and scientific exegesis were removed by the *Dei Verbum*, but the concrete working out of exactly what it is that should replace them is a complex and many-sided process that is still very much ongoing.

## 2.2 Biblical pastoral ministry

The *Dei Verbum* also provided far-reaching inspiration for the area of biblical pastoral ministry. In this regard articles 21-26 (Chapter VI) are above all of importance.

Article 21 reads:

*The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. She has always maintained them, and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the Word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: "For the Word of God is living and active" (Heb. 4:12) and "it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32; see 1 Thess. 2:13).*

This first article together with the last article (26) constitutes the framework of the whole chapter. In both, the veneration of the Word of God is set in parallel with the veneration of the Eucharist. Both, the table of the bread and the table of the Word should be prepared for and accessible to all the faithful. Of special significance, too, is the statement that Holy Scripture must be "the supreme rule of faith" and the basis of all Christian preaching. Likewise central is the role that regular Bible studies play in education and in the life of clerics, as well as of all believers. For, as it says in article 25 citing the words of Saint Jerome: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."

The text goes on in article 22:

*Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful (christifidelibus aditus ad Sanctam Scripturam late pateat oportet). ... But since the Word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books.*

Here we encounter an excellent formulation of the Council. It describes the necessity and the character of a biblical pastoral ministry. To provide "easy access to Sacred Scripture" – this includes promoting the translation and distribution of the Bible as well as providing people with the resources and the opportunities to enter into a life-relevant dialogue with the Word of God. In article 25 this point is addressed in the following words:

*It devolves on sacred bishops ... to give the faithful entrusted to them suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books, especially the New Testament and above all the Gospels. This can be done through translations of the sacred texts, which are to be provided with the necessary and really adequate explanations so that the children of the Church may safely and profitably become conversant with the Sacred Scriptures and be penetrated with their spirit. Furthermore, editions of the Sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable footnotes, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation. Both pastors of souls and Christians generally should see to the wise distribution of these in one way or another.*

## 35 Years of CBF



Exactly a year after I took office as Director of the Catholic Biblical Association in Stuttgart came the meeting of the CBF in Bogota, which I experienced as very moving. The paper given by Carlos Mesters at that meeting I found really inspiring, as I did the open and forward-looking atmosphere of the meeting. Since that time it has become clear to me how important the CBF is for the solidarity of Catholic Biblical Associations worldwide, for mutual exchange, mutual stimulation in our work. I think of the many people I came to know, especially during the meeting in Bogota, who are inspired by the Bible. I realize that I am not alone with my problems here in Germany. To my surprise I have noticed how almost all Bible workers in basic communities

have difficulties with the hierarchical church. They complain of the lack of financial assistance, but above all of the lack of moral support. A worldwide problem. Even more so, I find it striking how little Bible work is cherished and fostered by the hierarchy. My impression is that although the hierarchy does nothing to hinder Bible work, neither is it particularly fostered or promoted.

Fr. Franz-Josef Ortkemper, Director Katholisches Bibelwerk (Catholic Biblical Association), Germany



In summary, it could be said that the *Dei Verbum*, particularly article 22, represents the “Magna Charta” for the work of all those who are actively engaged in biblical pastoral ministry. Their goal is to cultivate an awareness of the importance of the Bible and to support the formation of all the faithful in the right use of the Bible.

A number of other themes that were significantly impacted by the *Dei Verbum* could be cited here. Among these, the question of the importance of the Bible for the liturgy and for the education of clerics, and the central recognition of the fact that the Old and New Testaments belong together are two that merit attention. The necessity of interconfessional collaboration in the area of Bible translation should also be mentioned here. The *Dei Verbum* gives Catholic Christians the explicit commission to work on Bible translations, and to do so in collaboration with their sisters and brothers of other confessions (cf. *DV22*: “And should the opportunity arise and the Church authorities approve, if these translations are produced in co-operation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them”). This conciliar assignment issued to Catholics has resulted in collaboration and cooperation with many institutions and organizations from other churches and ecclesial communities.

This brief and cursory backward look shows that the *Dei Verbum* truly represents a milestone in the history of the Catholic Church and its relation to Holy Scripture. The fruits of this remarkable document have indeed been many and various.

## II. The first 40 years after *Dei Verbum*

What results would emerge if we took stock today of the nearly forty years of the reception history of this conciliar text? Here too, without making any claim to completeness, we will highlight especially three points.

### 1. The awakening of biblical pastoral ministry

In the course of the years following the *Dei Verbum* a number of new approaches to the Bible saw rapid development. A real explosion took place in Catholic Bible production. Alongside the existing Bible translations,

new translations were and are being produced in numerous countries of the world. Pastorally oriented commentaries on the Bible were also being written. Materials and study aids for biblical pastoral ministry likewise began to appear, as did Bible correspondence courses and other related activities at the grass-roots level. New approaches to the Bible, such as bibliodrama, for example, were developed; and new life was breathed into old proven methods such as that of *lectio divina*. The training of clerics and lay catechists – the formation of the formators – was thoroughly revisited in the light of the newly discovered central role of Scripture that took place in the years following the publication of the *Dei Verbum*. More recently, the advantages of the “newer” media and means of communication such as the computer, the internet and e-mail have also increasingly been seen as a useful resource for the biblical pastoral ministry. In short: in all the regions of the world, biblical pastoral ministry is experiencing a dramatic upturn, and the impact of this biblical animation of the pastoral life of the Church is almost everywhere to be felt.

### 2. The Catholic Biblical Federation

It is hardly an exaggeration to describe the Catholic Biblical Federation as a “child” of the Second Vatican Council, since the Federation was created specifically to carry out the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council concerning the Bible, particularly with respect to *Dei Verbum*, Chapter VI. The *Dei Verbum* is thus the lead-text of the Federation, and Chapter VI of the Constitution its real motto and the leitmotif of its work.

The idea of such an organization for promoting the Catholic biblical apostolate was already proposed in 1950 by the Austrian Canonist Pius Parsch, one of the protagonists for a renewed liturgy and an awakened interest in Scripture. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1964, during the third session of the Second Vatican Council, a request for an organization of this kind was again made by Bishop Emile Cekada of Skopje, former Yugoslavia. The idea was then brought to fruition by Cardinal Bea who in 1968 called together for consultation in Rome the existing directors of Catholic biblical-pastoral organizations. Finally, on April 16, 1969 the Federation was

## 35 Years of CBF



The encounter of persons coming from Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America and Europe made me poignantly aware of the richness of the religious and cultural settings in which the biblical pastoral ministry attempts to take root, of the multiplicity of forms which this ministry takes and must take, but also of the interest, necessity and difficulty of bringing these different approaches into a respectful and constructive dialogue with each other. This is for me one of the major challenges for the CBF as a federation. It must implement structures which permit this common reflection and help it to bear fruit in dialogue with the individual organisms, with subregions and regions and which seek to communicate to the larger Catholic Christian community their common concerns, convictions and commitments.

*Thomas P. Osborne, coordinator of the Southern and Western European subregion 1996–2002, Luxembourg*



founded, also in cooperation with Cardinal Willebrands, chair of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

Till today the CBF remains affiliated with what is now called the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and it has for a long time been *the* institution for the biblical pastoral ministry within the Catholic Church. First called "World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate", its name was simplified to "Catholic Biblical Federation" in 1990. Today the CBF is represented by 311 members in 127 countries of the world. Thousands of women and men have become engaged in the most



Cardinal Augustin Bea

varied realms of biblical pastoral ministry and Bible work. As priests, religious, catechists and dedicated lay men and women they perform the work of evangelization in the most varied contexts and cultures. They translate the Bible into local languages in which no translation yet exists (and there are still thousands of

such languages). They train women and men, catechists, teachers, lay collaborators or future priests. They do serious research on the books of Scripture and produce biblical pastoral materials for community or classroom work. They develop new Bible-reading methods, e.g., for Bible circles in "small Christian communities", or offer biblical seminars and workshops. Their contributions extend to social projects in education and community work, as well as to the production of periodicals, radio or television programs – and much more. Thus, the Catholic Biblical Federation is a vibrant network that creates bonds between people of all regions, cultures and nations.

### 3. The Instruction on the "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" and other documents

The *Dei Verbum* was to remain for many years the most important official announcement of the ecclesiastical Magisterium on the meaning of the Bible and its interpretation in the life of the Catholic Church. But even during this post-conciliar period a series of further documents and pronouncements devoted to this were to appear. Among these the most important is undoubtedly the instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled: "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church", which was published in 1993 on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, respectively, of the two so-called biblical encyclical "Providentissimus Deus" (Leo XIII) and "Divino Afflante Spiritu" (Pius XII). This text first offers a comprehensive and instructive overview of the methods and tools of biblical scholarship that have become more developed and specialized since the *Dei Verbum*. It sketches guidelines for handling these methods and puts in place a number of fundamental hermeneutical principles. The summary of methods here is fairly

exhaustive, and alongside the historical critical methods, newer scientific and literary methods as well as insights from the human sciences are also taken into account. Particularly important in this connection is the unambiguous and sharp rejection by the commission of every form of fundamentalistic reading of the Bible. Of special interest is the last part of the document, which concerns itself explicitly with the significance of Scripture and its interpretation in the life of the Church. There can be no doubt, however, that it confirms once again the central role of Scripture in the life of the Church and the special importance of biblical pastoral ministry, or the biblical apostolate.

Further publications of the Magisterium that pointed the way forward on the question of the interpretation of the Bible in the Church will be only briefly mentioned here: such as the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI "On proclaiming the Gospel in the world of today" (1975) and another document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission from the year 2001, which treated the question of the meaning of the Old Testament for Jews and for Christians ("The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible"). These documents, too, are to be seen in the broader context of the reception of the *Dei Verbum*.



During the constituent assembly of the WCFBA (now CBF); in the centre Pope Paul VI and Cardinal Willebrands

### On the way to Canaan

This incomplete and above all historically intended backward look at the origin and influence (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of the *Dei Verbum* shows that this text is still a vital force even four decades after its publication and that it continues to have a profound influence on the life of the Church. The rediscovery of the Word of God, which had begun even before the Council, came to full fruition through the work of the Second Vatican Council. In the time after the Council, the *Dei Verbum* became fertile ground for numerous positive developments. The hope expressed by the Council that "the treasure of revelation, entrusted to the Church, may more and more fill the hearts



of men" (*DV 26*) has been brought to fruition and continues to be brought to fruition in the most varied realms.

In spite of all these positive developments and events that have taken place in the course of the last forty years there still remain open questions which have posed new challenges (and opened new opportunities) that could hardly have been dreamed of by the council fathers.

The world of today faces a great variety of challenges and problems. It is not only global challenges such as the problem of the growing influence of fundamentalism, the crisis of the churches and of faith, the difficulties of interreligious and intercultural dialogue that must be confronted; rather, such challenges must be faced in the narrower ecclesiastical realm as well.

