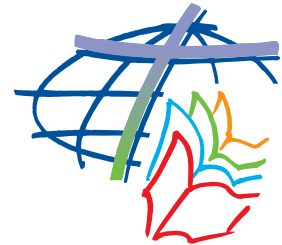

CBF Newsletter

Catholic Biblical Federation

October 2005



Dear friends of the Catholic Biblical Federation,

On November 18, 1965, the Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, was solemnly released for publication as one of the last documents of the Second Vatican Council. Despite its brevity, *Dei Verbum* stands like no other conciliar document for the new orientation of the Roman Catholic Church in matters related to the Bible; it has triggered profound transformations in theology, catechesis, liturgy and pastoral ministry. Besides the question of the relation of Scripture and Tradition – which was adjusted in favor of a new valuation of Holy Scripture – and that of the exegetical methods – which brought with it the full legitimization of historical-critical methods in biblical exegesis – the new outlook of the Council affected above all the central role given to Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church. The sixth chapter of *Dei Verbum* stipulates, among other things, that Sacred Scripture should be the soul of theology and that it should penetrate and inspire all realms of pastoral ministry, since access to the biblical message must be opened wide to all the faithful.

For this reason the CBF, in conjunction with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, invited interested parties to Rome last September for an international congress entitled “Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church,” on the occasion of the 40th anniversary celebration of *Dei Verbum*. About 450 participants from a hundred countries responded to this invitation, among them 60 bishops, a number of cardinals, high-ranking representatives of the Curia and numerous representatives of different Christian denominations and of other religions. It was not a matter of celebrating a document, a piece of paper. The point of the meeting was rather to take a critical look at where we are at present moment and to discuss central questions and challenges which a pastoral ministry inspired by Sacred Scripture has to face in the 21st century – against the background of the inner ecclesial situation, in view of ecumenical dialogue, in the context of diverse cultures and religions and in dialogue with society and the world.

The first tender fruits of this congress are already visible. The participating bishops have pledged to take up corresponding initiatives in their own Episcopal Conferences. Inquiries have been made from around the world regarding the papers and lectures given at the congress; concrete suggestions have already been taken up at various levels. The Holy Father received a letter in the name of the congress participants in which the suggestion is made for a Bishops' Synod on the Word of God – which by the way has been on the CBF agenda for many years. The same suggestion was made in a number of addresses in the course of the Synod on the Eucharist, which has just been concluded. We are therefore confident that the insights and results of the congress will not remain limited to the circle of participants but will have far-reaching effects in the local churches and at the grass roots level. We also have reason to hope that the stimuli that emanate from the congress will help in concrete ways to ensure that the concerns of *Dei Verbum* forty years after its publication be once again brought into the general consciousness and that powerful new impulses be given to its implementation today.

In the following pages you will read excerpts from the address of Pope Benedict XVI to the participants at the congress, as well as from two of the main papers and an opening address. Any of you whose interest is piqued by this reading will find the complete corresponding texts, as well as many other papers and announcements, in English translation, on the Internet site of the congress (www.deiverbum2005.org). If you should happen to have no access to the Internet available please do not hesitate to order the texts that interest you through our General Secretariat.

Dear friends of the Catholic Biblical Federation, alongside my personal thanks for your interest and your support I would like also to pass on to you the thanks of the Holy Father, as he expressed it in the course of his address during the congress on September 16, 2005: “My very special thanks goes to the Catholic Biblical Federation for its activities, for the biblical pastoral ministry you promote, for your loyalty to the teachings of the Magisterium and for your spirit of openness regarding ecumenical collaboration in the biblical realm.” In this expression of thanks you, dear friends of the CBF, are very explicitly included.

With best wishes from the General Secretariat,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander M. Schweitzer". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Alexander M. Schweitzer
CBF General Secretary

“That the Word of God may speed on to the ends of the earth ...” International Dei Verbum Congress in Rome

From September 14 to 18, 2005 more than 450 participants from 100 countries met in Rome at an international Dei Verbum congress. Besides some 60 cardinals and bishops many participants came as representatives from biblical organizations and movements, were individuals engaged in various ways in the biblical pastoral field, in Bible work, Bible translations or were biblical scholars. Many representatives of other churches, church organizations and religious communities also participated in the gathering.

