

**SETTIMANA CONCLUSIVA DELL'ANNO CENTENARIO  
DEL PONTIFICIO ISTITUTO BIBLICO  
[3-8 maggio 2010]**

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**Comunicazione Pastorale della Bibbia**  
P. Ludger Feldkämper, s.v.d.

**INTRODUCTION**

**Your Excellencies ....**

To address such an illustrious corona of people, in such a place and in such an occasion is indeed a privilege and a challenge. Certainly, I would have wished that someone else would stand here before you and I would be among the listeners. But when I was requested by Fr. James Swetnam for this contribution to the jubilee celebration, I did not find a sufficient reason to say “no” and I accepted. Thus I am here together with you to commemorate and celebrate, to remember and ultimately to thank the giver of all good gifts for gift of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and for all the blessings for the entire Church that had emanated from Institution.

Ever since the dictum St. Thomas Aquinas “quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur” – long before the insight that “voraussetzungslose Exegese’ is not possible” – we know that in the act of reading, of texts as well as events the reader is very much subjectively involved. Hence, I would like to you to know from which perspective and bias I will try to approach the topic. As all the speakers during these first three days of this week of celebration also I am indebted to the *Biblicum* as a former student.<sup>1</sup> Already during my ten years of teaching in a School of Theology and a Catechetical Institute<sup>2</sup> in the Philippines, I have become more and more involved in the biblical-pastoral ministry. For twenty years (1984-2005) this ministry became my full-time job. During this time I have come to know to a fair extent the post-Vatican II biblical movement world-wide, I have come to appreciate ministers of the Word in this field, many of them, like myself, graduates of the *Biblicum*.

Because of my formation at the PIB and full-time involvement in the practical work with the Bible, my keen interest has become more and more in “bridging the gap”<sup>3</sup> between biblical scholarship and the Bible in the pastoral ministry.<sup>4</sup> The interest of the

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<sup>1</sup> 1964-1967; licentiate in 1966 and doctorate in 1977.

<sup>2</sup> 1967-1972 in the Archdiocesan Major Seminary (later called: Immaculate Conception School of Theology) and in the Religion Teachers’ Training Center (later called: St. Benedict Institute), both in Vigan, Ilocos Sur, Philippines

<sup>3</sup> This has been the title of booklet on the biblical-pastoral ministry in Africa, published by the Gaba Institut in Eldoret, Kenya, in the 1970s.

<sup>4</sup> For this I had to make a decision. After my doctorate at the *Biblicum* in 1977 Fr. Fritzleo Lentzen-Deis suggested I should become a member of the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* which would have meant to publish (a least) one scholarly article every year. Two arguments made me decide against this invitation:

pastoral dimension of the Bible may also have been conditioned by the fact that I am a member of a missionary congregation, the Societas Verbi Divini, Divine Word Missionaries, Misioneros del Verbo Divino, in Italian abbreviated: Missionari Verbiti. For us, the name contains a program!

I am very much aware that I am sharing my reflections with you at the centenary celebration of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, an institution of high class biblical scholarship, both research and teaching. Fr. Maurice Gilbert, S.J. has rightly concluded his conference "The Centenary of the Biblical Institute" on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2009 by saying: "Our exegesis does not have pastoral concerns directly in mind...The golden rule...is still: the literal sense of the texts alone forms the basis of faith and morality. That is the sense we are feeling our way towards. That is how the Church calls us to its service."<sup>5</sup>

Certainly, nobody would want to argue about this with a man who has been one of the outstanding rectors of this Institute. But on the other hand who would certainly not deny that the pastoral dimension has from the beginning been the horizon of the life and work of the Institute. *Vinea Electa*, the Apostolic Letter states at the very beginning the concern behind the foundation of the PIB: "affinché la VIGNA ELETTA della Sacra Scrittura possa produrre frutti sempre più abbondanti, tanti per i pastori della Chiesa, quanto per tutti i fedeli". This ateneo biblico should provide "alle scuole cattoliche un grande numero di maestri competenti per la spiegazione dei Libri divini."<sup>6</sup>

Two texts of *DEI VERBUM* could perhaps be considered as a continuation or further explanation of these opening lines of *Vinea Electa*. The Constitution states that the "exploration and exposition of the divine writings" should be done in such a way that "as many ministers of the divine word as possible" that as many ministers of the divine word as possible will be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God".<sup>7</sup>

This passage of *DEI VERBUM* no. 23 is taken up and commented in the Pontifical Biblical Commission's document "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": "Beyond this attention to the text in its original historical context, the church depends on exegetes, animated by the same Spirit as inspired Scripture, to ensure that "there be as great a number of servants of the word of God as possible capable of effectively providing the people of God with the nourishment of the Scriptures ("Divino Afflante Spiritu," 24; 53-55: "Ench. Bibl.," 551, 567; "Dei Verbum," 23; Paul VI, "Sedula Cura" [1971])."<sup>8</sup>

The same document, before it speaks of the exegete's work of scholarship, the exegete's ecclesial task is mentioned: "for it consists in the study and explanation of Holy Scripture in a way that makes all its riches available to pastors and the faithful."<sup>9</sup>

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1) the limited library of our seminary and the pastoral needs of that region; 2) An observation by Fr. Carlos Mesters (in: *I Popolo Interpreta la Bibbia*, Assisi 1978, p. 58) "Vengono pubblicati più di 10.000 articoli e libri scientifici all'anno su tutto ciò che è argomento biblico. Ma per ora, l'esegesi è critica solo in relazione al senso della "lettera" della Bibbia e non in relazione all'applicazione di questo senso alla nostra realtà." The pastoral situation of our area in the Philippines did not motivate me to write the title no. 10.001.

<sup>5</sup> 100° Anniversario di Fondazione del Pontificio Istituto Biblico, p.52

<sup>6</sup> [www-biblico.it/doc-vari/vinea\\_electa\\_lett-html](http://www-biblico.it/doc-vari/vinea_electa_lett-html)

<sup>7</sup> DV 23

<sup>8</sup> III,B,3

<sup>9</sup> III,C

And the conclusion of DEI VERBUM the hope is expressed that through the “reading and study of the sacred books...the word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified (2 Thess. 3:1)” and that “the treasure of revelation... may more and more fill the hearts of people”<sup>10</sup>. The study of the sacred books – isn’t this, what the *Biblicum* stands for? And that the Word of God may spread, be received with honor and touch the heart of people – isn’t this the purpose of the pastoral communication of the word of God? The scholarly and the pastoral concern with the Bible as the Word of God – two aspects, not just parallel to each other and even less in contrast and opposing each other! I would rather see them as complementary to each other in the sense that ultimately biblical scholarship is at the service of biblical-pastoral ministry!

Are there perhaps biblical models for these complementary vocations? In biblical-pastoral seminars I often illustrate biblical apostolate or biblical-pastoral ministry with the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8,26-40) with its three stages 1) having a bible and reading it; 2) (helping towards) understanding what the text says; 3) starting from Scripture to proclaim the Good News of Jesus. – Perhaps the model for the other, the scholarly interest in and approach to the Bible could be Apollo of Alexandria, an authority on the scriptures (Acts 18,24-28) – whose teaching and learning, like the investigation of the author of the Third Gospel is characterized by “accuracy” (ακριβως / ακριβεστερον – Acts 18,25f and Lk 1,3).

The title which the organizers of this week of celebration have given to my contribution is: “Comunicazione pastorale della Bibbia” In the light of what I have said, in my preparation of this paper I have been guided by a twofold interest: 1. To show some significant contributions the *Biblicum* has made to the biblical-pastoral ministry – in addition to preparing ministers of the Word; 2. Instead of giving a dry lecture on *comunicazione pastorale della Bibbia*, I would like to illustrate it by presenting some protagonists of the biblical-pastoral ministry whom I have come to know either personally or through their contributions to this ministry.

I would like to deal with the topic in three steps:

Part I: The Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Catholic Biblical Federation. After a short presentation of the Federation I would like to draw attention to the contributions the *Biblicum* has made to the Federation in particular and (through it) to the biblical-pastoral ministry world-wide.

Part II: In a second part I would like to sketch what I have learned at the PIB for the ministry of the Word I have been involved in; and how this learning process has continued through the various phases of this ministry.

Part III: In the third and last part I would like to share some experiences on the development of the biblical-pastoral ministry since Vatican II and of the challenges that lie ahead.

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<sup>10</sup> DV 26

## MAIN PART

### I The Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Catholic Biblical Federation

#### (I) The Catholic Biblical Federation<sup>11</sup>

In this first part I would like to draw your attention to the Church's official action arm for the biblical-pastoral ministry, the Catholic Biblical Federation and the role of the Biblicum in its foundation and formation. Certainly, all of you will agree that the scholarly approach to the Bible is the domain of the Pontifical Biblical Institute – together with other institutions, like the older *École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem* of the Dominicans. Sixty years after the foundation of the Biblicum, Catholic Biblical Federation (*Federazione Biblica Cattolica*)<sup>12</sup> was brought into being as an institution for the pastoral communication of the Word of God.

During Bishops' Synod in 2008, at least three Bishops, all of them students of the Biblicum, referred to the Catholic Biblical Federation:

- Bishop Emmanuel LaFont of Cayenne has summed what the Federation stands for in these words: “La Fédération Biblique Catholique est un instrument privilégié des évêques pour que Parole soit la source et l'inspiration de toute prière, de toute évangélisation, de toute homélie, de toute catéchèse, de tout document épiscopal, de toute oeuvre de charité”.<sup>13</sup>
- Bishop Joseph Luc André Bouchard of Alberta, Canada, in referring to the Catholic Biblical Federation, expressed the following wish: “Que la Fédération Biblique Catholique mondiale (CBF), appuyée par le magistère avec les autres Dicastères romains, étudie la possibilité de mettre sur pied des Congrès Internationaux sur la Parole de Dieu pour permettre une lecture “ cum Ecclesia” de l'Écriture.”<sup>14</sup>
- Bishop Arturo Bastes, S.V.D., of Sorsogon, Philippines commended the Federation in these words: “The members of the Catholic Biblical Federation (found in 129 countries today) have developed techniques in doing biblical pastoral ministry which prove to be effective in transmitting God's message to contemporary men and women. These creative methodologies must be included in the official curriculum of the formation programs in theological faculties and houses of formation.”<sup>15</sup>

What is the Catholic Biblical Federation? Let me attempt an answer by explaining the three elements of which its name is composed.

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<sup>11</sup> Reginald Fuller, *The WCFBA – How it came to be*, in: *Word-Event XVI-3+4* (1986) 43-45; Bernard Orchard, OSB, “*Founding the Federation –Sharing Resources in the Service of Scripture*”, in: *Word-Event XVI-3+4* (1986) 46-47; Otto Knoch, *Die Vorgeschichte der Gründung der Katholischen Welt-Bibelföderation aus meiner Sicht*, in: *Bulletin DEI VERBUM* 3 (1986) 8-12

<sup>12</sup> From its foundation in 1969 until the Plenary Assembly in Bogota, Colombia in 1990, it was known as the *World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate / Federazione Biblica Cattolica Universale*.

