

The Final Statement of the Bangalore Plenary Assembly

The 119 delegates from 53 countries participating in the Third Plenary Assembly in August 1984 further elaborated the objectives of the Federation, particularly in reference to the prophetic mission of the Church in a changing world. The intensifying proclamation of the biblical message is seen to be inspiring new ministries and communitarian structures within the Church and is animating a widening dialogue with other Christians as well as with non-Christians in search of a truly human order where justice and equality prevail.

GOD'S PROPHETIC PEOPLE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Third Plenary Assembly of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA) met from 12th – 25th August 1984 at Bangalore, India. One hundred and nineteen participants came from fifty-three countries bringing with them the experiences and insights of many different cultures. The Assembly was undoubtedly enhanced by the religious atmosphere of the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC).

The Assembly gave the Federation an opportunity to re-affirm its objectives. It was able to review how far it had progressed since the 11 Plenary Assembly which met at Malta in 1978, especially in relation to the specific recommendations made at that Assembly. The Malta Statement was seen as a landmark in the work of the Federation – and participants at Bangalore felt strongly that the work of the biblical apostolate had developed considerably as a result.

1.2 In response to the suggestion made by Pope John Paul II in his message to the Assembly, that “it may be helpful for the Federation to review the goals it has set out to attain”, the Assembly sought to clarify further its present goals. It attempted to do this in the context of the present realities of its membership and of the world itself which has evolved considerably during the last six years.

1.3 The theme at Bangalore was “Would that all were prophets” (Num 11:29). One of the highlights of the Assembly was a rich sharing of experiences in the biblical apostolate as it is undertaken in many different parts of the universal Church. From this, an optimistic vision emerged.

First, the spirit of the recommendations made at the Second Vatican Council, that biblical ministry be in the mainstream of the evangelizing mission of the Church, is coming more and more to fruition.

Second, the positive, concrete result of this is seen and felt in the lives of individuals and communities throughout the world.

Third, the Assembly was happy that the prophetic thrust of the biblical message is discerned in a growing number of local Churches. This is happening at various levels and in various cultures and world situations. It is taking place where the liberating force of the Word of God is most needed, both in the north and the south, among the rich and the poor.

Finally, in line with the theme: “Would that all were Prophets”, the Assembly not only recognized the important role of the laity, but also saw that lay persons are increasingly active members of the prophetic Church. It noted also that young people have an important role in the biblical apostolate.

PART ONE

2. FROM MALTA TO BANGALORE

2.1 The “transformation of life” spoken about at Malta can only be achieved through a struggle – a struggle against both personal sin and the unjust structures of society. Ours is a world of ever-deepening conflicts between ideologies, systems, nations and races. In the struggle to dominate world economy, people become mere tools in the hands of the powerful.

2.1.1 The Old Testament prophets called for a transformation both social and spiritual – a transformation of the whole of life. This call must resound also in our own troubled world: “Would that all were prophets”. In a similarly oppressive situation, God put out his hand and touched his people saying through Jeremiah: Look, today I am setting you over nations and over kingdoms to tear up and to knock down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant (Jer 1:9-10).

2.1.2 The Old Testament prophets are types of THE Prophet, Jesus, who came to reveal a God of love, of mercy and fullness of life. He showed a preference for the poor and the oppressed (Luke 4:18). His concern was also for those who were materially rich but spiritually poor, and who had rejected his friendship. This Jesus is our hope because he loves us; he announces the Kingdom of God to us and so challenges us to a change of heart and structures. In this sense he is always creating a new people, who in turn work together to build up a new society which is human and just.

2.1.3 Christ entrusted his prophetic mission to his people, his Church. *Lumen Gentium* clearly states: “The Holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office” (LG 12). When the whole community of Christ’s faithful undertakes to discern the realities of today in the light of faith, the Spirit is promised to be with them.

The Holy Spirit distributes his gifts as he wills (cf. 1 Cor 12:11) to all the faithful – bishops, priests, religious and lay persons – for the benefit of the whole community. Lest our prophetic voice be weak or inadequate, leaders are warned not to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good (1 Thess 5:19-21).

2.2 The Federation has come to an awareness that, if all God’s people are to play their prophetic role, they must have access to God’s Word: The Bible in their hands and in their own language.

2.2.1 God’s people have the right to be formed in scriptural knowledge, and they should be helped to realize its dynamic force which can transform their world and their lives. Only then can our spirituality become truly biblical, and therefore Christian. In the liturgy, the Word of God is always creative in the life of the Church, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist where the Word of God is proclaimed and the Bread of Life is offered and received.

2.2.2 The Assembly re-iterates that the Church’s teaching office bears a special responsibility for the authentic interpretation of the Word. We want to stress, however, the fundamental responsibility of all in the prophetic mission (LG 12). It is the right of the laity to take their proper part in the interpretation of the Word of God concerning the burning questions of the day. As *Lumen Gentium* makes clear, the laity are called by God to live in the world “that being led by the Spirit of the Gospel they may contribute to the sanctification of the world” (LG 31).

2.2.3 It is quite obvious that the Bible is to be read in the original context in which the Israelites lived, as well as in today’s context of the different situations in which people find themselves. Therefore, this Assembly is agreed that a fundamentalistic interpretation of the Bible must be strongly rejected.

2.3 In discerning the signs of the times, it is necessary for a prophetic people to be open to the stirrings of the Spirit beyond the confines of the Church. Therefore, we feel called to listen to God speaking to us in many ways, including through the scriptures and the spiritual values of other religions, thus enlarging our understanding of the mystery of God and leading us to interpret our own Scriptures in a new light. We feel challenged to dialogue with peoples of other beliefs in order to evolve a common vision and set of values and so to commit ourselves to the building of a new humanity.

