

The Final Statement of the Bogotá Plenary Assembly

THE BIBLE AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation (formerly the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate) took place in Bogotá, Colombia, from June 27 to July 6, 1990. About 140 delegates and invited observers from 70 countries representing the five continents took part in the Assembly. It was providential that the Plenary Assembly coincided with the 25th Anniversary of the promulgation of “*Dei Verbum*”, the Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation.

1.2 The theme of the Assembly was “The Bible and the New Evangelization”. The key biblical text adopted for the Assembly was “Behold, I make all things new” (Isa 43,19; Rev 21,5).

2. PART ONE

THE CALL FOR A NEW EVANGELIZATION

2.1 The theme “The Bible and the New Evangelization” was chosen for the Assembly in line with the general call of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, for a New Evangelization in the whole world as we move into the third millennium. “Reflection on the Bible face to face with the New Evangelization acquires a greater importance for a new proclamation of the Word of God, the Good News of salvation” (John Paul II to the IV PA). The Assembly was deeply aware of the great changes and newness around us, in the world at large and in the Church of God.

2.2 The newness in the world around us is manifested in many ways and has deep significance:

- the incredible possibilities of science and technology in controlling nature, including the very makeup of the human person;
- automation, new media, and the computer revolution are all leading to an internationalization of the processes of production, modifying labor relations and provoking a new organization of our economic and social system;
- the danger of total destruction – atomic and ecological – still hangs over humanity raising a new awareness of the necessity of defending life and our planet;
- a rediscovery of ancient cultures and peoples and the emergence of the so-called “third world” into a community of nations calling for new relationships between peoples;
- the growing awareness of the dignity of women and their right to equality with men in all sectors of life;
- the increasing phenomenon of fundamentalism in all religions with the danger this poses for peaceful co-existence;
- the sudden political upheavals of Eastern Europe breaking down the old alignments of forces in the world, with the great uncertainties about the future course of events.

All these are causing the emergence of a totally new world order which is beyond our expectations.

2.3 The Church of God finds herself in the midst of this newness. If the primary task of the Church is evangelization, she is challenged to a New Evangelization in response to the newness around her. The call for the New Evangelization is therefore not only timely but necessary. In fact the present call for a New Evangelization can be traced back to the new Pentecost which was Vatican II in the Church of our days, as Pope John XXIII prophetically envisaged when he called the council. Already in 1975, Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* spoke of a new era of evangelization.

2.4 There is in fact a basic newness about evangelization itself. This consists in the fact that it is the saving work of the Lord Jesus himself. In him God has made all things new. Therefore Christian evangelization is always new. Ours is not the first nor will it be the last project of a new evangelization. Indeed, every generation must discover anew the newness of the Gospel message. The Bible remains a constant point of reference. The Word of the Lord lasts forever. (Isa 40,8). The Scriptures cause to resound in the words of prophets and apostles the voice of the Holy Spirit (DV 21).

3. The New Evangelization in the Latin American Context

3.1 As our Plenary Assembly meets in Latin America to reflect on the New Evangelization, we join the Latin American Church in celebrating and thanking God for its five hundred years of evangelization. We share their concern for a New Evangelization in this important moment of their history.

3.2 The first evangelization, in the fifteenth century, left a deep imprint on this continent. However it also had its shady sides. Many self-sacrificing and zealous missionaries, true heralds of the Gospel, came to offer a generous testimony to the love of Christ and brought the gift of faith to this land. This testimony was often compromised by the political and economic interests of those, who also claimed to be Christians, through their unjust exploitation of the riches of this land, as well as through their lack of respect for the human rights of the people who lived here for centuries.

4. The New Evangelization and the Biblical Apostolate

4.1 The New Evangelization is a preoccupation of the whole Church: from the head to the members, at both universal and local levels, with varying emphasis in different parts of the Church. The task belongs to the whole Church and its implementation must touch every aspect of the life of the Church: kerygmatic proclamation, catechesis, liturgical celebration, service to the world, theological reflection, pastoral practice and institutional structures. The biblical apostolate is an important aspect of the New Evangelization. "All the preaching of the Church, like the Christian religion itself, must be nourished and directed by the Holy Scriptures" (DV 21). It is in this context that the Catholic Biblical Federation must locate its own role in the New Evangelization. The specific concern of the Federation is to make sure that the Bible takes its rightful place in this project of the universal Church, at different levels and in different regions, to identify how the Bible can best be used to promote it, and what the Federation can do to act to promote and support such endeavors. Thus the journey of the Federation from Vienna through Malta and Bangalore to Bogotá is a gradual build-up under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of an organized biblical-pastoral response to the challenges of the New Evangelization.