The Bible as the Word of God, with its life and faith histories can make an important contribution to the confronting of such questions. When it is discovered and interpreted anew, in every age and by every generation, as a witness to the relationship of God with His people; when its liberating message is unraveled and applied to people's actual life situations; when men and women rediscover the multifaceted character of their own lives in the texts and life histories of the "ancient" biblical books – then Scripture is unfolding its potential to transform human lives and with them the world. This is what makes it visible, almost palpable, that Scripture is at one and the same time a historical document of the past and a faith witness for the present, that these aspects do not stand in contradiction or competition, but that they belong inseparably together.

Such an understanding has an impact on biblical pastoral praxis and on exegetical work, as well as on the way the two relate to each other. The question as to how mutual exchange and interplay between academic-scientific studies on the one hand and the concrete, practical work in the field of biblical pastoral ministry on the other can be improved and intensified still remains a challenge. More than ever is it necessary to find methods (and persons, too) that have the capacity to build

bridges, so that scientific study of the Bible and biblical pastoral praxis do not approach Scripture in their own independent ways, but can rather be seen as two panels that belong together, of one and the same door. I mean by this that door which stands wide open and enables access to Scripture.

Revelations need to be worked out, absorbed. Compared to what would be a "normal" reception period for an Ecumenical Council in the Catholic Church, the now almost 40 years that have elapsed since the Second Vatican Council and the *Dei Verbum* would actually appear to be a relatively short time. In such matters, things tend to be measured in centuries rather than in decades. In other words: today, 40 years later, we still find ourselves in the mid-phase of the impact and reception of this important document, but by no means at its end. Much has been achieved in this time, important goals have already been reached on the road traveled by the word of God, a number of milestones have already been passed along the way. But at the same time much remains to be done. The peak-experience of the Council is an event of history, the return into ecclesial reality is our present. But the journey toward the Promised Land continues ...

(Transl: L. Maluf)

<sup>1</sup> *Robinson, Robert Bruce*, Roman Catholic Exegesis since *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. Hermeneutical Implications (=SBL.DS 111), Atlanta 1988, p. 23.

## 35 Years of CBF



The Catholic, and by this I mean the worldwide and comprehensive unity in diversity has taken on not only one but many faces for me through the CBF: lay, religious, priests, bishops, members of many different cultures, nationalities and language communities, representatives of different spiritualities and theological traditions – all of these have marked and continue to mark the life of the CBF.

The CBF has thus become a mirror of the Bible itself, with its 72 books, its numerous and highly varied characters and narratives, with the great lines of hope for redemption through Jesus Christ, of trust in the one God, and of love for the poor and disadvantaged, but also with the tension-filled multiplicity of different world and life experiences.

*Daniel Kosch, EC moderator 1996–2001, Switzerland*



## Life of the Federation

### AFRICA

#### Ghana: Bringing God's Word Down to Earth. Dei Verbum Course 2004

*"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it."*

This prophetic word from the Book of Isaiah (Is 55:10-11) was the source for the motto of the Dei Verbum course 2004 "That God's Word might come down to earth" which took place in Adoagyiri-Nsawam from August 9<sup>th</sup> to September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

30 participants, two thirds of them lay, from nine of the country's different dioceses took part in the course, among them many women. During the forty-day course, experts offered work sessions on a wide variety of topics. The spectrum ranged from the purely biblical (Kingdom of God, message of Jesus, the land of the Bible, etc.) to general ecclesiastical (Church as community of communities, the Second Vatican Council etc.) to biblical pastoral themes (Bible-sharing, *lectio divina*, Basic Bible Seminar etc.). The personal exchanges people were able to have with one another and the information they were able to share on pastoral activities went a long way toward restoring a closer union of hearts and minds among the multipliers and animators for Bible work in Ghana – so that God's Word might cause the earth "to sprout and shoot". ■

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### AMERICAS

#### Ecuador: Meeting of the Members of FEBIC LAC in the Bolivarian Zone

Representatives of the CBF member organizations from the zone of the so-called Bolivarian countries of Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela held a meeting from September 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004, in Betania, the center of social education of the Ecuadorian Bishops' Conference, near the capital city of Quito.

The meeting adopted as its motto: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). It afforded us the opportunity to come together as brothers and sisters, to share our experiences, and to reflect on the significance of a biblical animation of the Church's pastoral ministry and how it should be conceived concretely, especially in light of the upcoming 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum*.

Alexander M. Schweitzer, General Secretary of the CBF, was with us and his presence and active participation strengthened our bonds of union with the Federation. Also present at the meeting was Fr. Efraim Martinez, Executive Secretary of the Department of Mission and Spirituality of the Latin American Bishops' Council (CELAM).

We devoted a good part of the first day of this meeting to getting to know each other better and to sharing our experiences, successes and challenges with one another. The next

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step was to analyze and try to comprehend these experiences in the light of the so-called biblical animation of the pastoral ministry which was so strongly promoted by *Dei Verbum*. To this end, Mgr. Diego Padrón, Archbishop of Cumaná, Venezuela, and member of the Executive Committee of the CBF, offered some valuable keys for a better understanding of this document in his paper entitled “*Dei Verbum* in the Life of the Church.” Fr. Jesús Antonio Weisensee, the subregional coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean, likewise provided helpful insights, with his talk on: “*Dei Verbum* and the FEBIC LAC”.

On the second day of the meeting we took up the task of reflecting on the criteria, the methods and the strategies of a biblical animation of pastoral ministry in the Church as present in our individual countries. The results of these reflections represent important road-markers for our future work.

With respect to the question of *criteria*, we agreed that Holy Scripture must be the soul of pastoral ministry. The Bible should be a pervasive presence in every pastoral field. It is not so much a question of an entirely new pastoral ministry, but rather of a new mentality that develops gradually in the direction of helping us to focus on the Bible as a source of inspiration for the work of evangelization. Biblical pastoral ministry and biblical animation are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are complementary, because the goal of biblical pastoral ministry is precisely the biblical animation of the whole of pastoral ministry in the context of our Latin American situations.

If we take up the *methods* of the biblical animation of pastoral ministry, in light of our different situations and experiences in the various countries, our objective is not uniformity but rather the mutual enrichment that comes with the variety of perspectives. Our intention is not to prescribe specific methods, but rather to develop general schemes that can help us discover commonalities that exist within this variety. In this sense the whole pastoral ministry should serve as a point of departure for reading and illuminating our lives in the light of the Bible and the Bible in the context of our lives – while maintaining the integrity of the Word and its contemplative appropriation, which are in no way threatened by the newer hermeneutical approaches to Bible-reading.

As for the *strategies* of a biblical animation of pastoral ministry, it seems urgently important that we sensitize every level of Church life to the necessity and the significance of biblical pastoral ministry and of the biblical animation of the apostolate. In this connection, frequent recourse to *Dei Verbum* and the publicizing of its ideas are also of fundamental importance. It is a matter of rethinking our own attitude with respect to the Word of God and creating training courses – whose purpose is not only to understand the Bible, but also to experience it in prayer, at a variety of levels and in a variety of ways (through forms of popular piety, Bible months, seminars, etc.).

On the second workday of the meeting we also gave some thought to the possibilities of a biblical animation of specific pastoral fields. The participants could choose here between five work-groups, on the following topics: indigenous pastoral ministry, pastoral ministry among the black population, pastoral ministry and women, pastoral ministry and the state (with emphasis on migration) and ecumenical dialogue. These themes further enriched our reflections on criteria, methods and strategies of a biblical animation of pastoral ministry, with their focus on the various forms of contextual Bible-reading and various hermeneutical approaches to the Bible in the churches of the individual countries.

The third day was devoted to the topic “Biblical Spirituality”. Very helpful here was the paper of Fr. Gabriel Naranjo, cm, on the theme “Biblical Spirituality of Pastoral Ministry”, wherein he demonstrated that our Church of Latin America is particularly open to a biblical spirituality. This is especially manifest for example in its spirituality of exodus, of journeying, of liberation and of solidarity. Ultimately, biblical pastoral ministry is an ongoing invitation to read the biblical text through the medium of the so-called “contextual” readings. Such forms of biblical reading are of great assistance in the search for the affirma-



tion of specific identities, whether of the indigenous native, the African American, that of an urban, a feminine, or other identity.

Like any form of spirituality, biblical spirituality should be rooted in the socio-cultural and religious reality of peoples. Authentic, contextual Bible-reading must therefore take the concrete realities of daily life as its point of departure, so that it can promote avenues of ecclesial communion through specific hermeneutical approaches.

Training sessions devoted to *lectio divina* are a must. This prayerful reading of Scripture has for ages been an acknowledged method in the Church. It is centered on the person of Christ who is the focal point of our peoples' yearning to hear the Word of God. But we are likewise aware that God is not heard only in the written word of Holy Scripture but also in the cry of pain of our peoples for a better life, in the silent cry of so many cultures to which the world pays no attention at all.

This second meeting of the members of the Bolivarian countries showed in an impressive way what an enormous wealth of human values and forms of spirituality there are in our local communities and churches.



It was also a meeting that challenged, that inspired, that offered new hope. It was a time and an opportunity that came to us as a gift of God, to enable us to grow in faith; an opportunity to experience the meaning of God's Word as a source of the Father's revealed love and as nourishment for our lives and our spirituality; an opportunity to intensify our ongoing efforts to become ever more qualified agents of the divine Word, ready for dialogue within the Church and with the world, in the service of the Gospel.

We fully identify with the spirit and recommendations of *Dei Verbum*, in the full conviction and certainty that Holy Scripture is a health-giving nourishment (DV 24), that it constitutes "the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life" (DV 21) – making possible a vital encounter with the Lord Jesus. Holy Scripture does indeed offer a means for the renewal of the whole Church, for it is through the Word of God that we acquire "the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" (DV 25, and cf. Phil 3:8).



Following are some extracts from the Final Statement of the meeting:

From the teamwork done in the workshops, and from the discussions that took place in plenary session it is possible to draw the following summary conclusions:

- ❑ The Constitution *Dei Verbum* has an importance for the Church similar to that of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the other two Constitutions of Vatican II. Nevertheless, it has not been taken sufficiently into consideration in each of the different pastoral ministries of the Church nor has it been promoted in pedagogical form, in such a way that its contents and message would reach all faithful Catholics.
- ❑ This situation is a serious obstacle to the development of the biblical pastoral ministry and makes more remote the hope that the faithful receive a biblical initiation that is adequate to the renewed catechesis.
- ❑ The biblical animation of ministry is a novel concept that emerges from *Dei Verbum* (cf. 21) and is the object of biblical pastoral ministry.
- ❑ The biblical pastoral ministry is not just one ministry among others; rather it has precedence over all the other particular ministries and is a response to what is prescribed by Vatican II: "all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture." (DV 21)

The service that biblical pastoral ministry can provide for the whole life of the Church is:

- ❑ to invite people to adopt Sacred Scripture as the foundation of their life plan, as a source of spirituality and sustenance for the whole Christian life (DV 21);
- ❑ to promote and motivate a direct experiential relationship with the Lord in communion with other believers, striving to insure that the Word of God written in the Bible be heard, deepened, shared, celebrated, lived and proclaimed to others, that it might be the soul of the whole life of the Church (cf. DV 24);
- ❑ to provide a methodology based on DV 23 that would integrate knowledge, experience and witness ("to enlighten their minds, strengthen their wills, and set men's hearts on fire with the love of God");
- ❑ to favor ecumenical dialogue;
- ❑ to sensitize the Episcopal Conferences to the idea that they should assume as their proper duty the biblical animation of the pastoral ministry.