<sup>13</sup> Intervention on 09/10/2008

<sup>14</sup> Intervention on 09/10/2008

<sup>15</sup> Intervention on 11/10/2008

It is, first of all, a *Federation*, a union or an alliance of independent and autonomous organizations. In fact, the existence of some of these organizations pre-dates the creation of the Federation in 1969. Some of the founding members of the Federation, for instance the Catholic Biblical Associations of Germany (KBW - Katholisches Bibelwerk) and of Switzerland (SKB - Schweizer Katholisches Bibelwerk) were founded already in the 1930s (1933 and 1935 respectively). The members of the Federation are of two kinds: a full member is an institution - one per Bishops' Conference - entrusted by the Conference with the biblical-pastoral ministry in the area of the Conference; associate members are other institutions (like publishing houses, pastoral centers, individual dioceses or religious orders) having this kind of ministry as their priority. - Through its ca. 300 member organizations the Federation is present in some 130 countries. The world-wide character of the Federation can also be seen in the fact that it has held its Plenary Assemblies in all the continents: In Vienna, on Malta, in Bangalore (India), Bogota (Colombia), Hong Kong, Jounieh (Lebanon) and Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania). - The ecclesial character of the Federation has two dimensions: through the members it is primarily at the service of the local Churches, but at the same time through the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity it is in liaison with the Holy See. -

The CBF is a *biblical* Federation, not a *Bible* Federation. This means: its purpose is not the translation, production and distribution of the book of the bible which has been the original purpose of the Bible Societies of Protestant origin. While the Catholic Biblical Federation collaborates with the Bible Societies, its scope is wider: not just the book, but how to read the book - responsibly and fruitfully! - The purpose and scope of the Federation is none other than the implementation of the directives of Vatican II concerning Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church as can be seen from the following quotations of Dei Verbum VI in art. III of the Federation's statutes<sup>16</sup>: The Federation promotes

- 1.1. translations and widespread distribution of the sacred Scriptures, since "easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (DV 22);
- 1.2. the study, understanding and use of the Bible among Catholic clergy and people, since "all the clergy... (and all) who are legitimately active in the ministry of the Word" as well as "all the Christian faithful" are to learn "through diligent sacred reading and careful study of the divine Scriptures the excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ" (cf. DV 25);
- 1.3. a pastoral care that is solidly founded on the Scriptures since "like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture" (DV 21);
- 1.4. all means whereby "as many ministers of the divine Word as possible will be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the People of God" (DV 23).

Finally, the Federation is a *Catholic* organization. This is not to be understood in its narrow confessional sense (Catholic vs. Protestant), but in its original sense of "all-embracing" since after the Council nobody can claim to be Catholic without being at the

<sup>16</sup> [www.c-b-f.org](http://www.c-b-f.org) → The CBF → Constitution

same time ecumenical! In fact, since the beginning the liaison office at the Holy See has been the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. – On the other hand it has been felt all along the history of the Federation, that it is legitimate or even necessary to stress the Catholic dimension of Federation for at least two reasons: because of the relative neglect of the Bible among Catholics and because of the need to do biblical-pastoral work in the Catholic context and tradition.

## (II) Pontifical Biblical Institute and Catholic Biblical Federation

Nobody here will doubt the specific contribution of the Pontifical Biblical Institute towards the place of the Bible and the “Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. It is certainly different from that of the Catholic Biblical Federation. And yet, it cannot be denied that the *Biblicum* has played a significant role in the foundation and history of the Federation. I would like to illustrate this by the parts four rectors of the Institute – the founding rector and the three who have become Cardinals – have played with regard to the biblical-pastoral ministry respectively, partly in relation to the Catholic Biblical Federation.

### 1. *Fr. Leopold Fonck, S.J. and Fr. Arnold Janssen, S.V.D.*

The year 1909 was the centenary of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, but also of the death of the founder of the Society of the Divine Word, St. Arnold Janssen. These two events at first sight may not have anything to do with each other. But because of my bias mentioned above I am wondering whether they are just a curious historical coincidence. Both the first rector of the *Biblicum*, Fr. Leopold Fonck, S.J. and Fr. Arnold Janssen, S.V.D. hailed from the same area, that of the Lower Rhine in Northern Germany: Arnold Janssen from the little town of Goch, Fr. Fonck from a farm nearby. Both were almost contemporaries and stayed for some time in the small town of Kempen – the older Janssen, while pursuing his plans of founding an Institution for the spread of the Gospel, Fonck as a pupil at the secondary school (Gymnasium), studying the classical languages which prepared him for later becoming a biblical scholar. It’s interesting to observe that the ambience, in which “*The Imitation of Christ*” of Thomas a Kempis<sup>17</sup> originated, also became the fertile soil for two different, but complementary vocations for the ministry of the Word, the scholarly study of the Bible and the pastoral and missionary use and spread of the Gospel. Fr. Fonck dedicated his life and energies primarily in the service of the *verbum inspiratum*, Fr. Janssen spent his years first and foremost in the service of the *verbum incarnatum*. Yet, he understood *Verbum Divinum* also as referring to the “Word of the Spirit”, Sacred Scripture.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This classic of the *Devotio Moderna*, though in many regards conditioned by its time, is full of quotations of Sacred Scripture and is said not to have failed its influence on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

<sup>18</sup> The love for the Incarnate Word of God and the appreciation of the inspired Word is rooted in the piety of the Janssen family. “E’ doveroso però premettere che l’amore per la Sacra Scrittura era per Arnoldo un po’ un’eredità di famiglia. Durante la Quaresima il padre era solito alla sera, leggere – e qualche volta anche commentare – l’epistola ed il vangelo del giorno. Altrettanto faceva d’inverno, particolarmente la domenica sera. Assai familiare era soprattutto il prologo del Vangelo di S. Giovanni che veniva letto ogni sera

In the rule for his new foundation in 1885 he tells us how he wanted the name of the Society of the Divine Word to be understood:<sup>19</sup> “The name of the society is: Society of the Divine Word (Societas Verbi Divini). Here we attribute the adjective “divinum” to all the three divine Persons. Thus under ‘Verbum Divinum’ we mean:

- a) the Word of the divine Father, that is the Second Person of the godhead;
- b) the word of the divine son in his holy humanity, i.e. the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- c) the word of the Holy Spirit, i.e. all Holy Scripture and, in a secondary sense, the priestly word which admonishes and instructs human beings, insofar as this is done as representing the Church and in line with its teaching.”

Among the first students at the Biblicum in 1909 there were three members of the Society of the Divine Word, founded by Arnold Janssen<sup>20</sup>. One of the Society’s most outstanding students at the PIB later became Superior General, Fr. Heinrich Heekeren. Also he is from the Lower Rhine area and he brought to the attention to the entire Society of the Divine Word that the biblical apostolate – as implied in its name as understood by Arnold Janssen is an integral part of the Missionari Verbiti. It is not surprising, then, ever since the Congregation has been involved in the various fields of the biblical ministry. It may suffice to mention in this connection Editorial Verbo Divino, which has become *the* Bible publishing house for Latin America.<sup>21</sup> For more than twenty years already the SVD has an official coordinator in most of its Provinces and one at the level of the Generalate.

## 2. Cardinal Bea and the foundation of the Catholic Biblical Federation

Connected with the biblical ministry more directly than Fr. Fonck, has been Fr. Augustine Bea. His contribution to the “break-through” of “modern exegesis” (historical-critical method) is well known. It is sufficient to mention his participation in the exegetical congress in Göttingen in 1935 and his contribution to *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) which seems to be an open secret! One of his students told us once that the Latin of his lectures and of the encyclical were astoundingly similar! Likewise well-known is his role in the Council (1962-65) in general and his contribution to the making of DEI VERBUM in particular; there is no need or time to dwell on that here.

Less known is perhaps his role in providing for the implementation of DEI VERBUM through the founding the Catholic Biblical Federation. In fact, in any run-down on the history Cardinal Bea is referred to as its founder.

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dall’ottobre al aprile, al termine del rosario.” Pietro Sessolo, S.V.D., *La Spiritualità del Beato Arnaldo Janssen*, Roma 1986, p.141

<sup>19</sup> Manfred Müller svd, *Living by the Word*. In: *Witnessing to the Word* no. 11 (June 1987) 13

<sup>20</sup> Matthias Geurts, Netherlands (1909-10); Wilhelm Leusch, Germany (1909-10) and Anton Wirtgen, Germany (1909-10)

<sup>21</sup> Not wanting to by-pass the enormous contributions other religious and missionary Institutions have made in the biblical-pastoral field, let me just mention the Pauline Family, sons and daughters of Bl. Don Alberione, especially with its international network SOBICAIN (Società Biblica Cattolica Internazionale); the Salesians of Don Bosco with their ABS (Associazione Biblica Salesiana); the Claretians and many others.

In 1964, the city of Stuttgart which is the capital of Baden-Württemberg, the home state of Cardinal Bea, hosted the 80<sup>th</sup> German “Katholikentag”. Stuttgart called “City of the Bible” is known to any Bible scholar as the domicile of Württembergische Bibelanstalt and Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, the publishers of the Biblia Hebraica, the Septuaginta and the Greek New Testament. It is likewise the home of Katholisches Bibelwerk. No wonder that this particular Katholikentag distinguished itself by marked biblical profile which Pope Paul VI acknowledged and underlined in his radio message of 6<sup>th</sup> September.

During the Katholikentag, 50.000 copies of the New Testament with a preface of Cardinal Bea, were distributed among the participants. He visited the ecumenical Bible exhibition and met with the director of Katholisches Bibelwerk (KBW), Dr. Otto Knoch who told him about similar Bibelwerke in Austria and Switzerland as well as their contacts with the Württembergische Bibelanstalt. Likewise, Dr. Knoch suggested a meeting with the representatives of these Catholic Biblical Associations in view of future collaboration.

After another visit in Stuttgart in 1966, the Cardinal followed up these suggestions by setting up at the Pontifical Council for Unity a desk for biblical matters under Fr. Walter Abbot SJ and by regularly consulting Fr. Norbert Lohfink SJ of the Pontifical Biblical Institute.

On September 23, 1967 Fr. Christian Reusch SVD, one of the founders of the publishing house Editorial Verbo Divino in Spain wrote a letter to Fr. Walter M. Abbot, assistant to Cardinal Bea which he concludes with the appeal: “A Catholic Bible Society, therefore, has to be founded.”

On April 22-23, 1968, during the Easter octave, Cardinal Bea at the request of Pope Paul VI called a consultation meeting of already existing biblical-pastoral institutions – among them Fr. Reusch – to discuss the desirability and profile of such a Catholic Biblical Federation. Though this came into existence only one year later under Archbishop (later also Cardinal) Willebrands. But ever since, when the history of the Federation is re-told, Cardinal Bea is referred to as the “founding father”.

