

THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE TODAY

By

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(1) World Assembly of Catholic Biblicists.

During eight days of intensive work, 76 delegates from 44 countries shared with one another their personal and varied cultural experiences of communicating the revealed message of the Good News to man's troubled and suffering society.

On April 11, 1978 these communicators of God's Word began pouring into Malta to participate in the second plenary assembly of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA).

Their task was to re-awaken the biblical consciousness of the People of God through ways appropriate to the reality (1) of a world becoming aware of its inner unity and interdependence, (2) of a Church called to be the light, leaven and salt of that world.

(2) In the Crossroad of Varied Cultures.

Malta could not have been a more fitting venue for the second world assembly of the Federation's members. Situated almost at the center of the Mediterranean, it possesses a wealth of historical traditions, culture, art, and science out of all proportion to its diminutive size.

From as early as the fourth millenium B.C. to as late as 1964, Malta's cultural heritage grew steadily as a result of successive waves of civilizations and the cross-fertilization of different cultures.

Neolithic inhabitants, megalithic peoples, the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks and Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Christian Europe like Spain, France, Great Britain all but have left their deep imprint on this fortunate island.

Malta boasts yet of another glory that has a more direct bearing to the Bible. Saint Paul was shipwrecked there, but he survived, converted the people and proceeded thence to Rome to give, by his martyrdom, the supreme witness to the Word of God.

(3) Time for Assessment and Setting of Priorities.

To Malta the 76 delegates representing 40 Episcopal Conferences and 125 Catholic Bible Societies and Associations brought with them their varied rich cultural backgrounds. They studied together and more importantly, lived and experienced together the implications of their membership to the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate.

All five continents were represented. Asia contributed to this meeting of self-study and future-planning in the persons of 14 delegates from Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand.

For eight intensive and insightful days, the 76 delegates worked, studied, prayed, ate, and laughed together. There were also moments of anxious confrontation and debate, which is inevitable in a gathering of this nature. But the Bible was a catalyzer. There was no single moment when the delegates did not feel they were one community, despite racial and cultural differences, candidly evaluating together the successes and failures of their efforts in their respective countries, and trustingly planning together the direction and priorities that their-work must take in the future.

(4) An Important Development in the History of Evangelization.

Just what exactly is the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate? What is the purpose and the instrumentalities of the WCFBA that held its second plenary assembly in Malta on April 12-19, 1978?

It is a Catholic world fellowship of administratively distinct multi-national, national and local biblical organizations having episcopal recognition, in particular the offices for the biblical apostolate of the episcopal conferences. As stated above, some 40 episcopal conferences and 125 Catholic bible societies and associations are present members of the Federation.

The WCFBA is a service organization existing to help bishops and pastoral-biblical organizations discharge their responsibility to make the Bible available and intelligible to all, taking the Word of God as an invitation to faith (kerygma) and as a source of enlightenment, strength and fraternal charity (catechesis).

It is the primary concern of local Churches to promote the scriptural message within the process of evangelization and the full integration of the Word of God within every aspect of the Christian community. Hence it is obvious that the development of a service

organization like that of the WCFBA constituted a new and important step in the history of evangelization and in the witness of unity given by the Church.

The biblical apostolate is not only a means for evangelization; it is also evangelization in so far as the "Good News" is at the heart of all evangelization efforts. It is not simply the apostolate of the Bible; it is also the apostolate with the Bible because it applies Scripture to life.

Although the term "biblical apostolate" cannot be found in any authoritative works on the Church's pastoral outreach that are ten years old or more, yet it is not a new thing. The biblical apostolate began on the Road to Emmaus, and its activities started with the Sermon on the Mount. What is new is its identity as a rallying point for insisting that all our evangelization be based biblically. As Vatican II would put it: "...all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by the Sacred Scripture." (*Dei Verbum*)

(6) The Bible Regains its Place in the Life of the Church.

A 19th century catechism, carrying the approval of Cardinal Manning for its English translation, contained a question-and-answer item that sounds strange to modern ears. The question was whether it was advisable to make vernacular translations of the Bible so that all, including the laity (!), could use it. The amazing reply was that the Church forbade the Bible to be read in the vernacular by all persons indiscriminately, and that absolution would be refused to those who chose to read it, or retain possession of it without permission.