(Report: Jaime Castillo)

On September 13 and 14, 2004, so directly at the close of the zonal meeting of the Bolivarian countries, the yearly meeting of the Executive Committee of the subregion of Latin America and the Caribbean (FEBIC LAC) took place. Members of this committee are the zonal coordinators of the subregion, the subregional coordinator, both of the current representatives of Latin America in the Executive Committee of the CBF and the CBF General Secretary. The meeting was hosted by the Community of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) in Quito. The premises of the Centro Bíblico that sits on a rise at the outskirts of the town, but more importantly still the hospitality of the Divine Word Missionaries' community offered an eminently suitable and stimulating climate.

The meeting dealt with questions surrounding the upcoming change in office of the subregional coordinator, Fr. Jesús Antonio Weisensee (see the "Newsflash"), the shaping of a subregional presence on the CBF website, as well as the contribution of FEBIC LAC to the International Congress on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* in September 2005 in Rome. As a venue for the next subregional meeting, which will take place in July 2006, Panama was suggested.

(Report: Alexander M. Schweitzer)



## Brazil: CEBI – 25 Years in Service of the Word

In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, almost all the countries of Latin America were ruled by military dictators. These governments attempted to silence civil society and to convince people that only the power of weapons could maintain order and thereby protect progress. They actually managed to stifle many gains; many freshly sown fields were destroyed and the harvesting of many crops prevented. But there was one form of resistance the dictators never anticipated: the resistance of those who allowed themselves to be consistently guided by the Spirit, along the lines of Is 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord Jahwe has been given to me, for Yahwe has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor; to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty of captives, freedom to those in prison”. Thousands of groups and communities managed to keep the flame of hope alive, even amid the greatest sufferings and the most discouraging setbacks. Moreover, they took the initiative to launch projects that not only contributed, and still contribute, to the process of re-democratization, but they also put on display a viable path of survival and of brotherly solidarity and community.

These projects were always marked by a very robust mysticism, grounded in the so-called popular Bible reading (*leitura popular*), a form of biblical interpretation oriented to the life-situation of “simple” folk. Here, the people themselves rediscovered and appropriated what had been kept from them for centuries: the Bible. Inspired by the insights of liberation theology, numerous communities made the Bible once again a source for life and nourishment along their way, with the organization of the people and their struggle to acquire full human and civil rights.



In this connection and in this spirit CEBI (*Centro de Estudos Bíblicos* – Center for Bible Studies) was launched 25 years ago. CEBI does not claim credit for the rise of the *leitura popular*, which is primarily a fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work. But it set for itself the task of spreading and promoting the *leitura popular*, which we like to refer to as the “great people’s college,” where the exchange of knowledge and the living word enable us always, and with great joy, to utter the prayer: “I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what is pleased you to do” (Matt 11:25-26).

Our methodology does not take the Bible as an end in itself. Scripture is rather a lamp to our feet, a light for our journey (cf. Ps 119:105); it is a lighthouse whose role it is to illuminate life itself. For this reason our principal concern, our starting point and endpoint is the day-to-day lives of human beings, especially the lives of the millions of poor people who live in our continent and throughout the world. And: life in its totality. For this reason we read the Bible in a spirit of ecumenical openness and strive for a new relationship between man and woman and a new relationship to nature and the environment. So it is that feminist and gender hermeneutics, an ecologically oriented Bible-reading, a Bible-reading from the point of view of the native and of black identity have gradually made their way into the texture of our methodology. All of this constitutes a path of spirituality, a continuous striving to overcome the dualisms and dichotomies that are so strongly rooted in Christian-Western culture.

The activities of CEBI occur above all in the context of small groups and in the so-called Bible schools that exist in almost every Brazilian state. These groups meet with a certain regularity to study the Bible, to address the realities of their everyday lives, to be together and to celebrate together. They thus rely both on their faith and on their experience. Many of them write down their reflections and pass them on as study-aids to numerous other groups. In order to support such initiatives, the CEBI operates a publication program (even using its own printing presses) so as to insure that the material can be made available to people in an accessible language and at an affordable price.

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The CEBI offers a variety of courses and ongoing-educational events, and in addition a Bible correspondence course, which at present has over 4,000 participants. In order to insure a more systematic and academic education for the numerous group leaders, the program *DABAR* has been established. This amounts to a specialization course for biblical pastoral ministry in the broadest sense of the term.

Today the CEBI is present in thousands of groups and communities, in all the States of Brazil and in other countries of Latin America, Europe and Africa as well. It has joined in a partnership with the so-called *associações de moradores/as* (associations in which the inhabitants of slums form a kind of union), with popular health associations, with organizations committed to work for women and their rights, indigenous people and people of African origin, farmers, and people who are homeless or landless. They are also active with aid agencies for children, young people, environmental agencies and other institutions and groups.

In this way, and always with an attentive ear to what the Spirit is saying to the churches (Rev 2:29), we are striving to become sign and symbol of the Word that transforms, the Word that brings hope, in the service of God's kingdom and in search for life to the full.

(Report: Edmilson Schinelo)

### God's Word on its Way Through Peru

*Sr. Eleana Salas, fma, is the representative for biblical pastoral ministry in the Commission for Catechesis and Biblical Pastoral Ministry of the Peruvian Bishops' Conference. In the following article she reports on several pastoral initiatives and project activities conducted during the past year.*

"...so that your Excellency may learn how well-founded the teaching is that you have received." (Lk 1:4). We reiterated the reason Luke gives for having written his Gospel countless times in 2004: He wrote it for his community at the end of the first century, but also for people nowadays, at the beginning of the third millennium, who wish to rediscover the living countenance of Christ in Holy Scripture.

"Spending a year with St. Luke" was our motto for 2004. This expressed our hope that it would not just be for one week, our annual Bible week, that we would come closer to God's Word, specifically in the Gospel of St. Luke, but that we would be studying this Gospel for the whole year with the assiduity recommended in the Conciliar Document *Dei Verbum*.

The "Guide to Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Peru" which was published last year gave new impetus to various projects and initiatives. It was our goal to place God's Word not only into the hands, but above all into the hearts of our brothers and sisters in Peru.

Following steps were taken to accompany God's Word on its way among the Peruvian people:

1. We established a **biblical pastoral team** composed of members from the Commission for Catechesis and Biblical Pastoral Ministry, from the Bishops' Conference, from the organization "Lectura Pastoral de la Biblia" (biblical pastoral reading circle) and from SOBICAIN (Sociedad Bíblica Católica Internacional). Also included in the team were a few co-workers of the Peruvian Bible Society. In almost two years of work, with all of its highs and lows, we were able to create a climate of sincere brotherly, sisterly and ecumenical friendship. Thanks to this team whose membership and enthusiasm continues to grow, both quantity and quality of the pastoral initiatives have been steadily increased.

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- 2. Teaching aids for biblical pastoral ministry:** Up until a short time ago we drew upon biblical pastoral aids from Ecuador, for which we are very grateful. However, we have come to believe that our team is meanwhile in a position to produce its own materials. At first we developed a medium-range plan to produce materials on the four Gospels. In 2003 the focus was: "Listening to God's Word." We declared 2004 to be the Year of St. Luke and published a brochure called "Towards Reconciliation and Joy". We specifically chose this title because of the climate of violence and the division of our people which require the forgiveness and joy proclaimed in this Gospel. At present we are working on a brochure on Matthew for the year 2005.
- 3. Meeting for biblical animators and coordinators in biblical pastoral ministry:** At the beginning of 2004 we organized a conference for all diocesan coordinators and biblical facilitators of individual groups and biblical organizations. More than 60 people attended, among them our own two bishops and twelve Protestants. We addressed the basic aspects of St. Luke's Gospel and were able to complete a workbook on it which each participant then took home. This introduction designed for the whole year is available in various versions according to the age of each target group. Everyone was greatly motivated by the meeting and it will certainly have its effect on our work in 2005 when we focus on *Dei Verbum* and the Gospel of St. Matthew.
- 4. Fourth National Bible Contest for pupils:** This contest was meant to motivate younger children and secondary pupils throughout the year to read and immerse themselves in the Gospel of St. Luke. The participants, pupils from elementary and secondary schools, were divided into three age groups. The national contest was to be just as ecumenical as our biblical pastoral team was, and as the school contests at local level. In order to achieve this we approached various organizations for support, as for instance the ONDEC (National Office for Catholic Education), the representatives of the diocesan liaison offices of ODEC and the "Bible Houses" of the Peruvian Bible Society. We had 5,000 information brochures with registration forms printed at first – not enough by far, since more than 8,400 pupils registered! This Bible contest made for a lot of work and worry since we had promised the winner of the oldest group a trip to the Holy Land, but then we did not get the support we had hoped for from certain organizations which had been more generous in the past. Nevertheless, everyone who worked on the project was extremely gratified. We had the feeling that we did indeed attain our goal in view of the fact that so many pupils read this Gospel with great interest. The nine winners have been chosen in the meantime, most of them from the provinces, and we will be organizing a trip to the Holy Land (alternatively Rome) for the best one. Some of the runners-up are going to Cusco or taking part in a summer-camp while others have already received bicycles as prizes.
- 5. Regional meetings:** In 2004 we also organized five regional meetings for representatives of all Peruvian dioceses. The purpose was to exchange information on applied catechesis and biblical pastoral ministry in a somewhat more homogeneous context (bearing in mind the great cultural diversity of our country). It was also an opportunity to focus attention on the "Guide to Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Peru" and to discuss a few basic elements of the Gospel of St. Luke in detail. The participants were already familiar with the brochure "On the Road to Reconciliation and Joy" and this was meant to be a part of their continued reflection throughout the year. Finally, the brochure "Outline for Education in the Faith in Peru", developed by a catechetical team, was presented to the attendees.
- 6. Bible weeks:** In order to deepen knowledge on the Gospel of St. Luke we offered Bible weeks with interesting topics every other month, five in all: "Introduction to the Gospel of St. Luke", "The Role of Women in the Third Gospel", "Discipleship according to St. Luke" and "Mercy". There was a group of the faithful who did not miss one meeting, they became ever more familiar with the Gospel message and found joy and satisfaction in their profound new insights.



