

**Greeting of the Catholic Biblical Federation
to the XII Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’
Conferences**

Jakarta, 21 July 2026

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, dear delegates of the Episcopal Conferences of Asia, dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Please receive the warmest greetings of all those who make up the Catholic Biblical Federation. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to take part in this Assembly and to address you today. I greet you on behalf of His Eminence Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, President of the Catholic Biblical Federation, here present among us; on behalf of the members of the Steering Committee of the Federation; and in my own capacity as its General Secretary.

The Catholic Biblical Federation, created in 1969 to put into practice the Conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum*, is a living network at the service of the biblical apostolate, present today in almost 120 countries through 333 full and associate members. Asia occupies a place of honour in this family: almost all the Episcopal Conferences of Asia are full members of the Federation — with the exception, for now, of Japan, Macau and the recently established Episcopal Conference of Central Asia, which we warmly hope will soon join this common home of the Word. Seventeen institutions of your Conferences, together with 51 associate members, make Asia one of the most vibrant regions of the entire Federation. For this living communion, allow me simply to say: thank you.

I wish to congratulate you on the theme of this Assembly: *“Synodal Conversion and the Mission to Be Bridges and Bridge-Builders in Asia”* — *“You will see greater things”* (Jn 1:50). Where did God himself begin to build bridges? In his Word: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:1-2). Sacred Scripture is the first bridge thrown across the distance between heaven and earth, and every bridge the Church builds — with the poor, with cultures, with religions, in your own “triple dialogue” — rests upon that first bridge.

For this very reason I recall today, with gratitude and admiration, the remarkable biblical trajectory of the FABC itself. From its earliest Plenary Assemblies the Federation wove the Word of God into its pastoral vision, and it created its own instrument for this field: BIBA, the Bishops' Institute for the Biblical Apostolate, always organized in close cooperation with the Catholic Biblical Federation. BIBA II, held in Malaysia in 1999, remains one of the most complete programmes of biblical formation ever produced by a continental episcopal body; BIBA III in 2010 and BIBA IV in 2013 carried this dynamic into the horizon of the New Evangelization; and through AsIPA and the small Christian communities gathered around the Gospel, Asia has taught the whole Church what communal listening to the Word looks like in practice.

Dear Brothers, allow me, with great respect and fraternal affection, to share a hope. For more than a decade the BIBA series has not convened, and the biblical apostolate is today less visible in the structures and programmes of the FABC than it once was. Nothing has been lost — but a precious dynamic of your own history is waiting to be reawakened. Perhaps this Assembly, dedicated precisely to synodal conversion, is the providential moment to take it up again: not as one more programme alongside others but, as *Verbum Domini* reminds us, “as a means of letting the Bible inspire all pastoral life” (VD 73).

The recent Synod points in the same direction. Number 83 of its Final Document states: “*Listening to the Word of God is the starting point and criterion for all ecclesial discernment*”, and then maps the places where God speaks to his People: the liturgy, the living Tradition of the Church, meditation on the Scriptures, popular piety, the cry of those who are made poor, the events of history, creation, and personal conscience. There is no synodality without listening, and no ecclesial listening that does not begin with the Word of God. If synodal structures and processes are to grow in the Churches of Asia, they will need women and men formed to listen to the Scriptures and to discern together — exactly what BIBA II so wisely outlined. May I respectfully suggest that this number 83 could find a home in the fruits of your Assembly, and the biblical apostolate its place in the renewed structures of the FABC, as the foundation of the synodal conversion you are seeking.

Whatever shape your discernment takes — a renewal of the BIBA series, the formation of biblical animators, or new common initiatives — please know that you can count on the structures, the materials and the fraternal accompaniment of the Catholic Biblical Federation. Be assured of the interest and the prayers of all its members. May the Lord bless your deliberations with the light and power of his Spirit, and may you — gathered in listening to his Word — indeed “see greater things”. I wish you a fruitful Plenary Assembly.

Thank you very much!

Fr. Jan J. Stefanów, SVD
CBF General Secretary