There could have been abuses for prompting the Church to act the way she did regarding the reading and possession of a bible. But the catechism in question fairly reflected the attitude among Catholics in the post-Tridentine period. We have come a long way since then.

Pius XII began what has been called the biblical movement. However, already pioneering works were done by such biblical luminaries as Lagrange, a Lapidé, Pere Vincent, Bea and others. The swell grew and reached the shores of the five continents. The Catholic laity took greater and greater interest in Scripture. In Africa, for example, the lay people turn spontaneously to Scripture with the desire to find therein the answers to their most fundamental questions about life.

Vatican II stamped its approval on the biblical movement. It stated that "...easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" and "...all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture." (*Dei Verbum*). The biblical movement became the biblical apostolate, binding bishops, priests, religious and the laity as well. The Bible has regained its pride of place in the Church.

(6) The Birth of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate.

Vatican II designated as a primary objective of the pastoral work of the Church the integration of Scripture into the daily life of the faithful. It also urged cooperation with Christians of other traditions in making the Scriptures available to all.

Pope Paul VI commissioned Cardinal Bea, then President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, to make that mandate a reality, so that the Word of God would be the principal instrument for creating and nourishing Christian communities in all aspects of their pastoral life.

In April, 1968 Cardinal Bea received leaders of Catholic biblical associations from the European countries, plus India and the Americas, together with three members of the United Bible Societies (UBS) to survey the international needs of the Church having to do with access to and use of the Bible.

This consultation resulted in the formal establishment of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate at a meeting in Rome of delegates from 24 countries,* presided over by Cardinal Willebrands, Bea's successor. The declared purpose of this international body was to promote the biblical apostolate by aiding its development in local churches, and to further cooperation in this regard with the United Bible Societies.

On the occasion of the establishment of the WCFBA, Pope Paul VI in a special audience told the delegates: " 'The Word of God should be available at all times', declared Vatican Council II. Yes, always and easily, and ever more widely. It is not only priests and religious brothers and sisters who should have the Scriptures, read them, meditate on them, and meet Christ Our Lord daily in this way. All are called to this meeting with Christ our Lord.

* The Philippine delegate appointed by the CBCP was Fr. Efren Rivera, O.P. He was elected to the WCFBA Executive Committee.

"Vatican Council II has made it clearer than ever before that we and our brother bishops throughout the world have a serious responsibility to do all we can to help provide people with easy access to the Scriptures. When dedicated people like yourselves come forward to help us in this great task, we rejoice and give heartfelt thanks."

(6) Between Vienna and Malta.

The constitution of the WCFBA provides for holding plenary assemblies of Federation members every six years. Its first was held in Vienna (1972) and its second now in Malta (1978). The Malta assembly proposed for itself two objectives: a six-year assessment of the biblical apostolate of the Federation, and setting of priorities of the next six years.

The delegates to the Malta assembly were encouraged as they assessed the development of the biblical apostolate during the past six years. But it also became clear to them that Christians (including themselves for more reason) can play their specific role in helping both the Church to fulfill her mission, and the world to find the answer to its deepest fundamental questions, only through a deeply rooted biblical spirituality.

Accordingly, the delegates brainstormed on the theme of biblical spirituality. Father J.N.M. Wijngaards, a Mill Hill missionary, brilliantly presented a position paper on the theme. The delegates then broke into six workshops to tackle the following topics they had chosen: (1) training of all, (2) experience of God, (3) searching the Scriptures, (4) testimony of the Spirit, (5) transformation of life, (6) biblical spirituality and ecumenism.

(7) Assessing the past six years.

From reports of the delegates, the emerging keynote was the newness of the biblical apostolate as this took on novel forms in spreading to several countries. The hunger for Scripture on the part of the laity was noted as a new phenomenon in the Church, one of the "signs of the times."

Emerging countries (like those of Africa) felt a certain newness of Scripture in their lives. Fired by a strong desire for community-building and nation-building, their hunger for Scripture which possesses a built-in power for creating communities is simply remarkable.