7. **Bible month 2004:** Since we fortunately have a large and diverse team we were able to offer a broad spectrum of Bible projects in September:

- ❑ **Fourth Bible week:** This took place at the beginning of September under the motto “Mercy as proclaimed in the Gospel of St. Luke”.
- ❑ **Second Bible Expo:** The Bible exposition offered a variety of opportunities to acquaint people with the Bible and a broad spectrum of biblical products and materials: Bibles, religious literature, CDs, art objects, posters etc., produced by both Catholic and Protestant publishers. More than 7,000 people visited the Bible Expo which took place from September 24 to October 3, 2004.
- ❑ **Bible museum:** A great attraction was the “smallest Bible in the world” from Indonesia. Many found the info plaque on a displayed “dinar” (ancient Roman coin) very interesting and also an exhibit of oil similar to that used by the woman to anoint Jesus, priced at almost 300 dinars! The patience and work entailed in translating the New Testament into more than 20 of the languages spoken in the regions of the Sierra and the jungles of Peru drew great respect.
- ❑ **Lecture series:** There were lectures every afternoon on the Gospel of St. Luke from a Trinitarian perspective. Topics ranged from “The Image of Christ According to St. Luke” “The Father”, “Prayer”, “Mercy”, “Women’s Role” etc. Starting point was the question how each topic was reflected in this profound third Gospel.
- ❑ **Children’s show:** On Saturday and Sunday afternoon the young children had the opportunity to take part in an entertaining show in which clowns and animators communicated ideas and messages inspired by the Word of God and proclaimed in the Gospels.
- ❑ **Workshop on religious studies:** 100 participants attended this workshop which took place from September 27 to October 1, 2004. The work-groups were headed by both Catholic and Protestant religious scholars and following topics were dealt with: history of the Bible in Peru, homiletics, reading the Bible from a pastoral perspective, aids and methods in biblical pastoral ministry.
- ❑ **Youth festival:** Representatives of various types of music took part, among them P. Diego who is very popular in Peru. The high quality of the performances made the organizers and many in the audience wish for similar events in the future, offering opportunities to preach in the language and rhythm of the youth.
- ❑ **Finale of the National Bible Contest:** Of the original 8,400 participants in the local Bible contests 36 representing the various regions took part in the finale. After a written test 20 were singled out to take part in the oral quiz. The tension felt by the young participants was shared – at least in part – by us jury members; we rejoiced and suffered with them. Loud applause from the crowded hall accompanied the answers which showed unusually good knowledge of the Gospel. All of the winners but one came from the provinces. We will always remember the enthusiasm shown on that evening! Since we cannot organize such an event each year, every region will be holding their own contests on the remaining Gospels in the coming years. The next nation-wide contest is planned to take place in three years.

**Celebration of prayer – day of the Bible:** The month of September, Bible month, is a special reminder to our Christians on the message of the Bible and on the work of Saint Jerome, the great interreligious church scholar and author of the Vulgate (together with Jewish theologians of his time), and was thus an appropriate month for a celebration of prayer. As text we chose the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) which shows how mercy can take on concrete form. Comments and meditations on the text were offered by the Catholic bishop who heads our communion, an Anglican bishop, a Presbyterian pastor and a Catholic priest, all of them causing our hearts to glow. A group of the disabled, people suffering from AIDS or cancer, and a group of single mothers were invited as guests of honor as they represent those groups nowadays who are often pushed aside by society, and who we hope will now find the strength they need in the biblical message. They



presented the roses that we distributed among each other with the final benediction: "Peace be with you. Let us be as brothers and sisters to each other!"

I am beginning to understand more and more why praise is mentioned so often in the Bible. Here people witnessed firsthand the miracles of the Lord. Now I understand the joy of the two disciples who listened to Jesus all afternoon when he explained the Scriptures to them: They felt their hearts burning within! (cf. Lk 24,32) We, too, even though exhausted, gave thanks with full hearts to the risen Lord who had been among us the whole time.

(Report: Sr. Eleana Salas, fma)

## ASIA / OCEANIA

### Philippines: Silver Jubilee Celebration of John Paul I Biblical Center

John Paul I Biblical Center (JPIBC) in Vigan City, Philippines, celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year with religious services, special prayers and a regional biblical workshop.

JPIBC, founded in 1979, with two Divine Word Missionaries and a Benedictine Sister playing significant roles, is the regional biblical center for the 14 dioceses in Northern Luzon and the Cordillera. It is at the service of the local Church whose bishops, accompanied through the years by the Chairman of the Board of Directors, Archbishop Edmundo M. Abaya of Nueva Segovia, have both guided and supported it and also availed themselves of its services. The center has become a providential instrument for the implementation of the directives of the II Vatican Council concerning Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church, especially Chapter VI of *Dei Verbum* which pleads that "easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (DV 22). Its basic Bible seminar using the "Vigan Method – a simple method of lectio divina in groups" both of which have been translated into many languages and are in practice in several countries in Asia and Africa, has helped many Catholics to discover the Bible as their basic prayer book and book of life. JPIBC joined the CBF in 1982, thus becoming the first CBF Associate Member in the Philippines.

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The silver jubilee was celebrated with services and special prayers for the biblical apostolate and the work of the center on parish and diocesan level. Highlight and closing-event was the 22<sup>nd</sup> Regional Biblical Workshop for Northern Luzon under the motto "God's Word: Living Hope and Lasting Peace" which took place from September 27 to 30. In an "atmosphere of prayer, gratitude, joy and hope" (final statement) the participants –



bishops, priests, religious and laity – "reflected on the past, the present and the future of the biblical apostolate in the Northern Luzon Church" (FS). Three talks were held to mark JPIBC's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the first by one of its Founders and CBF General



Secretary of many years, Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, svd. His talk “Remembering” was not just a tribute to the roots, foundation and first two-and-a-half decades of work by the center, it also gave clear evidence of JPIBC’s importance and its influence not only in the Philippines but worldwide. Main celebrant-homilist of the Silver jubilee thanksgiving Mass on September 29, Most Rev. Arturo Bastes, svd, chairman of the Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate (ECBA) and moderator of the CBF Executive Committee reflected on “The Present Trends of the Biblical Apostolate” and pointed out the difficulties and challenges encountered by ministers of the Word today. Most Rev. Cornelio Wigwigan, vicar of the Apostolic Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe and one of the first collaborators in biblical ministry in the region, described his vision of the future of the biblical apostolate in southeast Asia and outlined the path to walk and the direction in which the Spirit of God is leading in his contemplation “JPIBC at 25: Towards the Future”.

In the workshop’s Final Statement the participants commit themselves:

- ☐ to working more intensively and with dedication to help realize the desire of the Fathers at Vatican II, to provide the laity easier access to God’s Word (*Dei Verbum 22*);
- ☐ to serve always in close coordination with our pastors and other ministers towards the realization of Northern Luzon Church’s pastoral thrust of building and sustaining basic ecclesial Communities;
- ☐ to learn to appreciate the beauty and richness of our cultures, discovering in them the seeds of the Word.
- ☐ to continue finding new and creative ways to making the Good News known to the women and men of our time.

They further state:

In the realization of this commitment we need JPIBC to continue journeying with us, providing us the much needed encouragement, inspiration, assistance and support as it has always done.

Word files with full text of the three talks can be obtained from the CBF General Secretariat; please send your request to [bdv@c-b-f.org](mailto:bdv@c-b-f.org). ☐

## EUROPE /MIDDLE EAST

### **Czech Republic: Annual Meeting of the Subregion of Central Europe**

The annual meeting of the CBF subregion of Central Europe was held from September 6 to 9, 2004 at the Czech Biblical Association in Dolany near Olomouc; it was held as a directors’ conference with enlarged participation according to a rotation system and was hosted by the diligent team of the Biblical Association under the directorship of Petr Chalupa.

The agenda included various items offering on the one hand the opportunity to exchange information on projects and ideas ripening to fruition in various countries in the past year, a few examples being:

- ☐ The Hungarian Biblical Association is working on a concordance to the Bible which should be finished in two to three years. The Romanes/Lovari Bible translation is progressing well. The New Testament is already finished and was published in 2002; the Old Testament should be ready by the end of 2005. Apart from this project, over 1,000 people took part in biblical pastoral seminars for biblical disseminators.



- In Romania the Children's and Youth Biblecamps continue in popularity and follow-up meetings are now being offered. A Bible day is planned for 2005 for the eight deaneries of Transylvania.
- The Croatian Biblical Association also contributed towards a Year of the Bible which was organized in 2003. Alongside the intensification of media work (among other things there are now weekly broadcasts on biblical topics on national TV) a Bible correspondence course (*e-learning*) was developed. The synod of the archdiocese of Zagreb devoted itself especially to consolidating efforts in the entire biblical pastoral field.
- Biblical pastoral activities in Slovenia were especially marked by the country's new relationship to Europe because of the expansion of the European Union (EU). The goal of the efforts was to transcend the borders in people's minds now that the actual borders of the country have been opened.
- A second national Bible Sunday was held in Slovakia in 2004 together with the Slovakian Bible Society. Many children and youths participated in the Youth Bible olympiade which mostly took place in the schools. Moreover, a Bible exposition on the Holy Land was opened.
- The Bible olympiade was also a huge success in Poland, with university scholarships being offered along with other prizes. The range of the educational project Hieronymus (target group are pupils, teachers and catechumens) was increased; 1,000 schools took part in the past year.
- The newly renovated residence of the Czech Biblical Association was opened (cf. BDV 68/69) and is meanwhile well established, it is booked all year with courses and classes. Courses on biblical figures are especially popular.
- In the Netherlands a new ecumenical Bible translation was published after twelve years of cooperation between the Netherlands Biblical Association and the Netherlands Bible Society and was met with much public attention and enthusiasm.
- The year 2003 was celebrated in Germany, Austria and Switzerland and also in the Netherlands as a Year of the Bible and was met with great enthusiasm in all of these countries (cf. BDV 68/69). Among the most successful activities were exhibitions, film showings, stage productions and concerts, readings and a hand-written Bible in six volumes worked on by individuals and various groups from church communities. All in all, this Year of the Bible contributed to a greater public awareness of the Bible and the work of the Biblical Associations.

Moreover, the annual conference offered an opportunity for mutual exchange on how the individual biblical associations judged their present situation and which goals they were setting, and in the course of this sharing the principal ideas of a "mission statement" were elaborated while also setting priorities, main goals and concrete plans with an eye to the future. Financing, budgets and fund-raising were included in the talks. The subregion



is facing new challenges due both to the EU expansion on May 1, 2004 and to financial difficulties. Thus the participants at the annual meeting took advantage of the opportunity for a detailed analysis and stock-taking of the situation and agreed on several basic tasks to be carried out in future. Along with mutual sharing of information at regular meetings are the *Colloquium Biblicum*, German courses for biblical scholars and students of theology from eastern Europe, work on Bible translations and other biblical pastoral



materials as well as youth and media projects. The directors present agreed that the sub-region should be marked by the principles of solidarity and mutual support in the future as well. However, the “missionary” aspect and the continued development of the biblical associations in Eastern Europe should not be neglected. A separate module was dedicated to practical Bible study; John 21 was used as an example to discuss and practice the concept and possibilities of working with biblical figures. The meeting was rounded off by a guided tour of the old city of Olomouc and the theological faculty of St. Cyril and Methodius of the Palacky University as well as a visit with the Archbishop of Olomouc, Mons. Jan Graubner.

The subregion is facing a new start insofar as Anton Kalkbrenner has meanwhile left the Austrian Catholic Biblical Association and taken on new responsibilities in the archdiocese of Vienna. For this reason he stepped down from his office as subregional coordinator after many years of service. Claudio Ettl offered him thanks and appreciation in the name of the CBF General Secretary for his tireless and dedicated service in the biblical pastoral ministry and for the concerns of the CBF; Béla Tarjányi, Director of the Hungarian Biblical Association, thanked him in the name of everyone present for the many years of good cooperation. It should not be left unsaid that the welcoming atmosphere of the new premises of the Czech Biblical Association and the hospitality and cordiality demonstrated by all the staff made a positive and decisive contribution to the success of the meeting.