During the meeting of consultation under Cardinal Bea in 1968 and during that of the foundation under Archbishop Willebrands, one phrase of DEI VERBUM became sort of a slogan which characterizes the biblical-pastoral ministry: “Easy access to Sacred Scripture be provided to all the Christian faithful” (DV 22). From the very beginning this was not understood in the narrower sense of making the book of the Bible available – through translation, production and distribution, but as referring to making the contents of the Bible available.

Founded by Cardinal Bea, the Catholic Biblical Federation is the Church’s official organization for pastoral use of the Bible.

### *3. Cardinal Martini and the heart of the biblical-pastoral ministry*

A good number of us present have attended the course of textual criticism given by Fr. Carlo Maria Martini, a rather academic subject! Perhaps only few of us realized at that

time that we were sitting at the feet of a person who later would become one of the most outstanding promoters of *lectio divina*.

Cardinal Martini can perhaps be considered a living symbol of this twofold respect of the text. As scholar and expert in textual criticism of international fame he is the only Catholic co-responsible for the edition of the Greek New Testament which is the basis for all interconfessional translations. At the same time, as is well known, has become most outstanding in contributing to the pastoral use of the Bible, in particular in promoting *lectio divina*.

In 1990, under the aegis of Fr. James Swetnam, the Pontifical Biblical Institute commemorated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of DEI VERBUM. For this purpose Cardinal Martini, in the overcrowded Aula Magna of the Gregorian University, gave a conference on *lectio divina* as sketched – without the term being used – in DV 25. In this section, not only ministers of the Word and religious men and woman, but “all the Christian faithful” are exhorted to acquire by “frequent reading of the divine Scriptures” the “excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:8) and “remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for “we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying.” This conference met with “successo strepitoso” not only among the listeners. The Cardinal showed in his talk that even in Vatican documents, in which one would have at least expected that *lectio divina* would have been mentioned, it was strangely absent<sup>22</sup>. After the Conference of Cardinal Martini – at least “post hoc”, if not “propter hoc”<sup>23</sup> in most of the Vatican documents of greater importance *lectio divina* has been recommended.

Cardinal Martini, as is well known, was not theoretician as far as *lectio divina* is concerned; he practiced it with young people in the Cathedral of Milano, gave innumerable conferences about, and used it in retreats and his many books. Thus, in this way, the Cardinal, most likely more than anybody else has brought *lectio divina* to the level of consciousness of the Church at large. The best proof of this is the great number of interventions during the Synod of 2008 as well the propositions submitted to the Holy Father promoting *lectio divina*.

In fact, in the Catholic Biblical Federation the conviction has grown – as emerged through a survey taken among all its members – that *lectio divina* is the heart of the biblical pastoral ministry – parallel to the maxim of the Council that “the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology”. (DV 24).

More than once Cardinal Martini has been invited to become the President of the Catholic Biblical Federation. He had to decline because he felt overburdened with his other responsibilities – in the huge diocese of Milano and at the Holy See. Yet, I dare say that he has made a significant to the Federation and to the biblical-pastoral ministry

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<sup>22</sup> Carlo M. Martini, The Pastoral Use of Lectio Divina, Bulletin DEI VERBUM19 (2/1991) 8-13

<sup>23</sup>John Paul II: Pastores Dabo Vobis (1992), 46 und 47; Pontifical Biblical Commission, Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, (1993) IV, C, 2; John Paul II: Tertio Millennio Adveniente, (1994) 36.40; Vita Consecrata, (1996), 94; Ecclesia in America, (1999) 31; Ecclesia in Oceania, (2001) 38; Novo Millennio Ineunte, (2001) 39-40; Rosarium Virginis Mariae, (2002) 28-31; Pastores Gregis, (2003) 15

world-wide by making us realize that *lectio divina*, the prayerful and life-related reading of the Bible as Word of God is truly the heart of the biblical-pastoral ministry.

#### **4. Cardinal Vanhoye: bridging the exegesis and the biblical-pastoral ministry gap**

Many of us remember Fr. Albert Vanhoye's lectures on the Letter to the Hebrews. With his emphasis on the study of the structure he belongs to those professors at the PIB who opened up to narrative and rhetorical methods and to the synchronic reading of the texts – methods which are more helpful for the practical and pastoral use of the Bible.

After the Plenary Assembly of Bangalore, India in 1984, the new General Secretary as an alumnus contacted *Biblicum* every year to pass on information about and to arouse interest in the Federation.

On 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1984, he accompanied the new President of the Federation Msgr. Alberto Ablondi<sup>24</sup> and Msgr. (later Cardinal) Jorge Mejia (an alumnus of PIB and Vatican representative on the Federation's Executive Committee) on a first visit to the PIB for a presentation of the biblical-pastoral ministry and the Federation. Their presentation was attended also by Fr. Rector Vanhoye and Fr. Vice-Rector Swetnam.

On 21<sup>st</sup> November, 1985 Fr. James Swetnam - who previously had participated in an Executive Committee Meeting of the Federation - and I addressed some 50 *Biblicum* students on two topics: Fr. Swetnam on "Importance of the WCFBA for Ecclesiastical Students in Rome" and I on "The World-Wide Biblical Apostolate and the WCFBA twenty years the II. Vatican Council"<sup>25</sup>

On 7 April 1986, the Executive Committee of the Federation which held its annual meeting in Nemi, Roma, visited the PIB where Fr. Swetnam, at that time vice-rector and dean had continued to foster awareness for biblical-pastoral work and concerns among the students of the PIB. Both Fr. Swetnam and Fr. Lentzen-Deis underlined the change in outlook at the PIB. "While the scientific and academic study of Scripture remains its primary concern, it is felt that even during this time of formation the students should be oriented<sup>26</sup> towards the pastoral ministry."

After these regular contacts I suggested in 1987 to Fr. Rector Vanhoye to have the PIB affiliated with the CBF as an associate member. Fr. Vanhoye hesitated at first, pointing out the different thrusts of PIB – biblical scholarship – and CBF – biblical-pastoral ministry. After some common reflection he agreed that, dealing with the Bible not just as a book of

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<sup>24</sup> Ludger Feldkämper, *Fellowship through the Word – Bishop Alberto Ablondi Third President of the Catholic Biblical Federation 1984-1996*. In: Riccardo Burigana ed.), *Dall'amicizia al dialogo*. Roma, 21-44. Cf, also: Alberto Ablondi, *Sulla Parola: Incontro personale col Santo Padre* (1985), in: *Saggi di Esperienze Pastorali*, Torino, 2005, pp. 83-85; Id., *La parola di Dio salva la parola umana, il Vangelo salva l'uomo di oggi* (Intervento del Vescovo in un convegno internazionale sulla Parola – 2000), in: *ibid.* 75-83.

<sup>25</sup> *Word-Event XV-4* (1985)25-29

<sup>26</sup> Letter of General Secretary to all Members, May 1986, p. 4

the past, but as a book of the Church, has to lead ultimately (or to be open to) its pastoral use. On the other hand, responsible pastoral ministry has to take into account the results of solid biblical scholarship. Hence, to guarantee this, the Federation needs the contribution of trained exegetes and institutions like the PIB in which qualified exegetes were/ are being trained.

After his term of office as Rector of PIB, Fr. Vanhoye became Secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission which published in 1993 its important document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church". Signed by the President of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, it is certainly a document of common efforts and shared responsibility, but the burden of this hard word of exploration and collaboration lies certainly on the shoulders of Commission's Secretary. Though the first two chapters, "Methods and Approaches for Interpretation" and "Hermeneutical Questions" may be rightfully considered an up-date of and commentary on ch. III of DEI VERBUM, the last two chapters on "Characteristics of Catholic Interpretation" and "Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church" on the other hand with its sections Actualization, Inculturation and Use of the Bible deal with ch. VI of DEI VERBUM.

Under the heading "The Use of the Bible in Pastoral Ministry" the object of the biblical apostolate is defined as "to make known the Bible as the Word of God and source of life!" (IV,C,3) and elsewhere even more concise in the context of liturgy: that "the written text becomes living word" (IV,C,1). In greater detail the task of the exegete - his scholarly work being at the service of the pastoral use of the Bible - is explained under III,C,1: "In their work of interpretation Catholic exegetes must never forget that what they are interpreting is the <word of God.> Their common task is not finished when they have simply determined sources, defined forms or explained literary procedures. They arrive at the true goal of their work only when they have explained the meaning of the biblical text as God's word for today. To this end they must take into consideration the various hermeneutical perspectives which help toward grasping the contemporary meaning of the biblical message and which make it responsive to the needs of those who read Scripture "

I would like to sum up this section on PIB and CBF in this way: The Pontifical Biblical Institute, through three of its outstanding professors and rectors who later became Cardinals has made a significant contribution to the pastoral communication of the Bible - through playing a part in the foundation of the Catholic Biblical Federation, through helping to discover *lectio divina* as the heart of the biblical-pastoral ministry and through and through defining the role of the exegete in the pastoral ministry.

## II **Biblicum students in the biblical-pastoral ministry**

(1) The PIB became **affiliated with the Catholic Biblical Federation** as an associate member only 18 years after its foundation. This, of course, does not mean that graduates of the PIB became involved in the biblical-pastoral ministry in general and the CBF in particular.

I myself became acquainted with the Catholic Biblical Federation during its second Plenary Assembly on the island of Malta in 1978, a few months after finishing my doctorate at the Biblicum. Among the 76 participants in that second PA of the Federation,

almost one third (23) of them, were graduates of the *Biblicum*. And there has been a steady number of them in all the subsequent Plenary Assemblies (1984 –Bangalore/India: 24; 1990 – Bogotá/Colombia: 41; 1996- Hong Kong: 42; 2002 Jounieh/Lebanon: 51; 2008 – Dar-es-Salaam: 46)

(2) More telling than statistics is probably the personal testimony **Bishop LaFont**, a graduate of our Alma Mater, made during the Synod on the Word of God in 2008: „La Fédération Biblique Catholique est un instrument privilégié des évêques pour que Parole soit la source et l'inspiration de toute prière, de toute évangélisation, de toute homélie, de toute catéchèse, de tout document épiscopal, de toute oeuvre de charité.” Then he continued reflecting on the formation he received at the PIB and his second and complementary schooling from the so-called simple people. “Je témoigne de la fécondité de la Parole parmi les petits et les humbles. J'ai une licence d'Ecriture Sainte à l'Institut Biblique de Rome, mais les pauvres m'ont ouvert davantage encore à la force de la Parole. Ils m' ont évangélisé... Pour eux je redis avec le Christ : « Je te bénis, Père, Seigneur du ciel et de la terre, d'avoir caché cela aux sages et aux intelligents et de l'avoir révélé aux tout-petits. Oui, Père, car tel a été ton bon plaisir» (Mt 11, 25-26). Les pauvres ont une ouverture profonde à la Parole de Dieu, et l'Eglise se doit de toujours la lire en proximité avec eux.