Many delegates reported the phenomenon of spontaneous Christian groups spring up, chiefly among the laity, interested in reading and discussing the Bible together. Some (delegate from Japan) said many non-Christians showed great interest in reading the Scriptures. Aside from the traditional method of privately reading the Bible, a great interest in group reading and discussion of it was noted by the delegates.

The need of forming animators of the biblical apostolate from among the ranks of the clergy and the laity was stressed. A greater involvement of bishops and priests in the movement was discreetly recommended. The latter is all the more urgent if the emerging keen desire of the laity for Scripture needs to be channeled along the right way.

From reports of the delegates, the Federation members are engaged intensively and extensively in the work of translation, publication, distribution of Scripture; in producing biblical commentaries, aids, radio programs; in organizing bible-study-groups and bible-sharing-groups; in setting up structures for the biblical apostolate on multi-national, national, diocesan and local levels. These activities are being done by Catholics only, or in cooperation with Christians of other traditions where this is possible.

(8) Biblical Spirituality.

In the euphoria of their achievements, the delegates have not forgotten that the important thing is not the fact that they have been able to get more and more copies of the Bible into the hands of the faithful. (People in our country just as well, more eagerly even, take hold of copies of Liwayway or Women's or Today's Bulletin.)

Having received or bought their copies of the Bible, the faithful must know how to use it properly. This is of paramount importance if the faithful are to fulfill truly their mission in the Church and in the world. A deeply rooted biblical spirituality assures the correct use of the Bible.

What is biblical spirituality? This is not a novelty that is being proposed to the faithful. The first Christians and those of the succeeding centuries had it. Biblical spirituality is no different from Christian spirituality. It is essentially the application of the Gospel to one's life, one's thoughts, actions and prayer.

In the lives of many Christians today the biblical aspect of Christian spirituality needs to be stressed, often almost introduced

for the first time. For some historical reason, many Catholics have lost or did not have the habit of reading the Bible and nourishing their spiritual life with its words.

There is a need to restore Christian spirituality to its true dignity by stressing its source which is the Bible. There is an urgency to propagate a biblical spirituality because there are Christians who don't take the Bible seriously enough. If Christians disregard the importance of the Bible for their lives, whatever they will do will be standing on sand alone.

That this is the task of the moment can be clearly deduced from the words, actually a command, of the Vatican II: "It devolves on sacred bishops 'who have the apostolic teaching' to give the faithful entrusted to them suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books, especially the New Testament and above all the Gospels... so that the sons of the Church may safely and profitably become conversant with the Sacred Scriptures and be penetrated with their spirit." (Dei Verbum)

Every Christian must therefore be reminded of the fact that the Gospel is his principal rule of life. Promoting biblical spirituality means making people realize this fact, trying to ensure that every Christian turns again to Sacred Scripture and seeks inspiration from the day-to-day contact with the Word of God itself.

(9) Brainstorming on Biblical Spirituality.

The theme needed to be broken down into topics and so studied if the delegates had no wishes to misunderstand and mis-represent so important a subject. The workshops reports are illuminating and its recommendations highly practical on the matter of biblical spirituality.

One workshop felt the experience of God and of Christ in the Bible is very important. Formerly, in catholic teaching this experience was neglected. The revelation of God was talked about in a scientific, 'objective', detached manner. As a result, a two-fold dichotomy in academic and spiritual, academic and pastoral life showed in pastors, teachers and seminarians who went about their duties in an ineffectual, anaemic manner.

Reading or teaching or proclaiming Sacred Scripture should lead not so much to an increase in knowledge as to an experience of God's presence. It is not enough to stress orthodoxy in faith and perfection in religious practice: all Christians must be shown how to be sensitive to the living presence of God in our lives through the inspired words of the Bible.

God who talked to and was experienced as having really talked by biblical Israel (Old Testament) and by the early Apostolic Church (New Testament), is also personally talking to and should be experienced as so talking by us today whenever we take hold of the Bible.