*(Report: Claudio Ettl)*

### **Austria: 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Katholisches Bibelwerk Linz**

Together with numerous visitors and friends, the Katholisches Bibelwerk Linz (Biblical Association of Linz) celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary on October 25, 2004. The Director of the Catholic Biblical Association of Germany, Franz-Josef Ortkemper, gave the ceremonial lecture on the theme “The Fundamental Concern of Jesus”. A glance back at the past decades of the work of the Biblical Association of Linz roused many memories. The ceremony ended with a vesper service and a buffet.

The Biblical Association of Linz – like so many beginnings in the biblical field – is a fruit of the Second Vatican Council and was started in 1964 under the direction of the then Professor of Pastoral Theology and later Archbishop Alois Wagner. Originally the focus was on providing information about the Catholic faith; but before long there followed the first ecumenical Bible exhibitions and a series of Bible correspondence courses.



A highpoint of the work of the past years was the Bible exhibition developed in conjunction with the biblical department of Salzburg, which has since attracted over 300,000 visitors. The Biblical Association of Linz has for years also been working closely with the Greisinghof Biblical Training Center. Out of this collaboration sprang an independent Bible school and more recently also a large Bible garden with various kinds of plants and trees normally found in the Holy Land. It also contains possibilities for meditation and contemplation such as a bridge, a place with a wonderful view, a fountain and a chapel.

The Biblical Association of Linz at present employs six full-time collaborators and has many honorary collaborators under the direction of Franz Kogler. All of these women and

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men live according to the Word of God and are endeavoured to make it an ongoing vital force in the Church as well. With a variety of publications and events the biblical association presents biblical themes in a practical and understandable way, fosters the spreading of Holy Scripture and finds the most diverse and creative ways of making the Bible accessible, meaningful and relevant to people.

Among the great variety of missions of the Biblical Association of Linz belong the following:

- the production of the Linzer Bibelsaat, a free periodical that comes out five times a year for the ongoing education of over 7,000 Bible devotees;
- the creation and continuation of Bible exhibitions in the parishes (on the exhibition “Discover our Bible. With All Five Senses”, see the report in the BDV 68/69); these exhibitions can also be taken out on loan by interested dioceses;
- the formation and ongoing education of Bible circle leaders and persons interested in the Bible;
- the training and networking of over 220 Bible circles in the Diocese of Linz;
- Information, counseling and ongoing education for personal Bible-reading, for those with close links with the Church as well as for those who do not regularly attend;
- the organization of multi-segment Bible seminars and the ecumenical lecture series “Halt(e)stellen in der Bibel” (“Stops” in the Bible);
- the production and dissemination of numerous printed materials for full-time as well as part-time collaborators working in education and pastoral fields;
- the drafting and production of brochures, games and computer-games (CD-ROMs) on the Bible;
- the giving of what have now become 16 different correspondence courses on themes of the Old and New Testaments – women, faith, prayer, “stumbling blocks” in the Bible, Christ in the World, Bible-reading plans, apocalypse and sects – with yearly enrollments of over 200 participants.

*(Report: Franz Kogler)*

## 35 Years of CBF



An efficient organ of coordination, the CBF is important because it coordinates and inspires the biblical apostolate from all over the world. In a nutshell, the CBF may be described as “the heart that beats for the service of the Word of God.”

In the near future, I hope, the CBF may open branch organizations to coordinate biblical apostolate in different languages especially in Asia. In the far future, the CBF may invite individuals as members, according to their merits.

*Fr. Abraham Mariaselvam, EC member 1969–1972, India*



## Newsflash

### Asia / Oceania

- ❑ **Fr. Thasanai Komkris** was forced to resign from his official duties for the Catholic Commission for the Bible of Thailand of the Thai Bishops' Conference for health reasons. **Sr. Chantana Sirichantanakul, shb**, has been appointed as acting secretary general. The offices of the Catholic Commission for the Bible of Thailand have been moved (new address: Catholic Commission for the Bible of Thailand, 122/11 Soi Naksuwan Nonsi Road, Yannawa, Bangkok 10120, Thailand, Tel.: +66-2-681-3900-1315, Fax: +66-2-681-3900-1305, E-Mail: thaicatholicbible@yahoo.com).

### Americas

- ❑ **Jesús Ant3nio Weisensee Hetter**, coordinator of the subregion of Latin America and Caribbean since 2000, took over new responsibilities in his diocese in Uruguay and for this reason resigned from his post with the CBF on December 8, 2004. CBF General Secretary, Alexander M. Schweitzer, thanked him for his devoted and tireless service in the biblical pastoral field in the subregion and for his many efforts in the interests of the CBF. **Fr. Gabriel Naranjo Salazar, cm**, will take over the duties of the office in the subregion temporarily until a new permanent subregional coordinator can be found.
- ❑ **Fr. Juan Bendinelli**, CBF zonal coordinator for Cono Sur, has taken on new responsibilities in Argentina and thus stepped down from his post as CBF coordinator.
- ❑ **Fr. Manuel Corral, svd**, has also given up his post as CBF zonal coordinator for Mexico. **Toribio Tapia Batena** is his successor as Executive Secretary of the Commission for Biblical Pastoral Ministry of the Mexican Bishops' Conference and is now also new CBF zonal coordinator for Mexico.

### Europe / Middle East

- ❑ **Anton Kalkbrenner**, CBF subregional coordinator for Central Europe since 1993, has left the Austrian Catholic Biblical Association and taken on new responsibilities in the archdiocese of Vienna. For this reason he stepped down from his post as CBF subregional coordinator in September 2004. CBF General Secretary, Alexander M. Schweitzer, expressed his gratitude and appreciation for Mr. Kalkbrenner's many years of service in the biblical pastoral ministry in Central Europe and for his commitment to the CBF.
- ❑ **Msgr. Wolfgang Schwarz**, Director of the Austrian Hospice in Jerusalem for 16 years, took up office as new Director of the Austrian Catholic Biblical Association (ÖKB) on September 1, 2004.
- ❑ **Fr. Heinrich Heekeren, svd**, eighth general superior of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD), died quite unexpectedly on December 14, 2004, at the age of 73 in Steyl, Netherlands. Spreading the Word of God was one of Fr. Heekeren's most urgent concerns during his ministry. The intensive cooperation between the SVD and the CBF in many areas dates back to him. One concrete example is the international Dei Verbum courses offered by the SVD in cooperation with the CBF in Nemi, Italy. We will remember the fruitful and open sharing and the tireless service of Fr. Heekeren for the common goal with great gratitude. R.I.P.
- ❑ **Bishop emeritus Alberto Ablondi**, former bishop of Livorno and CBF President from 1984 to 1996, celebrated his 80th birthday on December 18, 2004. There will be more details on this in the next issue of the BDV, but for now: Happy birthday and *ad multos annos!*



## Bible and Church

### A Bible Week in Costa Rica

*“The Bible and the Church”*: under this motto the dioceses of Costa Rica celebrated their twelfth Bible week, from September 27 to October 2, 2004. Each day of the week was devoted to a different aspect of the theme, ranging from the personal reading of the Bible, through the role of Holy Scripture in liturgy and catechesis, to the significance of the Bible for society and ecumenism. The following manual was drafted by the Bishops’ Conference of Costa Rica for the preparation and execution of the Bible week.

#### Motivation

The purpose of this 12<sup>th</sup> Bible week is to enable the Word of God to be read, lived and reflected upon by individuals, groups, movements and communities who are willing to devote space and time to Bible-reading. Under the general title: “Bible and Church” we will present a different theme for each day of the Bible week, to be discussed in group session. With each theme, we will approach the Bible in five steps that go from life to the Word and then back to life again, as follows:

- *We look at life together*, that is, we observe what is going on and consider the realities and persons of our community in relation to the Bible.
- *We listen to God’s Word*. With attention and faith we open our minds to what God is saying to us through His Word, so as to illuminate the life of the community.
- *We delve into the Word*, that is, we strive to acquire a more profound understanding of the message of Holy Scripture, as it relates to the theme in question.
- *We engage ourselves with the Word*, because the reading is an invitation to assume a concrete commitment, at the personal or community level.
- *We pray with the Word*, that is, we draw from the Bible itself in our response to God who addresses us with His word, with His teaching.

Moreover, with the opening rite of the enthronement of the Bible, we strive to create a prayerful and festive ambiance around the written Word of God, so as to deepen the love and reverence with which we approach Scripture, in company with the believers of all times.

#### Opening Ritual: Enthronement of the Bible

- The group or community assembles at the chosen location. The celebration begins with a joyful song and the invocation of the Holy Spirit.
- One individual carries the Bible at arm’s length; he or she is accompanied by two other persons holding vigil lights or wax candles. The Bible is placed solemnly on the altar, a table or another elevated place. If possible the table should also be decked with flowers. The lit candles signify the presence of Christ, the light of the world, and the flowers help to create a more festive atmosphere.
- The leader may proclaim a few verses from Ps 119, in alternation with the response: *Your Word, Lord is the light of our way*; or, the group may sing a hymn in unison.
- Everyone sits down. A designated reader reads aloud from James 1:13-25 and invites those present to share their thoughts on what they have heard.
- The leader asks those present to stretch out the right hand toward the enthroned Bible and to renew their profession of faith and their baptismal promises. The response of each is personal, as when we recite the Creed. The following or similar questions could, for example, be asked: *Do we believe that God is speaking to us, as He once spoke to the Jewish people through signs and through His prophets? Do we believe that Jesus is the Living Word of God, who became man, who died on the cross for our sake and rose again from the dead? Do we believe in the Church, which has the task of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, present in the Holy Scriptures? Do we believe that we are Church, so that we can be salt, light and leaven in the world?*
- After this confession of faith, the participants can approach the Enthroned Bible to venerate it with a kiss, a touch, a bow or some gesture of love that reveals their respect for the Word of God. In the meantime, an appropriate hymn may be sung.
- This liturgy of Enthronement continues then with spontaneous prayers or petitions; then follows the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the prayer for peace and the peace greeting. The ceremony concludes with a final hymn and an appeal to the participants to



attend, whenever possible, the various meetings of the group or community during these days of the Bible week.

## First Day: Bible and Personal Reading

### 1. Opening hymn and exhortation

### 2. We look at life together

In our time, many Christians have become more familiar with the Bible. It is a book that is read, that helps them to encounter God or Christ and to accept their teachings. The Bible is for them a personal book. They study it, reflect upon it, and strive to live in accordance with the Word of God. This reading of Scripture takes place inside or outside the Church, in a Catholic setting or in that of another Christian denomination. We find the Bible in the hands of many people, and even of unbelievers. There is, on the one hand, an intense interest to get to know the Bible better; on the other hand, we find considerable ignorance of the Bible, or even a total lack of interest in it. *(The group can exchange thoughts on this topic, until everyone has had the opportunity to tell the group about their own personal experiences with the Scriptures.)*

### 3. We listen to God's Word (Psalm 119:1-32)

One of the participants proclaims the text of Psalm 119:1-32. Everyone reflects silently on the reading; then everyone reads the text for themselves in their own Bible, consulting the explanatory notes, after which spontaneous reactions to the text can be expressed, or the participants can tell what the text means to them: the situation, the word or expression that they found particularly striking or that appealed to them personally. Finally, the text is proclaimed a second time.