This personal testimony confirms from experience what the Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission had stated already in 1993: „Aber man darf sich freuen, die Bibel in den Händen der Armen, der einfachen Leute zu sehen, die zu ihrer Auslegung und Aktualisierung in geistlicher und existentieller Hinsicht ein helleres Licht bereitstellen können, als was eine selbstgerechte Wissenschaft zu seiner Erklärung beizutragen vermag (vgl. Mt 11, 25).“ (PBC:IBC IV,C,3).

I have never met Bishop LaFont. But I, and surely many of you present here, can easily identify with his intervention since we have undergone experiences similar to his.

(3) Upon the suggestion – and even insistence – of Fr. Swetnam I would like to sketch now some of the **learning experiences** that have become **significant in my own journey** with and the ministry of the pastoral communication of the Word.

### 1. Formation at the Pontifical Biblical Institute during the time of the Council

I was privileged to be a student at the Gregorian University and the Biblical Institute during 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> sessions **Vatican II**. We experienced from nearby the genesis of *DEI VERBUM* and left Rome with a certain “post-conciliar enthusiasm” about implementing the Council’s directives concerning Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church.

In hindsight and in the light of later experiences I can say that the following statements of *DEI VERBUM* have become very significant for my ministry of the Word:

„*DEI VERBUM AUDIENS et PROCLAMANS!*” (DV 1). One of our professors, Fr. Maximilian Zerwick insisted, not to refer to the dogmatic constitution on Divine Revelation as “*DEI VERBUM*” but to mention also the “*audiens et proclamans*”. If I understood him correctly, he did not want us to look at the Word of God as a static reality,

but as something “out there” or “on high”, but as something dynamic, as part of a dynamic process, as something to be listened to and to be proclaimed. For my academic teaching and especially for my many Bible seminars I have drawn conclusion, not “teach” the Bible or the Word of God, but to help the students and participants how to read the text and to listen to the Word attentively – so they could live and proclaim it convincingly!

DEI VERBUM speaks of revelation, word of God and Sacred Scripture in terms of the intimate dialogue between friends (DV 2), between bride and bridegroom (DV 8), between father and children (DV 21). Thus, reading the Bible properly can only mean doing it “prayerfully”: listening to God in reading and answering God in prayer (DV 25). Hence, teaching exegesis has fulfilled its purpose only when it has led to answering the Word in prayer and life, when the Bible has become one’s basic prayer book and the book of life.

“Easy access to Sacred Scripture for all the Christian faithful” (DV 22) After my years of specialization in Sacred Scripture in Rome I was assigned to teach Scripture in a seminary, to a limited group of people who were to acquire a familiarity with Scripture superior to that of the ordinary faithful. Yet, the Council – in one of its revolutionary statements – launched a challenge that the Scriptures be accessible to ALL: that Bibles would be available to and that their contents would be within the grasp of all the faithful. Hence, this should at least be kept in mind in teaching exegesis in seminaries and catechetical institutes.

The “exploration and exposition of the divine writings” by Catholic exegetes “should be so done that as many ministers of the divine word as possible will be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God, to enlighten their minds, strengthen their wills, and set men's hearts on fire with the love of God.” The ultimate aim of teaching exegesis – the “exploration and exposition of the divine writings” – would be to prepare ministers of the Word – as many as possible – for providing the nourishment of the Scriptures to the people of God. Hence, not just teaching a book but preparing people for biblical-pastoral ministry.

Among our excellent **professors at the Biblicum** I would like to single out some from whom I have profited considerably in the biblical-pastoral ministry. Needless to say, I have come to this evaluation and appreciation only this kind of experience.

**Fr. Carlo M. Martini:** For me personally – and I trust for most of you would agree –the lectures of Fr. Martini were an introduction to and an exercise in “attentive reading”. And this, in my experience in the biblical-pastoral ministry is the greatest, most important challenge. Bible reading has not been part of the Catholic tradition. And where Catholics read the Bible, they do it very superficially. And to teach the faithful the attentive reading of the text is more important than to tell them about the discoveries of the various criticisms of biblical scholarship. To lead them to the “joy of discovery” is more beneficial for them than to feed them with the results of scholarship that go beyond their grasp.

Something else I learned from Fr. Martini’s explanation of the history of the text and the manuscript tradition. He made us aware of the two attitudes towards the sacred text: one, to keep and transmit it unchanged (in German: “festschreiben”); the other, to make it

understandable by modifying for the benefit of the readers (“fortschreiben” in German). A few years later (1975) Pope Paul VI, in no. 4 of EVANGELII NUNTIANDI spoke in a similar vein spoke of a twofold fidelity: “both to a message whose servants we are and to the people to whom we must transmit it living and intact...”. Hence, communication of the Word of God in general and concretely the biblical-pastoral ministry has to take both poles seriously: the message and the addressees.

A significant contribution, not just for teaching exegesis, but for the biblical-pastoral ministry at large and for the preparation and formation of ministers of the Word came from me from **Fr. Luis Alonso Schökel**. Aside from his lectures, his book *The Inspired Word – Scripture in the Light of Language and Literature* (translated from the original *La Palabra Inspirada*) has been of great help. He opened our eyes for the shift of attention from the inspired author to the inspired word and finally on to the inspired reader. Drawing attention to the “three functions of language”, following Karl Bühler’s, *Sprachtheorie*,<sup>27</sup> viz. statement (Darstellung), expression (Kundgabe) and address (Auslösung), he helped conveying the basic insight that dealing with the Word of God in Sacred Scripture implies more than conveying its contents. Many of Fr. Alonso’s insights not only anticipated further developments in hermeneutics; they have also turned out to be very applicable and useful in the practical biblical ministry.

The moderator of my doctoral dissertation was **Fr. Fritz-Leo Lentzen-Deis**. Aside from his personal interest in his students he prepared them also for their involvement in the biblical-pastoral ministry by favoring the pragma-linguistic approach. Principles of communication in general are applied to the Bible. Accordingly, the biblical authors – e.g. of narrative texts - did not write in order to document facts, mediate knowledge and present “objective” truth. They propose to their readers to identify themselves with the characters of their narratives, to assume their attitudes as models for action. Only in this way the “truth” of a biblical text is really understood.<sup>28</sup> This method aims strongly at facilitating the dialogue between the reader and the text.

Dealing with students from all over the world, Fr. Lentzen-Deis became very interested in the topic and concern of reading the Bible in different contexts. Hence he started project group “Evangelium et Cultura” also with the purpose collaboration in the series of a commentary for biblical-pastoral praxis.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> . Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache, Jena 1934; here: *The Inspired Word*, p. 134

<sup>28</sup> R. Huning, *Bibelwissenschaft im Dienste populärer Bibellektüre*, SBB 54, Stuttgart 2004, 332-351; C. Mora Paz-M.Grilli-R.Dillmann, *Lectura Pragmalinguística de la Biblia, Teoría y aplicación*, Verbo Divino 1999. Cf. the series of “Kommentar für die Praxis”: Fritzleo Lentzen-Deis, *Das Markus-Evangelium*. Stuttgart 1998; Rainer Dillmann-César Mora Paz, *Das Lukas-Evangelium*. Stuttgart 2000; Detlev Dormeyer-Florencio Galindo, *Die Apostelgeschichte*. Stuttgart 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Fritzleo Lentzen-Deis SJ, *Scientific Exegesis and Biblical Apostolate*, Word-Event XVI-1+2(1986) 28-29; Examples of his project AA.VV. *Intercultural Exegesis*, Word-Event XVI-3+4 (1986) 33-37

## 2. Teaching and on-going formation in the Philippines

In 1967 I was assigned to teach exegesis in an inter-diocesan Major Seminary – later called **Immaculate Conception School of Theology** – in Vigan, the northern part of the island of Luzon, Philippines. Since I was the only exegete in that seminary at that time I was prevented from specializing too early and was forced to teach all the biblical subjects – which later I considered to be an advantage rather than a disadvantage. And in the course of my five years there I became involved in other aspects / dimensions of the formation of future priests: of the spiritual formation (as spiritual director) and the pastoral ministry (as supervisor and advisor in the seminarians' various apostolates. As my first learning experience I had to widen the understanding of my assignment: from teaching exegesis to the formation of ministers of the Word. Thus I discovered the challenge to teach and do research in such a way that as many ministers of the Word as possible would be formed for providing the nourishment of the Scriptures to the people of God (DV 23).

The formation of “as many ministers of the Word as possible” (DV 23) continued at the **Catechetical Institute** in the nearby Monastery of the Benedictine Sisters of the Eucharistic King. Teaching in this Institute called for less academic emphasis and a stronger orientation towards the pastoral ministry. It likewise implied another advantage to which I will return later.

In 1968, my second year in the seminary, I was invited for the first time to the neighboring diocese of Bangued, Abra for talks on the Bible for a wider audience: catechists, pastoral leaders, teachers, men of the cursillo movement, interested lay people. At first I was hesitant to accept these invitations because I feared I would lose precious time which I should use for preparing my classes in the seminary. But soon I realized that this kind of experience turned out to be an advantage for my teaching in the seminary: it became less “bookish” and more practical and pastoral.

This was due to the fact that my students, the lay people in the diocese of Bangued, Abra, became my teachers! Understandably, I had a certain pride of having been privileged to study at the Pontifical Biblical Institute! But in Abra I realized that the seminar participants there came with questions that had not been raised and answered at the PIB. They somehow wanted to know how the Bible – concretely the passage under study – was related or relevant to life, THEIR life. My / our formation at the Biblicum had been excellent and necessary, but it had to be complemented. And I am grateful for the complementary formation I underwent in Abra.

I also noticed a difference between my students – future ministers of the Word! – in the seminary and the **lay participants** in the diocese. For the seminarians, exegesis was one of the many theological subjects they had to study and pass an examination about. They lay participants came on their own (aside from some catechists who had been sent by their parish priest) – because they were interested! I noticed that the interested in Scripture was greater outside of than in the seminary! In fact, most of them most likely had never heard about the Council's directive that “easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for

all the Christian faithful" (DV 22). But there they were – hungry for the Word of God (cf. Amos 8,11!)

From this experience I could only agree with what the Pontifical Biblical Commission stated in its document "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": "But there is *reason to rejoice* in seeing the Bible in the hands of people of lowly condition and of the poor; they can bring to its interpretation and to its actualization a light more penetrating, from the spiritual and existential point of view, than that which comes from a learning that relies upon its own resources alone (cf. Mt. 11:25)."<sup>30</sup>

Providentially, this interest in Scripture coincided with the publication of the New Testament and then the entire **Bible in the native languages** and a price people could afford – thanks to the collaboration of the Bishops' Conference with the Philippine Bible Society. Collaboration with them, however, was not a matter taken for granted by some Bishops. At the first appearance of Bible Societies their Bibles had been burned by fanatic Catholics! Only when the Scripture professor of the seminary consented to be present at a Bible promotion seminar called "Operation Philip" of the Bible Societies, the Bishop concerned gave the green light for the seminar to be held! Thus the training at the Biblicum served for mediating between the Bible Societies and the Bishops.