The experience of hearing God speak is not a face-to-face encounter with Him, yet it is valid and direct experience of God. (Examples of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Therese of Lisieux, Charles de Foucauld). The experience, again, may not be as clear and outspoken at every Bible reading, at every contact with the sacred text. But every Christian who listens with devotion and desire will at least on some important occasions in his life have experience of God addressing him in the sacred text, conveying to him a personal message.

This is a persuasive way to show to the faithful that the Bible, despite its age, is still the book for us today, relevant for our times, a living companion, a sure guide, an actual friend. Otherwise, it will remain for many, as in fact it does, just another of so many ancient books, perhaps possessing a greater historical and cultural value than the others.

(10) Searching the Scriptures.

This was recognized by another workshop as the second constitutive element of biblical spirituality. The desire to experience God when reading the Bible, which is legitimate and recommended, should not lead to arbitrariness, magic, and fundamentalism. These are avoided by adopting the method of "searching the Scriptures". Jesus Christ, model of teachers and evangelizers, also "searched the Scriptures" (cfr. Luke 4:17-22). It is an approach to Scripture taken not for the sake of mere study, nor of finding arguments to refute opponents, nor of casual reading. It is an approach that sees in Scripture the answers to our existential needs.

When Jesus was handed the book of Isaias (actually a scroll) He deliberately sought the passage He wanted. He didn't come across the quotation by just opening the book at random. From this we can see that Jesus searched the Old Testament, that He was struck by some passages more than by others, that He reflected on them and integrated them into His own teaching. He felt and realized (a deeply religious experience) that words such as the ones found in the Isaian scroll were spoken to Him in a special manner. (Luke 4:16-21)

This is the meaning of "searching the Scriptures". It is an approach to Scripture that springs from a deeply felt personal need.

It implies an anxious longing, a personal search, an awareness that God can satisfy our personal needs. But to hear God speak and address us a personal message we must read the Scripture on our knees, so to say, listen to the sacred words as a child listens to the words of his father. This was how Saint Therese of Lisieux read the Bible. She also "searched the Scriptures".

However, the workshop on the above topic was careful to point out that there is no real contradiction between this spiritual-pastoral ("searching the Scripture") and the historical-critical approach. The latter is required to assure the "objectivity" of the biblical text. A proper balance between the two approaches is essential in order to avoid both the arbitrariness of fundamentalism and the pretensions of pseudo-biblicism. The great need of today is to integrate the spiritual approach of the Patristic age with the best results of historical-critical techniques.

(11) Witness of the Spirit.

One workshop discussed extensively the topic on Bible-sharing-groups. The participants felt that this phenomenon was rather universal (from England to South Africa, from Lesotho to Korea from North America to Oceania, from Guatemala to Manila) and quite effective besides. Bible-sharing-groups, according to the participants, are a simple way of helping people encounter God in a direct manner. Through them, a community helps the individual live out his faith. They foster the bond of unity in a village, enabling it to experience itself as a Christian community. They are a continuation of daily life where a family can meet and discuss life-issues. Finally, the delegate from Korea said these groups (over 300 in that country) strengthened Catholic students in their faith.

Actually, the Bible comes to us through the Church, through the witness of other persons who share their faith with us, through our communion with the other disciples who believe in Christ. Scripture is proclaimed to us in liturgy, taught to us in preaching and instruction, illustrated for us by the examples of saints and the traditions handed down through the interpretation given by our brothers and sisters who, like ourselves, are searching for its meaning.

Today's Bible-study-groups and Bible-sharing-groups, so popular and spreading like contagion, give modern expression and apparel to an ancient advice of Saint Paul for his converts at Colossae: "Let the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other, and advise each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs to God".

The Bible is a book of the people, the People of God. It is read in community, explained by the community. Its hearers share their reflections because they believe they can receive the fulness of its message when they are willing to listen to the Spirit who teaches through others. The witness of the Spirit is the third constitutive element of biblical spirituality.

(12) Transformation of Life.

The ultimate test of biblical spirituality does not lie in a subjective conviction, in the knowledge that God speaks to us, but in the fruits it produces in our attitudes and conduct. The prolonged searching in the sacred texts, the endless meditation and prayers about Scripture can even be used as an escape from putting God's Word into effect. The Word of God, experienced, sought for, and shared with, should end up by transforming one's life, or else everything about it would just happen in vain. Transformation of life is the fourth and last constitutive element of biblical spirituality.