### 4. We delve into the Word

This very beautiful Psalm, called the *Psalm of the Law*, presents to us the theme of the Word of God: its importance, its function as revelation of God's will, its qualities and properties, the dispositions of the people who hear and meditate on it (love, delight, reflection, satisfaction, recollection, instruction). It also speaks of the positive benefits and blessings that flow from this Law.

If we read the Bible personally, we do so because we believe that the Lord is addressing His Word to us and we place ourselves at His disposition. We seek to understand His teachings and to put them into practice, to know God and Jesus Christ, to communicate to others what we have discovered in the pages of Holy Scripture. The attitude of the believing Jew, who takes delight in hearing and reflecting on the law of the Lord present in the Scriptures can be ours as well today if we read the Bible with faith in the Church. The Bible is *par excellence* the Word of

God. Let us work through its pages with attention and perseverance.

### 5. We engage ourselves with the Word

The following question can serve to challenge us: what obligation follows upon reading and reflecting on Psalm 119? What attitudes should we as Christians assume when we read and meditate on the books of Scripture?

### 6. We pray with the Word

We could take up this Psalm again, this time as a prayer, in which we ask God for His light and strength, to help us be truly open to the biblical teaching. In closing, a suitable hymn may be sung.

## Second Day: Bible and Family

### 1. Entrance song and exhortation

### 2. We look at life together

Most of us have a Bible at home, or at least a New Testament. In the best case, it remains open on a stand in the house, and we pick it up from time to time to read or meditate on it in a family setting, or to use it for a short prayer session. But it can also happen that it simply sits on the shelf, that we neither read the Bible nor talk about it in a family setting. *(The group discusses the experiences different individuals have had with the Bible at home.)*

### 3. We listen to God's Word (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

A participant proclaims the text of Deut 6:6-7. A period of silent meditation follows. The participants then read the text in their own Bible, consulting the explanatory notes. Next, those who wish to can tell the group what the text suggests to them: what situation, what word or sentence of the reading they found particularly striking. Then the text is again proclaimed.

### 4. We delve into the Word

This text that we have heard and meditated on forms part of the confession of faith of the Israelite people, the so-called Shma Israel ("Hear, o Israel"). The Shma confesses the unity and uniqueness of God and exhorts the people to love Yahweh with their whole heart. This profession of faith forms part of the first commandment that we have all learned in catechism and that Jesus himself recited as a believing Jew.

The important thing we find in this commandment is the idea that we should take every opportunity we can to communicate the faith to our children, beginning with a Bible-reading or a family catechesis. This shows the importance of the Bible in the family, when it comes together to pray with the Bible, to read through its texts, to learn its lessons, to help children or the young in catechesis, or simply to



have a good time reading the Bible together. Let us not forget it: when the Word of God takes a central place in the life of a family, it becomes spiritual nourishment for every member of the family community.

#### 5. We engage ourselves with the Word

The text of the “Shma Israel”, which fathers of Jewish families used to teach, and still teach to their children, as part of a family catechesis on the Book of Deuteronomy, gives rise to the following questions:

What kind of a challenge does this text issue to us as a family today? What place do we give to the Bible at home? How can we take home with us the biblical message that we hear in the liturgy, and in particular in the liturgical readings? What is this text inviting us to do today? How can we make good use of the Bible in our family?

#### 6. We pray with the Word

We close by reciting Psalm 137 in common, followed by spontaneous petitions, the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the kiss of peace.

### Third Day: Bible and Catechesis

#### 1. Entrance song and exhortation

#### 2. We look at life together

In our parishes, catechesis occupies a very special place because it is the Church’s teaching which helps us grow in faith and has something to say to everyone: children, youth, adults. We know our catechists who dispense the teaching of the Faith. And the Bible is the catechetical book par excellence, both for the audience and for those doing the instructing. *(The group can discuss the importance of the Bible, its use in catechesis, the different ways in which its teaching can be put into practice, the catechetical works or biblical aids that different individuals might be aware of.)*

#### 3. We listen to God’s Word (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

One group member reads aloud the text of 2 Tim 3:14-17. All meditate on it in silence. Then everyone reads it silently in his or her own Bible, consulting the explanatory notes. After which, those who wish to can comment on what the text means to them, some word or expres-

sion they found particularly striking or challenging. Finally the text is again read aloud.

#### 4. We delve into the Word

Timothy is not alone, either in his Christian faith or in his ministry. He relies on the help of Holy Scriptures, which he received from childhood from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Tim 1:5), and which it is his duty to transmit to other believers as bishop and catechist of the community. We note the importance Saint Paul attributes to the Bible: a book that is “inspired by God and can profitably be used for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people’s lives and teaching them to be holy”. This text should inspire catechists to regard Scripture as the basis and source of all catechesis.

This is why catechesis, as a particular form of the ministry of the Word in the Church, should consider the Bible as its “book par excellence”, because it is the Word of God entrusted to the Church. For catechesis, the church goes back to the Bible. The Bible occupies an outstanding place in the life of the Church and is not merely a subsidiary aid. Catechesis is an introduction to the reading of the Bible, in accordance with the Spirit who dwells in the Church. Catechisms and their contents must therefore be strongly biblical in character and catechists should be familiar with its teaching and content. Only in this way will they be able rightly to transmit the message the Bible addresses to us, in line with the teaching of the Church.

#### 5. We engage ourselves with the Word

What does the text of 2 Tim 3:14-17 commit us to in family or in parish catechesis? What can fathers of families, catechists and priests do to insure that Bible is the central book of catechesis? What place does the Bible occupy in our lives and in our community engagements?

#### 6. We pray with the Word

The meeting is brought to a close with Psalm 19:8-15; together we pray the Our Father and the Hail Mary, and then sing a closing hymn.

### Fourth Day: Bible and Liturgy

#### 1. Hymn and exhortation

## 35 Years of CBF



I think of the CBF in connection with the wealth of experiences of simple Christians, when they share these in the light of God’s Word. My hope for the future is that the CBF will be able to convince the successors of the Apostles and all the faithful to give the Word of God a sacramental and practical place of honor in the life of the Church – above and beyond the lip-service of high-sounding documents.

*Fr. Gerhard Mellert, svd, coordinator of the subregion of Latin America and Caribbean 1991–1997, Montserrat* ■



## 2. We look at life together

As Christians we take part in liturgical celebrations, whether for the sacraments, and most especially the Eucharist, for patronal feasts, for community prayers, for holy hours, for liturgies of the Word. On all of these occasions we hear readings from the Bible, often in conjunction with a homily by the celebrant, and are struck by the beauty of the symbols, so rich in meaning. The liturgy as a whole is a celebration of the marvelous works of God, proclaimed and revealed in the Bible. *(The group exchanges thoughts on how it discovers the Bible in liturgical celebrations, how the Bible functions in these settings, the signs and symbols that surround it, the gestures, the prayers and everything else connected with the Scriptures.)*

## 3. We listen to God's Word (Nehemiah 8:1-12)

A participant reads aloud from Neh 8:1-12. There follows a period of silent reflection. Then the participants read the text for themselves in their own Bible, consulting the explanatory notes. Finally, the text is proclaimed again.

## 4. We delve into the Word of God

In this text of Nehemiah, the Law of God – that is to say, the first five books of the Bible – is proclaimed, and then interpreted, by Esra and the Levites, in the framework of a great liturgical assembly. Worship creates community and brings children, young people, men and women together. They listen with attention to the Word of God, are profoundly moved by it and are filled with joy. Centuries later, Jesus will do the same thing in the synagogue of Nazareth when he reads the text of Is 61:1-2 (cf. Lk 4:16-21) and proceeds to interpret it in the presence of the assembled community who receive his words with joy.

The Church does the same thing, too, because the Bible has a privileged place in her liturgical celebrations. The readings are taken from the Bible, then expounded in the homily; biblical psalms are chanted or read; the prayers, petitions and hymns used in the liturgy draw their inspiration from the Bible and are full of its imagery and symbolism. The liturgical actions and signs also derive their full significance from the Bible. The Church teaches that it is above all in the liturgy that people receive the bread of life from the table of the Word just as they do to the body of Christ (*Dei Verbum* 21). In the liturgy Christ is present in a very special way in the Holy Scripture, for when the Word of God is read and proclaimed in the Church, it is Christ who speaks (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7).

## 5. We engage ourselves with the Word

What does this text call on us to do, to what action does it commit us – as it brought together the Jewish community, who listened with joy to the Word of God, and as it cast its spell on the people of Nazareth? With

how much attention do we listen to the Bible when it is read at Holy Mass and at the celebration of the other sacraments? How important is the homily to us? Do we discuss these things at home? What biblical symbols do we detect in our liturgical celebrations? Do we sing, do we praise God and then put into practice the biblical teachings? What can Jesus and Nehemiah teach us?

## 6. We pray with the Word

We pray or sing together Psalm 122, and close the session with petitions and a prayer.

## Fifth Day: Bible and Social Reality

### 1. Hymn and exhortation

### 2. We look at life together

Many countries in Latin America and in other regions of the world live lives of painful impoverishment, aggravated by a widening of the gap between rich and poor. The primary victims of this phenomenon are families, the majority of which are poor in these countries. Inflation, low salaries, the lack of access to basic services, unemployment, and the rise of shadowy economies are the primary causes. The existing economic order is in many cases diametrically opposed to the peoples' interests. The misery is real and the exclusion of the poor takes on ever more dramatic forms. The Church cannot remain indifferent to this situation. *(The group discusses all these issues, analyzing how they apply to their own life situations.)*

### 3. We listen to God's Word (Acts 4:32-37)

A participant proclaims the text of Acts 4:32-37. All reflect on it in silence. Then everyone reads the passage in their own Bible, consulting the explanatory notes. Those who wish to may then tell what the passage suggests to them: the situation, the word or expression that especially caught their attention, or that appealed to them in one or another way. Finally, the text is again proclaimed.

### 4. We delve into the Word of God

St. Luke likes to summarize the life of the early Christian community (cf. Acts 2:42-47). Among other things, it is a shared existence, concretely realized in a community of goods as a sign of brotherhood, and a way of living out the Lord's teachings. The story of Barnabas is told as an event which was certainly not the universal norm for the church of that time (see Acts 4:32ff), perhaps not even a customary practice, but nevertheless a wonderful ideal for the members of the Church. What is important here is the climate of community among all, which is described by a formula ("the community of the faithful was one heart and soul") similar to that used by Deuteronomy to express the fullness of dedication to



God, who is to be loved “with one’s whole heart and soul” (Deut 6:5).