All the **Bishops** at that time had been trained before Vatican II. The Council had been an eye opener for most of them as far as the "modern approach" to Scripture was concerned; but at the same time, feeling the lack of formal training, they relied on the expertise of their seminary professor. Hence, when I was asked during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation on the island of Malta in 1978 about my priorities in my future biblical-pastoral ministry, I answered: "Work on (wirken auf!) the Bishops!" This has turned out to be necessary (they are the first ministers of the Word in the diocese!) and most fruitful. At the same time they made it rather easy for me! When they became aware what was going on in the diocese of Abra as far as the biblical apostolate is concerned, they asked that I be reassigned to the Philippines (I was in Rome at that time for the doctorate) not only to teach in the seminary, but also to initiate in the other dioceses the biblical-pastoral ministry that was going on in Abra.

This request of the bishops was answered by my religious superiors when they reassigned me to Vigan in 1978, after my doctorate at the Biblicum. An additional impetus for my involvement in the biblical-pastoral ministry – in addition to my teaching in the School of Theology – proved to be my participation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Assembly of CBF on Malta and the visit of centers for the biblical apostolate in India and Korea. The event of Malta – meeting 76 people from 44 countries, all of them involved in the ministry of the Word – served as a confirmation; meeting with pioneers in the biblical ministry in India and Korea as an additional encouragement.

Another encouragement came from Pope John Paul I. The last audience before his untimely death on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1978 was granted to Bishops from the Philippines. In his address concerning evangelization he encouraged them to continue in their efforts in

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<sup>30</sup> PBC:IBC IV,C,3

the biblical apostolate. “Dear Brothers, we are spiritually close to you in all the efforts you are making on behalf of evangelization: as you train catechists, as you promote the biblical apostolate, as you assist and encourage all your priests in their great mission at the service of God's word, and as you lead all your faithful to understand and to fulfill the requirements of justice and Christian love.” Because of these words of encouragement we named the Biblical Center the origins of which go back 1978, after the “smiling Pope”, calling it John Paul I Biblical Center.

The inspiration for the Center came from Sr. Henrietta, the Sister who had been the directress of St. Benedict Institute for the formation of catechists before she became involved in catechetical and pastoral work at “grass roots level” in the villages (barrios). She also initiated the most successful project of the Center, the Basic Bible Seminar which has spread beyond the Philippines and has been translated into several languages. For me, the initiative of this Benedictine Sister and my collaboration with her have become an important lesson: “*Spiritus, ubi vult, spirat*” and looks for effective instruments in the ministry of the Word also among those who were not privileged to undergo specialized studies in Scripture! (Yet, a Sister of the same Congregation who has been much inspired by Sr. Henrietta, has been the first Filipina who gained a licentiate at the PIB, Sr. Miriam Alejandrino OSB).

30 years after its foundation John Paul I Biblical Center as the first of twelve regional biblical centers in the Philippines is now serving 14 dioceses of one geographical and linguistic area. Its significance can be seen mainly under the following headings: - First of all, it has provided an instrument for the Bishops to fulfill their most important ministry, that of the Word! As an associate member of the Catholic Biblical Federation, the first one in the Philippines, it does at the regional level what the Catholic Biblical Federation with its official mandate is doing world-wide. Secondly it has created a structure for a consistent - and not just sporadic - biblical-pastoral ministry. Each of the dioceses connected with and guided by the Center has its diocesan core team for the biblical apostolate. Finally - last not least - since the Center is located in the Seminary, the seminarian as future ministers of the Word not only study exegesis: they grow up with the biblical-pastoral ministry which becomes a real concern for them.

### **III Biblical-pastoral ministry world-wide in the wake of the Council**

#### **1. A diachronic reading of the biblical movement since the Council**

As for the Pontifical Biblical Institute<sup>31</sup>, also for the biblical-pastoral ministry a new chapter starts with the year 1968. This year is known as the year of student revolts in Europe - which had their repercussions not only worldwide, but in the Church. Professor Ratzinger experienced this unrest among the students of the faculty of Catholic theology of the University of Tübingen, I myself among our seminarians in Vigan, Philippines!) But

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<sup>31</sup> Maurice Gilbert, SJ, *The Pontifical Biblical Institute - A Century of History (1909-2009)*, “In the wake of the Council” p.238

1968 was also a year of many significant biblical-pastoral events. Three years after the promulgation of the Constitution DEI VERBUM, seeds sown during the Council began to sprout like early flowers of spring.

Yet, less than twenty years later, in 1985 the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops regretted that the implementation of this document had still been “too much neglected.”<sup>32</sup> And in the following year, on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1986, Pope John Paul II, addressing the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation, repeated this complaint and challenged the Federation to do something about it.<sup>33</sup>

What was result of their and others’ efforts? In the 1993 document of the Biblical Commission, joy is expressed about “seeing the Bible in the hands of people of lowly condition and of the poor who can bring to its interpretation and to its actualization a light more penetrating, from the spiritual and existential point of view, than that which comes from a learning that relies upon its own resources alone (cf. Mt. 11:25).”<sup>34</sup>

Another twelve years later, Pope Benedict XVI, addressing on 16 September.2005 the members of the Catholic Biblical Federation on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of DEI VERBUM, expressed his conviction about “a new spiritual springtime” would come about in the Church through “*Lectio divina*”.

A step nearer to the realization of this conviction as well as the fruit and climax of many efforts made before, has certainly been taken with Pope Benedict’s convocation of the 2008 Synod of Bishops on “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church”. Since 1984 – almost contemporaneous with the complaint about the neglect of DEI VERBUM, in each of its Plenary Assemblies – which take place every six years – the Catholic Biblical Federation had pleaded for a Synod on this topic.<sup>35</sup> In fact, already in 1986 the Executive Committee of the Federation already suggested “Bible Synod Guidelines”.<sup>36</sup> Cardinal Martini on various occasions had made himself the spokesman of this concern. And during the Congress on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of DEI VERBUM (2005) Archbishop John Onaiyekan (student at the PIB 1971-74) likewise pleaded for such a Synod.<sup>37</sup> When it finally took place in 2008, not less than 80 graduates of the PIB participated as delegates or special invitees.

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<sup>32</sup> “Hearing the word of God with reverence, the Church has the mission of proclaiming it with faith (cf. [DV](#) 1) Consequently, the preaching of the Gospel is among the principal duties of the Church, and especially of the bishops, and today it takes on the greatest importance (cf. [LG](#) 25) In this context is seen the importance of the Dogmatic Constitution “[Dei Verbum](#)”, which has been too neglected.”

<sup>33</sup> “The Final Report of the Synod stated that the Dogmatic Constitution “[Dei Verbum](#)” had been too “neglected” in the twenty years following the Council, and it deserved a more profound consideration and implementation. May I suggest, dear friends in Christ, that you can be of special assistance in efforts aimed at responding to this challenge.”

<sup>34</sup> PBC:IBC IV,C,3)

<sup>35</sup> Bangalore (1984 -3.2.7); Bogotá (1990 - 8.1.3; Hong Kong (1996 - 8.1.3); Lebanon (2002 - 5.3.)

<sup>36</sup> Proposals for a Synod in Word-Event XVI-3+4 (1986) %

**19** “Permit me to conclude these reflections with a call and indeed an appeal, which I strongly suggest for this august assembly to approve and endorse: namely to request that the Holy Father convokes as soon as possible an Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the

## 2. A synchronic look at the biblical-pastoral ministry in some regions

After a quick diachronic look at the biblical movement since the Council, let us now have a synchronic look at some geographical regions.

The biblical-pastoral ministry, making the Scriptures available as Word of God and source of life, implies a great variety of activities which include awareness building, translation / production / distribution, formation, research organization. All these activities can be found in the various regions, since they are all interconnected and make their contribution to the biblical-pastoral ministry.

And yet, the emphasis may be different in different regions. Even more than this! There may also be differences – not only in the activities of promoting the Word of God in Sacred Scripture – in the approach to and reading of the Bible. This may be summed up in terms of “reading the Bible in context” and “inculturation of the Word of God”<sup>38</sup>

The different approaches have been summed up in a rather general way as such: “If you want to study the Bible, go to Europe, the United States of America and other “Western” countries; if you want to read the Bible in relation to life, go to Latin America; if you want to meditate the Word, go to Asia, if you want to celebrate it, go to Africa!

Not a complete and exhaustive presentation of the situation of the biblical-pastoral ministry can be attempted here, but only a glimpse at noteworthy events and examples.

### (1) Europe and the Middle East

#### (a) In Rome and Italy

As mentioned above, during Easter Week of 1968, **Cardinal Bea** convened the directors of existing Catholic biblical-pastoral institutions for a consultative meeting which led then one year later to the foundation of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (later called Catholic Biblical Federation). In their addresses at this convention, both Cardinal Bea and his secretary Fr. Walter Abbot, SJ, referred to “Easy access to Sacred Scripture for all Christian faithful” as a summary of the biblical-pastoral directives of the Council, for the implementation of which an instrument, an organization had to be created. - On Pentecost Sunday of that year, the Vatican published the Guiding Principles on the Interconfessional Collaboration in Translating the Bible, signed by Cardinal Bea on behalf of the Holy See, and by the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Donald Coggan, on behalf of the United Bible Societies.

In the same year in Italy, **Enzo Bianchi** started the Community of Bose, which has distinguished through the promotion of lectio divina.<sup>39</sup> His booklet “Pregare la Parola” which I discovered when I was doing my doctorate, has become a “classic” on lectio

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Church”...It is about time to look at Dei Verbum, especially the issues raised in chapter six of the document...A synod on the Bible would be a most effective way to carry the zeal for a New Evangelization beyond the year 2000. These concerns were addressed by Pope John Paul II in his programmatic encyclical: *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. A synod on the Word of God would give a fresh boost to this plan of action.”

<sup>38</sup> IBC IV,B

<sup>39</sup> Enzo Bianchi, *Pregare la Parola*. Gribaudi. 1974; *La lettura spirituale della Bibbia*, Piemme, 1998.

divina, translated into numerous languages and followed 25 years after its publication by “La Lettura Spirituale della Bibbia”.

Likewise in Italy in 1968, **Andrea Riccardi** founded the by now international Community of Sant'Egidio committed to living the Gospel dimensions of charity, justice, reconciliation and peace. “The Community of Sant'Egidio is now a global family of more than 50,000 volunteers in 73 countries, dedicated to charity, evangelizing and peacemaking.”