The participants of the workshop on this topic decided on a practical approach: they identified the "signs of the times" in their local situations and from there proceeded to the discussion of politics, social commitment, interpretation of life and Scripture, areas all of which needed to undergo the transforming and liberating influence of the Bible.

The transformation of life concerns as much the Christian community as the individual believer, as one workshop judiciously noted. The Scripture calls for a total conversion of individuals and of communities so that they become communities of faith, witnessing to the fact of God active in their lives carrying out the establishment of His Kingdom.

All listeners of God's Word must be involved in the conversion and witness process which the present community of faith, the People of God now, Christ's Church (not unlike the ancient Israel and the early Apostolic Church) is itself undergoing in terms of making the qualities of God's Kingdom a reality in their society.

The participants stated that the dichotomy, in many Christians, between spiritual life and political life was the result of their having followed spiritualities which lacked in historical and incarnational dimensions and are not at all influenced by a Biblical spirituality. People must be helped to examine their lives in the light of the Scriptures and re-interpret the Scriptures also in the light of their life experiences if ever they can hope for a transformation of their lives.

It was suggested that this is best done in groups (Basic Christian Communities, Charismatic Groups, Bible-Study-Sharing-Groups, Prayer-Groups), in all of which positive values undeniably exist. Dangers of group-processes were also pointed out: groups without priests, emotionalism, superficiality, fundamentalism.

The workshop also suggested that emphasis on the Mystery of the Cross might help people today to avoid a lopsided, triumphalistic interpretation of Scripture, pointed out the need to "deprivitize" Scripture by adopting the Liturgy and the Lectionary to foster communal celebration as a healthy reaction to private, individualistic, "ghettoish" worship.

(12) Biblical Catechesis.

The biblical apostolate includes within the gamut of its concerns catechesis and homily. Elsewhere in this report/position paper, it was pointed out how the WCFBA as a service organization helps bishops and pastoral-biblical organizations in the two-fold use of Scripture as proclamation and catechesis.

This was why, aside from the indispensable theme of biblical spirituality, the 76 delegates to the Malta assembly studied also that of biblical catechesis. The recently concluded Synod of Bishops on Catechetics for Our Times (October 1977) added a compelling reason for them to brainstorm on the role of the Bible in catechesis and pastoral preaching.

An Indian bible scholar and priest, D.S. Amalorpavadass, gave a brilliant lecture to start the brainstorming sessions on biblical catechesis. The lecturer is director for many years back of the famed Bangalore National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Center. Incidentally, the Indian priest chaired the assembly sessions, from start to end, with amazing mastery and precision.

Catechesis, according to the lecturer, has evolved into a direction and a dimension different from those of 25, 50 years ago. Three stages can be identified in its evolution: the first period emphasized the method of catechizing (Psychological approach), the second stressed the content of Catechesis (Kerygmatic approach), and the third, the present one, is concerned mainly about the relevance of the Gospel, Church, Catechesis to man and his life (Experiential/existential/human approach).

The various new trends in the world today and the concrete pastoral situations obtaining in the Church at large and in a particular country have more or less determined the route that the catechetical movement has presently taken. On the one hand (to

mention but a few), desacralization, secularization, de-christianization, crises of youth, this age of change, challenge and confrontation, and on the other hand, progress in human sciences, the rise of democracy, technology and technopolis, a renewed understanding of apologetics, fundamental theology and hermeneutics, the renewal of adult catechumenate, the pastoral need to dialogue with non-Christians and unbelievers or men of good will.

(14) New Understanding of the Aim and Task of Catechesis.

The aim of catechesis, as it is understood today, is the education of the faith of the converts or the baptized. Its task is to foster this growth of faith and to develop the life of God's children. It does not content itself with merely imparting a religious knowledge or giving religious instruction, but it aims at initiating and educating one to a life of personal and community relationship with God, and with one another in the world of today. It therefore should take into account the whole of man's life, secular and religious, his actual living conditions, social, economic, political, cultural and religious. This education in faith implies a gradual but total transformation of man into Christ, achieved through sacramental life and day-to-day, round-the-clock life of faith.