5. PART TWO

WHAT WE UNDERSTAND BY THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

5.1 Faith tells us that God is present in life, in nature and in history (Pss 8,1-10; 19,2-7), since everything was created in Christ and for Christ (Col 1,15-16). The Spirit of God is at work in all of humanity (Wis 8,1), leading it towards Christ through different paths and gifts (John 14,2). Therefore, we have to listen to the living Word that God speaks to us in order to be able to proclaim it (DV 1).

5.2 Nevertheless, we are like the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24,13-35). We sometimes still do not perceive the presence of Christ, who walks with us (Luke 24,16). Looking at the life and history of our peoples, we are not always able to recognize within them the presence of Christ the way Paul did with regards to the history of his people, when he said: "The rock was Christ!" (1 Cor 10,3).

5.3 Faced with new challenges, we need new methods. We need an evangelization that is "new in its ardor, new in its method, new in its expressions." (John Paul II, Speech to 19th Plenary Assembly of CELAM, Haiti, 9th March, 1983).

5.4 We, the disciples, in order to be able to evangelize, must allow ourselves to be evangelized, that is:

- to feel the challenge and the crisis of the newness (Isa 43,18-19);
- to go through darkness and the experience of not knowing (Lam 3,2.6; Isa 42,18-20);
- to experience the temptation of following other paths (Matt 4,1-11; Mark 8,33; Heb 4,15);
- in order to experience, through radical obedience (Heb 5,8; Phil 2,8), in a new and gratuitous way, the friendly face of God who makes life arise from death (Phil 3, 10-11; Eph 1,18-23) and to experience that Jesus is the Lord (Acts 2,31; Eph 2,11).

5.5 This new experience of God will give us new eyes to understand what God realized in the past and, with the light of the past, discern the signs of the Reign of God which is coming about in the life and in the history of our peoples.

5.6 In this way, the Spirit of Jesus will make us capable of understanding the Word that he addresses to us (John 14,26; 16, 13). Guided and strengthened by the Spirit, we will be witnesses, even to the ends of the earth. Then we shall be able to recognize, like Peter, the Resurrection of Jesus present in events (Acts 2,14-36; 3,11-26); to open the Scriptures, like Philip, (Acts 8, 26-40); to discern, like Paul, the presence of the God of Abraham in the cultures of peoples (Acts 17,22-31); to denounce, like Stephen and Paul, what is wrong in religions and cultures (Acts 7,1-54; 14,11-18); to embrace, like the community of Antioch, those who are not Christians (Acts 11,19-26); to denounce, like Paul before Peter, what is wrong in the Church itself (Gal 2,14); to perceive, like Paul, that God continues to lead all peoples to Christ (Col 1, 15-16) – so that all might have life, and have it to the full (John 10,10), and that God might be all in all (1 Cor 15,28).

5.7 From this new experience of God in Jesus Christ, a new ardor is born which produces courage and leads us to say: “We cannot keep quiet! We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 4,19-20). This new ardor will become in us a force and a light that will help us be the leaven of a new humanity (Matt 13,33), the guarantee of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa 65,17). This ardor forces us to announce the Good News of the Reign of God in the same way as Jesus did on the road to Emmaus.

5.8 The two disciples were in a situation of death in which we recognize what many of our peoples are experiencing: they are afraid (John 20,19) and flee from Jerusalem (Luke 24,13); they are no longer able to believe in the small signs of hope, since they refuse to believe in the women (Luke 24,22-23); they await a glorious messiah and, thus, are not able to perceive the glory of God in the death of Jesus (Luke 24,21). “We were hoping he would be the one who would liberate Israel, but...!”

5.9 Jesus arrives as a companion and friend, who walks with them. He listens and dialogues: “What are you discussing?” (Luke 24,17). Concerned about the situation of the two disciples, Jesus wishes to help them transform the cross, a sign of death, into a sign of life and hope.

5.10 This attitude of dialogue, of listening and of embracing is the first step towards the New Evangelization. It means to live thirty years in a humble and unpretentious manner in Nazareth in order to learn what to announce during the three years of public life.