Both Enzo Bianchi and Andrea Riccardi are lay people; both were young when the Council ended (Bianchi \* 1943, Riccardi \*1950, a university and a high school student respectively at that time); both were inspired by the Council which Bianchi considered to be the “end of the Babylonian Exile of the Word of God in the Catholic Church”; both were struck by the Word of God to which they responded in complementary ways: Bianchi through the “prayer response” of lectio divina, Riccardi by the “action response” of the social dimensions of the Gospel; both of them charismatic figures, and founders of institutions / movements: **Enzo Bianchi** started the Community of Bose, which has distinguished through the promotion of lectio divina; **Andrea Riccardi** founded the by now international Community of Sant'Egidio committed to living the Gospel dimensions of charity, justice, reconciliation and peace. “The Community of Sant'Egidio is now a global family of more than 50,000 volunteers in 73 countries, dedicated to charity, evangelizing and peacemaking.”

#### (b) **The Middle East.**

In **1985**, in Larnaca, on the island of Cyprus, the first meeting took place of 20 exegetes and ministers of the Word in the Arabic speaking countries of the Near and Middle East: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Jerusalem. Cyprus was not chosen in the first place because it was the home of Barnabas and the place of the first stop-over of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Rather, it was chosen for the practical reason: it was the only place in that war-torn area that could be reached by people from all these countries: Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon etc.

Organizer of this first-ever meeting of its kind on Cyprus, aside from the General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation, was the Coptic-Catholic Bishop of Minia, Egypt, Antonios Naguib, since 2006 Patriarch. After his studies at the PIB (1962-64) and as Scripture professor of the Coptic-Catholic seminary in Maadi, Egypt, he had been involved in the interconfessional translation project of the Bible into Arabic. He became the first sub-regional coordinator of the CBF for the Middle East and as such, with the CBF General Secretary, he undertook a most adventurous journey through Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, to contact the different hierarchies of the Catholic Oriental Churches for the sake of promoting the biblical-pastoral ministry.

The second Cyprus Meeting in February 1988 had as topic “The Reading of the Bible in our Middle East context”. This topic developed into a program for the years to come. – After Lebanon became accessible again since the 1990s, every two years a Biblical-Pastoral Congress has been held in that country for the entire Middle East – with very qualified resource persons from both the region, especially Lebanon, and from abroad. All contributions to these congresses have been published in Arabic. In this regard, the Lebanon is considered a real blessing for the biblical movement in the entire Middle East.

This has been acknowledged by the entire Catholic Biblical Federation during its 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly held at Jounieh, Lebanon in 2002. At present, *Biblicum alumnus* (1981-84; 1993-94) Fr. Ayoub Chahwan, professor of the famous Khaslik University in Beyrouth, is the promoter and the coordinator of the Middle East biblical-pastoral ministry.

## (2) Latin America

(a) A significant, but little known event for the biblical-pastoral ministry in Latin-America may be the arrival on the scene of **Johannes Straubinger**. He is at the same time an illustration of the different facets of what is implied in biblical-pastoral ministry or biblical apostolate. A priest of the diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart he was involved, together with a group of lay people in the foundation of Katholisches Bibelwerk of Stuttgart in 1933, at the beginning of the Nazi-regime. In 1938 he was forced to leave the country and went to Argentina. He has been referred to as "a biblical scholar concerned to make God's Word understandable for everyone in the context of daily life."<sup>40</sup> He founded the "Revista Biblica", dedicated to the apostolate of the Gospel. In seven years he translated the entire Bible into Spanish, known as "La Biblia Platense" with notes – both scientific and practical as a help to apply to daily life. He recommended that there should be a Bible in every Catholic home and encouraged daily Bible reading by the faithful, following the pattern of readings during the liturgical year.

(b) Some events of the year 1968 are certainly significant for the particular quality of the biblical-pastoral ministry in Latin America, the Second Plenary Assembly of the Latin American Bishops and the International Catechetical Congress both of which took place in the city of Medellin, Colombia. Both stand emblematically for the "option for the poor", the emphasis on Basic Christian Communities and the thrust of liberation theology. This is the background against which the biblical-pastoral ministry of Dutch-born Carmelite **Fr. Carlos Mesters** has to be understood. Since the year of the two Medellin events he was in close contact with Basic Christian Communities in Northeast Brazil decided to give up teaching in the seminary in order to help the poor in reading the Bible.<sup>41</sup>

For me, Frei Carlos Mesters is the most outstanding *example* of a person who has been trained in biblical scholarship and at the same time is close to the people, yes, even to the poor who were the privileged addressees of the Word of God.<sup>42</sup> I have been privileged to meet Carlos several times. Each of these encounters had its special significance and illustrates one of the aspects of the biblical-pastoral ministry Carlos Mesters stands for. I met him twice "in absentia" in 1978: first, when I bought his booklet „Il Popolo interpreta la Bibbia"<sup>43</sup>, a translation of "Flor sem defesa" which, like Enzo Bianchi's "Pregare la Parola"

<sup>40</sup> „Johannes Straubinger –A Bible Translation for Latin America“, Word-Event XVI-3+4 (1986) 37

<sup>41</sup> Ralf Huning, *Bibelwissenschaft* p.168

<sup>42</sup> "The entire biblical tradition and, in a particular way, the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels indicates as privileged hearers of the Word of God those whom the world considers *people of lowly status*. Jesus acknowledged that things hidden from the wise and learned have been revealed to the simple (Mt 11,25; Lk 10,21) and that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who make themselves like little children (Mk 10,14 and parallels)" (IBC IV,B, 3)

<sup>43</sup> *cittadella edictrice assisi*, 1978

has become a "classic" in the biblical-pastoral ministry. The second time I encountered him in the inaugural address "To interpret life"<sup>44</sup> of Cardinal König of Vienna during the Second Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation on Malta (1978). Again I met him, already as General Secretary, in the library of the Ecole Biblique of Jerusalem. He used his sabbatical for studying the methodology of the Fathers of the Church, how they interpreted the Bible – to compare it with the "methodology" of the ordinary faithful and with the poor! – I witnessed him during a Bible seminar in the town of Mendes near Rio de Janeiro in 1989 when the message arrived from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that the so-called Palabra-Vida project was "not acceptable"; he made the sign of the cross and continued the work he was doing at that moment: preparing for a Liturgy of the Word by tying a rope around a Bible! – In 1990, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation in Bogota, Colombia, he led the drafting committee in redacting the final statement "The Bible in the New Evangelization", using the Emmaus account Lk 24,13-35 as its model. During the next Plenary Assembly in 1996 in Hong Kong under the motto "Word of God – Source of Life"<sup>45</sup> he guided the entire Assembly every day in its lectio divina on Jn 4<sup>46</sup>.

Wolfgang Schürger,<sup>47</sup> in his dissertation the history and methodology of Centro do Estudos Bíblicos in Belo Horizonte - the director of which Carlos Mesters was from 1979-1990 - sums up the Latin American experience with and approach to the Bible in these words of Mesters: "Die historischen Wissenschaften haben durch ihre neue Methode aus der Bibel ein altes Buch gemacht. Die kirchlichen Basisgemeinden Lateinamerikas lesen die Bibel mit einer sehr alten Methode, aber dadurch wird sie zu einem Buch mit neuem Leben."<sup>48</sup>

Not only has Carlos Mesters influenced the biblical-pastoral ministry in Latin-America and – through the Catholic Biblical Federation – world-wide. At times in danger of being censured by ecclesiastical authorities because of his alleged leanings towards liberation theology, he has been justified in many respects. May it suffice to refer to some statements of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (1993):

- "The Interpretation of a text is always dependent on the mindset and concerns of its readers."<sup>49</sup>
- "Because the liberation of the oppressed is a communal process, the community of the poor is the privileged addressee of the Bible as word of liberation."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Robert Delaney (ed.), *The Proceedings of the Plenary Assembly of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate*, Malta 1978, 28-33.

<sup>45</sup> This motto echoes the definition of biblical apostolate in the 1993 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (IV,C,3): "The biblical apostolate has as its objective to make known the Bible as the Word of God and source of life."

<sup>46</sup> Published in *Bulletin DEI VERBUM* 40/41 (1996) 25-33

<sup>47</sup> Wolfgang Schürger, *Theologie auf dem Weg der Befreiung. Geschichte und Methode des Zentrums für Bibelstudien/CEBI in Brasilien*. Erlangen, 1995

<sup>48</sup> Id., *Altes Buch mit neuem Leben. Der Umgang mit biblischen Texten in den Basisgemeinden in Lateinamerika als Herausforderung für Europa*. In: *Una Sancta* 58 (2003) 62

<sup>49</sup> I.E – Contextual approaches

- “The Scriptures, as given to the Church, are the communal treasure of the entire body of believers...Thus, all the members of the Church have a role in the interpretation of Scripture”<sup>51</sup>
- “But there is reason to rejoice in seeing the Bible in the hands of the people of lowly condition and of the poor; they can bring to its interpretation and to its actualization a light more penetrating, from the spiritual and existential point of view, than that which comes from a learning that relies upon its own resources alone (cf. Mt 11,25)”<sup>52</sup>

### (3) Africa

As Carlos Mesters somehow stands for the biblical-pastoral ministry in Latin America, so has the name **Lumko** for the same in Africa. Lumko however is not the name of a person, but of the family that donated a piece of their property for the Pastoral Institute of the Bishops’ Conference of South Africa which goes back to the plans of Archbishop Martin Lucas, S.V.D., the Apostolic Delegate in South Africa in the 1950s. Best known among the directors of the Lumko Institute are probably two Fidei Donum priests, who later became bishops in South African dioceses, Fritz Lobinger and Oswald Hirmer. Of the many “Lumko methods” of dealing with the Bible which they created in close contact with the people is the so-called “Seven Steps Method of Bible Sharing”<sup>53</sup>. This has become so wide spread and gained such a reputation that Bishop Hirmer presented it during the Synod on the Word of God on 08.10.2008. The purpose of this method is to make the Bible accessible in the prayerful atmosphere of small groups in order to discover their life-related dimension – even without the presence of a biblical expert.<sup>54</sup>

This and the other Lumko methods have become successful not only in Africa. They have become known and useful also in Europe. In Asia these methods have impressed the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences so much as an effective way of a Bible-centered renewal of the Church that they decided to adopt them for Asia as the Asian Integrated Pastoral Approach (AsIPA). Since 1990 the Lumko materials have been translated into 20 different languages.<sup>55</sup> In short, the Lumko methods are not only Bible study or sharing methods. They are exercises for a new way of being Church.