A total of 18 panels and discussion forums dealt with relevant questions pertaining to biblical pastoral ministry. The topics concerned: exegesis, catechesis and liturgy, ecumenical topics, interreligious dialogue with Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, the challenges created by religious sects and the growing problem of fundamentalism, the question of religious values in today's secularized societies and the theme of justice and peace in a globalized world. Thus the congress offered a platform for international exchange on contemporary biblical pastoral ministry and the direction this could head in future.

Main speakers at the congress were Cardinal Walter Kasper, the former Archbishop of Milan, Carlo Maria Martini, and Archbishop John Onaiyekan, chairman of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar. Besides these main addresses, more than 50 internationally renowned biblical specialists also contributed as guest speakers. A highlight of the congress was the solemn mass in St. Peter's Basilica, followed by a private audience with Pope Benedict XVI. As a young theologian and professor of fundamental theology and dogmatics at that time, Joseph Ratzinger was actively engaged in the intensive consultations on *Dei Verbum* as theological consultant of Cardinal Frings of Cologne. His authoritative commentary on *Dei Verbum*, valid to this day, was published shortly after the closing of the Council.

An exhibition took place in parallel with the congress where some 30 biblical pastoral organizations presented their biblical materials – from translations, religious books on specialized themes, journals, programs of study and training to materials for Internet, radio and television.

Bishop Vincenzo Paglia, CBF President, took stock of 40 years Dei Verbum in his greeting address:

Exactly 40 years have gone by since the publication of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*. With this text the Second Vatican Council drew our attention to the primacy of the Word of God and, as it were, put the Bible back into the hands of all the faithful.



Bishop Vincenzo Paglia

The influence of *Dei Verbum* on the life of the Church has been remarkable. It is this document, together with the Constitution on the Liturgy, that has perhaps brought the most profound changes into the life of the Christian communities. But the conciliar constitution reveals

higher expectations than what has thus far been achieved. In fact, if the road already traveled has been very considerable, one must nevertheless acknowledge that much of what the document suggests remains to be done in order for the Bible to really become the ordinary book of prayer and of interior formation of the faithful. A single statistical

fact will make the point: the great majority of practicing believers know the Bible only through the Sunday liturgy and there are really relatively few who make it the daily nourishment of their lives. And perhaps the same would have to be said of the impact of the Bible on the pastoral life of our Christian communities. We could say that there is still “little Bible” in the ordinary lives of individual believers and in the communities.

In his opening address Cardinal Walter Kasper paid tribute to the theological importance and the many positive effects of Dei Verbum. He also addressed its important impulses in ecumenical dialogue.

The Word of God belongs to all; therefore it must be interpreted with the consensus of all. In listening to Scripture it is essential to listen to all those who also endeavour to interpret it; it is essential to listen synchronically to what the others around us and diachronically to what others before us have heard. The correct exegesis of the Word of God can only result from an open collaboration in which all – but in a different way – play their part: the testimony of



Cardinal Walter Kasper

the office of the Church as well as the testimony of the laity and the theologians, the testimony of the saints and of the common people, not least the testimony of the liturgy, but also of Church art and also the external prophecy of the world.

The ecumenical significance of spiritual reading (*lectio divina*) and interpretation of Scripture while synchronically and diachronically listening to all others cannot easily be overvalued. In reading and contemplating the original document of our shared belief, our shared heritage and the heritage of the others are brought into play and into discussion. It tells us not only what we already share in faith and what we can do together; it also tells us what we can do to allow the already existing but still partial ecclesial communion to ripen into full ecclesial communion. For if it is true that through His Word God gathers the Church from the four winds, and that God's Word cannot be without God's people, then today, too, God gathers His people in ecumenically shared *lectio divina*. In the *lectio divina* the ecumenically already existing yet incomplete unity becomes reality and at the same time prepares the way for unity. Ecumenical dialogue makes progress to the degree that it makes room for the dialogue of God with divided Christendom in shared spiritual study of the Word of God.

Archbishop John Onaiyekan of Abuja, Nigeria, addressed the challenges confronting biblical pastoral ministry in the 21st century and forwarded an appeal that the next Bishops' Synod concern itself with "Holy Scripture in the life and mission of the Church".