5.11 The second step is to help the disciples read events with new eyes. Jesus goes through the Scriptures, through the past, through tradition. He goes through what they already knew. The Scriptures, re-read in the light of the Resurrection, clarifies the situation in which the disciples found themselves.

5.12 The pedagogy of Jesus is wise. The NEW which he announces is not totally new. It is an ancient newness that is found in the history and in the hope of the people. Jesus draws the veil away from it: “How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24,25-26). Reading the Scriptures in this way, Jesus breaks the erroneous vision of the dominant ideology and prepares the disciples to discover the presence of God.

5.13 In this way Jesus places the event, the cross, within the broader perspective of God’s design and, thus, the disciples discover that they are not lost. The history of the world continues in the hands of God.

5.14 Jesus uses the Scriptures, starting from the concrete problem of the disciples, and discovers in the situation new criteria for listening to the texts. With the help of the Scriptures Jesus gives light to the situation and opens a horizon of hope. At the same time he helps them perceive the mistakes and calls for conversion.

5.15 But the Scriptures by themselves do not necessarily open our eyes, do not make us see. They barely make our hearts burn inside (Luke 24,32). What opens our eyes and makes us perceive the living presence of the resurrected Christ is the concrete gesture of sharing (Luke 24,31). The sign of sharing brings about the community, in which Christians have all in common (Acts 2,44-45; 4,32-35). The highest expression of this communion is the Eucharist which reveals to us the sacramental dimension of the Word of God. This is the third step of the New Evangelization which opens our eyes and makes us discover the presence of the Good News of the Resurrection in our life.

5.16 It is now that the newness of the Resurrection gives light to the life of the two disciples. If Jesus is alive, then there is with him a power stronger than the power that killed him. Here is the root of freedom and courage. Now they themselves are risen and are reborn. The cross, a sign of death, becomes a sign of life and hope.

5.17 The result of the New Evangelization: instead of fear, courage is reborn; instead of fleeing, they return to Jerusalem; instead of dispersion, they gather in community; instead of the fatalism that accepts what

happens, a critical conscience that reacts before the power that kills; instead of unbelief and desperation, faith and hope. It is the resurrection on the road. It is the new and victorious life that thus enters into history (Eph 1,19). It is this conversion which is transforming reality, creating new ways of human living together.

6. PART THREE

HOW DOES THE NEW EVANGELIZATION BECOME GOOD NEWS

The variety of contexts in which we live today requires that our proclamation of the Word should affect the lives of the people and allow it to become the Good News of salvation for all. We shall now examine these contexts one by one:

6.1 The Context of Cultural Pluralism

The Second Vatican Council has described the Church as a reality in the world (GS1). This demands from her that her identity based in Christ be constantly rediscovered in her relationship with the peoples and cultures. The Church has seriously to encounter the cultures of the world. The Word that she has to proclaim becomes effective only in as far as it becomes significant for these cultures. The Pentecost event brought the Gospel into contact with different cultures and languages (Acts 2). Throughout the entire history of the Church, continuous efforts at inculturation have been made. The Word became present in the world through the action of the Spirit just as it happened at the incarnation of the Word in the womb of Mary. This is an ongoing process closely linked to the ministry of the Word. Therefore inculturation of the Gospel message becomes a necessary condition for any meaningful ministry of the Word. This will have serious consequences both for the Word and for the world. It will unfold the riches of the Gospel. It will question the ambiguities present in human cultures. It will give greater relevance to the Word for the people. It will demand that the Church review her methods of proclamation, and evolve a new hermeneutic (making the exegesis of the text relevant to the context) in the interpretation of the Word. The Word will thus become a reality in continuous communication with the world. This communication will build up the Reign of God in which the riches of all nations will be brought to the glory of God (Rev 21,24,26).

6.2 The Context of the Socio-political and Economic Situation

The Bible must become a book for the world because we cannot understand the Bible without the human reality in need of salvation, nor can we understand the human reality without the Bible. Looking at the world of today we realize that it is a world which suffers from injustice, exploitation and inequality. Some expressions of this are:

- the widening economic gap between north and south, rich and poor
- the exploitation of the resources of the so-called "third world"
- the injustices of patriarchal and sexist systems
- the violation of human rights
- racial discrimination and national conflicts
- the evils of social systems that use political power to oppress the people and that produce victims

To all this we can also add the changes brought about by secularization, materialism and technology.