From this text and its teachings the Church sees the absolute necessity of prioritizing the service of the poor, following in this the example of Jesus, with a suitable social apostolate and in collaboration with all the institutions that are devoted to the care of marginal groups: the handicapped, the sick, the elderly, abused or abandoned children, prisoners, and all those who have need of her support and solidarity. The state too should accept responsibility for the most vulnerable, promulgating laws that defend the rights of the marginalized and the excluded. The Bible is the Word of God, rich in instruction; it expresses the desire of God to heal the pain of humanity and to thwart any attempt to ostracize or exclude our brothers and sisters.

### 5. We engage ourselves with the Word

When we hear Luke’s description of life in community, what does it say to us today, how does it challenge us? The poor are a part of our reality and surroundings – what do we do for them, how do we proclaim the Good News to them and how do we help them to improve their situation? What does our parish do? Do we as individuals work with it, or with another institution that is engaged in this work? How does the Bible motivate us to fight against every form of injustice, marginalization and poverty?

### 6. We pray with the Word

We recite together Psalm 133. Next follow voluntary petitions, the Our Father, and the kiss of peace. The meeting ends with a common hymn.

## Sixth Day: Bible and Pastoral Ministry

### 1. Hymn and Exhortation

### 2. We look at life together

Our parishes, communities and groups are generally active in pastoral ministry, that is to say they participate in the task of the Church which is to render Christ present in all his spheres of influence: in the work of evangelization, in the Eucharist and in the life of charity. The pastoral ministry is the specific action of the Church,

and the Bible should be the book par excellence of this mission. (*Members of the group discuss everything that takes place in their parish: what is its mission? Does the Bible occupy a privileged position or is it absent at the ministerial level of the diocese, of the parishes, that is when it comes to the concrete work the church does on the spot?*)

### 3. We listen to God’s Word (Acts 13:44-49)

A participant proclaims the text of Acts 13:44-49. All reflect on the text in silence; then, everyone reads it for themselves in their own Bible, consulting the explanatory notes. People are then invited to tell what the text means to them: the situation, the word or expression that struck them or appealed to them in a particular way. Finally, the text is proclaimed again.

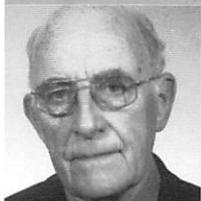
### 4. We delve into the Word

Once again St. Luke enchants us with his report on the life of the community that gathers around the Word of God, just as in Lk 4:16-21 and Acts 2:42-44. In spite of the rejection of the Jews, the community grows and builds itself up on the Word of God (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:29; Lk 1:80). It is simply marvelous to see how the Word transforms the life of a community. And this is what the Bible, as Word of God, can do in the Church.

The Church is “people of the Word” (*pueblo de la Palabra*): her whole work, life and mission are born and draw nourishment from the Scriptures. To be authentic, all pastoral work should be biblically inspired, organized and presented. The Bible is the book that nourishes, motivates and strengthens the work of pastoral ministry. If this dimension were lacking, the care of souls would be sterile, lifeless, lacking in warmth and meaning. For the Word of God creates, gives life, nourishes; it is the soul and the motivating force of pastoral ministry. This ministry derives its salutary nourishment from Holy Scripture and it is from this source that it is able to produce fruits of holiness.

The pastoral ministry, the mission of evangelizing that is incumbent on the Church, should be organized around a suitable biblical apostolate, with its various structures, its agents and its addressees: this is necessary, even indispensable. If the Bible is not at the center of everything, there can be no genuine pastoral ministry.

## 35 Years of CBF



A very special highlight to me was the procession with Bibles and lit candles as part of the opening ceremony of the Plenary Assembly in Lebanon. I found it so significant symbolising the commitment of the members of bringing the Word of God as a light into the dark world. It was just great and it expressed very vividly what the Federation stands for. It moved me profoundly and it often comes back to my mind.

Fr. Arnold Jurgens, mhm, CBF General Secretary 1978–1984, Netherlands



### 5. We engage ourselves with the Word

With respect to the pastoral ministry, and to parish work generally: what challenges come to us today from this text we have just heard, and from the teachings of the Church? What place will we give to the Word of God in the context of our pastoral ministry, of our plans for community and church?

### 6. We pray with the Word

We pray together Psalm 101 – followed by the rosary, *ad libitum*.

## Seventh Day: Bible and Ecumenism

### 1. Opening hymn and exhortation

### 2. We look at life together

Christianity is divided into various confessions: there are Catholics, Evangelicals, Lutherans, Orthodox. Then there are the sects, such as the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, etc. Other Christians are constantly trying to approach us. We either welcome their conversation, or we put them off. For many of them the Bible is the most important book for study, for worship and for mission. The Bible is often used, however, more as a ground for argument than as a catalyst for unity and understanding, as should be the case in ecumenism, that is in the search for the union of all in the Church. *(The group discusses all of this; which groups it recognizes as Christian, how they employ the Bible, their attitudes toward the Church and the question of whether there is one or another group in the community which is especially active in ecumenical efforts.)*

### 3. We listen to God's Word (1 Cor 1:10-17)

A participant proclaims the text of 1 Cor 1:10-17. The group meditates on it in silence; then, everyone reads it for themselves in their own Bible, consulting the explanatory notes. People can then volunteer to tell the group what the text means to them: the situation, the word or expression that struck them or particularly appealed to them. Finally, the text is proclaimed again.

### 4. We delve into the Word

In the Christian community of Corinth profound divisions had arisen, in stark contrast to the unity of Christians so earnestly desired by Christ (Jn 17:21). Mutually antagonistic groups were declaring themselves partisans of Paul, of Peter, or of Apollo. This threatened to obscure the reference to a single master, Christ, to whom they had all been consecrated through Baptism and whom they had decided to follow with full knowledge of the wisdom of the cross, the only valid wisdom for this community.

Ever since these ancient times, and even till today, division has plagued the unity of the Church. Since the time

of the great schism that divided the church of the West from that of the East in 1054, as well as the other great division that resulted from the Protestant reformation five hundred years ago, it has been a struggle for Christians to live in unity. Every effort must be made to search for avenues of reconciliation through prayer, work and mutual understanding. Rather than being a book that engenders disputes and that drives us further away from each other, Scripture ought to be a source of unity, of mutual charity, of solidarity. The Bible is everyone's book. We love it, we study it with the desire of being instructed by it. For the Bible is light and life, and should never be a cause of division and confrontation, as has so often happened in the past.

As Pope John Paul II explains, ecumenism is today more than ever an indispensable task within the life and mission of the Church in which we are all involved.

### 5. We engage ourselves with the Word

What is St. Paul's challenge to us today? What can we do to foster understanding and unity with those who do not belong to the Catholic Church? This applies to our own parish communities as well, our families, the various sectors of our lives at home and in the work place. How can the Word of God help us and motivate us in the performance of this difficult task?

### 6. We pray and celebrate the Word

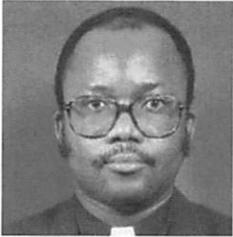
We conclude our reflection by reciting Psalm 127, followed by spontaneous prayers and an appropriate closing hymn. A final meal in common would be an ideal way to conclude this Bible Week.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



# Openness, Dialogue and Good Relationships

## The Word of God in a Pluralistic Society



*Emmanuel Kofi Fianu, svd, is professor of Holy Scripture and biblical languages at St. Victor's Mayor Seminary in Tamale, Ghana. He is also teaching for the Dei Verbum courses in Ghana, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo.*

The importance of the question of pluralism in our contemporary world is conceded by all of us. We have also become more aware of the place of pluralism in evangelization or the spreading of the Word of God. Let me bring together some of the pertinent issues that need to be dealt with when we speak of pluralism, especially as ministers of the Word.

### What is religious pluralism?

With a topic of this nature, one of the first things may be a definition of the central term – i.e. 'pluralism'. In our particular context we may have to qualify it as religious pluralism. We need to ask: "What is religious pluralism?". I do not intend to give a dictionary definition here. This is because the reality of our times tells us that the term could be defined in different ways – this is in itself a confirmation of what plurality is all about. We do not all see things in the same way.

A simple exercise may help us define the term. When I raise a crucifix before a Christian audience, what comes to the minds of the audience – a religious object, Catholicism, passion and death of Christ? Supposing the audience is a-religious, we may get answers focusing on the artist or carver, the type of wood used and the features developed in the molding or the carving. Someone would say we are looking at the same object, but the reality is that what is communicated to us is not the same. We perceive what is given us from the store of personal experience that we have.

In the not too distant past, religious affiliations were of a rather well-defined nature. Some countries were known as Christian countries, others were known as Islamic countries. African Traditional Religion was limited to Africa. Hinduism was to be found in India and Buddhism was in South and East Asia. The reality of our contemporary society is the coexistence of different religions in the same place. In our present world, we find different religions not only in the same country but also in the same town and in the same family.

### Do we still share common values?

In Ghana today, for example, we have to be conscious of a scenario of religious pluralism in which we find believers in African Traditional Religion, Christians, Muslims, Ba'hai, etc. One of the consequences of this reality is that groups of persons with different religious backgrounds, differ over their notion of morals, of what can be called good, of the purpose of life. In this situation, one may ask if it is possible for us to talk of a common good and a common way of life acceptable to all.

This is not the only realm of religious pluralism. We are also witnesses to the fact that even within the Christian circle, we are all not of the same doctrine and belief. We have Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Pentecostals, spiritual churches and sects. In Ghana today, it is impossible to know the number of Christian Churches that exist. The reality we face today is that in many towns and villages we have many Christian denominations – in some places they are innumerable.

In the face of the diversity of Christian Churches, we also have to reckon with the reality that we do not understand things about our faith in the same way. We do not understand the Word of God in the same way. Our religious inclinations influence our morals and way of life. It is not uncommon today to enter a family on a Sunday

## 35 Years of CBF



I am impressed with the work the CBF is doing with people, bringing them the Good News of Jesus in the context of a larger whole, and thus providing access to the Bible for many people. A liberation-theological interpretation of the Bible and a Bible-reading committed to the poor and oppressed are making visible the objective of a more just world, one more worthy of human beings.

*Heidi Wechsler, Project Department, Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund, Switzerland*



and see each one going his or her own way for worship – the father is going to the Catholic Church, the wife is on her way to the Church of Christ of later days, the daughter is going to Bethel Methodist Church, the son is going to the Musama Disco Kristo Church and one of the in-laws is on his way to the Central Gospel Church.

### Learning to live together in harmony

This may sound exaggerated but it is a reality in some Ghanaian families already. Apart from that, we must also admit that our workplaces do not have a religious homogeneity – even if we claim to be Christians, our denominational differences cannot be ignored. Over and above that we cannot claim all should follow a Christian way of conduct.

All this is what we mean when we talk about religious pluralism. In the face of this reality, we have to admit that it is not possible to think of a homogeneous religious perception of things in our contemporary society. To ignore this reality would mean closing our eyes to what is glaring at us. We have to acknowledge that we need to know how to live with one another in a harmonious way.

It may have been good to look at the issue of religious pluralism from two perspectives; namely on the interreligious level and on the Christian or ecumenical level. The first would have dealt with our relation with non-Christian religions and the second with the various denominations of Christian faith.