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<sup>50</sup> I.E.1 – The Liberationist Approach

<sup>51</sup> III.B.3 The Roles of Various Members of the Church in Interpretation

<sup>52</sup> IV,C,3 In Pastoral Ministry

<sup>53</sup> [www.c-b-f.org](http://www.c-b-f.org) → Biblical-Pastoral Ministry → Methods and Approaches

<sup>54</sup> About the reservations of biblical scholars the “simple reading of Scripture cf., already Jacob Kremer, *Die Bibel, ein Buch für alle – Berechtigung und Grenzen ‘einfacher’ Schriftlesung*, Stuttgart 1985. More recently: Christian Schramm, ; Id., “Wenn zwei einen Text lesen...” *Alltägliches Bibelverstehen empirisch untersucht. Bibel und Kirche* 64 (2/2009) 114-117

<sup>55</sup> AsIPA heisst Asian Integral Pastoral Approach

AsIPA ist asiatisch, weil es die Gegebenheiten der asiatischen Völker ernst nimmt, die die Kirche in Asien herausfordern.

AsIPA ist integral, weil es den ganzen Menschen ins Auge nimmt. Die spirituelle Ebene ist dabei ebenso wichtig wie die soziale. Priester und Laien sollen sich partnerschaftlich für eine lebendige Kirche einsetzen.

AsIPA ist pastoral, weil es die Vision eines neuen Weges Kirche zu sein verwirklicht und insbesondere Laien ausbildet, damit diese ihre Mission in der Kirche und der Welt wahrnehmen. AsIPA zielt auf eine neue Art der Führung: begleiten, moderieren, anregen statt machen.

The Church in Africa has not only exported. It has likewise been open and receptive to benefitting from other biblical-pastoral initiatives and contributions. The Publishing House Verbum Bible in Kinshasa, an off-shoot of Editorial Verbo Divino in Spain makes the Bible and biblical materials accessible and available all over Africa. The DEI VERBUM of Nemi, Roma, a training course for leaders and facilitators in the biblical apostolate, have been adopted and modified according to the local situation in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Congo. The Basic Bible Seminar of Vigan, an introductory course to the Bible and lectio divina in small groups, has been translated into several African languages.

The promotion and coordination of the biblical-pastoral ministry on the continent have been entrusted to BICAM, the Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar which in 1975, at the request of SECAM (the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences for Africa and Madagascar) has developed out of the Africa Service of the Catholic Biblical Federation. The biblical ministry in Africa and the work of BICAM has received an additional boost through the 1995 post-synodal document *Ecclesia in Africa*. The Pope says in no. 58 of the document: "In order that the Word of God may be known, loved, pondered and preserved in the hearts of the faithful (cf. *Lk 2:19,51*), greater efforts must be made to provide access to the Sacred Scriptures, especially through full or partial translations of the Bible, prepared as far as possible in cooperation with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and accompanied by study guides for use in prayer and for study in the family and community. Also to be encouraged is the scriptural formation of clergy, religious, catechists and the laity in general; careful preparation of celebrations of the Word; promotion of the biblical apostolate with the help of the Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar and the encouragement of other similar structures at all levels. In brief, efforts must be made to try to put the Sacred Scriptures into the hands of all the faithful right from their earliest years."

A praiseworthy attempt towards "reading the Bible in context" has been made by African biblical scholars – and some expatriates who worked in Africa – with *The African Bible*, published by Paulines Publications Africa in 1999. The biblical text is that of *The New American Bible*. The editors and contributors – 24 out of 39 are graduates of the *Biblicum* – did not have the false pride of producing yet another English translation of the Bible into English. Instead of investing time and energy into this, have used it to provide introductions and annotations from an African perspective – referring to African culture, quoting African proverbs, adding to the introduction to each book a rubric: "Relevance of Genesis for Africa". "By paying attention to the context of life in Africa today and seeking to identify themes particularly relevant to African societies of the twenty-first century, the *African Bible* aims to be a source of inspiration and nourishment for the people of Africa."<sup>56</sup>

#### **(4) Asia – China**

The year 1968, the year of many biblical initiatives in various parts of the world has been also of particular significance for China. In Hong Kong, on Christmas day, the first complete Catholic translation of the entire Bible was published by the Franciscans Friars of

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AsIPA ist ein Ansatz, eine Methode, weil AsIPA prozessorientiert die Vision einer partizipatorischen Kirche verwirklicht. AsIPA richtet sich an das ganze Volk Gottes. Es ist eine pastorale Methode, die Christus- und gemeinschaftszentriert ist.

<sup>56</sup> *The African Bible*, General Introduction, p. 15

the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, initiated by the Italian **Fr. Gabriele Allegra**, OFM who had dedicated 40 years of his life to this task. The “Franciscan Bible” or also “Scotus Bible” is often considered as *the* Catholic Bible in Chinese. The Studium Biblicum Franciscanum – affiliated to that of Jerusalem – began in 1945 in Beijing but had to be moved to Hong Kong at the time of the Communist take-over.

Worth mentioning in this context is the fact that the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum has become the beginning of an entire network for the biblical-pastoral ministry in the Chinese world. In Hong Kong itself it has inspired the beginnings of the Hong Kong Catholic Biblical Association<sup>57</sup> with which it works closely together. Likewise it has helped in the foundation of the Hong Kong Catholic Biblical Institute which aims to promote biblical studies on a wider level among the general faithful with a 3-Year-Diploma Course and a 4-Year Open Program.

Beyond Hong Kong, a wider network for the biblical-pastoral ministry among all the Chinese all over the world in the “Chinese Diaspora” is the United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association (UCCBA)

The Association has been suggested during the first Asian Workshop of the Catholic Biblical Federation in Hong Kong in 1985 and officially founded there in 1990. So far it has gathered representatives of its member associations eight times (in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Macau and Sydney. The last time, in celebration of the 100th birth anniversary of Venerable Fr. Gabriel Maria Allegra OFM, the promoter of Catholic translation of the Holy Bible into Chinese in 2007 the more than 110 delegates came from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Australia, the United States, New Zealand, Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Canada and Vietnam.<sup>58</sup>

“Reading the Bible in Chinese Cultural Context” – the topic of the UCCBA Meeting in Singapore in 1998, is a special concern of Sr. Maria Ko Ha Fong SMA, a professor of Scripture at the “Auxilium” here in Rome. Born in Macau and grown up in Hong Kong she joined the Salesian Sisters at an early age. Away from home, while in Italy and Germany, she learned to appreciate ever more the values of her own Chinese culture. During her doctoral studies in Münster, Germany, she became familiar with the Fathers of the Church and their way of interpreting Scripture. This opened her eyes and aroused her interest in the ways and methods in which the Chinese classics have been read and interpreted. During the Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation on Hong Kong in 1996 she shared some of her insights in the key note address.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> The President of this Association, a lay woman, has been participated in the 2008 Synod of Bishops as an “auditrix”.

<sup>58</sup> The biblical-pastoral thrusts of the Association can be gleaned from the labels of the meetings: "God's Prophetic People", "Bible in the New Evangelization", "Bible and Formation of the Laity", "God's Word Giving New Life to Chinese Communities", "Reading the Bible in Chinese Cultural Context", "Interactive Interpretation of Confucian Books and the Holy Bible", "Word and Eucharist - Source of Life", "Experiences of Community Building with the Word of God".

<sup>59</sup> - Maria Ko Ha-Fong, FMA, Reading the Bible in an Asian Context, in: Bulletin DEI VERBUM 40/41 (1996) 11-16.21-24.

Since the opening up of China in the early 1980s, giving more freedom to the Church after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) new possibilities were opened for the biblical-pastoral ministry to satisfy the hunger for the Word of God. Truly, the picture is not homogeneous: older Christians are satisfied with their traditional ways; the younger ones are open to and desirous for new ways and forms. Because of the isolation of the Chinese Church and its isolation from the outside with its concomitant lack of formation and keeping abreast in theology, a vacuum has arisen also and especially as far as the Bible is concerned.

The Catholic Biblical Federation has become aware of the new challenges and possibilities since the mid-1980s. In 1985 Bishop Alberto Ablondi, CBF President since 1984, reading the signs of the times, went to the People's Republic for China for three weeks, thus opening the Federation's eyes for the tremendous biblical-pastoral needs and perhaps possibilities in that vast country. This was followed by trip in 1991 of the General Secretary who accompanied Fr. Dominic Chang, the Executive Committee member of the Hong Kong. We wanted to explore the possibility of obtaining from the civil authorities the permission to reprint the Old Testament (or the entire Bible) of the Franciscans in Mainland China. In May of the following year this permission has been given. A next step in making this Bible available in China has been a distribution campaign of the Community of Taizé which started in 2008/2009. Now the Patriotic Association is giving this Bible for free to dioceses as remuneration for their relief work after the disastrous earthquake in the Province Sichuan in 2008.<sup>60</sup>

During the past four years I have been to China once or twice every year and have given twenty Bible seminars to different groups in different dioceses: at the National Seminary for priests; in Formation Houses for Religious Men and Women of various Congregations; for seminarians; in a parish; for mixed groups – lay men and women, seminarians, sisters and priests in three dioceses – with the attempt to set up some structure for the biblical-pastoral ministry to assure continuity.

## CONCLUSION

Several conclusions seem to impose themselves at the end of this section:

- (1) the immense amount of accomplishments in this field during the past 45 years;
- (2) the vast task ahead – if we just think of Africa and Latin America with their booming biblical activities and the “threats” or “competitions” coming from sects and indigenous groups, of the secularized Western world, of Asia with a Christian minority and its ancient religious traditions and their sacred writings
- (3) the diverse activities in the involved in what is involved in “comunicazione pastorale della Bibbia: creating awareness in the role and importance of the Word of God; translating and publishing the Bible and Bible related materials; helping

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<sup>60</sup> Another Catholic translation of the Bible available now in China is the so-called Pastoral Bible, an offshoot of the famous *Biblia Latino-Americana* (1971) and its English counterpart, published in the Philippines: *The Christian Community Bible – Pastoral Edition*

people to understand according to their ability and related to their lives; studying, doing research and teaching; organizing the sharing of resources.<sup>61</sup>

- (4) the commitment of so many dedicated people, whose hearts were set on fire with the love for the Word of God (cf. Lk 24,32) who were guided by the Spirit to proclaim the good news of Jesus – from Scripture (cf. Acts 8,29.35)

All these variety of activities have been given mainly two labels: “biblical apostolate” and “biblical-pastoral ministry / *pastorale biblica*”. The “biblical apostolate”, according to the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission has as its objective “to make known the Bible as the word of God and source of life.”<sup>62</sup> “Biblical-pastoral ministry / *pastorale biblica*” is the title of Synod proposition no. 30<sup>63</sup> and it is described / defined as “as biblical animation of the whole of pastoral care.” During the Synod, Bishop Silva Retamales, Auxiliary of Valparaíso has suggested that “biblical-pastoral ministry / *pastorale biblica*” be understood as “*animación bíblica de la pastoral*”<sup>64</sup> In other words: “the Bible in the pastoral ministry. This, of course, can be understood as a statement. But the editors of the German biblical-pastoral review *Bibel und Kirche*,<sup>65</sup> in the recent issue dedicated to the Synod understood it as an imperative and made it the title of that particular issue: “Mehr Bibel in die Pastoral!”