We require a new vision of faith where all human beings can experience their brotherhood and sisterhood with the one God, our Father and Mother (Hos 11,1-9; Isa 49,15). Our biblical apostolate should question this deformed world. The light of the Gospel should enable us to discover and destroy the idols we have made and dispel the shadows that prevent human beings from walking in the light of God (Rev 21,24).

6.3 The Context of Today's Ecological Imbalances

The earth is a common heritage which God has given to the whole human family (Lev 25,23). But modern colonialism, motivated by economic interests, strengthened by political power, scientific and technical progress has exploited the resources of the earth in such a way that today we are faced with the danger of serious ecological imbalance. The use of creation was not so much guided by human need as by human greed. There is a growing awareness in many people, especially the young and women, of the need to care for creation. This consciousness, however, has only recently entered into the awareness of the Christian communities.

Therefore we need a critical re-reading of Genesis 1-11 and other biblical texts in order to rediscover the relationship between humanity and nature; we need to strengthen the other biblical traditions which regard human beings not only as the center and crown of creation, but also as part of it (Job 38-39; Ps 104; Prov 8,22-31 etc); we need to discover ways and means of forming Christians for the biblical-pastoral ministry in view of these ecological questions.

6.4 The Context of Multi-religious Situations

Christianity in some regions today finds itself in the same situation as ancient Israel in its exile. The Christian communities are living in the midst of other religious groups. Some of these religious groups are reviving their religious traditions and at times they become aggressively fundamentalist. Therefore, our ministry of the Word has to take into account the religious reality of the people around us. We should pass from an apologetical approach to an approach of dialogue based on Vatican II. In some cases, especially with Islam, this may not be easy. However, it is always necessary to maintain our Christian openness without renouncing our right to proclaim the Gospel and to criticize tendencies in religions to violate human rights and human values.

Our openness to these religions should enable us to discover our own common basis as believers in the same God, journeying towards the same destiny. Thus we shall build up a society united in hope even if, at times, we cannot have one community of faith with people of other religions. In this way, the Bible will become the book of hope for all peoples. This is the Good News that we can proclaim to them. In order to do this, the Church has to become aware of the fact that she has to function as leaven in the midst of the world.

6.5 The Context of People Emerging from Totalitarian Systems

The recent events of Eastern Europe and the return to democracy in some Latin American countries should be interpreted as part of the history of salvation. We may compare it to the return of ancient Israel from the exile. The life of the people of God after the exile was not the same as it was before. Any effort that ancient Israel made to restore the pre-exilic state met with the disapproval of God.

The biblical-pastoral ministry therefore should enable us to proclaim the Word in such a way that a new society, and a new Church, which are able to maintain the values of the exile can be built, as it enjoys the benefits of freedom.

6.6 The Context of the New Awakening of Marginalized Groups

Our world today experiences more than ever the cries and groans of groups that have been marginalized for ethnic, linguistic, economic, social, sexist or political reasons. While some of these groups are minorities, they form great majorities in some nations.

The Bible is one of the few books within humanity which has stood for the oppressed and the marginalized. As ministers of the Word we are called to continue the mission of liberation. We see that these marginalized groups, who have been evangelized, are now evangelizing. Our biblical ministry therefore should enable Christian communities to listen to the Gospel that these oppressed peoples preach to us and to respond to the exigencies of the Word through constructive action towards building a society of justice and freedom for all.

6.7 The Context of Ecumenism

The spirit of ecumenism is a universal phenomenon today. The various Christian Churches and ecclesial communities work together in many areas of Gospel witness and service to the world. The Bible should strengthen this common commitment. Our efforts at an ecumenical reading of the Bible should aim at building up communities that are based on Christian love and communion.

6.8 The Context of Christian Communities

The Church which is entrusted with the proclamation of the Gospel continually needs to renew her structures and methods of evangelization. The Bible must become more and more the book of the Christian community. The laity in a special way must have a greater access to it. The whole ministry of the Church should be understood as a ministry of the Word (Rom 15,16; PO 2; LG 21; GS 38). This would require a change from a ritualistic and legalistic understanding of the ministry of the Church to a more prophetic and proclamatory approach.

7. PART FOUR

A NEW WAY OF READING THE BIBLE

All the different ways of reading the Bible are not equally apt, although they all have been adapted fruitfully in the past. The New Evangelization to which we are committing ourselves demands from us new ways of reading and proclaiming the Word, in continuity with the sound tradition of the Church. This should enable us to discover God's plan today in our midst and to respond to it adequately and relevantly.