### Premise: Accepting realities

Let me give some general principles that could guide the proclamation of the Word of God in a pluralistic society. One of the basic things we need to state here is the need to admit to ourselves that we live in a pluralistic society and so we cannot expect everybody to think in the same way as we do. Some of us ignore this reality and try to push our way through. Such an attitude only results in resistance and conflict. We are aware that even when we are of the same religious background we do not think in the same way, we may have a common moral principle but we do not behave in the same way. That is the reason for us to realise that the situation would be different when we encounter people of different denominations or religious affiliation.

If we go back to the example of the family I described earlier on, we may speculate that there could be confusion in such a family because of their religious diversity. Supposing we discover that this family lives in harmony, we may ask ourselves the secret to such success. We may have heard already from other circles that the best and most effective way to proclaim the Word of God is by our way of life. People would remark on what we do and would be attracted to us. One of those things that attracts attention is good relationships. In the family I talked about, if we are able to find all of them living in a good relationship, we know that religion has not caused a problem in the family. If we establish good relations in our workplaces, we have taken an important step ahead in our effort to proclaim the Word of God.

### Respect and common commitment

Imagine an encounter with a Muslim or a Traditional African believer. What is primary here is not whose religion is the true one or which one holds primary place. The first thing we should work for is the recognition of each other, which leads to a good relationship. If I have a good relationship with my non-Christian neighbour, we can talk about a number of things. We may not have to talk about Allah or God but as we learn to work together, to keep our environment clean, to promote health services, education and development in our area, we learn to know more about one another. The common platform would let us realise that there is something we can appreciate in one another. This builds up confidence and it would be the ground on which we could stand to know more about the religious beliefs of the other person. We do not need to have a common religion in order to agree among ourselves. There are also times when we recognise the good in people who do not belong to our faith. In the public ministry of Jesus we find an example in Luke 7,1-17. When a Roman official or a Centurion came to ask Jesus for help, the Jewish leaders pleaded earnestly with him saying: “He deserves this of you, because he is friendly towards our people; in fact, he is the one who built the synagogue.” (Luke 7,4f.). He did not need to embrace Judaism to win their admiration. Good relationships are important in a pluralistic religious society.

## 35 Years of CBF



It is my hope that the CBF take a long and hard look at the pastoral use of the Bible in the Church and in the coming Congress in 2005 dedicate a lot of time to discussing why the promotion of the pastoral use of the Bible since Vatican II has largely been a failure.

*Fr. James Swetnam, sj, professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, coordinator of the subregion of Rome 1990–1993, Italy*



## 35 Years of CBF

### The CBF in future:

Growth in the awareness that each member is called to contribute to the aim of the CBF (Dei Verbum 22), rather than asking what profit /advantage do I get from the CBF.

That the full members take into account, support and encourage the associate members, and consult regularly with them.

*Fr. Wim Wijten, svd, coordinator of the subregion of South East Asia 1984–1990 and of Rome 1996–1999, Belgium* ■

### Dialogue builds confidence

Good relationships generate dialogue. It is the first principle to any meaningful coexistence between any two people. When two people can talk together, they get to know each other's thoughts and they learn more about one another. Dialogue enhances good relationships and builds up confidence. Dialogue takes place in an atmosphere of openness. Openness makes it possible for us to listen to the other and also hope the other will listen to us. As we are enlightened by the other, we also hope to enlighten him or her. Openness therefore must be reciprocal.

A good illustration of what I am driving at is given us in Acts 17,16-34 – Paul's address in the Areopagus in Athens. Here we observe the openness of Paul in explaining his faith. He worked towards a good relationship with the Jews and the Greeks in the city of Athens. We also notice an initial openness of the people of Athens. They invite Paul to the Areopagus for a discussion. This openness was short-lived. In Acts 17,32 we hear them say "we would like to hear you on this some other time". In other words, they told Paul that they were not prepared for this teaching. This certainly is not to be our attitude.

### Knowing what we are talking about

When we talk of religious dialogue, then we must say that dialogue supposes that we know what we are going to talk about. If I want to talk about my belief, my faith with someone who is not of the same religious faith, I must know my own doctrine. If I am not conversant with it I would not be able to enlighten the other.

Many Catholics feel they do not know enough about their faith so they feel ill-prepared to dialogue with others. If we see dialogue as sharing our faith, what we believe deep within us, then we must all admit we are equipped for making our faith known to the other person. We may not know everything about our faith, and we would not be able to know all things about our faith. We cannot wait to know everything before we begin to share our faith. Whatever we know we should be confident enough to share.

### Sharing faith

There are various ways of bringing God's Word to others. We know that the Word must first take root in ourselves before we can share it with others. What we have acquired should give us the confidence to share with people of other denominations or other religions. We may not be successful if our goal is to go and show that they are wrong, or we want to defend the Catholic faith. Our goal should be to share our faith and make Christ known through our witness. It is not a fight, it is not a debate at the end of which there must be winners and losers.



Often we go to our encounters with prepared arguments to 'teach' or 'show' the other that we are right and they are wrong. We cannot go to a dialogue table with already prepared solutions – then there is no need for dialogue. It is only an imposition and that does not respect the other person and does not encourage good relationships. In religious circles such an attitude only breeds apologetics. We all know that in a situation where one wants only to defend his own beliefs and not really explain them, there is no way forward. The other partner in dialogue also ends up defending himself and indulging in apologetics.

### Open to dialogue instead of fundamentalism

In dialogue, we must also be prepared to learn more about the doctrine of the other person. I cannot dia-



## 35 Years of CBF



My hope and expectations for CBF in future: Move from intellectualism to the pastoral interpretation of the Bible. Let it read in the language of the common man. Inculturated way of reading the Bible. In order to give flesh to the Word, CBF should encourage those art forms that are able to make the Bible appealing to the common people: like bibliodrama, biblical dance, music, painting, etc.

*Fr. Thomas D'Sa, director of NBCLC (National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre), India* ■

logue with someone when I am ignorant of his religion. My knowledge of his religion would help me appreciate what he is living and if I think I should help him understand my religion, I would know where to start. We should not fall into the bad habit of learning about the religion of the other person only to find faults with it and to brandish that as a weapon against him or her. Such an attitude only breeds fundamentalism.

Unfortunately, we must acknowledge a growing and widespread Christian and Islamic fundamentalism on the African continent. This situation calls for our urgent attention especially as ministers of the Word of God. The best tool for curbing this trend is to introduce others to the meaningful interpretation of the Bible. The various methods we studied and applied during the Dei Verbum course and other workshops should be efficient tools for this task. The various tools of the biblical pastoral ministry should help us enhance the right understanding of the Scriptures and avoid fundamentalist interpretations.

I think the first and most appropriate attitude to handling the Word of God in a pluralistic society is personal attitude or disposition. When we work adequately on ourselves and approach issues in the right manner, we may be sowing the seeds which will develop into good relationships and mutual understanding. We would then discover that our differences are not really cause for antagonism and hatred. We would discover the appropriate way to express our religious and denominational differences without tearing one another apart, without being apologetic and fundamentalist. ■

## 35 Years of CBF

*In the 2004 issues of the BDV, friends and collaborators of the CBF who have been with the Federation for a more or less lengthy stretch of what is now its 35 year journey had the opportunity to express themselves. The statements chosen for the BDV are selections from a whole series on articles and contributions which, for reasons of space, we were unfortunately unable to publish in printed form; you will find these, however, shortly, in their complete and original form, on the CBF website under [www.c-b-f.org](http://www.c-b-f.org).* ■



**International Congress  
Rome, September 14–18, 2005**

[www.deiverbum2005.org](http://www.deiverbum2005.org)

Please note that the Congress has been postponed by one day. It will now take place from September 14 to 18, 2005.

For further details please see hereto [www.deiverbum2005.org](http://www.deiverbum2005.org).

**Special thanks go to the following persons and institutions for their photos:**

Centro de Estudos Bíblicos (CEBI): 15; Ludger Feldkämper, svd: 20; Emmanuel Kofi Fianu, svd: 31; Katholisches Bibelwerk der Diözese Linz/Franz Kogler: 23; Gerhard Mellert, svd: 27; Heidi Wechsler: 25.

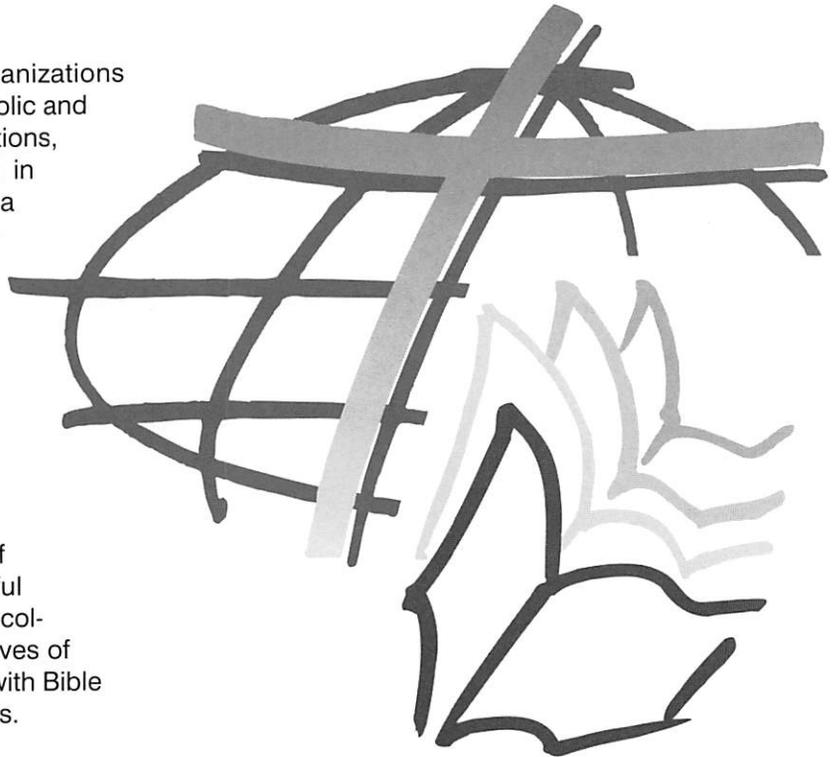
**Comment to BDV 70/71**

Regrettably, Fr. Jolly Mudakkampurath, svd, was inadvertently named by the editors as author of the article "The approach of the Fundamentalist" printed in our last issue. This article, however, derives from a text originally published by Fr. Peter Edmonds, sj, in his booklet "Celebrating a Bible Week" (Pauline Publications, Nairobi 1995; see hereto Fr. Edmonds' article in BDV no. 26). We regret this error.

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to the ministry of the Word of God. At the present time, the CBF membership includes 92 full members and 219 associate members coming from a total of 127 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 Holy Scripture.

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



In particular, the CBF works towards 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.

At the beginning of the third millennium Holy Scripture can be viewed as the great textbook of humanity. Especially in times like this the reading of the Bible not only helps the Christian community to grow in faith and love, but it can and should also offer to the whole world those words of brotherhood and of human wisdom that it so desperately needs. This is the great challenge that the Catholic Biblical Federation sets for itself.

**Vincenzo Paglia, Bishop of Terni-Narni-Amelia, Italy, President of the CBF**