The Bible has become very much the book of the Church. There was a time when it would appear that Catholics were discouraged from reading the Bible. At least in my own experience as a child in Nigeria, this was to some extent true. Indeed to carry a Bible around was considered a Protestant thing to do.



Archbishop Onaiyekan

The Catholic went to church with his rosary and missal. He learnt about his faith through the cate-

chism and the famous "Bible History" books. The Protestant carried the Bible and perhaps also a hymn book to church and to Sunday school. But since *Dei Verbum*, a lot has changed in this regard.

There is the whole area of the new communications technology. If the Word of God is God's communication to humanity, then it cannot but make full use of the modern means of communication. The communications highway is now practically taken over by secular messages. The Word of God must find its way also on to the same highway, so that the world may believe. We note here that modern information technology somehow has a way of bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. It is now possible even in the poorest village of Africa to set up a computer system with Internet, relying only on solar energy and satellite communication. This was not possible twenty years ago and certainly not in 1965. It means therefore that new frontiers can be opened and more people reached using the new technology.



Mutual exchange during breaks

In the years ahead, we have to take this into serious consideration. This is an area where amateurism is just not good enough. Here is definitely an area where there is a crying need for world-wide solidarity. Those who have been supporting the missionary activities of the Church in the poorer nations should have this as a high priority. It is good and fitting to continue helping to build churches. But a well prepared radio program may reach far more people with the message of the gospel, especially those who may never come to our churches.

Permit me to conclude these reflections with a call and indeed an appeal, which I strongly suggest for this 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 Church. We are now about to celebrate a general ordinary synod on the Eucharist. It would indeed be theologically logical to follow it up with a synod on the Word of God. After all, *DV21* declares that: "... the Church has always venerated the

divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord.” It goes further to state that “... in the sacred liturgy (the Church) never ceases ... to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ”. It is clear that on this “one table”, the Word of God and the Body of Christ, go together.

The Holy Father granted an audience to the participants of the congress at his summer residence, Castelgandolfo, on September 16. Pope Benedict XVI emphasized the significance of Dei Verbum for the Church and acknowledged with thanks the Catholic Biblical Federation's activities.

I congratulate you on this initiative which concerns one of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Council. I heartily thank all those who work in the service of the translation and diffusion of the Bible, supplying the means for expounding it, teaching it and interpreting its message. In this sense, a special thanks goes to the Catholic Biblical Federation for their activities, for the biblical pastoral ministry they promote, for their faithful adherence to the direction of the Magisterium and for their spirit of openness to ecumenical collaboration in the biblical field.



CBF General Secretary A. M. Schweitzer with Pope Benedict XVI

We are grateful to God that in these last times, thanks among other things to the impulse given it by the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, the fundamental importance of the Word of God has been

more profoundly revalued. And as a consequence of this a renewal has taken place in the life of the Church, above all in preaching, in catechesis, in theology, in spirituality and on the path of ecumenism itself. The Church should continuously renew and rejuvenate itself, and the Word of God, which never grows old and is never exhausted, is a privileged means of attaining this goal. It is in fact the Word of God which, through the Holy Spirit, is continuously guiding us anew into the whole truth (cf. Jn 16:13).



Biblical exhibition

In this connection, I would like especially to recall and to recommend the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*: the assiduous reading of Holy Scripture accompanied by prayer realizes that intimate colloquy where, by reading, we listen to God who speaks and, in prayer, we respond to Him with confident openness of heart (cf. *DV* 25). This practice, if effectively promoted, will bring to the Church – of this I am convinced – a new spiritual spring. As a firm point of biblical pastoral ministry, *lectio divina* should for this reason be further encouraged, through the use, too, of new methods, carefully considered, that are fully up-to-date. We ought never to forget that the Word of God is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (cf. Ps 118/119:105).

As I invoke the blessing of God on your work, on your initiatives and on the congress in which you are participating, I join you in the wish that animates you: “That the Word of God may speed on” (cf. 2 Thess 3:1) to the ends of the earth, so that through the proclamation of salvation the whole world may be brought from hearing to faith, from faith to hope, and from hope to love (cf. *DV* 1). ■