2.4 We would like to emphasize that the community of the Church cannot afford just to appear to be prophetic; the community must live and act in such a manner that all the world is struck and challenged by its voice and life. Scripture and Tradition tell us that this happened in the early Church.

2.4.1 This Assembly re-emphasizes the centrality of the Bible in the evangelizing work of the Church. The prophetic mission of Jesus can be stated as Love – a love which calls men and women to a relationship with him and which impels all to work for a truly human order where justice and equality prevail.

2.4.2 The Assembly condemns the attitude of those regimes and even churches which, consciously or unconsciously, use the Bible to justify or legitimize oppression or privileges, e.g., apartheid, sexism, economic oppression and neo-colonialism.

PART TWO

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to implement what we have lived and learned during the Third Assembly we make the following recommendations:

3.1 Recommendations to Continental and Regional Groups

The Plenary Assembly of the WCFBA feels strongly that for the official promotion of the biblical apostolate during the coming years at continental or regional levels, the following steps should be taken:

3.1.1 Formation of continental and regional centers of the WCFBA where they do not yet exist and the establishing of liaison with the continental or regional federation of bishops' conferences such as SECAM, CELAM, FABC.

Where a committee for the biblical apostolate does not exist in the above organizations, it is strongly recommended that steps be taken to persuade the authorities concerned to establish one as soon as possible.

3.1.2 The proposed functions of such continental and regional structures for the biblical apostolate are:

3.1.2.1 To gather, evaluate and disseminate information about all biblical apostolate groups and movements, their initiatives and activities.

3.1.2.2 To organize mobile teams to help in the activities of the biblical apostolate of the continent or of the region.

3.1.2.3 To consider creation of subcontinental and subregional structures with a promoter in each zone.

3.1.2.4 To establish better links with international bodies such as major superiors' conferences, OCIC, UNDA, UCIP.

3.1.2.5 To organize regular meetings at continental and regional levels for members of the WCFBA and others engaged in the biblical apostolate – at least every three years.

3.1.2.6 To promote the biblical apostolate among young people to help them perform their prophetic function among their peer groups.

3.1.2.7 To unify efforts in their continents and regions for the production of biblical aids.

3.1.2.8 To promote the distribution of Word-Event and La Palabra Hoy in collaboration with national biblical apostolate centers and to provide correspondents.

3.2 Recommendations to Bishops' Conferences

We respectfully submit to the national bishops' conferences the following recommendations, that they:

3.2.1 Join the WCFBA as full members;

3.2.2 Make the biblical apostolate a priority in pastoral practice, and encourage the pastoral use of the Bible which is not limited to liturgy and catechesis;

3.2.3 Foster the growth of small groups and communities through the biblical apostolate, promote the use of the Bible as foundation for family prayer, and promote the biblical apostolate among young people;

3.2.4 Provide adequate budgeting for the biblical apostolate and make subsidies available for publishing biblical materials at low cost;

3.2.5 Endorse and encourage national and regional biblical centers by appointing full-time promoters, translators and other pastoral workers in the biblical apostolate, and encourage the foundation of institutes for training biblical scholars;

3.2.6 Take care that the biblical apostolate, undertaken in areas which are predominantly non-Christian, acknowledges the presence of God in other religious traditions;

3.2.7 Propose to the Holy See a bishops' synod on the biblical apostolate in the Church.

3.3 Recommendations to National Centers for the Biblical Apostolate

We, as members, commit ourselves to promote the biblical apostolate in the following ways:

3.3.1 Working in close contact with biblical scholars and taking their findings into account;

3.3.2 Fostering, encouraging and supporting the translation, production and distribution of the Bible, preferably on an interconfessional level, especially with the United Bible Societies (UBS) and similar organizations, and encouraging efforts for an ecumenical reading of the Bible at all levels under opportune guidance;

3.3.3 Promoting the production of popular aids and commentaries according to the needs of various groups and age-levels, and being sensitive to modern media development and finding ways of presenting the Bible in the electronic field;

3.3.4 Fostering a use of the Bible which takes into account the social and cultural background of the people and the insights of humankind in order to create a new world;

3.3.5 Promoting in small communities a reading and study of the Bible which discerns the signs of the times and motivates to action;

3.3.6 Giving special attention to the marginalized and the oppressed so that they can have access to the Bible and its liberating and hope giving message;

3.3.7 Promoting biblical training of lay leaders and those engaged in pastoral work;

3.3.8 Fostering the use of the Bible as a book of prayer, especially in families;

3.3.9 Exchanging among ourselves information about initiatives and experiences in the field of biblical apostolate;

3.3.10 Promoting regular and systematic fund-raising for the biblical apostolate;

3.3.11 Gaining new members and strengthening collaboration between full and associate members of the Federation, particularly on a national level.

3.4 Recommendations to the Executive Committee and the General Secretariat

We recommend that they take steps:

3.4.1 To prepare a "Handbook for the Biblical Apostolate";

3.4.2 To make material available in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese;

3.4.3 To facilitate a sharing of documentation and pastoral methods for the biblical apostolate among the various countries;

3.4.4 To promote liaison with the United Bible Societies and similar organizations for increased production of low cost Bibles.

4. CONCLUSION

We are called to live out our prophetic ministry in a world which has radically changed from the nomadic, agricultural and simple life of the Israelites as seen in the Bible. We live in a very different world, yet through the Bible we experience a God who does not change. Our hope is in the Lord, and to live in this hope means we must live dangerously, for we stake our lives on God alone. Staking our lives on God alone IS the prophetic challenge given to us by the same Lord who led the Israelites out of slavery into the promise of a new society.

“WOULD THAT ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE LORD WERE PROPHETS.”