7.1 We should start with the reality in which we actually find ourselves today, and we should allow the Word of God to throw light on this reality. This would entail on our part, attentive listening to the God who speaks through the Scriptures, through his Church, and through the human situation. In this process the joys and sorrows of the world will have to become the joys and sorrows of the disciples of the Lord (GS 1). Such a reading will reveal to us the true face of God, not the God of abstract philosophy, who remains unmoved by the events of the world, but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose face in Christ and through the coming of the Reign of God is turned in loving compassion and concern for all those who suffer in every age and are struggling to find meaning in their life.

7.2 We should read the Bible in a prayerful setting. The Bible is the Word of love, addressed by a God of love. It is not primarily a description of himself but a communication of himself to his people. In order to understand this Word, it is necessary to create an attitude of openness in love to this God. Only then can we truly enter into the message that is communicated. This has to take place both in private reading and community reading, especially in liturgical celebrations. In the liturgy this Word is translated into signs that relate to life. Even ritual actions become proclamation. The saving presence of Christ in the liturgy is thus proclaimed both under the sign of Word and Sacrament.

7.3 Our reading of the Bible should enable people to discover the true content. All efforts to interpret the Bible in order to justify political and ideological positions should be considered as a betrayal of the message. It should provoke the people of God to conversion and commitment in the service of the brothers and sisters. When it is read in the community of believers who are open to God, it can give us strength to be faithful to our vocation of service in the world.

7.4 We should be careful to avoid the danger of fundamentalism in the reading and interpretation of the Word of God. This can be achieved by taking into account the following elements in our reading of the Bible:

- The Bible is a book that deals with our relationship with God in the context of a believing community and not a book that gives the scientific explanation of this world.
- We have a gradual unfolding of the pedagogy of God in the Bible. Therefore in interpreting texts the total content and the global dynamism of God's plan which culminates in Christ must be taken into account.
- Since the Bible uses a variety of literary devices in the interpretation of the Bible, care should be taken to explain them using a proper methodology.
- Finally it is not possible to read the Bible and understand its message independently of the community and historical context in which it lives.

7.5 Our way of reading the Bible should give a new thrust to our biblical apostolate:

- *a thrust from the book to the Word:* Our duty is not above all to multiply and distribute Bibles, which is of course important. It is rather to make the Word of God alive in the hearts of all our brothers and sisters in the world.
- *a thrust from the institutional structure to a creative presence:* Structures and organization remain necessary, but even more, imagination, creativity and above all a contagious faith in the liberating power of the Word of God are important.
- *a thrust from clergy to laity:* We must be convinced that every Christian is responsible for spreading the Good News and that lay men and women are in a privileged situation to reach every person of this world in need of salvation.
- *a thrust from a private reading to a transforming presence in the world:* Of course, personal piety will never become obsolete. But the Spirit of God which inspires the Scriptures tends to make all things new. It is a leaven that aims to transform societies, a fire that purifies us from our sins, a love that fills the gap between rich and poor, a light that gives sense to our lives and guides us in the only true way to happiness.

- *a thrust from the Church to the Reign of God:* The Church, like Jesus, is a servant. The spouse of Christ is not her own goal. Her fulfillment is made up of humble service to the world as she gathers humanity in a new community of love around Christ.

8. PART FIVE

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Preamble

In order to make sure that the Bible is not only possessed and read but also believed and lived we make the following recommendations:

8.1 Recommendations to the Whole Church

8.1.1 We appeal to Bishops and Bishops' Conferences to ensure that the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* is implemented in the various dioceses and regions through the establishment of biblical-pastoral centers or institutes.

8.1.2 We appeal to Bishops and Bishops' Conferences to give the biblical apostolate the priority it deserves in their pastoral endeavors and to encourage it through the formulation of a biblical-pastoral plan and through the conscientization of the faithful through pastoral letters on the biblical apostolate or other appropriate means such as the celebration of Bible Sundays, weeks, months or even a Bible year, especially in those areas where this is not yet a practice.

8.1.3 We appeal to Bishops and Bishops' Conferences to dedicate the next Synod of the Bishops to "Biblical-Pastoral Ministry" so that the relative neglect of the Conciliar Document "Dei Verbum" may be set right.

8.2 Recommendations to the Catholic Biblical Federation

8.2.1 We appreciate the present structuring of the Federation on the regional and subregional levels, and we appeal to the Federation to ensure that these structures are effective and function to promote the biblical apostolate.