On a deeper level, and in line with some key assertions of DEI VERBUM, pastoral communication of the Bible, biblical apostolate and biblical-pastoral ministry could be circumscribed as follows:

- To facilitate – through the Scriptures - a dialogue between God and man:
  - “And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may **talk together**; for “we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying.” (DV 26)
  - “In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and **speaks with them**” (DV 21)
  - “Through the same tradition...the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her; and thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly **converses with the bride of His beloved Son**; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (see Col. 3:16)” (DV 8)
  - “Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1;15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love **speaks to men** as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself”.(DV 2)

<sup>61</sup> These are the five areas of the biblical-pastoral ministry according to the reflections and sharings of one of the DEI VERBUM courses at Nemi. Cf. above

<sup>62</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 1993, IV.C.3.

<sup>63</sup> „Dei Verbum” exhorts that the Word of God not only be made the soul of theology but also the soul of the whole of pastoral care, of life and of the mission of the Church (cf. “Dei Verbum,” 24). ...The synod recommends increasing “biblical pastoral ministry” not in juxtaposition to other forms of pastoral care but as biblical animation of the whole of pastoral care.”

<sup>64</sup> Intervention on 09/10/2008

<sup>65</sup> *Bibel und Kirche* 4/64 (2009)

- To come to the excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ  
"To learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:8). "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ. (DV 25). Cf. Act 8,35: "Starting from this Scripture text, he proclaimed the good news of Jesus"
- To be guided by the Spirit  
"Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written" (DV 12). Cf. *οδηγεῖν* in Acts 8,31 and Jn 16,13: Philip, led by the Spirit, leads the eunuch to the understanding of Scripture; through Philip the Spirit leads the eunuch into the full truth

And even deeper the texts of the Council, St. John's Gospel – after its prologue about the Incarnate Word (1,14) as the exegete of the Father (1,18) introduces us into the Trinitarian dimension of a life with and out of the Word (John 14:15-24)

- <sup>15</sup> "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth...
- <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him
- <sup>23</sup> Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.
- <sup>24</sup> Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me.

What is the **role of the exegete in the biblical-pastoral ministry**, what is the role of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, *the* training place of exegetes in the Catholic Church in the biblical pastoral ministry?

1. Pertinent guidelines are found, first of all, in the document of the **Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1993 "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church"**.
  - a. In the section III.B.3: "The **Roles of various members** in the Church in Interpretation"

"The Scriptures, as given to the church, are the communal treasure of the entire body of believers"

"Thus all the members of the church have a role in the interpretation of Scripture."

In the exercise of their pastoral ministry, **<bishops,>** as successors of the apostles, are the first witnesses and guarantors of the living tradition within which Scripture is interpreted in every age. "Enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they have the task of guarding faithfully the word of God, of explaining it and through their preaching making it more widely known" ("Dei Verbum," 9; cf. "Lumen Gentium," 25). As co-workers with the bishops, **priests** have as their primary duty the proclamation of the word ("Presbyterorum Ordinis," 4). They are gifted with a particular charism for the interpretation of Scripture, when, transmitting not their own ideas but the word of God, they apply the eternal truth of the Gospel to the concrete circumstances of

daily life (*ibid.*). It belongs to priests and to <deacons,> especially when they administer the sacraments, to make clear the unity constituted by word and sacrament in the ministry of the church.

Recognizing the diversity of gifts and functions which the Spirit places at the service of the community, especially the gift of teaching (1 Cor. 12:28-30; Rom. 12:6-7; Eph. 4:11-16), the church expresses its esteem for those who display a particular ability to contribute to the building up of the body of Christ through their expertise in interpreting Scripture ...In particular, the discovery of the literal sense of Scripture, upon which there is now so much insistence, requires the combined efforts of those who have expertise in the fields of ancient languages, of history and culture, of textual criticism and the analysis of literary forms, and who know how to make good use of the methods of scientific criticism.

Beyond this attention to the text in its original historical context, the church depends on exegetes, animated by the same Spirit as inspired Scripture, to ensure that "there be as great a number of servants of the word of God as possible capable of effectively providing the people of God with the nourishment of the Scriptures (*"Divino Afflante Spiritu,"* 24; 53-55: *"Ench. Bibl.,"* 551, 567; *"Dei Verbum,"* 23; Paul VI, *"Sedula Cura"* [1971]). A particular cause for satisfaction in our times is the growing number of <women exegetes;> they frequently contribute new and penetrating insights to the interpretation of Scripture and rediscover features which had been forgotten.

**b. In the section III.C: The Task of the Exegete**

**Il compito principale dell'esegesi** è proprio quello di condurre a questa analisi, utilizzando tutte le possibilità delle ricerche letterarie e storiche, al fine di definire il senso, letterale dei testi biblici con la maggiore esattezza possibile (*Divino afflante Spiritu*, EB 550). Per tale scopo, lo studio dei generi letterari antichi è particolarmente necessario (*ibid.* 560). (II.B.1)

"Nel loro lavoro d'interpretazione, gli esegeti cattolici non devono mai dimenticare che ciò che interpretano è la Parola di Dio. Il loro compito non finisce una volta che hanno distinto le fonti, definito le forme o spiegato i procedimenti letterari. Lo scopo del loro lavoro è raggiunto solo quando hanno chiarito il significato del testo biblico come Parola attuale di Dio." (III,C,1)

"L'interpretazione della Bibbia, anche se **compito particolare degli esegeti**, non è tuttavia loro monopolio poiché essa comporta nella Chiesa, degli aspetti che vanno al di là dell'analisi scientifica dei testi. La Chiesa, infatti, non considera **la Bibbia** semplicemente un insieme di documenti storici concernenti le sue origini; l'accoglie **come Parola di Dio** che si **rivolge ad essa, e al mondo intero nel tempo presente**. Questa **convincione di fede** ha come conseguenza uno sforzo di attualizzazione e di inculturazione del messaggio biblico, come pure l'elaborazione di diversi modi di uso di testi ispirati, nella liturgia, nella *lectio divina*, nel ministero pastorale e nel movimento ecumenico." (IV)

“In diversi paesi sono state realizzate pubblicazioni, con **l'aiuto di esegeti**, per aiutare i responsabili pastorali a interpretare correttamente le letture bibliche della liturgia e ad attualizzarle in modo valido. È auspicabile che simili sforzi abbiano una sempre maggiore diffusione. “ (IV.C.3)

“Un importante contributo viene offerto dalle associazioni e movimenti ecclesiali che mettono al primo posto la lettura della Bibbia **in una prospettiva di fede e di impegno cristiano**. Numerose “comunità di base” centrano le loro riunioni sulla Bibbia e propongono un triplice obiettivo: conoscere la Bibbia, costruire la comunità e servire il popolo. Anche qui **l'aiuto degli esegeti** è utile per evitare attualizzazioni poco fondate. (IV,C,3)

## 2. In the Propositions of the Synod submitted to Pope Benedict XVI:

Proposition 26 - *To enlarge the perspective of today's exegetical study*

The first consequence of such absence is that the Bible becomes for present-day readers a mere book of the past, incapable of speaking to our time. In these conditions, biblical exegesis runs the risk of becoming pure historiography and history of literature.

The second consequence, perhaps even graver, is the disappearance of the hermeneutics of the faith pointed out in "Dei Verbum." Instead of believing hermeneutics, what is then insinuated in fact is a positivist and secular hermeneutics that denies the possibility of the presence and access of the divine in the history of man.

Proposition 28 - *Dialogue between exegetes, theologians and pastors*

Episcopal conferences are requested to favor regularly meetings between pastors, theologians and exegetes to promote greater communion in service to the Word of God.

We hope that exegetes and theologians will be able to share ever better the fruits of their science for the enhancement of the faith and the edification of the People of God, always keeping in mind the characteristic dimensions of the Catholic interpretation of the Bible (cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," III).

Are there any conclusions for the Pontifical Biblical Institute?

Among the interventions of *Biblicum* graduates and others during the Synod I would like to highlight just one: the concerns that were expressed about the biblical formation in seminaries. This has some relevance to the *Biblicum* since perhaps the majority of its students are or will be involved in the seminary formation of future ministers of the Word.

- Bishop Cornelius Esua of Cameroon: "A course on the Biblical Pastoral Ministry be introduced in the Seminary curriculum and in Formation Houses to prepare future priests and religious for this ministry"<sup>66</sup>
- Archbishop John Ha of Kuching, Malaysia: "Formators must cultivate in seminarians a "Word of God" spirituality."<sup>67</sup>
- Bishop Arturo Bastes, S.V.D., of Sorsogon, Philippines: "Biblical courses in the seminary....should be complemented with methods that take into account the culture and the life situation of the hearers."<sup>68</sup>
- Bishop Gaspar Mudiso, S.V.D., of Kengo, Congo: "Mon intervention concerne l'Apostolat biblique, précisément la préparation ou formation des futurs prêtres à l'Apostolat Biblique comme discipline académique dans les séminaires et maisons de formation religieuse.

Si la Parole de Dieu doit inspirer toute la pastorale de l'Église, il nous faut repenser ou revoir la formation aux grands séminaires et dans les maisons religieuses. Car la Parole de Dieu n'est pas et ne peut pas être une matière d'enseignement comme une autre, au même titre que les autres.

Il y a donc nécessité d'une préparation très sérieuse, tant académique, scientifique que spirituelle des futurs prêtres. Cependant, nous déplorons une certaine insuffisance à ce sujet dans la formation donnée aux séminaires. L'étude de la Bible tend à privilégier la lectio scholastica la lecture académique de la Bible qui transmet principalement des connaissances intellectuelles, lesquelles sont, certes, nécessaires, mais laissent un vide quant à la lecture spirituelle, c'est-à-dire à la dimension pastorale de la Parole de Dieu.

Justement l'Apostolat Biblique comme discipline académique veut combler ce vide. Il veut aider le croyant à rencontrer son Seigneur qui s'adresse à lui et l'interpelle dans le concret de sa vie. Ce cours pourrait avoir cette double finalité:

- a) Éveiller chez le séminariste une prise de conscience aiguë des Écritures comme Parole de Dieu, source de la vie chrétienne et instrument du ministère pastoral ; b)
- Aider le séminariste à traduire ses connaissances des Écritures dans sa situation quotidienne de vie (Cfr BICAM : Syllabus, Accra 2008, p. 21).

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<sup>66</sup> Intervention on 10/10/2008

<sup>67</sup> Intervention on 11/10/2008

<sup>68</sup> Intervention on 11/10/2008

## **Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come Holy Spirit, make us holy.

Fill our hearts with a burning desire  
for the Truth, the Way and the fullness  
of Life.

Enkindle in us your fire that it may  
make us into light  
that shines and warms and consoles.

Let our heavy tongues find words  
to speak of your love and beauty.

Make us a new creation  
so that we become people of love,  
your holy ones, visible words of God;

then we will renew the face of the earth  
and everything will be created anew.

Come Holy Spirit, make us holy,  
strengthen us, stay with us. Amen