This education in faith and transformation of life that catechesis promotes, should give the Christian a new world vision, a different hierarchy of values, cause in him a change of attitudes, guide him towards maturity, commit him to the task of the Church and of society, urge him to remain in living contact with God and to bear witness to Christ.

The new catechetical approach understands revelation in terms personalist, communitarian and social, concrete, existential and historical, actual and on-going, dynamic and relevant. God continues to reveal Himself to us here and now, in our world, in the events of our history and in the midst of our life. He has a message for us, designs for our times and for our life. How can we recognize His presence and interpret His designs? In the Old Testament the prophets interpreted the events of history and life-experience of the people (Israel) as signs of God's revelation or interpersonal relationship and enabled the people to discover their meaning and orientation for the future. The Church today must fulfill a similar prophetic mission.

The new catechesis interprets the signs of revelation, namely the signs of God's self-gift in our life and world. It enables a group of faithful to meet and discover God in the midst of their

life-situations and to understand His designs through the Word proclaimed and interpreted. Its pedagogical movements and stages are as follows: (1) evocation of a human experience, reflection on it, and interpretation of its significance at the human level; (2) interpretation and discovery of its fuller meaning and ultimate fulfillment in the light of God's Word proclaimed; (3) with the discovery of the relevance of the Word to life, to review and re-live the same human experience in full consonance with faith.

(15) **The Two World-Visions.**

Not unlike catechesis, which, within the span of three quarters of a century, evolved from a psychological method to kerygmatic to experiential, the delegates also graduated from holding an old world-vision to a new world-vision within the duration of the lecture given by Father Amalorpavadass.

The former world-vision had us seeing ourselves living and moving among four realities (God, man, world, Church) more or less separate, mutually exclusive and distant from one another. God created the world, which once created goes on by itself like a machine. It has become bad due to sin. It is a God-forsaken place and is in need of salvation. God reveal Himself to the Church (from then on "official" revelation is closed) and entrusted to her what is necessary for the salvation of sinful mankind in this godless world. The children of the Church are supposed to go forth from "their" world to the pagans in the "other" world and to persuade them to abandon this wicked world and "enter" the Church. The least that can be said about this world-vision is that it's unsatisfactory and leads to feelings of complacency, superiority complex, domination and triumphalism.

The new world-vision (that easily comes to one who has a new appreciation of present world trends, new approach to the theology of revelation and faith, new life-situations in the Church) sees the four realities of God, man, world and Church not as separate and opposed but related, forming a single whole, a single context or framework, yet distinct. God, who created the world and transcends it, is present in the heart of the world, in the course of history and in the dense realities of human existence. He guides all peoples everywhere and at all times, and continues to reveal Himself to his children through events and men. There is but one world which God loves and one current of history and life, one human family which all men (including Christians) belong.

Christians, after having experienced the joy of fellowship and reconciliation with God through the Word, sacraments and service

of love, yearn to share this Christian experience with their fellowmen, and thus hasten the total fulfillment of God's plan, the coming of His Kingdom, the new Heaven and the new Earth. This new world-vision is a vision of God's dynamic presence in the heart of the world, God-directed history, God-permeated life.

After this substantive lecture, the delegates broke into continental workshops for further study and discussion. They were excused from reporting the results of their workshops, perhaps as an indulgence to their spent humanity, especially after such a lecture. Here it can be repeated: "...the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." But the workshop, participated by this writer, showed unweariness in its discussion. It pointed out how really the Word of God continues to reveal itself in creation, in world history, in the Scriptures, in the Church's magisterium, in her Liturgy, in one's present life-situations, in the "signs of the times", in the contemporary faith-community's prophetic function, and is still awaiting new expressions of revealing itself in the future. The Word of God is a living Word, always actual and present, in all our human categories of time, past, present and future.

Our workshop also agreed on the legitimacy of the contemporary faith-community's prophetic function of interpreting present life-situations in the light of Scriptures, and discovering the fuller meaning of Scriptures in the light of life-situations which are then reviewed and re-lived in full accordance with that new understanding of the Word of God. The prophets of the Old Testament fulfilled this heuristic function; the early Church of the Apostolic age also performed such mission; the Church of today must continue to give this kind of service.

(15) Description of a good Catechist.

One is now in a position to give a dynamic description of what is catechesis and who is the good catechist. Catechesis is a prophetic ministry of the Christian community by which a group of Christians are enabled to discern God's revealing and saving presence and to interpret the meaning of their lives and their orientation for the future, and thus to discover God's plan for themselves and the world in the light of His Word, in acknowledging which the community surrenders itself to God, feels saved and reconciled, and realizes communion with Him and its fellowmen.

The catechist/ evangelist/ preacher no longer lectures to his audience from outside in an uncommitted way. He is within, and belong to a human group, in solidarity with which he experiences

all events and aspects of human life including tensions and conflicts. He first has to discover God and His designs in his own life-situations, environment and community; then he shares with others his discovery as the fruit of his self-evangelization, personal meditation, assimilation and interiorization, relationship with God and consequent personal conversion and transformation.

The catechist/ evangelist/ preacher is a pedagogue who has experienced God by means of a genuine interpersonal relationship and fellowship, and can guide others to the same experience by a testimony of word and deed in concrete life-situations. In this he becomes a sign of actual revelation taking place, and he plays the role of a prophet by interpreting its significance and guiding his group to respond to it in faith within the community of the Church.

(16) Relations between WCFBA and Other Bodies.

One session was spent to tackle more earthy matters. Since 1971 the WCFBA has been doing evaluation work of bible projects for a number of European funding agencies. It appears that these agencies and the constituents they represent, have realized "that man doesn't live on bread alone" (in this they have earned the gratitude of many needy Churches in the third world) "but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." They want to do something about this now.

The organizations for which the office of the Federation, based in Stuttgart, W. Germany, fulfills this function are as follows: Adveniat, W. Germany, Centraal Missie Commissariaat, Netherlands, Church in need, W. Germany, Katholische Jungschar, Austria, Lentenfund of the Swiss Catholics, Switzerland, Missio, Aachen, W. Germany, Missio, Munich, W. Germany.

The above funding agencies support bible projects that meet their criteria and set of priorities. Examples of projects that may be submitted for financing by these agencies are biblical pastoral and educational projects, translation and production projects, commentaries and other pastoral aids. It is further supposed that the local hierarchies, through their own biblical commissions, should recommend the projects and commit themselves financially to some degree.

There is another body with which the WCFBA maintains a most cordial relationship in view of common concerns regarding the Bible. This is the United Bible Societies (UBS), which was represented in

the Malta assembly by an Italian, Dr. Renzo Bertalot. The UBS is a non-denominational organization which exists to serve all Churches and has no direct or predominant relationship with any single Church. Its service consists in making Scriptures available to Christians and non-Christians alike, thus providing one of the essential tools of mission and evangelization.

A world fellowship of Bible Societies, the UBS is at work in over 150 countries, and has completed translation projects of the Bible or portions thereof in more than 1526 languages, with other 617 projects still in progress (1973 statistics). There are four regional centers that coordinate the work of over 56 member Bible Societies: in Nairobi for Africa, in Mexico City for the Americas, in Manila for Asia and the Pacific, in Zurich for Europe. The office of the UBS General Secretary (like that of the WCFBA) is in Stuttgart.

While the UBS work is defined in terms of translation, production and distribution, that of the WCFBA is more concerned with the biblical pastoral field. However, both the UBS and the WCFBA have overlapping interests; they serve the common purpose of making the Bible available in all parts of the world; they have a wide range of contact, common concerns and field of cooperation.

It was the Vatican Council II that opened a new era of cooperation between Roman Catholics and other Christian Churches. So that the Bible can become integrated in the daily life of the faithful, Vatican II mandated making Scriptures available to all, in cooperation with Christians of other traditions.

Cardinal Bea, by expressed wish of Paul VI, made this mandate a reality by paving the way for the establishment of the WCFBA which would work in close cooperation with the UBS. Dr. Renzo Bertalot spoke appreciatively of the existing cordial relationship between the two bodies. He expressed a wish (a prayer in fact) for a wider development of the common task by the two bodies, a stepping-up of efforts so that the reading of the Bible, ever growing in popularity, may result in the true conversion of individuals and of Churches, hastening the day for the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer and the longing desire of so many Christians: "ut unum sint".

(17) Winding up the Assembly Work.

The Malta assembly was coming to a close. May the delegates start now breathing more easily, or should they realize that the real work was just about to begin? The latter seemed to be the general sentiment, although all also felt relieved on the last day

of the assembly. The delegates had covered the following agenda: (1) a six-year assessment of biblical apostolate by the Federation (5 sessions); (2) biblical spirituality (7 sessions); (3) Bible and catechetics (2 sessions); (4) relations between WCFBA and other bodies (2 sessions), (5) follow-up and prospective (7 sessions).

One evening was spent to join in celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Catholic Bible Society of Malta, which played host to the 8-day assembly. The affair featured a solemn concelebration in St. Publius' Church (Publius was Saint Paul's first convert in Malta) and a soiree at the adjoining Catholic Institute. The President of the Republic of Malta, the Metropolitan Archbishop, many distinguished members of the Maltese society, the 76 delegates of the WCFBA all joined in thanking the Lord for keeping the Malta Bible Society this long (20 years) which, in the words of its amiable director Msgr. Carmel Sant, has been putting across to the people of Malta the biblical message and spiritual values of conversion, justice and love.

Sunday (April 16) the delegates allowed themselves the luxury of a respite and the pleasures of sightseeing. They visited the important churches in the island-republic, strolled inside venerable museums, admired the remaining traces of a megalithic civilization, saw the bay where Saint Paul was believed to have been shipwrecked along with 276 persons, and actually experienced the menacing waters of Malta in an hour-long cruise along the Valletta harbor. In the evening they were guests at the St. Edward School for Boys where a reception was held to honor the new president of the WCFBA, Cardinal Paul Zoungrana of the Upper Volta in Africa.

The African prelate is a bible scholar in his own right, chairman of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) an ardent promoter of the Word of God in his archdiocese. He succeeds Cardinal Franz Koenig of Vienna who guided wisely the Federation for six years, especially in its initial struggle for existence. There has also been a change of hands in the general secretariatship of the WCFBA. Father N. Jurgens, MHM, succeeds Fr. J. van der Valk, SDB. The spectacular growth of the Federation was due greatly to the efforts of the latter.

I was the outgoing president who urged the delegates: "... to clarify our evangelizing priorities, since these will determine in practice how our faithfulness to the Gospel and our faithfulness to the people (to whom the Gospel message is addressed) will

express itself." The Federation will function according to the policies, decisions and initiatives that the delegates would take. Its orientation and development for the next six years will be determined by the priorities the delegates will have chosen.

(18) The Final Statement.*

That and many other things besides are contained in the final statement of the assembly. The document includes the insights of the assembly (which it wants to share with Bible enthusiasts everywhere), some recommendations discreetly given to concerned parties, and the priorities it is determined to undertake for the next six years. Briefly, the final statement attempts to describe in as few words as possible all that happened in Malta.

The Apostles were not bothered by the fact that comparatively only a handful of people knew of the drama that happened in Jerusalem around the obscure person of a Nazarene. After having received the power of the Spirit promised to them, they went forth and preached the Good News everywhere, with the Lord Jesus working with them and confirming their message.

Not much unlike the above, the work of the 76 delegates may have escaped the notice of the greater portion of humanity. Cardinal Koenig had already warned them of the dismal alienation of most peoples of the globe and the present terrible drama of the split between Gospel and culture. But that didn't worry the delegates. In the farewell ceremonies, social and liturgical, they exchanged assurances of mutual support, firm determination and selfless dedication in promoting everywhere the Word of God. As they left the beautiful island of Malta, there kept ringing in the ears of their heart, the words of the parting song they had sung, with vigor and in cascading tempo, during the farewell concelebration: "Go out into the whole world, and preach with joy the Good News!"

* See *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, no. 585-586, August-September 1978, pp. 500-505.