8.2.2 Regional and subregional structures should be supported and developed.

8.2.3 There should be closer contact, greater collaboration, and mutual assistance through the sharing of information, resources and material within the Federation.

8.3 Recommendations to the Members

8.3.1 *Material for the biblical-pastoral ministry*

We appeal to members of the Federation to make available

- Bibles in various languages and for various categories at affordable prices, in collaboration with the United Bible Societies and other such organizations;
- special pastoral editions of the Bible and commentaries;
- biblical-pastoral material, courses, etc
- audio-visual material, especially for the illiterate.

8.3.2 *Structures for biblical-pastoral work*

We recommend the establishment of appropriate structures, such as biblical institutes, biblical centers, biblical commissions, for the formation, promotion and coordination of biblical-pastoral work.

8.3.3 *Formation of personnel*

8.3.3.1 Conscious that the biblical apostolate cannot be effectively carried out without well-trained agents, we strongly recommend the solid formation of animators, facilitators and coordinators for the biblical apostolate at all levels.

8.3.3.2 Lay people should be given a privileged place in this formation, given the fact that they have a particular role in the New Evangelization. This formation should place great emphasis on both the content and the process.

8.3.3.3 The formation and spiritual life of the clergy and the religious should be based on the Bible, not only on the intellectual level, but especially on the experiential level, considering their role in the biblical-pastoral ministry and proclamation of the Gospel.

8.3.3.4 The use of the Bible as a source of personal prayer and spiritual nourishment through Bible sharing and prayer groups should be an integral part of the formation in seminaries and formation houses of religious.

8.3.3.5 We appeal to biblical scholars and exegetes to make their knowledge more available for the pastoral work.

8.3.4 *The pastoral use of the Bible*

We recommend that members of the Federation develop and strengthen the use of the Bible in the life of the Church.

8.3.4.1 Through contextual reading in groups in order to interpret the texts with a relevance to the life of the people, new methods are to be developed so as to make this Bible reading more effective.

8.3.4.2 A privileged place for reading and interpretation of the Bible is the small Christian communities. It is necessary to train leaders who can animate such communities. In a multi-religious context, we should encourage the formation of basic human communities in which the members will be able to reflect on human issues and values in the light of the Bible and other Scriptures.

8.3.4.3 The whole liturgical celebration should become a proclamation of the Word. For this we recommend the following:

- selection of texts which take into account the life situation. The books of the Hebrew Bible, especially the prophetic and wisdom literature should not be neglected. The order of Sunday readings should be revised in this sense;
- there should be no celebration without a homily or some other method of interpretation, because the Word can be found in the life of the people only by interpreting it;
- the songs in the liturgy should have greater biblical foundations;
- the liturgical language should reflect the richness of the biblical images of God, humanity and creation.

In order to achieve these aims, we again stress the importance of Bible Sundays, Bible weeks, months or years in the life of the parishes and dioceses.

8.3.4.4 Biblical retreats for clergy, religious and lay people should be organized. For this it will be useful to prepare retreat kits which can be adapted to various regions.

8.3.4.5 The Christian family life should have its center of unity and strength in the Word of God. For this it is necessary to make family prayer an occasion for reading and reflecting on the Word of God.

The various events of family life should be interpreted in the light of the Bible. In order to achieve this it is necessary to form training centers for leaders of families in parishes.

8.3.4.6 The Christian communities – parishes, dioceses and local Churches – should listen to the Word of God in order to be evangelized themselves. *Metanoia* according to the biblical message should build up a Church that is more oriented to its lay people, and less clerical in its mentality .

8.3.4.7 Popular devotions should be conducted in such a way that, through them, the Word of God enters into the prayer and life of the people.

8.3.5 *Biblical-pastoral work as an answer to the challenges of today's life*

8.3.5.1 *Inculturation*

The proclamation of the Word of the Bible should take into account the cultural diversity of people. It should interpret them prophetically in the light of God's Word, denouncing the evils and highlighting values so that it may become clearer that the Word of the Lord fulfils the legitimate aspirations of men and women.

8.3.5.2 Dialogue with other scriptures

The Word of the Lord must become good news for all religions. This can be achieved through a dialogical approach to their scriptures, by reading these scriptures together with the Bible in order to interpret human events and values. It is necessary to prepare manuals that can give guidelines to conduct such sessions of dialogue.

8.3.5.3 Fundamentalism

In order to counteract the dangers of sects and biblical fundamentalism, we recommend the following:

- solid biblical formation which will enable people to interpret the Bible correctly;
- foster openness to a God who speaks in human history and to read the Bible in that context;
- distribute information, e.g. statements that have already been made on this matter.
- Bible based Christian communities should be formed.

Where there is the special challenge of an aggressive fundamentalism in other religions, we recommend an adequate biblical formation which deepens the faith of Christians so that they may remain faithful, even against all pressures.

8.3.5.4 Socio-economical and political challenges

Bible centers should take into account, in a very special way, the presence of the poor in their context and should realize that God's Word today comes to us especially through them. For this, Bible groups for the marginalized people should be organized, and those engaged in animating these groups should become first and foremost, listeners of the Word that emerges from the midst of the poor. They should learn to read the Bible in a spirit of openness to these people.

A prophetic use of the Bible demands that it be read in the context of the socio-political situation. This means that commentaries on the Bible should be prepared which throw light on, and challenge, unjust social structures, violation of human rights, situations of oppression and exploitation.

It also requires that we join with and encourage all groups and movements that are in favor of justice, peace and solidarity with the oppressed.

We also ask all those who are working in the biblical-pastoral ministry and the whole Church, in collaboration with other Churches and religious groups, to urge governments to announce a biblical *shabbat*, or Jubilee year, before the year 2000, so that the foreign debts of the poorest nations of the world will be cancelled instead of becoming an eternal debt.

8.3.5.5 Formation of the youth

The youth of today carry within them the promises of tomorrow. The Word of God is active in them. They should therefore be trained to listen and respond to God. They are also the evangelizers of today and tomorrow. As such they are capable of evangelizing the adults. Adequate Bible editions and biblical programs which can answer the demands of today's life, will enable them to fulfil this mission. For the same reason the catechesis of the youth should be based on the Bible.

8.3.5.6 The role of women in the Church

The lay people, and especially women, are going to have an important role in the life of the Church. Therefore, we strongly recommend the following:

- the Church and the biblical-pastoral work should assist in all efforts to emancipate women in the different countries, nations and cultures. Prostitution and any other exploitation of women, such as in tourism, should be denounced in the name of God.
- women should especially be encouraged to become agents of the proclamation of the Word. They should be given the opportunity to take over responsible and leading positions in the biblical apostolate and in the Church. Women should be better represented in national and international commissions and also in the Federation itself.
- the Bible is very rich in texts dealing with women. These often unknown texts should be given back to the people of God, because the women of the Bible show the way to the Reign of God and throw light on the role of women today. Biblical texts that are hostile to women or stand in a very sexist or patriarchal tradition of interpretation should be proclaimed always with a critical comment made on them.
- women have to be involved in Bible translations and in the revisions of these translations as a guarantee that their needs will be heard.

8.3.5.7 *The challenge of the ecological problem*

The Bible speaks about creation as a gift that God made to the whole human family. In order to respond to the serious ecological imbalances of today, the biblical pastoral ministry should help to alert Christians to these problems, and support all groups which are engaged in these matters.

Ecological problems should be a theme for Bible Sundays, Bible weeks, of retreats, of Bible groups and of every biblical and theological formation in colleges, seminaries and universities. The injustice that has been done, and continues to be done, to creation must be recognized as sinful in the light of the Gospel.

We encourage all Churches to co-operate with peoples and groups who are concerned with these ecological challenges.

8.3.6 All the members of the Federation are invited to ensure that these recommendations are made known and put into practice for the good of the Church and human society.

9. CONCLUSION

At the first Pentecost all those who received the Spirit became prophets of the Word. They were sent into the world to begin the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. We believe that the same Spirit is in our midst today inviting us to be prophets of the New Evangelization.

We can fulfil this mission by allowing ourselves to be transformed by the Word of the Lord as were the first disciples.

We can fulfil this mission by looking towards the wider horizon of the world, leaving aside our selfish dreams and narrow ecclesial centered mentality.

We can fulfil this mission by setting aside our fears and self-centered sense of preservation and plunge into the world that is struggling to become the Reign of God.

We have the assurance of the presence of the Risen Christ; this is at the heart of our faith.

We have the gift of his Spirit, who is hovering over the face of our earth, causing the emergence of a new world order.

We can therefore commit ourselves to this New Evangelization with confidence because we are sure of the truth of his words, "BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW."