

WORD OF GOD IN THE LIFE & MISSION OF THE CHURCH**5TH FABC-OE & CBF ASIA-OCEANIA BIBLICAL CONGRESS****and****Bishops' Institute for the Biblical Apostolate (BIBA) III****4 - 8 November, 2010*****Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand*****Organized by****FABC Office of Evangelization in collaboration with****The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF)****CONTENTS**

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VII. WORD CENTRED AND INTEGRATED SEMINARY FORMATION

- Archbishop John Ha

In reflecting on this theme, I am sure that our primary concern and aim is to form Christ-like priests or, if I may be bold enough to use the expression *ALTER CHRISTUS* - in the positive sense of the term. Indeed, priests of the mind of Christ are especially needed in today's world eroded by serious negative trends which, Pope John Paul II, has very clearly pointed out in the various documents of his - especially in his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*. As such trends have made their inroad into and impact on society, the Church will have to be on the guard against them. Therefore, Seminary formation must equip future priests to handle these trends.

FIDES ET RATIO

Among the trends the Pope cautions against is reason's "one-sided concern to investigate human subjectivity" that forgets the transcendent truth towards which "men and women are always called to direct their steps" (art.5). This trend underlies different forms of agnosticism and relativism, which tend to devalue even the truths judged to be certain. It has brought about serious negative consequences.

i) Major Consequences listed are:

- a) Loss of Direction: "This (ignoring the transcendent truth) is why many people stumble through life to the very edge of the abyss without knowing where they are going" (art.6).
- b) "Crisis of Meaning": This comes about through an increasing fragmentation of knowledge (art.81).
- c) Eclecticism - which is the tendency to use individual ideas drawn from different philosophies without concern for their internal coherence, their place within a system or their historical context (art.86-87).
- d) Scientism - the trend that accepts as valid only forms of knowledge derived from positive sciences and relegates

- religious theological, ethical and aesthetic knowledge to the realm of mere fantasy (art. 88).
- e) Pragmatism – the trend that excludes theoretical and ethical considerations when making choices (art.89).
 - f) Nihilism – the rejection of the meaningfulness of being and negation of all objective truth (art. 90).

ii) Undesirable Impact

Such trends have made their undesirable impact even on theology. The Pope gives a few examples in articles 97 and 98:

- a) the dogmatic pragmatism of the early years of the 20th century which viewed the truths of faith as nothing more than rules of conduct;
- b) a Christology which proceeded solely “ from below”;
- c) an ecclesiology which developed solely on the model of civil society;
- d) the disorientation of people’s ethical conscience due to a crisis of truth and loss of the sense of the universal truth.

PARADIGM SHIFT

This is a shift from the past understanding of *training* (seminary or priestly training) to the current one of *formation*. Training applies to skills, while formation focuses on the person – his character and qualities. While the paradigm shift as such is correct and commendable, there have been to my mind two major obstacles to its achieving its goal.

- i. The first obstacle is that the seminary system in general still follows the traditional centuries-old approach, originally following the monastic life-style of a strict, “walled-in” community living. More often than not, despite its strictness, its routine and convenience, its relative comfort (compared to homes of candidates in general) seem to create an atmosphere that lends itself too easily to a development of a complacent, “take-things for

granted” attitude. Applied to such traditional system, the focus on the person tends to enhance these unhealthy attitudes.

- ii. The second obstacle emerges from what is commonly called psycho-spirituality, a spirituality that aims at building up the person’s relationship with Christ and response to his call on the basis of his personal psychology. While per se psycho-spirituality has great value, experience has shown that its emphasis on the person, supported by relativism, tends to reduce spirituality to a subjective realm. For, its focus on the person tends to leave out or sideline the Spirit’s movement. Yet, this latter is the force of spirituality – the quintessence of which is relationship with the Lord. There is an objective goal in spirituality – to conform, that is, configure oneself to Christ. For this the Holy Spirit’s role is indispensable.

FOCUS ON THE WORD OF GOD

Given these negative trends and their impact, the Church’s duty to proclaim the truth is urgent. To carry out this duty, her leaders, especially the priests, must know and proclaim the truth clearly and live by it in their lives. In later documents, Pope John Paul II appeals to the whole Church to focus on the Word of God.

i) Fides et Ratio

Here, the Pope teaches, “Underlying all the Church’s thinking is the awareness that she is the bearer of a message which has its origin in God himself (cf. 2 Cor. 4:1-2). The knowledge, which the Church offers to man, has its origin not in any speculation of her own, however sublime, but in the Word of God which she has received in faith (cf. 1 Th. 2:13).” (art. 7).

The Pope calls for a return to the Word of God in *theology* and in *catechesis*. “Theological work in the Church is first of all at the service of the proclamation of the faith and catechesis. Proclamation or kerygma is a call to conversion, announcing the truth of Christ, which reaches its summit in his Paschal

Mystery: for only in Christ is it possible to know the fullness of the truth which saves.... What is communicated in catechesis is not a body of conceptual truths, but the mystery of the living God" (art. 99).

A more recent statement of Pope Benedict XVI is worth recalling: "When exegesis is not theology, Scripture cannot be the soul of theology and, vice-versa, when theology is not essentially interpretation of Scripture in the Church, such theology loses its foundation" (Benedict XVI, Oct. 14, 2008, quoted in the Propositions of the Synod on the Word of God).

ii) *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

Art.39, affirms that the primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed *listening* to the Word of God." It is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives.

iii) *Ecclesia in Asia*

Article 22 of this document echoes the Synod Fathers' stress on the importance of the biblical word in the passing on the message of salvation to the peoples of Asia. This is because the word of God has an inherent power to touch the hearts of people. Following this, there is a call to:

- a) Develop an effective biblical apostolate to ensure wider diffusion and more intensive and prayerful use of the sacred text;
- b) Make the sacred text the basis for all missionary proclamation, catechesis, preaching and styles of spirituality;

- c) Provide biblical formation as an important means of educating the people in the faith and equipping them for the task of proclamation;
- d) Incorporate pastorally oriented courses on the Bible into formation programmes for the clergy, for consecrated persons and for the laity.

WORD- CENTERED FORMATION

The above extracts from the various documents of the Pope's provide more than enough grounds for us to focus on the Word of God not just in basic Christian faith formation but also in the priestly formation of our seminarians. We need to do two things:

(i) reach a common understanding of the meaning of "word-centered" formation; and (ii) practical implementation of it according to the concrete situations.

i) What is Word-centered formation?

A pre-requisite for an understanding of Word-centered formation is an appreciation of the mystery of the incarnation. The Word of God became Man in Jesus Christ to dwell among human beings and to reveal the Father to all. To all who believe and accept the person of Jesus Christ is given power to become God's children (Jn. 1:12). This amounts to having life in the name of Jesus (Jn. 20:31) - which is eternal life.

A Word-centered formation is putting seminarians in touch with Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh in all the realities of life: good and bad, planned and unplanned, pleasurable and burdensome, satisfying and frustrating - in the seminary and outside the seminary. It is leading them to encounter Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh in people they encounter or live with. It is guiding them to respond to all these encounters with an experience of Jesus Christ according to this one command He has given: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love...This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (Jn. 15:9, 12-14).

In *koinonia* love and knowledge are synonymous. Knowing Jesus Christ means loving one another as He has loved us. Knowing Jesus Christ and loving one another, made possible by the Holy Spirit, lead us into an intimate relationship with the Father. Loving as Jesus has loved is giving flesh to the Word – incarnating the Word, making Him present and visible to those around us. It is becoming an *alter Christus*.

An indispensable way of forming seminarians into *altri Christi* is to focus on the Word of God – to make that Word a living reality for them so that their lives will be firmly anchored on it. This amounts to “be with” Jesus the Word of God made flesh – to be in His company, which was what Jesus did when He appointed the twelve to be with Him (Mk. 3:14). It was only after the apostles had been with Him that He sent them out to preach and cast out demons (Mk. 3:15). In essence, a Word-centered formation is rooted in the person of Christ to whom the seminarian strives to configure himself in order to be an *alter Christus* to all men and women and in all circumstances of his life and ministry. The Word of God is primarily communicated through the sacred Scriptures especially as interpreted by the Church. It is in these sacred Scriptures as the inspired Word of God that the seminarians will encounter Jesus Christ. The whole seminary formation should therefore be centered around and firmly anchored on the sacred Scriptures as the Word of God.

ii) How to implement a Word-centered formation?

a) Biblical Spirituality and Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction is the most important tool to form seminarians in the mind of the Lord. The most fundamental role of the spiritual director is to configure the seminarian’s life and conduct to the Lord’s. An indispensable part of this role is to motivate as well as guide the seminarian to read and pray the Sacred Scriptures, “pondering them in their hearts” as our Blessed Mother did (Lk.2:19,51). To this end, *lectio divina* – a spiritual reading of the Bible – is especially to be promoted and followed. Through this

praying and pondering of the Sacred Scriptures, the seminarian will be in touch with Jesus Christ the Word made flesh and get to know him better. In this way, the seminarian will be able to better imitate Jesus Christ, embrace His way of life, including the cross, and reflect Him in his life and ministry.

All this is biblical spirituality, which is fundamental to the life of every Christian and much more of every priest whose identity is essentially an *alter Christus*. Every form of spirituality (including that for every religious Congregation) is anchored on biblical spirituality. The spiritual director ought to be so personally in touch with his directee as to help him, in the light of God's Word in the Sacred Scriptures, to experience God's presence in his life in a personal way and discern his will for him. Once this is done, the spiritual director proceeds to guide his directee to live in relationship with God and respond to His will. The directee's need to grow towards perfection and constantly face recurring new situations call for regular spiritual direction.

All this entails using the Sacred Scriptures as a programme and content for spiritual direction. Over a period of time, the seminarian's spiritual life will truly be permeated by God's word and he will have a genuine biblical spirituality. His life and mentality will be fashioned in the image of Christ. This ensures fidelity and stability - anchored on and reflecting the steadfast love of God - in all areas of his life: emotional, psychological, mental and spiritual. This is because God's Word has power: it gives life and sustains commitment.

b) Sharing of God's Word

The Spirit-filled Christian community of the apostolic age was devoted to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). For the early Christians, the apostles' teaching constituted what is equivalent to our understanding of God's Word in the Sacred Scriptures. Fellowship, that is, communion (*koinonia*) is paired with the apostles' teaching. The implication is that the Word of God as

taught by the apostles led the Christians of their time into a communion, which very likely refers to the idealized community living in which there was radical and total sharing of life and property as depicted in Acts, 2:44-45. It was in this Word-activated communion that the breaking of bread, that is, the Eucharist, and prayers took place.

Devotion to the Word of God obviously presupposes the individual member's use of the Word in his prayers and life. But it also calls for the community's reading and praying of God's Word - a clear manifestation of which is in Bible sharing. Bible sharing is a group sharing of experience of the Word and its power in the lives of the group members - that is, seminarians in the context of the seminary. Bible sharing helps to build up one's biblical spirituality, as it provides group motivation and guidance as well as enhances Christian living and communion.

In the vision of the Asian Bishops, expressed in their Final Statement of the FABC assembly in Bandung in July 1990, the new way of being Church in Asia is a "communion of communities" - a "participatory Church". To achieve this, the assembly strongly advocates Bible sharing aimed at building Small Christian Communities. The presupposition is the power of the Bible as God's Word to build up communities. Bible sharing in the seminary will build up its community as well as equip seminarians for their future priestly ministry of building up Small Christian Communities envisaged by Asian Bishops.

Bible sharing can and should deepen in proportion to the level of one's faith as well as one's understanding and experience of God's Word in studies and in life. From this point of view, Bible sharing is best done by groups formed on the basis of stages of formation in the seminary.

c) Scripture and Seminary Studies

Apart from spiritual direction and Bible sharing, Scripture courses, philosophical and theological disciplines must be given in the

seminary. While a certain academic formation needs to be ensured, one must not lose sight of the spiritual dimension of these courses. Scripture courses must help seminarians to meet God who came to intervene in human history and save mankind and whose intervention found its summit in the person of Jesus Christ. They must help seminarians to give the necessary and proper response to this intervention. Anything short of this is a failure – however brilliant its academic part may be.

1) Stages of Formation in God's Word

1.1. Stage 1: Getting to know Christ: In certain seminaries this stage corresponds to the Initiation Year.

1.1.1. Basic formation through the study of one Gospel

Wherever the candidates generally have little knowledge of their Christian faith, it is necessary to start off their seminary formation with very basic faith formation. This is to say, in the first year of seminary formation, attention should be focused on the basis of the Christian faith and practical Christian living. The basis of the Christian faith is the person of Jesus Christ and His teaching. For this purpose, one Gospel should be studied – and Mark's Gospel is recommended, because historically it was the first Gospel to be written. Students should be helped to encounter the person of Christ and His demands for discipleship in this Gospel.

1.1.2. Listening and responding to God speaking

Here, I appeal to two principles for biblical education offered by R.C. Hill his book, *Breaking The Word of God: Principles of Teaching Scripture*, (Subsidia Biblica -15), Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome 1991 page106). They offer some useful suggestions, (Firstly, “read the text sensitively, expectantly and communally. Secondly, text and experience should be brought together. What is concretely advocated here is an attitude of listening. If sacred Scripture is God's word to us, we must first of all listen to it very attentively. God does not speak to us in vacuum. So, we must expect Him to

speak to us in the very concrete situations of our lives. This means that we ought to come to God with all our experiences. We ought therefore also to be attentive to our own situation contributed to not just by ourselves but also by others around us. So, we must listen to God speaking to us in the very concrete situation of our lives.

Once we have listened to God, we ought to give Him the proper response. There is first of all the prayer response which we give practically immediately. There are two levels of prayer response: the personal and communitarian. These two levels are interactive as one leads to and enriches the other. The personal prayer response takes various forms – meditation, *lectio divina*, devotions (e.g. visits to the Blessed Sacrament; rosary). Community prayer, for the greater part, is the liturgy – the Divine Office and the Eucharist, although there are also the devotional ones like the Holy Hour, for example.

Prayer response alone is not enough. It must lead to and be complemented with life response to give a total response to the Word of God. Life response is the kind of response given by every disciple of Jesus in the concrete situations of his or her daily life. In the seminary, it is a response given in the context of the community in the form of service to others in and outside the community. It is a response of communion, expressed in community life.

Being attentive to the Word in the Gospel requires one to be attentive to one's neighbors. Relationship with Christ is further built up through prayer and the liturgy. The class should spend their time to share their thoughts and experience of trying to be Christ's disciples.

What is cultivated at this stage is a living encounter with Christ – being in His company – and responding to Him in very simple ways. This is a basic Christian spirituality.

1.1.3. Studies and other ways to nurture the basic spirituality

This initial stage of the seminarian's formation is rather delicate and his basic Christian spirituality needs to be nurtured very carefully. Direct and progressive guidance by the Rector (Initiation Year Director) and spiritual director is very important. Spiritual conferences deal with the topics or themes drawn from those passages of Mark's Gospel that have been studied in class. These are intended to help the students to make the Gospel study relevant to their lives and understand their vocation better. Spiritual direction aims at personally helping the students to internalize their Gospel study and respond to Christ.

The other subjects of study must be geared towards building up this basic Christian spirituality. Basic Catholic Doctrine is taught to help the students understand Christ as well as His relationship to His Father in the Spirit (Trinity) and to His disciples (the Church). Basic principles of Christian morality are presented in very simple terms to form the moral conscience of the students. Liturgy helps them to understand the need for and the form of community worship of God. At this stage, the liturgical course could focus on the basic elements of the Divine Office as the Church's prayer and two sacraments: the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

The study of religions serves to help the students to see how non-Christians understand God and respond to him. In this way, the students will be helped to appreciate essential differences between the Christian faith and other faiths and to learn to respect the latter.

A cursory glance at the universe and the world, anthropology and human history, human psychology and society serves to provide a basic understanding of God as Creator and His plan, to situate ourselves in this universe, have a better self understanding so as respond to Christ better, and understand the mission of the Church according to God's plan.

Liturgical celebrations in the community and all other activities should help to provide an experience of the Lord's presence and saving intervention as well as elicit a response to it.

1.2. Stage 2 : Salvation History

1.2.1. Salvation History

A genuine encounter with the person of Christ in the Gospel will make a person want to go into salvation history. It is therefore opportune at this stage to lead the seminarians into God's work of salvation in human history as recorded and reflected on in faith in the Bible – starting with Abraham and moving on to the time of Christ and the apostles, the early Church and reaching our time, and carrying on till the end of time. At this stage, the Old Testament is introduced and its major sections (e.g. the Patriarchs, Exodus, Sojourn in the Wilderness, Sinai Covenant. Entry into the Promised Land, Judges, Kings and Prophets, Exile and Return) could be studied in some depth. The idea behind this study is to show YHWH as a living God, always interested in and concerned with the well-being of His people, always aware of their situation and problems, and intervening for their salvation. YHWH was always in dialogue with His people – verbally and through events. He was continually forming them into His people. Their faith in Him enabled them to see Him intervening in the events they encountered and hear Him speak to them.

1.2.2. God's Word and Philosophy

Noting the relevance of God's Word to philosophy, Pope John Paul II makes this appeal in *Fides et Ratio*: "I appeal to philosophers to explore comprehensively the dimensions of the true, the good and the beautiful to which the word of God gives access. This task becomes all the more urgent if we consider the challenges which the new millennium seems to entail" (art.103). Then the Pope says, "I appeal also to *philosophers*, and to all *teachers of philosophy*, asking them to have the courage to recover, in the flow of an enduringly valid philosophical tradition, the range of authentic wisdom and truth - metaphysical truth included - which

is proper to philosophical enquiry. They should be open to the *impelling questions which arise from the Word of God* and they should be strong enough to shape their thought and discussion in response to that challenge. Let them always strive for truth, alert to the good which truth contains. Then they will be able to formulate the genuine ethics which humanity needs so urgently at this particular time” (art.106).

1.2.3. God’s Word and Theology

Theology is faith seeking understanding. Christian faith is basically biblical, that is, built on Scripture as God’s Word. Faith seeks understanding in order to be deepened and lived more fervently. In other words, the believer who has come to a better understanding of his faith will better appreciate it and better live by it. Theology can therefore not be cut off from the Scriptures for the Word of God is its soul. *Optatam Totius* says, “Theological subjects should be taught in the light of faith... Students should receive a most careful training in holy Scripture, which should be the soul, as it were, of all theology” (art.16.)

Theology too cannot be cut off from life – the life of the believer, the life of the community – for faith gives meaning to life. Theological disciplines ought therefore to be reflecting on faith rooted in the Scriptures and brought to bear on life’s concrete situations. While it is not possible to touch on the Bible explicitly in every class of theology, there ought to be a certain consciousness of the Scriptures being at the foundation of every theological discipline so that the theological reflections or concepts are drawn on the Scriptures. Seminarians going through this theological formation will be helped to appreciate the relationship between their Christian faith and life and embark on a systematic reflection on the Word of God in today’s situation.

1.3. Stage 3: Study of the Gospels

The initial encounter with the person of Christ and familiarity with Salvation history provide a fertile ground for a deeper

understanding of the mystery and ministry of Christ as the Word of God made flesh – the culmination of salvation and center of all human history. In Christ, God’s union with mankind became visible and tangible. In Christ, man’s union with God reached its perfection.

1.3.1. This stage of formation focuses on:

1.3.1.1. The formation of the Gospels:

- the three stages: Jesus, Apostles and Evangelists - to show the development of one Gospel of Jesus Christ (kerygma) to four gospels to meet the needs felt by different communities – to show how the faith experience of Jesus was appealed to, to address the concrete needs/issues of each community;
- the synoptic problem;

1.3.1.2. The individual Gospels – Matthew, Luke and John (Mark was already studied in the IY)

- Introductory issues – like authorship, datation, place of writing, situation of the time, literary characteristics;
- theology and its conveyance (literary structure)
- text of each Gospel- with emphasis on familiarity;
- exegesis of major texts and presentations of major themes.

1.3.1.3. Efforts should be made to help students appreciate the mystery of Jesus, which cannot be exhausted by one’s experience of Him.

1.4. Stage 4 : Other Sections of the Bible

Stage 4 of the programme will focus on other sections of both the Old and New Testament that have not been covered:

1.4.1. Old Testament: Historical Books, Prophets, Wisdom Literature, Psalms and Apocalyptic Literature (e.g. Daniel and apocalyptic sections of prophets like Isaiah and Zechariah).

1.4.2. New Testament: Acts of the Apostles, Pauline Epistles, Catholic Epistles, Hebrews, Revelation.

Again, where possible, it would be best to treat these sections of the Bible together with other disciplines. For example, Acts of the Apostles could be presented with the Missiology (Dogma), Moral(Special) Issues (Christian life of sharing and justice in Acts2, 4-5; the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15), Inculturation (Liturgy - The Athens episode in Acts 17:22-31), the Church's authority to stipulate (Canon Law in Acts 15), Life in the Spirit and Conversion (Spirituality - Pentecost in Acts2; Paul's conversion in Acts 9) and Priestly Commitment (Spiritual Direction - Apostles' reception of the Spirit in Acts 2 and their evangelical commitment throughout the Acts).

2) Scientific Exegesis accompanied with Deeper Bible Sharing and Spiritual Direction

2.1. Goal

A Word-centered and integrated formation does not dispense with scientific exegesis. At a later stage of their formation, seminarians must be introduced to scientific exegesis, especially historic-critical studies, of both Old and New Testaments. The goal of this training is to help seminarians come to grips with the reality of the Bible as God's Word written in human words and thus, the relationship between the divine author and the human author. Scientific exegesis will lead the seminarians into the biblical world and help them understand how God related with His people in the different concrete circumstances of their lives. Hopefully, equipped with this knowledge and their faith, seminarians will be able to read the signs of the times and discern God's message for today in the concrete circumstances of our time.

A good training in scientific exegesis will give seminarians the tools for personal biblical study and interpretation. Coupled with training in application to current situation, it will make God's

Word in the Bible “come alive” for them and equip them to prepare homilies and conduct Bible courses.

2.2. Method

Here, the recommendation of two distinguished religious educators regarding biblical education, referred to on pages 104 and 105 of R.C.Hill’s book, *Breaking the Word of God: Principles of Teaching Scripture*, may be of help. These two educators, M.C.Boys and T.H.Groome, first pose two comprehensive questions designed to bridge the gap between scholars and students:

What is this Bible which we carry?

Who are we who carry it?

Each question prompts reflections on the scriptural Word and its ministers that have implications for learning and consequently for teaching.

Applying to the present

Knowledge of the Bible *per se* without any meaning or consequences for us would remain external to us. This knowledge must be interiorized or personalized so that it will have a bearing on our own lives and situations. In other words, biblical scholarship must be integrated with the life of faith. The biblical Word must find its incarnation in our lives. For this, knowledge of hermeneutical principles is necessary. We need to allow God’s word in the Bible to carry a message for us. Critical skills must always serve this biblical message. We need to allow ourselves to be formed and transformed by it. Our faith tells us that the Word of God speaks to us in different situations we encounter as much as it spoke to the people of the Bible in their different situations. One excellent model of relevant reading of the Bible is Pope John Paul II’s *GOSPEL OF LIFE*. This encyclical classically illustrates how God’s Word in the Bible addresses today’s situation.

This leads us to the next question: “Who are we who carry the Bible?” Here again, the chart produced by M.C.Boys and T.H. Gromme provides us a clear answer.

2.3. Deeper Bible Sharing

For critical exegesis to serve the biblical message, bible sharing would be most helpful. And with the findings from scientific exegesis, seminarians will be able to do a much deeper bible sharing than before and therefore be more deeply transformed by God's Word in it. Bible sharing will relate the texts studied exegetically to current times and situations and thus make the Word of God "come alive". Moreover, bible sharing will deepen the *koinonia* that flows from God's Word.

Bible sharing could also take the form of group work where critical analysis of current events is done in the light of God's Word in the Bible. Apart from their personal formation, group work will sharpen the seminarian's skill for the biblical - pastoral ministry.

2.4. Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction at this stage of the seminarians' formation aims at helping them to be aware of or acquire a deeper experience of God's presence and His Word and respond to this experience accordingly. *Lectio divina* ought to be deepened. Hopefully, at this stage, seminarians will be so "soaked" with God's Word that their perspective will be Theo - and Christo-centric and they themselves be *altri Christi*.

EPILOGUE

Proposing a Word- centered and integrated programme does not in any way imply or suggest that current courses/tracts in all major disciplines in St. Peter's College neglect sacred Scriptures. Rather, it attempts to put the Scriptures as God's Word at the centre of all study and life of the seminarians. Studying a particular topic offered by the Scriptures, reflecting on it in Dogma, drawing principles from it for life in Moral, experiencing it in the Liturgy and applying it for spiritual growth in Spirituality as well as spiritual direction - all within the same period- is

driving home the Word of GOD, “soaking” the seminarian in it and empowering him to live by it. Hopefully, at the end of it, the Scriptures will become God’s living and life-giving Word.

Drawing up an integrated programme requires the involvement of every formater – resident and external. What I have offered above are only two rough samples, to give an idea of the orientation and content of a Word-centered and integrated Seminary formation. I fully realize that a lot of brainstorming is needed to draw up an acceptable programme which can be adopted for use. I am also aware that no integrated programme can be so comprehensive that it covers every course/tract of every major discipline. For example, even in Scripture studies, topics like canonicity and historical criticism call for a separate treatment. So also do certain very specialized tracts in Dogma, Moral and Liturgy. I therefore envisage that if we accept a Word-centered formation, there will still be the need to allow for these specialized courses/tracts to be taught by themselves. But we ought to bear in mind that this can only be tentative. Experience will refine and sharpen it for the better.

I personally do not know of any Seminary having a Word-centered and integrated formation in the sense that I propose here. If you do know of any, it would be great asset for our deliberation to share it with us. In so far as St. Peter’ college is concerned, our efforts, if implemented will be a ‘first’ – and therefore will be subject to trial and error before reaching any degree of maturity. Even these tentative efforts will be worth trying. I think back of the Initiation Year IY Programme. My class was the first in College General to go through the IY, under the then Fr. Gregory Yong (later Bishop and Archbishop Gregory Yong).

This experience of the IY in Penang and Kuching gives me hope that the very tentative and perhaps even simplistic vision will, with experience and openness to change, gradually evolve into a fine programme. It is my conviction that we should move on without fear. But of course, I am only one individual in a big

group of Bishops and formators. I have no intention to impose my view on anyone.

If and once we have accepted the proposal and worked out its concrete implementation, we should put our whole heart and soul into it. On the basis of this experience, I believe that over a period of time the proposed Word- centered and integrated formation programme, once accepted and allowed to be continually revised, improved and refined, will be another distinctive mark of the College. More importantly, it will form priests whose lives and ministry will be Word - centered, ready to face the challenges of today's world - which, as the Pope has pointed out, is so fraught with negative trends. In other words, the programme we shall work out together will make the seminary formation in St. Peter's College relevant to our times.

* This is the text of a paper presented at St. Peters College, Kuching (2003). Some quotations from the Synod Propositions, have been added. The syllabus worked out with details of the subjects for each year, for lack of space, is omitted.

VIII. THE WORD OF GOD IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

- Ms Bibiana Joo-hyun Ro

Introduction

Members of SCCs in Asia have expressed their genuine joy and hope of encountering with the risen Lord Jesus through sharing the word of God in SCCs. It reminds us of the Holy Father Benedict XVI's remark in Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *VERBUM DOMINI*: "the synodal assembly was a testimony, before the Church and before the world, to the immense beauty of encountering the word of God in the communion of the Church."¹ Asian Church have made efforts in order to guide all the faithful to hear, see, touch, live out the word of God as a source and base

¹ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation , *VERBUM DOMINI*, no.1, (Vatican City, 2010).

of their life and mission of the Church, especially through SCCs. Holy Father Benedict strongly recommends SCCs in these words: “it is good that pastoral activity also favour the growth of small communities, ‘formed by families or based in parishes or linked to the different ecclesial movements and new communities’, which can help to promote formation, prayer and knowledge of the Bible in accordance with the church’s faith.”²

In this regard, deepening understanding of the essential marks of SCCs and gospel sharing methods and knowing what is AsIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach) which Asian Church has developed are meaningful. Because gospel sharing in SCCs is one of the effective ways to implement “pastoral care in the Christian communities as the proper setting where a personal and communal journey based on the word of God can occur and truly serve as the basis for our spiritual life.”³ Moreover, SCCs are “true expressions of ecclesial communion and centers of evangelization” (EN. no. 58; CL. no. 26, 51).

Therefore, I will introduce AsIPA, SCCs, and the Seven Steps gospel sharing method in terms of “a rediscovery of God’s word in the life of the Church as a wellspring of constant renewal....the word will be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity.”⁴ It is to share experiences of SCCs, people’s life stories in Asia who seek to listen to the voice of the word of God, an encounter with Jesus, and follow Jesus.

1. What is “AsIPA”?

AsIPA⁵ is the way to implement the vision of a new way of being Church—a participatory Church through SCCs in Asia. The FABC

² Ibid. no.73.

³ Ibid. no.72.

⁴ Ibid. no.1.

⁵ For further exploration of the AsIPA, see the following references: “Asian Integral Pastoral Approach Towards a New Way of Being Church in Asia (AsIPA): Report on the Consultation on Integral Formation,” in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon: Claretian Publications, 1997), 107-118; “The Second Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) General Assembly: Final Statement,” in *For All the Peoples of Asia*,

has inspired and guided the Asian Churches to implement communion ecclesiology and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Especially, the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC in 1990 articulated the vision of a new way of being Church (no. 8.0, 8.1.1).⁶ Many bishops of this Plenary Assembly were inspired to foster SCCs in order to actualize this vision of a participatory Church. It became a milestone for spreading SCCs all over the Church in Asia.

As a result of the Fifth Plenary Assembly, AsIPA desk was established under the Office of the Laity of the FABC in 1993. AsIPA has evolved and become the overarching guideline and way to building up SCCs in Asia. AsIPA desk has organized five AsIPA General Assemblies, several national assemblies, and many workshops as well as the development of animation teams and formation materials. All these have contributed to the emergence of thousands of SCCs all over Asia.⁷

Last year, AsIPA desk held two workshops at the Redemptorist Centre from Oct.18 to Oct.30, 2010. One was the First BILA (Bishops' Institute on Lay Apostolate) on SCCs and the other was AsIPA One International Workshop. Each one lasted for 5 days. They are aimed at introducing the vision of a new way of being Church and deeper understanding of SCCs, and gospel sharing methods. All processes and contents were designed in a very participatory way. They were focused on practicing gospel sharing methods, specially the Seven Steps gospel sharing method as well as the Group Response method. Moreover, participants spent several hours every day learning about SCCs and the Seven Steps gospel sharing step by step in a very practical process.

ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon: Claretian Publications, 2002), 107-111; Peter C. Phan, In Our Own Tongues: Inculturation in Asia (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 2003), 185-186.

⁶ The Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC, "Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium", in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, ed. Gaudencio Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 1992), 287.

⁷ The Final statement of BILA I on SCCs, (Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand, Oct. 18-23 2010).

As a result, the five bishops of Thailand among ten bishops who joined the BILA I on SCCs, decided to offer AsIPA workshop to about 200 priests of Thailand in July, 2011 for 5 days. Bangladesh participants with one bishop also planned to put their pastoral priority into SCCs for the next three year pastoral plan. Hsinchu diocese of Taiwan designed to promote SCCs and gospel sharing methods. Other participants from different dioceses and countries—Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Macau, Mongolia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, and Sri Lanka--made concrete plans to implement SCCs based on the word of God according to their contexts. Because the participants experienced that SCCs are one of the most effective means for the people of God to “approach the table of the word of God, so as to be nourished and live ‘not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’ (Dt 8:3; Mt 4:4)”⁸ toward a new way of being Church.

2. What are “SCCs/BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities)”?

Some priests and people may say, “We have always had small Christian communities such as prayer groups and various associations consisting of Christians in a small size!”

In any given SCCs, there may be many features or marks according to their context. Although SCCs are a little different from each other, SCCs have the same essential four marks in common as follows: 1) Members of SCCs are neighbours, 2) SCCs make gospel sharing the basis of their meetings, 3) SCCs act and do things together out of faith, 4) SCCs have to be linked to the Universal Church.

We will examine each essential mark of SCCs and its effects and gains.

1) Members of SCCs are neighbours

The members of a SCC do not come from different parts of the parish but from the immediate neighborhood. They have its

⁸ The Final Message of Word of God Synod, (Vatican City, Oct. 24, 2008).

meetings at home in rotation. It implies the family as the domestic Church is the most fundamental community in making up SCCs.⁹ It enhances “the formation of small communities of families, where common prayer and meditation on Scripture can be cultivated.”¹⁰

1. It encourages all the faithful—the rich and poor, young and old, different language groups and races, especially non Catholics and strangers to join SCC meetings.
2. It also brings SCC members to look closely at the daily lives and needs of one another and neighborhood. SCCs are “a solid starting point for a new society based on a “civilization of love” (RM. no. 51).

2) SCCs make gospel sharing the basis of their meetings

SCCs celebrate gospel sharing as a source and basis of SCCs. In SCCs, the word of God incarnated into the world is always the center of SCCs (Acts 2:42, 46; Mark 6:37, 41-42; DV. no. 10, 21, 22, 24-25). This emphasis of the centrality of the word of God in SCCs corresponds to “letting the Bible inspire all pastoral work.”¹¹

SCCs usually follow the Seven Steps gospel sharing method. From time to time, however, they also use other methods as well which help them see beyond their own lives and reach out to the lives of others. These methods include the Group Response and Amos Programme with social analysis. SCCs usually use the gospel of the coming Sunday for their gospel sharing. Later they choose texts from other books of the Bible as well. All members of a SCC bring their Bible along.

⁹ Ibid.: “The family, enclosed between the domestic walls with its joys and sufferings, is a fundamental space where the word of God is to be allowed to enter. The Bible is full of small and great family stories, and the Psalmist depicts with liveliness the serene picture of a father sitting at the table, surrounded by his wife, like a fruitful vine, and by his children, “shoots of an olive tree” (Ps 128).”

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, no.85.

¹¹ Ibid. no.73.

1. Through gospel sharing SCCs make Christ present in their midst, here and now, Jesus who truly becomes the foundation of their community.¹²
2. Gospel sharing strengthens SCCs members to become the Lord's disciples. "If you make my word your home, you will be my disciples" (Jn 8:31).
3. It makes SCCs members a new family. "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice" (Lk 8:21).
4. Through gospel sharing, the members of SCCs become spiritually nurtured, and mature in evangelical perspective to see, discern, and act the reality of the world.

3) SCCs act and do things together out of faith

In step 6 of the Seven Steps gospel sharing method, SCCs ask the question: "What is our task for the coming week?", "What is our task as "Church" in this locality?" The members of a SCC say, "We are the Church in this neighbourhood!" Therefore, SCCs feel co-responsible to undertake the continuing mission of the Church today in their neighbourhood.

For instance, SCCs participate in preparing the Sunday liturgy, preparing the children for First Holy Communion, sharing faith with catechumens, preparing the youth for Confirmation, welcoming strangers, acting as sponsors to catechumens, standing up together against injustice and corruption, forgiving each other, creating unity and peace. It is the way to live out evangelizing mission for transforming the world into the Reign of God in a particular place and time as the disciples of Jesus (GS. no. 47-52).

¹² Ibid. no. 51: "In the word of God proclaimed and heard, and in the sacraments, Jesus says today, here and now, to each person: "I am yours, I give myself to you"; so that we can receive and respond, saying in return. "I am yours". The Church thus emerges as the milieu in which, by grace, we can experience what John tells us in the Prologue of his Gospel "to all who received him he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12)."

4) SCCs have to be linked to the Universal Church.

The fourth essential mark of a SCC is unity with all other Christians. It is the Eucharist or the breaking of bread which is the strongest link between SCCs and the Universal Church.

1. Through the Eucharist and the word of God, the many SCCs and other groups in the parish become a “communion of communities.”
2. This creates a strong bond of unity. The local parish is linked to the Universal Church by the same faith and the same mission to bring God’s love to all.
3. The SCCs are represented in the parish pastoral council.
4. Leaders of SCCs receive continuous training and spiritual formation from priests.

Indeed, it has been proved that SCCs are an effective instrument to nourish the people of God to embody the word of God in life and carry out the mission of the Church today as the Asian Synod Fathers affirmed: SCCs “as an effective way to promote communion and participation in parishes and dioceses” (EA. no. 25).

3. Gospel sharing methods

The gospel sharing methods are used not only in many Asian Churches but also in Africa and Europe they have been developed by Bishop Oswald Hirmer and Bishop Fritz Lobinger of the Lumko institute in South Africa since 1978.¹³

The question about devising gospel sharing methods was “How can we enable the ordinary people to listen, share and live the word of God if we want to reach the multitudes of the people of God?” Keeping this in mind, all gospel sharing methods were designed for the ordinary faithful in a simple way but with a depth of spirituality and theological foundation as well.

SCCs embody the Gospel in their lives. There are several methods of gospel sharing such as the Group Response (the Bible-Mirror

¹³ Oswald Hirmer, *Gospel-Sharing: Its origin, description and theological conception*, (Nagpur, India: Pallottine Animation Center)

method), Look-Listen-Love, Amos Programme, and Life-Bible-Notes as well as the Seven Steps. They all aim at not only meditating on the word of God but also living out the word in daily lives.

4. Introduction of the Seven Steps gospel sharing method

4.1. Introduction of the Seven Steps

The Seven Steps gospel sharing method is a basis of gospel sharing for SCCs in Asia. It is one of the ways to encounter Jesus personally. The principle of developing the Seven Steps is rooted in the way Jesus Christ taught us. He invited the crowds and the simple people and entered into a personal loving relationship with them. This method helps to “enable the people of our time once more to encounter God, the God who speaks to us and shares his love so that we might have life in abundance.”¹⁴

Using the Seven Steps gospel sharing as a basis of SCCs has generated significant changes. The following story shows how the Seven Steps gospel sharing influences SCCs members in many ways.¹⁵

In the year of 2000, a group of 20 Koreans, had an exposure programme on small Christian communities in Mangalore and Goa dioceses in India. When they had a meeting with about 100 SCCs leaders of one parish in Mangalore, someone raised a question, “What good has the Seven Steps of gospel sharing done to you?” The spontaneous replies given by the members really gave us insights into how the Seven Steps has been a great tool for growth in Christian life. Some of their replies were: “The word of God has changed my life”; “Now I have come closer to my neighbour in love”; “Family prayer has become very important for me now”; “I have come closer to my family members”; “In the beginning only a few were participating in the step 5, now the number has increased and it has bonded us together”; “The word of life in the step 6 gives daily spiritual nourishment”; “This

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, no.1.

¹⁵ Fr. Arthur Pereira, AsIPA resource team member who belongs to Mangalore diocese, India, shared this story in the EXAMINER of MUMBAI (July 6, 2002).

method gives us strength to serve the needy every month with a definite activity"; "Due to this method, the word of God has effectively entered our life."

This is not only a particular story about the Seven Steps gospel sharing but about most SCCs members' experience on it.

1) Step 1: We invite the Lord.

We make ourselves aware of the Lord's presence by inviting Jesus in prayer, and welcome him in our midst. We suggest a personal, warm and direct invitation of Jesus in a spontaneous prayer usually citing a Gospel passage. In this gospel sharing we want to come in touch with a living person, the Risen Christ himself, the word who became flesh.

2) Step 2: We read the text.

Then someone reads the Gospel of the following Sunday slowly and in an attitude of prayer. The text is read a second time, if possible in different translations or in different languages if there are members present who use another language. By "reading the text" prayerfully in SCCs, we "proclaim" it. By "proclaiming the text", the Good News comes alive here and now.

3) Step 3: We pick out any words and meditate on them.

The facilitator encourages the participants to select any words or short phrases from the text and to repeat them three times clearly, slowly and prayerfully and keep silence in between. It creates an atmosphere of contemplation of the word. In the end of this step, the text is read once more.

4) Step 4: We let God speak to us in silence.

In step 4, we keep silence for a few minutes in order to listen to what God is saying to each person. During this time, some repeat within their hearts a certain word which has especially struck them. Others, in the spirit of the Gospel passage, seat themselves down besides Jesus and become "still" in the loving presence of the Lord.

5) Step 5: We share what we have heard in our hearts.

We share which word or phrase touched us in a very personal way and our experience with God's word. We want a personal sharing. It should be neither preaching nor discussion. Therefore, the sharing could be started by saying, "I am touched by this word, because..." or "I am struck by this phrase, because..." This

personal sharing is the most powerful proclamation of God's message. We share what we have "seen and heard ourselves" (1Jn 1:3-4).

6) Step 6: We discuss any task which our group is called to do.

In step 6, daily life is discussed. SCCs plan how to live out the word of God, which has become an inspiration and power for action. SCCs can choose the tasks either what the community will do together or individually undertake. Step 6 must be seen within the life of SCCs. Faith, life and practice become integrated in step 6. At the end of this step, a 'Word of Life' can be chosen from the text which the members of SCCs try to live during the week(s) ahead.

7) Step 7: We pray spontaneously.

All are invited to pray from their heart. The meeting can be ended with a prayer or a song which everybody knows.

4.2. Important Features of the Seven Steps

Each SCC in the Church of Asia is at a different stage of its growth. But all these SCCs right from the start have taken the Seven Steps gospel sharing as the foundation for their SCCs. Therefore, it would be significant for us to explore what is unique about this method.

1) Jesus is the leader: Unlike other methods, here Jesus is the sole leader. The facilitator's task is only to read out the steps and moderate in step 6. We invite the Risen Lord right at the start so that he may lead.

2) Based on the Bible: We cannot have this method without the word of God or the Bible. The word of God is a quasi-sacramental sign of the presence of Christ. The Risen Lord hidden behind these words becomes really present.

3) The Community is needed¹⁶: This method is given for a community. It is not meant for individual prayer. The members of

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, no.85: "the sacred text must always be approached in the communion of the Church. In effect, "a communal reading of Scripture is extremely important, because the living subject in the sacred Scriptures is the People of God, it is the Church."

the body of Christ meet Christ to strengthen their bond with Him and with each other.

4) Active participation and a new style of leadership: Here all have equal opportunity to participate in all the steps. Nobody is expected to play a major role while others listen. All, the rich and poor, learned or those with little education, youth as well as adults--all become brothers and sisters in Christ.

5) Easy to concentrate: The word of God is alive. The texts that we read, the words that we select, the sharing that we do, the spontaneous prayer that we make are all conducive to focus our attention on Jesus throughout. Each step creates prayerful and contemplative atmosphere.

6) Personal Sharing: In preaching or exhorting, we easily try to apply the word of God to others and to situations in general. But in the Seven Steps method, we have to find out what Jesus is saying to me today. The same Jesus is expressing his desire "Come down, I must stay in your house today" (Lk, 19:5).

7) Service is essential: There is no real gospel sharing without action. The Seven Steps method fills us with the heart and mind of Christ and guides us to follow his footsteps. As Synod Fathers say, SCCs could be "witnesses of communion with God and with the sisters and brothers, the word of God come to life. The just and faithful man not only "explains" the Scriptures, but also "unfolds" them before all as a living and practiced reality".¹⁷

5. The gains and challenges of the Seven Steps gospel sharing

5.1. Gains

There are many positive points which SCCs members have shared about their experience on the Seven Steps gospel sharing as follows: 1) It enhances the ordinary faithful to be familiar with the Bible; 2) It can be used by the ordinary people themselves without needing long and complicated training and theological experts; 3) By using the following Sunday scripture, Sunday Eucharist becomes more meaningful; 4) The role of facilitator signifies a new leadership style. Therefore, the members of SCCs can experience

¹⁷ The Final Message of Word of God Synod no. 10, (Vatican City, Oct. 24, 2008).

empowering, non-dominating, and participatory leadership; 5) It is an effective instrument to build up a community based on Scripture and is Christ-centered; 6) It helps members of SCCs link faith and life; 7) It encourages people to put the faith into practice; 8) It enables us to experience the presence of Jesus and to encounter him personally; 9) It brings SCC members to open their hearts to, and share their lives with one another in trust; 10) The word of God becomes more alive in the midst of people.

5.2. Challenges

Discerning some limitations and challenges of using the Seven Steps gospel sharing method would also help us.

1) Some find difficulties saying spontaneous prayers in step 1 and 7. Many ordinary people hardly join in spontaneous prayers. We need to practice it.

2) Sometimes, opening our heart to the Lord is not easy especially to those “who are worried and troubled over so many things”.

3) Personal sharing with others of what the Lord has spoken ‘to me’ personally for my conversion is indeed difficult because we are not accustomed to this.

4) At every meeting of SCCs, making plans about a service activity for the needy and social issues in neighborhood would be strenuous.

5) The danger of the Seven Steps method is that the members of SCCs may stay at the purely personal level rather than extend their horizon into the neighborhood and society. If step 6 is not accomplished well, SCCs may be too self-centered or parish-centered. That is the reason why SCCs have to use other gospel sharing methods from time to time.

6) Some people regard the Seven Steps method as a superficial exercise. They say, “It is about personal sharing of the word of God without intellectual views and opinions.” But this is a different approach from the Bible study or discussion.

7) Some say that SCC members are likely to understand the actual meaning of the Scripture wrongly or inappropriately in the Seven Steps method. However, in this gospel sharing, the most

important thing is not whether all the participants have grasped the exegetical meaning of the text or not. We avoid just “talking about” Jesus, or “discussing” the original meaning of the Biblical text, as important as this is, at other times. This gospel sharing aims at encountering Jesus, the word of God personally in life. The promise, “Where two or three comes together in my name, there I am with them” (Mt.18:20) is what inspires such sharing.

6. Suggestions

SCCs have faced challenges to move forward. I will highlight some challenge of SCCs which was also recognized by the participants of BILA I on SCCs.

“Even as we rejoice and celebrate the blooming of thousands of SCCs all over Asia, they raise new challenges and problems affecting their growth. *Passivity in members of our church and lack of Catholic understanding of the Sacred Scriptures make them easy prey to proselytizers, attuning themselves to teachers who turn them away from the truth of the Gospel (2 Tim. 4:4).....SCCs, for want of trained animators, still see themselves as prayer groups and need to be enlightened to see themselves as “disciples who follow-Jesus-in-his-mission”.*”¹⁸

In addition, the final statement of BILA I on SCCs recommends practical action, “In the next 20 years we need well trained animators at every level who can guide the existing communities into active evangelizing communities.”¹⁹ In order to cope with the above struggles and challenges of SCCs, I would like to propose some suggestions.

1) For the leaders of SCCs: Besides the Seven Steps and other gospel sharing methods used in SCCs of Asia, SCCs leaders also need to understand the original meaning of the biblical text and study the biblical foundations. It will complement the limitation of the gospel sharing methods used in SCCs.

¹⁸ The Final statement of BILA I on SCCs, (Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand, Oct. 18-23 2010).

¹⁹ Ibid.

2) For the ordinary members of SCCs: There is a need for formation, training and some structures to animate and support ministries in SCCs.²⁰ Therefore, the Bible training courses or materials in simpler and easier ways need to be offered to the ordinary members of SCCs.

3) For those who are involved in Biblical apostolate: If they can deepen their understanding of SCCs and participate in using the gospel sharing methods in SCCs, it will enhance our mutual support and growth.

SCCs based on the word of God are not one of the movements in the Church but a concrete expression of the Church in movement. Experiencing the word of God is the foremost way to foster SCCs which seeks to embody a new way of being Church—a participatory Church in Asia. We are the Church.

IX. YOUTH AND THE WORD OF GOD

- Mr. Manoj Sunny

I am truly delighted to reflect on the theme ‘Youth and the Bible’ in the context of Asia. This reflection becomes especially relevant in this year as the Church celebrates the Silver Jubilee of the First World Youth Day. This year, the UN also celebrates the 25th Anniversary of the Youth Year. Moreover, the UN has declared the period between Aug 12, 2010 and Aug 11, 2011 as the International Year of Youth with the theme ‘Dialogue and Mutual Understanding’.

Let me start with a quote from the Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for WYD 2006: “My dear young friends, **love the word of God and love the Church**, and this will give you access to a treasure of very great value and will teach you how to appreciate its richness.”

²⁰ The Final Statement of the Third AsIPA General Assembly (South Korea, September 2-9, 2003, no. 2.3.)

Who are the Youth?

In general, international agencies and organizations like UN refer to youth as people between 15-24 years. Most Bishops' conferences refer to youth as youngsters between 18 and 30/35. Multi-tasking thirty-six hours day, 5-minute attention span, etc., are some of the many such expressions that describe the youth of today. Beyond these definitions, youth is the most dynamic section of any society and the most fascinating stage of life. When we think of youth, we think of all that is beautiful in life such as fashion, sports, arts, media, new technologies, fun, adventure, relationships, idealism, creativity and great dreams. It is thus imperative that youth be seen not just as an age, but a state of mind and an attitude. Remember, almost 50% of the global population is under 25 - we are living in a young world!

Three Insights on Asian Youth:

1. Asia is younger than the world - Asian youth culture defines the global youth culture - The rise of Asian youth culture as a world influencer, rather than American or European youth cultures, is being accelerated by population. There are three billion people under twenty-five on this planet. Sixty one percent of them live in Asia. That is, 57% of the world's population live in Asia and 47% of Asia's population are under 25 years of age. In other words, 1/4th of the world's population is under 25 and live in Asia (Source: US Census Bureau).

2. Another interesting development is the growth of localisation in the youth culture, especially in Asia. There is a growing trend against Westernisation / Globalisation. It is an established fact that premium music channels like MTV Asia feature 80% local music and only 20% imported music this year.

3. One of the key words in the youth world is 'Networking' - they cannot survive without being connected to one another - they want to be equipped to reach others 24/7 - and they need to be reached too.

'This "being Asian" is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own tradition and to the Asian soul.' (*Ecclesia in Asia*)

Asian Youth World – A Closer Look:

- No more land phones in the youth world – they will never use it!
- Everything becomes mobile
- The end of traditional TV is near – because youngsters don't want to watch it according to someone else's schedule – 'I want to watch it according to my interests when I feel like watching it'
- They will have more virtual friends than real friends: they love to be part of social networking platforms, mainly for 3 reasons: They need freedom of expression, they need to be heard; and they need a community experience.
- They are being targeted by all brands – as a new generation of young consumers... and as they believe in unlimited choices. In this context I believe we should re-emphasise the presence of multiple youth movements/ministries with different charisms and working styles but with a common vision made available for the choice of youth.
- Most of them are students, generally single...
- They live with a dream career in healthcare; IT, business management, engineering, media, entertainment industry, etc.
- They like to think they are not influenced by brands or advertising; but this is not true. Even at the time of birth, everything is pre-defined – what to wear, which soap to use, which channel to watch, a time where good friendship and relationship matters
- Politicians and ideologies manipulate them – sometimes leading to violent extremisms

- Sports continue to be a strong influence among youth...

Today's youth are:

- Outspoken – they express themselves fearlessly
- Love to “be connected” – the key word in youth world
- Very individualistic – want to win this rat race at any cost
- Digital natives... born into a digital world
- They are the citizens of the media world – with unlimited possibilities
- Multi tasking – they are good in engaging all the senses at the same time.
- But on the other side, the challenges of poverty and joblessness are increasing and many times, youth are thrown into this post-modern world; they may find themselves lost in this quick transition.

Catholic Youth Ministry

The Church has so much to talk about with youth, and youth have so much to share with the Church. This mutual dialogue, if it takes place with great cordiality, clarity and courage, will provide a favorable setting for the meeting and exchange between generations and will be a source of richness and youthfulness for the Church and civil society. (Christifidelis Laici, 46)

In reality most of the youth movements work with two different types of people: the first category is that of youth who are *baptised*, but *not evangelised or re-evangelised*; the second category has those who are *neither baptised nor evangelised*. We need to help them to have a personal *encounter* with the Living Christ and they need to be sustained, deepened, and launched into mission. In other words, the four dimensions of a youth ministry are, (i) to help a person to *have a personal God-experience*, (ii) to *undergo Formation to become a Disciple and an Apostle*, (iii) to *grow as a part of a Community*, and (iv) to *be sent on Mission to produce fruits*.

The Church in Dialogue with Youth

Young people exert a very important influence in modern society. The circumstances of their life, their habits of thought, their relations with their families, have been completely transformed . . . The growth of their social importance demands from them a corresponding apostolic activity; and indeed their natural character inclines them in this direction. (Vatican II, Apostolicam Actuositatem, 12).

Concerning our approach to youth there are a couple of fallacies or at least half-truths quite prevalent among the Church leadership.

- Youth are unspiritual: They like only games and fun. The only way to get them and keep them with us is to have competitions and fun sessions.
- Youth can never be disciplined, they are not steady and dependable. They are out to disrupt any system that is out there.

The Church has much to give and receive from youth. A conscious effort to walk with youth and dialogue with this difficult reality will surely transform the heart and face of the Church. That is why our Holy Father said regarding the theme of the 2006 WYD - "The theme that I suggest to you is a verse from Psalm 119 [118]: "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*" (v. 105). Our dearly loved John Paul II commented on that verse of the psalm as follows: "The one who prays pours out his thanks for the Law of God that he adopts as a lamp for his steps in the often dark path of Life" (General Audience, Wednesday 14 November 2001)'.

How the Word of God Lights the Way of Youth

1. Helps youth to have personal God experience.

The key question for today's youth is "IS IT REAL?" not "IS IT TRUE?" Their lives are more likely to be changed through the heart than through the mind. It is here that the word of God brings about transformation in the lives of young people for it "is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword,

piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

“The eternal and divine Word enters into space and time and takes on a human face and identity... the divine Word has put on a face... That is precisely why the ultimate finality of biblical knowledge is ‘not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction’ (Deus caritas est, 1).” (Final Message of the Synod on the Word of God – 2008, Articles 4, 6)

There are numerous examples of youngsters who have experienced this heart changing power of the word of God. As a youth I experienced the depth of God’s love through a verse from scripture: ‘Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you’ (Is. 49:15).

2. Forms youngsters as missionaries

"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (*Jn* 8:31-32) The word of God speaks to the hearts of young people, who, despite their constant exposure to messages contrary to the Gospel, continue to thirst for authenticity, goodness and truth. And for many a young person, as for the apostles, the encounter with the divine Teacher is the beginning of an extraordinary venture – that of becoming apostles among their contemporaries. They begin to understand that "... the Christian has the mission to announce this divine word of hope, by sharing with the poor and the suffering, through the witness of his faith in the kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, of love and peace, through the loving closeness that neither judges nor condemns, but that sustains, illuminates, comforts and forgives... (Final Message of Word of God Synod – 2008,

Article13) Then it follows as Pope Benedict XVI says in his Message for WYD '08, "Those who allow themselves to be led by the Spirit understand that placing oneself at the service of the Gospel is not an optional extra, because they are aware of the urgency of transmitting this Good News to others."

3. Guides the day to day activities of people through daily reflections

(Daily Bread, Office of readings, daily reading plans, daily Mass reading based reflections etc..) It is no wonder that promoting the Bible among the youth was one of the propositions of the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God. Pope Benedict XVI's invitation is noteworthy: "My dear young friends, I urge you to become familiar with the Bible, and to have it at hand so that it can be your compass pointing out the road to follow. By reading it, you will learn to know Christ." (Message to the 20th World Youth Day, April 9, 2006). Note what Saint Jerome said in this regard: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (*PL* 24,17; cf *Dei Verbum*, 25).

A time-honoured way to study and savour the word of God is *lectio divina* which constitutes a real and veritable *spiritual journey* marked out in stages. After the *lectio*, which consists of reading and rereading a passage from Sacred Scripture and taking in the main elements, we proceed to *meditatio*. This is a moment of interior reflection in which the soul turns to God and tries to understand what his word is saying to us today. Then comes *oratio* in which we linger to talk with God directly. Finally we come to *contemplatio*. This helps us to keep our hearts attentive to the presence of Christ whose word is "a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (*2 Pet* 1:19). Reading, study and meditation of the Word should then flow into a life of consistent fidelity to Christ and his teachings. (Cfr. Message of Holy Father Benedict XVI for WYD 2006)

4. Helps youth to face difficult situations in their life.

“My dear young friends, meditate often on the word of God and allow the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. You will then discover that God’s way of thinking is not the same as that of humankind’s. You will find yourselves led to contemplate the real God and to read the events of history through his eyes. You will savour in fullness the joy that is born of truth. On life’s journey, which is neither easy nor free of deceptions, you will meet difficulties and suffering and at times you will be tempted to exclaim with the psalmist: "I am severely afflicted" (*Ps* 119 [118]. v. 107). Do not forget to add as the psalmist did: "give me life, O Lord, according to your word... I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law" (*ibid.* vv. 107; 109). The loving presence of God, through his word, is the lamp that dispels the darkness of fear and lights up the path even when times are most difficult. (Message of Holy Father Benedict XVI for WYD 2006)

5. Helps establish a Christian identity in their professional life

The Bible is a constant point of reference for all those who allow themselves to be guided by the Gospel in their working and professional lives, lighting up their road to sanctification.

6. Enables youth to grow as mature Christians

Saint James tells us: "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act - they will be blessed in their doing" (1:22-25). Those who listen to the word of God and refer to it always, are constructing their existence on solid foundations. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them", Jesus said, "will

be like a wise man who built his house on rock" (Mt 7:24). It will not collapse when bad weather comes.

7. Forms Disciples - A Guru-siṣya (master-student) Relationship

The Bible is a discipleship manual. The instruction that we receive from it cannot be limited merely to the intellectual or cultural realm, but to the integral realm of life. It is a life teaching, a teaching that includes various aspects of life: spiritual, emotional, moral, creational, fraternal and eternal.

- 8. Challenges youth to renounce themselves and go beyond their comfort zones** to take the Gospel to people who have never heard of Jesus. As Article 10 of the Final Message of Word of God Synod puts it, "the risen Christ makes an appeal to the hesitant apostles, to go forth from their protected horizon: 'Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...and teach them to observe the commands I gave you' (Mt 28:19-20). The Bible is fraught with appeals "not to be silent", to "speak out", to "proclaim the word at the right and at the wrong time", to be the sentinels that tear away the silence of indifference." Personally, I went through a time of discernment in my life almost 13 years back to decide if I should continue with a full time career as an Engineer or shift my focus from my career to a fulltime mission. One of the scriptures which gave me strength and conviction to take a fulltime mission was Matt. 6:33 - 'But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well'.

To build your life on Christ, to accept the word with joy and put its teachings into practice: this, young people of the third millennium, should be your programme! There is an urgent need for the emergence of a new generation of apostles anchored firmly in the word of Christ, capable of responding to the challenges of our times and prepared to spread the

Gospel far and wide. It is this that the Lord asks of you, it is to this that the Church invites you, and it is this that the world - even though it may not be aware of it - expects of you! If Jesus calls you, do not be afraid to respond to him with generosity, especially when he asks you to follow him in the consecrated life or in the priesthood. Do not be afraid; trust in him and you will not be disappointed. (Message of Holy Father Benedict XVI for WYD 2006)

Means through which the WOG reaches youngsters

Communication now casts a network that envelops the entire globe and the call of Christ gains a new meaning: "What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight, what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops" (Mt 10:27). Of course, the sacred word must have its primary transparency and diffusion through the printed text, with translations made according to the multiplicity of languages on our planet. But the voice of the divine word must echo even through the radio, the information highway of the internet, the channels of "on line" virtual circulation, CDs, DVDs, podcasts, etc. It must appear on all television and movie screens, in the press and in cultural and social events. (Final Message of Word of God Synod - 2008, Article11)

Taking on the form of today

Just as Jesus took the form of a human being and reached out to humankind in its own milieu, the need to interpret, package and present the Word of God in the cultural and technological landscape of the youth of today is more important than ever.

Lifestyle and content formats

Firstly, an understanding of the prevalent forms of lifestyles that influence youth is needed to be able to present the Word of God in forms relevant to young people. Besides clear lifestyle influences like music and movies, this also involves an understanding of the current cultural, linguistic scenarios that are part of youth culture

today. Thus to begin with, this calls for making young people realize that the Word of God is not dated but timeless and works within the dynamics and culture of youth lifestyles today.

Thus in content formats, today we are beginning to see youth bibles where the lingo and slang are downright youthful, youth masses and liturgy, contemporary music that is inspired by scripture, scripture slogans on vehicles and T-shirts, scripture messages in R&B or rap formats, movies that are scripture driven, hangouts or cafes where scripture and music are presented, short scripture based video clips, scripture in convincing presentation formats and many forms of scriptural content tailored for social networking and micro messaging sites. Definitely, this has to go a long way ahead. Even today, in a scenario where the internet has become almost a traditional medium due to its omnipresence, it is still difficult to find popular youth websites with stunningly designed content and formats that draw young people to the Word of God.

Music and scripture

Looking closely at content formats that youth consume, music immediately draws our attention. If the printed word had dominated earlier generations in influencing culture and changing perceptions, the audio visual formats seem to have completely taken over the youth world – especially in Asia.

In a Synovate Young Asians Research across respondents aged 15-24 years in China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, music was particularly close to the hearts and minds of the young in India (83%) and the Philippines (80%); followed by Vietnam (77%), China (69%), Thailand (67%) and Indonesia (65%).

"The love affair between music and young urban Asian consumers remains inseparable and it's no surprise that music continues to be

an important part of their daily lives." says Steve Garton, Executive Director - Media, at Synovate.

Thus music, as always, becomes the simplest content form to present scripture to the youth of today. Though there has been a significant growth of Christian bands and music groups, well trained, theologically sound, popular music groups that consistently present scripture through top rated music is still a rare phenomenon.

Scripture - a need to be visualized

If asked to recall something that has influenced them, most young people today think of a movie or song rather than a book. This shift away from the written to the graphic is somehow so typical of today's world. Rather than top ten books they think top ten movies; rather than top ten magazines, they think of top ten youtube videos; rather than favourite quotes, they think of favourite movie scenes. This visual culture is what drives the young world.

Thus, visualizing Scripture into content formats like movies, short films, videos, graphic animations and video games is crucial to communication today. There have definitely been some Scripture led and scripture inspired movies, but far too little to make any significant impact on contemporary youth culture.

Besides moving images, in today's world of packaging driven culture, good graphic design and typography is also something that draws the attention of youth. Thus Scripture-based posters, web banner ads, websites, car stickers, T-shirts and other merchandising opportunities are also avenues that have to be explored deeply.

Scripture in shorter formats

Instant micro messaging sites like twitter and constantly connected social network sites like facebook call for scriptural quotes and reflections that are short, specific, relevant and

memorable. So adapting scripture to web-based and mobile-based formats become important.

Scripture – discussed online

Weblogs or blogs have slowly become the internet equivalent of weekly columns and discussion forums. For a regular group of followers – these blogs become a hangout, a haven and often influence them in their decisions. From technology to lifestyle, the best blogs of today are highly influential catalysts in forming opinion worldwide.

Scripture blogs offer a perfect platform for discussion of scripture based day to day living or scripture based study that continues over a period of time. Today there are quite a good number of scripture based blogs on the web. Youth scripture blogs are much less in number and is a highly potential format for sustaining young people and helping them having a continued, deeper involvement with the Word of God.

Delivery Points

Secondly, reaching the youth today involves reaching the touch points in their lives where they are open to influences. Over the last decade, more than any conventional media, these touch points center around the internet – the internet delivered in mobile communication devices, portable music/video players and computers. And these mobile platforms are present in the lives of young people 24x7, constantly influencing their lives. Thus as access points of internet content are fast shifting into mobile devices, even laptops and computers are being considered outdated. The long and the short of it is that the content and delivery formats of Scripture today is changing and we need to present scripture in a new light to this generation. Given below are some of the multiple ways in which the word of God reaches young people today.

1. Liturgy, homilies and email/web reflections on mass readings (Navarre , Word Among us etc)
2. Divine office and Lectio Divina

3. Talks, seminars, Bible schools
4. Bible study groups (eg: Catholic Youth Bible)
5. Personal Bible study materials like study bible and DVDs
6. Books, other publications
7. Music
8. Blogs
9. Web based Bible study forums
10. Podcasts
11. Scripture based prayer (e.g. Jesus Youth prayer)
12. SMS
13. Email groups

Conclusion:

What the Church in Asia will become in the years to come will depend to a great extent on the way in which she faces the greatest challenge of today, that is, the fast growing and fast changing reality of youth and children. This Millennium dawned with the prophecy of our late Holy Father Pope John Paul II about reaping a harvest of faith in the soil of Asia. How many of us understand the urgency, the need of telling the story of Jesus in this vast continent 'through our deeds and words'?

And we have a Holy Father now who knows the challenges and the heart of the youth world. He said in his Message for WYD 2006: "From this moment onwards, my dear young friends, in a climate of constant listening to the word of God, call on the Holy Spirit, *Spirit of fortitude and witness*, that you may be able to proclaim the Gospel without fear even to the ends of the earth. Our Lady was present in the cenacle with the Apostles as they waited for Pentecost. May she be your mother and guide. May she teach you to receive the word of God, to treasure it and to ponder on it in your heart (cf Lk 2:19) as she did throughout her life. May she encourage you to declare your "yes" to the Lord as you live "the obedience of faith". May she help you to remain strong in the faith, constant in hope, persevering in charity, always attentive to the word of God."

In Ecclesia in Asia Pope John Paul II quotes the words of the Apostle Paul: "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10:13-14). So then, let us ask ourselves, "*If I don't do this mission, who else will do it? If I don't do this, what else can I do better than this in my life? And if I don't do it now, when am I going to do it?*"

"If WE don't do this mission, who else will do it? If WE don't do this, what else can WE do better than this in OUR lives? And if WE don't do it now, when are WE going to do it?"

And finally, Who will never know Christ if we only do what we do now? As one who has been actively involved in youth ministry for the last 22 years, I find immense joy in working with the youth which, for me, is the greatest privilege. I enjoy my life as a Catholic missionary. Let me close with a prayer – borrowing the words of Pope Benedict XVI – *for the emergence of a new generation of apostles ANCHORED firmly in the WORD OF CHRIST*, who will dare to take up their crosses and follow the one who loved us beyond all borders.

X. COMMUNICATION THEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL PASTORAL MINISTRY

- Fr. John Mishen

Communication is one of the most essential elements of human being. We cannot help to communicate in order to live with others in the society. According to Bernhard Haering (1973, 155), the reason why we as human beings are able to communicate is because we are created in "the image and likeness" of God who is a communicating God. In light of this, communication becomes a theological principle under which the whole theology is seen, including Biblical Theology. After all the Bible is the record of the experience of God's Word and Revelation transmitted to us through the communication medium of a book.

In this paper, I will first briefly discuss the development of communication theology and its basic elements, and then Biblical communication and its implication.

Communication Theology

Communication Theology sees the whole theology under the perspective of communication. However, in its development, there are at least three different approaches to theology and communication. The first approach is to develop a *Theology of Communication* which attempts to “baptize” mass media and to bring them into the flock of Christian faith. It considers mass media and all means of communication as gifts from God, for use in our apostolate and mission. The second approach is to aim to develop a *Communicative Theology* which attempts to present or teach theology in a more communicative and simple way, so that ordinary people could understand it. This is trying to answer the deep desires and expectations of the modern people in the apostolate and mission of the Church.

The third approach is what we call the *Communication Theology* which considers communication as a theological concept; it is in itself a theological expression (Gisbert Greshake). This is not a theology that tries to ‘baptize’ communication, but it is to understand the whole theology under the perspective of communication. If theology is the study of God, communication theology is to study God who is a communicating God. Thus Greshake concludes: “God himself is communication. He communicates himself to the world and enables her to be herself communicative so that creation in her communication becomes similar to Him and reaches closest communion with Him. In this view, it is essentially the concern of Theology to realize universal communication.” (2002, 5-6)

Basic Elements of Communication Theology

1. Revelation

Revelation is God's self communication. The whole of the Old Testament can be considered as a record of God's self-communication with Israel. It is fascinating to see how God reveals himself through different ways, signs and symbols. He reveals Himself in the clouds, winds, the burning bush, and He personally encounters people and speaks through prophets and other chosen ones. The Letter to the Hebrews summarizes this saying: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times in various ways" (1:1).

Speaking of the Bible as the record of God's revelation, Franz-Josef Eilers says: "God communicates thus in many ways verbally and non-verbally and finally his communication is presented, preserved and sealed in a book, a means of communication which is the proof of God's communicative act." (2009, 28)

2. Incarnation

Incarnation is the highest point of God's self communication. His Word and Only Son became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. As the Letter to the Hebrews describes, "in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..." (Hebr. 1:1-3).

Jesus, as the Word of God, communicates God through the circumstances of his life, by becoming flesh, birth in a manger, quiet years before public ministry, suffering, death and resurrection. He reveals vividly God's love to the world. Jesus is never tired of proclaiming the Good News of God's Kingdom. He speaks in different places, like the synagogues, private homes, marketplaces, on the streets. He uses parables and story-telling to speak to people in their own life experiences, and he never ceases

to communicate with his Father in prayer. He is not preaching the word but also living the word by a deep and total personal commitment to the Father until death on the cross. After his resurrection, he demands his followers to continue to communicate God's loving communication to the whole world, till the end of time (Mt.28:19). Through his life, Jesus defines 'communication' as "giving oneself in love" (*Communio et Progresio* #12), and he is "the perfect communicator of God" (#11).

3. The Church

As mentioned above, the Church is called and sent to continue God's Trinitarian communication in Revelation and Incarnation to the here and now of all times and places (Eilers, 2009, 31). This Church is born in the communicating act of God's Holy Spirit on Pentecost. And the Church community became a group of messengers of God's revelation to the whole world. Through the Church, God's revelation in Jesus Christ is to be further unfolded under the guidance of the Holy Spirit into the "koinonia" and "diakonia" of the faithful as living experience and witness of the Word or the communication of God today. Therefore, communication is essential to the Church (cf. Ad Gentes #2).

There are two approaches of Church communication, one is *ad intra* which means communication inside the Church, and it mainly refers to what we call the Pastoral Communication. Another is *ad extra* which refers to the Church's communication towards non-believers; it is the Evangelizing Communication. Besides preaching, liturgy, catechesis and diakonia, biblical pastoral ministry is one of the most important dimensions for the pastoral communication of the Church.

Communication and Biblical Pastoral Ministry

God's revelation is transmitted to us by a means of communication, a book, which is the Bible. The Biblical Pastoral Ministry is the mission of the Church to continue to proclaim and communicate the Word of God in our time and world. Any

pastoral communication or ministry of the Church has to start from the Bible.

The Pontifical Biblical Commission's document on the "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" (April 4, 1993) offers some concrete priorities for communication in biblical ministry. As for the role of the means of social communication in biblical communication it identifies three basic areas. (cf. Eilers, 2009, 115)

1. Publication

Publications "play a highly important role in the advancement and spread the Word". Beside publications as printed texts, also other more powerful and more rapid means of communication such as radio, television and other electronic media are mentioned. It states that "it is very advantageous to know how to make use of these things" to proclaim the Word of God. They are to help "make the biblical message something real for today."

2. Actualization and Inculturation

To actualize and inculturate the message of the Bible is really a communication task. It is an attempt which "presupposes a hermeneutical endeavor, the aim of which is to go beyond the historical conditioning so as to determine the essential points of the message in sincerely seeking to discover what the text had to say at the present time." The document offers three steps in the actualization of the Word: the first step is to hear the Word from within one's own concrete situation; the second is to identify the aspects of the present situation that are to be highlighted or put into question by the biblical text; thirdly it is to draw from the fullness of meaning contained in the biblical text, those elements capable of advancing the present situation in a way that is productive and consonant with the saving will of God in Christ. The document says: "by the virtue of actualization, the Bible can shed light upon many current issues."

For the inculturation of the Scripture, the principles of intercultural communication have to be applied, and lead to the formation of local Christian cultures, extending to all aspects of life. It is not a one-way process, but it involves mutual enrichment.

3. Importance of the instruments of Mass Communication

Pope John Paul II expressed his view on the relation between media and biblical communication and said: "When the meeting between Divine Revelation and the modern media is conducted with respect for the truth of the biblical message and the correct use of technical means, it bears abundant good fruits. On the one hand, it means elevating the mass media to one of the noblest tasks, which in some ways redeems it from improper and sometimes trivializing uses. On the other, it offers new and extraordinary effective possibilities for introducing the general public to God's Word communicated for the salvation of mankind" (to biblical scholars and media experts September 28, 1998).

- Other possible ways for Biblical Pastoral Ministry
 - The production and distribution of the Bibles
 - Actualizing and inculturating the biblical message in the context of people's lives
 - Lectio Divina
 - Bible sharing groups
 - biblical texts for text messaging
 - Bible sharings and discussions online through social networks.

Communication spirituality for biblical pastors/communicators

A biblical pastor/communicator needs a spirituality which starts with the experience and fire of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God and willingness to share the fullness and joy of the Good News to others. This is what we may call the communication spirituality. It requires a triple openness from every communicator: openness to God, to self and to others.

The openness to God starts with the personal experience of Him in silence and prayer. As Cardinal Martini says: “our communication with God starts from silence”, and silence is a more powerful way of communication than words, because in silence we, reflecting on Scriptures open our hearts to the Word, and allow it to change our lives toward personal holiness. By opening ourselves to God, we become closer to Jesus, the Word, and are filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus we are made courageous witnesses of Christ, just as the apostles were at the Pentecost.

The openness to self for the biblical pastors/communicators means to face one’s own personal reality, and form a concrete, balanced, mature, Spirit-filled and responsible personality, allowing the Word to fill and integrate into his/her life. He or she should always consider himself/herself as the instrument or medium of the Word of God, and become a living witness of the Word, so that he/she can be open to others, and listen to their stories and experiences, their needs and aspirations, in the sharing of the Word and faith experience to create and support living communities. And together they become the sign of hope, and sacrament of salvation to the world.

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XI. BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE IN CHINA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

A. An insider's View: *Fr. Paul Hu*

1. Brief Introduction

I am from the West of China, a parish priest of the Lanzhou Diocese in Gansu, responsible for the Pastoral – Biblical Core Team. Our diocese extends itself over a large area with a small population, from East to West around 1800 kilometers. There are almost 30,000 Catholics. Presently there are 38 priests, working in 41 parishes.

During the 30 years of greater openness and change in China, we spent most of our energy in building churches because during the Cultural Revolution about 149 of the old churches were destroyed and only 3 were left. During the last 2 years, we built 38 new churches which basically responded to the need for places of gathering. In addition we could give our Catholics formation in their life of faith.

In Western China, Bible study and promotion of Biblical Pastoral work started only during the past 10 years and is something new. Before that, our Catholics didn't have Bibles in their hands; only bishops, priests, seminarians and sisters had them. Only when the Pastoral Bible and the Scotus Bible were printed in China with many editions, Catholics had the opportunity to study the Bible. Today, in our diocese, while not everyone has a Bible in hand, at least each family has one.

In September 2008, we were fortunate to invite Fr. Ludger Feldkamper who helped us to establish a pastoral-biblical core team in the diocese. We thank him for his efforts, and the training he gives us. There are 12 members in our core team, 6 priests and 6 sisters. Though we are busy in the pastoral ministry in various parishes, we make efforts to actively participate in Bible studies

and in promoting the Biblical Apostolate. Every year we set an aim for our Biblical studies and arrange for the training programs.

During these past 2 years, we held several training programs in different parishes of the diocese; actively developed various types of Bible studies, among them some for groups of families, grouped according to age and educational levels. Some of these are meant to express the word in hymns used for dance, biblical role play, bible quiz, spreading the Good News through handy text message, or family, bible sharing, biblical liturgies and bible prayer. It is evident that through these Bible studies, Catholics are nourished and transformed by the Word of God, even to the point of radiating God's joy on their faces. The parishes grow in zeal and enthusiasm, showing the fruits of the Biblical pastoral ministry.

II. Opportunities

1. In recent years, compared with the past, the Chinese society offers more opportunities for evangelization and pastoral activities. We do value these opportunities of grace.
2. The elderly Catholics love to pray the rosary and make the Stations of the Cross, but the younger ones prefer to study the Bible and are interested in parish activities. This is a sign of the times and the need of our time. We should offer help for their growth in faith.
3. These hectic times make people tense, busy and anxious, but create an emptiness of heart, thus they need even more the nourishment and integration the Bible provides, especially in the Chinese society based on an atheistic orientation. It challenges us to spread the Word of God even more actively, fully and abundantly to those who are hungry for it.
4. With the opening of society we have more opportunities to reach out to other places and learn from people there, attend short seminars, to get new strength to serve the Word of God.

III. Challenges

1. The Church's role and place in China is different from that in the Western society. In China the Church is a weak and small

group, with little influence. This is not conducive to evangelization.

2. When seeing the Church as a whole, I think the Church is a young community, despite the fact that since Mateo Ricci until now, the Good News is already 400 years in China. But times change and in the fast pace of change is the Chinese society; the Church, her young Bishops and priests can hardly cope. The Church in China does not seem to have a clear vision for its development, it is struggling for its existence and growth.
3. We experience a great limitation in the use of Mass Media for evangelization.
4. Not all bishops are eager to promote biblical apostolate. Fortunately we have a bishop who actively supports and promotes biblical apostolate.
5. In a society that focuses on economy, people are busy and have no time for the formation of their faith life. To be “busy” is the greatest common temptation for the people of today.
6. Lack of personnel and material means is another problem for promoting the biblical apostolate. Priests, sisters and Catholics who promote the biblical apostolate lack good and right formation, knowledge and skill.
7. “The harvest is rich, but the workers are few.” There are too many people in China who don’t believe in Jesus or know him. This wide field needs more evangelizers to set out to work.

Conclusion

The Church in China is “a little flock” in the universal Church and needs the most care and help. We have difficulties but also graces, have challenges but even more opportunities. We also make efforts to find ways for an evangelization suited to the Chinese culture and reality, and hope to experience the concern of the universal Church. May God bless China, the whole world and our mission.

B. An outsider's View: Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, SVD

1. An outsider's involvement in the biblical apostolate in China.

My involvement in the biblical apostolate in China is linked to two facts: 1. I am a member of the Society of the Divine Word/Divine Word Missionaries; 2. I have been involved in the biblical-pastoral ministry (BPM) for more than 40 years (since 1968) and in particular for 20 years through the Catholic Biblical Federation, (16 years as General Secretary and four years as coordinator).

About the biblical apostolate as a special concern of the Catholic Biblical Federation let me recall just of few significant data. I limit myself to mentioning only such events I have been directly - or at least "behind the scenes" - involved in.

1984-1986

Why were these years of significance for the biblical apostolate in China? In 1984, during the third Plenary Assembly in Bangalore, India, the unforgettable Bishop Ablondi and I took over our responsibilities as President and General Secretary respectively of the Catholic Biblical Federation. In the Final Statement of that Assembly, the members of the Federation recommended that "for the official promotion of the biblical apostolate ...at continental or regional levels...sub-continental and sub-regional structures with a promoter in each zone" should be created. At that time the members of the Federation thought of de-centralization and regionalization only in geographical terms; this decision, however, paved the way for regionalization according to cultural criteria.

The following year, 1985, the first All-Asia Workshop of the Catholic Biblical Federation took place in Hong Kong. During the same year, the President of the Federation, Bishop Ablondi went to China for the first time where he contacted several bishops and came home with a list of subscribers for the Federation's quarterly publication, (since 1986) called Bulletin DEI VERBUM. Later he

made efforts to have four Chinese Bishops participate in an FABC Meeting in Japan.

One year later Fr. Angelo Lazarotto, PIME, addressing the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation in Nemi near Rome alerted the Federation to the new possibilities in China after the changes that took place under Deng Xiao Ping. His presentation served as a real “eye opener” for the Federation concerning the opportunities and challenges for the BPM in China.

1990-1996

The year 1990 was another important year for biblical apostolate in China. In April of that year, again in Hong Kong, the 2nd Meeting and the official foundation of the United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association (UCCBA) took place. The predominant concern of this Association has been to read the Bible and to promote the Word of God in the Chinese cultural context.

During the 4th Plenary Assembly of the Federation in Bogota, Colombia, likewise in 1990, the Hong Kong Catholic Biblical Association was elected to represent Asia in the Executive Committee and Fr. Dominic Chan Chi Ming was chosen as its representative. Likewise in Bogota, the regional structure of the Federation was officially created. For the subregion of Northeast Asia, Ms. Cecilia Chui was then appointed by the Executive Committee as the first – and so far only – coordinator. Since then, she has dedicated her professional skills and her love for the Word of God also to the service of the Word in the UCCBA.

In 1992, EC member Fr. Dominic Chan and I as General Secretary of the Federation met with officials of Church and State in China – in order to obtain permission for the printing of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Bible (commonly known also as the “Scotus Bible”) in Mainland China. Another significant step in the biblical apostolate in China! This edition initiated by Fr. Gabriele Allegra OFM (1907-1976) and carried out by him together with Chinese Franciscan Friars is the first complete Catholic Bible in Chinese, published only in 1968. This translation is considered to

be very faithful to the original, a milestone in the Church in China and the real beginning of the biblical-pastoral ministry.

The 5th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation was held in Hong Kong in **1996**, one year before the city's re-integration into the Motherland of China. The Assembly was particularly important for the biblical apostolate in China for two reasons. For the first time, representatives of the Church in China were able to participate in an event of the Catholic Biblical Federation. From then on, their participation in events of the Hong Kong Catholic Biblical Association (HKCBA), the United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association (UCCBA) and the Catholic Biblical Federation has been a regular feature and their numbers have been increasing from one event to the other. The other reason of particular significance was the key note address of Sr. Maria Ko Ha Fong, SMA, "Reading the Bible in an Asian Context", which she limited more or less to the context she was most familiar with, the Chinese context.

2006-2010

During the past five years I have conducted twenty-seven Bible seminars for different groups in the People's Republic of China. These seminars were held in the capital city of Beijing, and the following *six provinces*: Gansu, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning and Shanxi; at *four seminaries* (the National Seminary in Beijing; Jilin, Shijiazhuang and Taiyuan), for *four Sisters' Congregations* (in Bian Cun /Hebei; Fushun/Liaoning; Jilin/Jilin and Qiqihar /Heilongjiang) as well as at the Sisters' Formation Center in Taiyuan; one for the *novices* of an international congregation; five at *diocesan levels* (Lanzhou/Gansu; Handan and Xianxian, both in Hebei; Fenyang and Hong Tong, both in Shanxi) and one at parish level (Xiaobajiazi, Jilin). In addition to these activities in Mainland China and always in connection with them, I went four times to Hong Kong and Macao where I am in close contact with the HK and MC Catholic Biblical Associations and the United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association. Likewise, in February 2007 I

contributed to a three weeks Bible seminar for Chinese professors in the Holy Land.

2. Sharing experiences of the biblical apostolate in China during the last five years

I would like to present here a profile of these Bible seminars, highlighting some key elements. This presentation comprises the learning process of five years, reflecting at the same time more on the seminars of 2009 and 2010 than those of 2006. In none of them all the elements I will talk about have been presented together; neither has there been a blueprint for these seminars. What is presented here is rather the ideal or “meta-plan” which has been realized in different ways and various intensity. Those who are familiar with the Basic Bible Seminar (BBS) of John Paul I Biblical Center will discover many similarities. Perhaps the BBS can be considered the starting point.

2.1 The participants

As can be seen from the list just presented, the **participants** in these twenty-seven seminars were mainly religious men and women, priests and seminarians, but also interested and dedicated lay Christians, both men and women. The lay faithful, however, if at all present, were in most of the seminars in the minority.

At times these groups were homogeneous groups, priests, sisters, seminarians; at times they were **mixed groups**. The latter – considering the participants’ different background and familiarity with the Bible – present a challenge; but, at the same time, offer learning opportunities for all. Those who have not “studied” the Bible before – in general the lay people – have the chance to acquire a wider and deeper knowledge of the Bible; those who have already taken courses on the Bible – the priests and most religious – have the opportunity to *learn to listen* and to help others to understand and assimilate the contents.

The justification of the learning process in a mixed group is the situation in the parish in which all – priests, religious and lay faithful – are called upon to listen to, to interpret and to live the Word of God as a community. In the past, priests and religious were considered to be the ones competent to interpret the Bible. But since the Council a significant change has taken place. When in 1965 DEI VERBUM encouraged **all the Christian faithful** to have easy access to Sacred Scripture in order to acquire the eminent knowledge of Christ (DV 22 and 25), it still seemed to have considered the lay faithful mainly as recipients of the Word of God. The 1993 Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”, however, stresses that “*all the members* of the Church have a role to play in the interpretation of Scripture.” (III,B,3) The document even states that people of “lowly condition” and the poor “can bring to the interpretation and actualization of Scripture 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” (IV,C,3).

Admittedly, these convictions have not yet reached all levels of the Church at large and in China in particular. Thus the Bible seminars are an excellent opportunity to listen to the Word of God by **listening to each other**. They are, so to say, an exercise of being or becoming Church, a “new Church”. Perhaps this is very relevant for China, where the Church still seems to be rather “clerical” – in spite of (or because of?) - the young clergy.

In China as elsewhere, experience has shown that **those who have “studied the Bible”** have not necessarily learned how to “read the Bible” nor acquired the skill of introducing others to its responsible and fruitful reading. Furthermore, those who have more biblical knowledge than others are often not the best listeners nor necessarily more open than others to new discoveries and insights. Finally, priests and other ministers of the Word are often suffering from a professional handicap, i.e. thinking immediately of those whom they have to teach, or to whom they have to preach. They immediately want to “learn the Bible for

others”, thus neglecting to be touched by the Word of God beforehand themselves.

2.2 Starting point and the scope of the seminars

According to the principle, “starting from where the people are” - the approach also Jesus used with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24,13-35) - we begin our seminars usually with an inquiry or some kind of fact-finding. The first question concerns **the “presence” of the Bible** in the participants’ lives, communities and parishes. Here are some fragments from their ad hoc reports I have received on such occasions.

- In general, the Bible is now definitely more present among Catholics than it was in the past; in some places, this is more the case in the parish churches than in the homes and families; in other places all Catholic families are reported to have a Bible.
- Even in rather big churches - like the cathedral of Lanzhou - one can see at each seat a Bible for use before or after the Mass.
- In some parishes - for instance in Xiaobajiazi, Jilin diocese - before the Eucharistic celebration, the gospel is first read aloud by a reader, then by all the people together. Hence, the faithful are familiar with the text before the celebration begins - an opportunity for the preacher to come immediately to the point in his homily instead of re-telling the story another time!
- In another parish each day one chapter of the Bible is being read when the people come for morning and evening prayer.
- Participants in the **seminar in Xian Xian** observed that 80% of the families have a Bible, but many don’t read it since they have never been introduced to it.
- The Sisters of one Congregation are required by their constitution to read 10 chapters of the bible every day!

The other question deals with the participants’ **expectations**. Their sharing can be summarized under the following headings:

- to read and know the Bible better;

- to relate the Word of God to life;
- to know and love Christ / God better.

Hence, the majority of the participants do **not just want to know the Bible better**; they are also after “*spiritual* benefits”, i.e. they want to interiorize the Word of God, pray with the Scriptures and live the Word of God in their daily lives and then share with others what they have learned. Others come with the explicit expectation how to motivate others to read the Bible, and how to teach them to read it meaningfully and responsibly. Thus many – if not most of them were – are actual or at least “potential” facilitators and “ministers of the Word”.

Thus **purpose of our seminars** is not just *informative* but rather *formative*. Instead of transferring Bible knowledge from the head of the lecturer to those of the students, the aim of these seminars can be summed up as follows:

- to arouse or deepen in the participants a love and appreciation for the Bible as Word of God;
- to enable them through “simple methods” to read the Bible responsibly and fruitfully;
- to make them experience the “joy of discovery”;
- to assist them in making the Bible their “basic prayer book and book of life”;
- to help them to be involved in biblical-pastoral activities as “ministers of the Word” through promoting the biblical apostolate / biblical-pastoral ministry.

Hence, from the beginning, our seminars have had and maintained three dimensions: the “*intellectual*” / academic, the *spiritual* and the *pastor* to understand the Bible, to pray and live the Word and to share it with others.

2.3 The dynamics of our seminars consist of a mixture of lectures, personal and group work, praying and celebrating the Word, singing and other joyful and community creating activities.

- **Lectures** alternate with **group work**. Even in the “lectures” the participants are involved as much as possible – by reading the text aloud, by questions and answers. In the common sessions the tools for attentive reading are explained and then applied in personal reading and group work. During the reporting after the group sessions their positive discoveries are underlined and deepened, encouragement is given preference over correction!
- There is usually a very **joyful atmosphere**. Participants enjoy being together and experiencing community. Also the Chinese love to sing – and they do it aloud and with great fervour! Also warm-up exercises and dances are part of the seminars. All this becomes even more directly related to the purpose of the seminars when the participants, for instance are challenged to create their own Magnificat dance – as has been done in seminars in which we dealt with the Magnificat explicitly!
- Characteristic of the seminars is their **prayerful character**. The title “Lord, teach us to read” evokes the petition of the disciple: “Lord, teach us to pray”. - Traditionally in China, for many Catholics, “praying” seems to have been identical with “reciting prayers.” In rural areas it is still common practice that Christians gather in the church or chapel for morning and evening prayer. In the seminars it is self-understood that each session starts and ends with prayer, but that spontaneous prayer – as response to the Word – is favoured. In the Bible sharing or common lectio divine sessions, the participants are getting more and more familiar with spontaneous prayer, based on Scripture. This is carried over into the Prayers of the Faithful in the Eucharistic celebration.
- As special feature and an important element of our seminars is the solemn liturgy of the Word - the “**enthronement**” of the **Bible** at the beginning. This celebration impresses on the participants that the Bible is not an ordinary book, but *Sacred Scripture*; not just a book to be studied, but to be deeply venerated. Characteristic elements of the “enthronement of the Bible” are **three symbolic actions** and the proclamation of **three**

passages of Scripture, followed by a short homily and prayer, concluding with the blessing with the Bible. The three symbolic actions are: the pilgrim dance with the Bible (as a community we are on the way with the Word of God); the passing of the Bible from one person to the other (everyone receives and everyone shares); the enthronement proper with the three reverential bows (we give the Bible a “special” place in our hearts and communities).

- The enthronement at the beginning of the seminar serves as a model of what can be done in a home which is now also suggested in the Message of the Synod – that “every home should have its own Bible and safeguard it in a visible and dignified way, to read it and to pray with it”.²¹
- During the **special Eucharistic celebration** at the end of the seminar, the Bible once again has a significant place and role. In this liturgical context the participants pledge their own **commitment to the Word of God**: how they, as individuals and as a community, want to put the learning experiences of the seminar into practice – from reading the Bible regularly to forming a Bible sharing group.

²¹ While stressing the significance of the enthronement of the Bible, these words of Sr. Maria Ko, in an article “Towards an Asian Biblical Hermeneutics” are well taken: “We do not venerate Holy Scripture by putting it in the most honorable place in our churches and sanctuaries, by adorning it, bowing down in front of it, enthroning it, offering incense to it, kissing it, or carrying it in procession. The Word of God, “living and active” (Heb 4,12) wouldn’t feel at ease being treated merely as a sacred text or an holy object.

The ideal dwelling place of the Word of God is the hearts and lives of his sons and daughters. In order to reach this final destination, it accepted humbly the mediation of human words. Infinite wisdom hides itself in a book, fully accommodating historical contingency, poverty and the fragmentation of human language. It accepts even to die within the rigidity of the written word so as to rise again in the unlimited existential contexts, giving life to an infinite number of readers in every time and culture.”

2.4 The thrust and dynamics of the seminars

2.4.1 From reading the Bible to praying the Word - the spiritual dimension of the seminars

In line with the participants' expectations and my own experience and convictions, I have given my seminars **the two-fold title**: "Lord, teach us how to read; Lord, teach us how to pray".

Reading here refers first of all to *attentive reading*. "What is written, how do you read"? -Jesus responded to the scribe who inquired about how to enter eternal life (Lk 10,25-26). The ability of attentive reading cannot be taken for granted. After some sessions the seminar participants themselves realize that they are poor readers. They read fast, superficially, thinking they know its meaning already, reading into the text what they know from other "sources" - catechism class, homilies, apocryphal writings! To make the participants attentive readers is indeed a great challenge.

The participants are given **simple methods**, tools to dig for the treasure or to catch the fish themselves. We alert the participants to different ways of reading the text; to paying attention to the words (repetition may indicate key words), to asking different questions like "who, what, when, where, why..."), to drawing their attention to discovering the structure of a text, to paying attention to the context, to looking up cross-references etc..

At the beginning, the participants are ill at ease in using these tools (as non-Chinese are using chop sticks for the first time!); but soon they realize their usefulness which encourages applying them for their own benefit.

Through the use of these tools the participants are trained that in their reading they should be *guided by the text* in not just by their own impressions or by what they have previously learned about the text. At the same time they learn that the first and most important commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. In scholarly terminology - not used in our seminars! - our reading would be called a synchronic, canonical and intertextual reading.

Attentive reading is not the end, but the first step of the reading process that traditionally has been called *lectio divina*, a process from attentive reading of the biblical text to the reading of life and on to responding in prayer and assuming responsibility. This ancient method re-discovered during the past decades has been presented by the recent Synod "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church" – both in the Message to the People of God (nos. 5 and 9) and the Propositions submitted to Pope Benedict (nos. 3, 4 and 55) – as the greatest challenge to priests, religious and lay people alike.

The **different steps / aspects** of *lectio divina* are explained in detail: From the "reading of the text" we move to "listening to, and answering the Word of God".

Attentive reading (**lectio**): *what the text means in itself?* The participants are told that this is a necessary, but at the same time a preparatory step. Here the different tools with which the participants have been familiarized with are applied.

Reflection (**meditatio**): *what does the text mean to me?* Where am I in this text, can I relate this text to my life, what relation do I see between this text and my life, which echo does this text evoke in me, what does God want tell me through this text? –

Prayer response (**oratio**): *what does the text prompt me to tell God?* The reading and listening becomes the prayer response and the word as dialogue is complete. To be a true response, prayer should really co-respond to the personal word I have received: it could be an expression of joy, adoration, thanks, praise, contrition, petition, intercession...

"Contemplatio" and "actio". *Contemplatio* is explained as seeing reality in a new light, the light of the Word; seeing it with new eyes, the eyes of faith; and *actio* simply as doing the word, doing the will of God. The unity of contemplation and action can be simply expressed as having the "mind" or "attitude" of Christ (1

Cor 2,16; Phil 2,5) ; as “living in the presence of God and seeking to always do the will of God”.

Far from presenting lectio divina as a gimmick or as a new “in-thing”, I have tried to show the **role and action of the Holy Spirit** in this “spiritual exercise” of listening to the Word of God, since “Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written” (DV 12) I compare the indispensable invocation of the Holy Spirit with the twofold invocation (epiclesis) of the Holy Spirit during the Eucharistic celebration: the first one, to change to bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ; the second one over the people gathered for the celebration, that they “who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit” (Eucharistic Prayer II), “who are nourished by his body and blood may be filled with the Holy Spirit and become one body, one spirit in Christ.” (Eucharistic Prayer III). Thus, in lectio divina the Holy Spirit is needed and to be invoked first to change to “dead letter”, the written word into a living and life-giving word and to bring about the dialogue between God and us (lectio-meditatio-oratio) and then to transform us into other “Christs” (contemplatio and action).

In China - as in other countries with a strong Marian devotion - lectio divina apparently becomes more “attractive” when Mary - following the Gospel according to Luke - is presented as **the model** of attentive listening and of a wholehearted response to the word of God:

In the annunciation narrative (Lk 1,26-38) Mary’s three reactions / responses to the word of (God through) the angel illustrate the first three steps of lectio divina:

- her puzzlement and curiosity (v. 29) the attentive and inquisitive reading (*lectio*);
- her question, “how can this be, since I do not know man” in which she puts together the message and her life situation (v.34) the application to oneself (*meditatio*);

- her final response of surrender (v.38a) faith and prayer (*oratio*).

Mary is presented as a model of *contemplation* in the Magnificat in which she praises the holy, merciful and faithful God whom she recognizes - with the eyes of faith (Lk 1,46-55) - as he looks upon his lowly handmaid and has lifted up the lowly throughout the history of salvation; likewise in the two references to her “keeping all this in her heart” (Lk 2,19.51). This is followed by pointing at her as a model of *action* in Lk 8,21 (“my mother, brothers and sisters are those who hear the word of God and do it) and in 11,27f (“indeed, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it”). Both her contemplation and action are summarized in Lk 8,15 about the “generous and good heart” (referring back to 2,19.51) and “bearing fruit” (thus preparing for 8,21 and 11,27f).

This presentation of Mary as model for responding to God’s word has been experienced as very effective and appealing - instead of merely explaining the steps / aspects.

Many participants are already familiar with some form of lectio divina in small groups or “Bible sharing”. Often they had just been given the method, without sufficient explanation of the steps, the reasons behind them, the dynamics of the entire process from reading to praying and doing. It has been found useful to deepen or enrich their practice and experience in this regard by introducing to them the **Vigan method** for **lectio divina in small groups** which follows exactly the steps of the lectio divina.

2.4.2 From listening to proclaiming (Dei Verbum audiens et proclamans) – the pastoral dimension of the seminars

“Starting from this text he proclaimed the good news of Jesus” (Acts 8,35).

The account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8,26-40) is used in our seminars not only to illustrate and apply the methods for attentive reading, but also to show that the biblical-pastoral ministry does not stop and content itself with explaining the text.

It is presented as a model for the ministry of the Word, for evangelization with the Scriptures (Acts 8,35). Using this account as a pattern for the biblical-pastoral ministry, its three main stages are the following:

- providing the Bible and getting people to read it (8,28);
- helping others to understand the text (8,30f);
- starting from Scripture to proclaim the good news of Jesus (8,35) and be united with sacramentally (8,38).

Described in this account is a process from the book to the message which is ultimately the person of Jesus. This kind of evangelization is community-backed (8,26 cf. 6,5-6), is spirit-guided (6,5; 8,29; Jn 16,13) and is Scripture-based (8,35).

This type of evangelization is patterned after the model of the "new evangelization" given in the account of the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24,13-35). The process from being blind to recognizing the Risen Lord is marked by five steps:

- walking on the road together - fellowship and solidarity (24,13-18);
- inquiring about their situation, questions...(24,19-24);
- shedding light on life's mysteries from Scripture (24,25-28);
- recognizing the Lord in the breaking of bread (24,29-32; Acts 2,42), i.e. in the Eucharist (cf. 22,19-21) and charity (cf. Lk 9,16; Acts 2,44-45)
- sharing the good news (24,33-35).

The Risen Lord acts and continues his ministry through Philip; he needs and calls many Philips today who as ministers of the Word should be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures to the People of God" (DV 23), "to make known the Bible as the Word of God and source of life" (PBC: IBC IV,C,3).

In this context, modern Philips and ministers of the Word are presented to the participants. In addition to introducing to them contemporary Philips, the participants are also informed about communal and organizational efforts in the biblical-pastoral ministry; about the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) and its

subregion in North-East Asia and the United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association (UCCBA).

The participants are encouraged to continue on their own what they learned during the seminar – reading the Bible attentively and regularly, responsibly and fruitfully – and helping others to discover the treasure of the Scriptures. They are likewise encouraged to discover the desirability of making combined efforts towards collaboration in the biblical-pastoral ministry. In the diocese of Lanzhou a diocesan core team for this ministry, consisting of six priests and six sisters of three different congregations, was set up in 2008 and has produced marvellous fruits since then – as we have heard from Fr. Paul Hu. It has been our effort to promote this also in other dioceses. A first small step in that direction is the planning at the end of each seminar and the elaboration of a final statement. These are the mustard seeds that have been scattered and planted; others may water them, but God gives the growth (cf. 1 Cor,3-6-7).

3 Prospects and challenges

3.1 There are great opportunities for the biblical-pastoral ministry in China

- Also in China, there is a hunger for the Word of God (Amos 8,11)
- Bibles are available! This was not the case in the entire history of the Church in China before 1968, when the first Catholic edition of the entire Bible was published.
- The appeal the Bible has on people may be gauged by the following statistics: “In 1949, the Protestant Christian Church had 700.000 faithful, while the Catholic Church had 3.5 million. In 2006, the Protestant Christian Church published some 40 million different editions of the Bible for their 16 million believers, while the Catholic Church published 2.1 million Bibles for her 5 million believers... Optimistic projection from overseas gives an estimate of

- Catholic population of 7 to 12 millions. The Protestant Christian population is between 20 to 30 millions.”²²
- After the sad events of the expulsion of foreign missionaries at the time of the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and after the end of the Cultural Revolution 30 years later, a new phase of history of the Church in China has dawned. Now the time has come for a truly autochthonous or indigenous Chinese Catholic Church. – There is a great need for inculturation, for the Church to de-Westernize itself!
 - Young people are no longer satisfied with the traditional type of Catholicism, characterized by the recitation of prayers.
 - The availability of the Bible is an important step for inculturation: “The first stage of inculturation consists in translating the inspired Scripture into another language.... Translation has to be followed by interpretation, which should set the biblical message in more explicit relationship with the ways of feeling, thinking, living and self-expression which are proper to the local culture. From interpretation, one passes then to other stages of inculturation, which lead to the formation of a local Christian culture, extending to all aspects of life (prayer, work, social life, customs, legislation, arts and sciences, philosophical and theological reflection)”.²³

3.2 There are great needs

- Not all in the Church of China, – also among the Church leaders, the Bishops – seem to be convinced, that the biblical-pastoral ministry is “the soul of the whole of

²² John Baptist Zhang Shijiang, *The Bible in China and Evangelization*, TRIPOD vol. 27, no.144 (spring 2007)

²³ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, III.B

pastoral care, of life and of the mission of the Church".²⁴ There is a disparity in the emphasis on the Bible symbolized in the number of publications, in network of circulation, in effort of promotion, in internal coordination and cooperation with overseas organizations.²⁵

- The tools for the biblical-pastoral ministry are still lacking or have to be improved. For instance, Bibles sufficiently equipped with cross references – since the first and best commentary of the Bible is the Bible!
- A great need of proper formation of clergy and religious women. So far the Church in China has been blessed with many vocations – even though their numbers have been declining recently. - Some seminaries are understaffed; hence, proper formation of the seminarians is not guaranteed. The same with the many new congregations of sisters! Their level of education in theology, Scripture and spirituality leaves something to be desired.
- People trained in Scripture who are capable of realizing the stages of inculturation sketched above are still very few; those who have been trained in this field are still too few and they are tied to teaching jobs in the seminaries.
- There is a need for teamwork and collaboration in tapping their own resources.
- The laity must be encouraged and empowered! The future of the Church –also in China –seems to lie with them!

C. China Priority for Biblical Apostolate: *Ms. Cecilia Chui*

More than 700 years ago, seeds of the Chinese Biblical Apostolate were sown by Blessed John of Monte Corvino (1247-1328), a Franciscan friar, who founded the Catholic Mission in China after his arrival in the vast nation in 1294. He familiarized himself with the Mongolian Tartar language, preached in it, and translated the

²⁴ Synod 2008 on The Word of God in the Life and the Mission of the Church, proposition 30.

²⁵ John Baptist Zhang Shijiang, *The Bible in China and Evangelization*, TRIPOD vol. 27, no.144 (spring 2007)

New Testament and the Psalms. In 1307, Pope Clement V appointed John Archbishop of Beijing, the capital of China. After serving as an outstanding prelate for some 20 years, John was called for his eternal reward by God in 1328.

God's Preparation for the Birth of Chinese Catholic Holy Bible

Six hundred years after the appointment of John of Monte Corvino as archbishop of Beijing, God planned for the birth of another great servant of the Word, Venerable Fr. Gabriel Maria Allegra OFM in 1907. Since then, many attempts were made to translate the Scriptures into Chinese but only parts of it were successfully completed. During the 6th centenary celebrations of the death of Blessed John, Fr. Allegra decided to give the entire Word of God to the great nation of China. One year after his ordination, Fr. Allegra left Italy for China in 1931 at the age of 24, with nothing more than an ardent love for the Word of God and the Chinese people, and confidence in the Virgin Mary.

Pre and Post-Vatican II - Road of the "Chinese Word of God Made Flesh"

After Fr. Allegra's arrival in China, he undertook a vigorous schedule whereby he studied the Chinese as well as biblical languages on his own. On 11 April, 1935, he began translating the Old Testament. Interned by the Japanese during the war, Fr. Allegra lost many of his translation manuscripts. He started to translate the Old Testament again but this time with the help of 5 Chinese Franciscan friars. On 2 August, 1945, he established the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (SBF) in Beijing. The SBF was later transferred to Hong Kong, where Fr. Allegra and his collaborators completed the Chinese translation of sacred scripture from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek languages, paving the way for the birth of the Chinese Catholic Bible on 25 December, 1968. The SBF Bible was a providential gift from God to His beloved Chinese people, three years after the closing of the Vatican II Council.

This first Catholic edition of Studium Biblicum Bible signified, as the late Cardinal Paul Yubin of Taiwan (President of the Chinese Bishops' Conference in the 70's) said, "an important milestone for the Chinese Catholic Church". It also subsequently laid the foundation of the development of biblical pastoral ministry in the Chinese-speaking world. Biblical scholar Father Mark Fang SJ remarked: "The contribution of the Studium Biblicum edition of the Bible to China's Catholic Church was immeasurable. All liturgy books use this edition of the Bible as the blueprint; Bible courses conducted in seminaries or other educational institutions also use the Studium Biblicum Bible as the starting point for exegesis."

Chinese Biblical Pastoral Ministry and Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF)

Following the availability of the complete Chinese Catholic Bible in 1968, the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF, formerly known as the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate) was established in 1969 with the endorsement of Servant of God Pope Paul VI. The Dei Verbum, especially Chapter VI - Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church - is the Magna Charta of the Federation. The Studium Biblicum Franciscanum became an associate member of CBF in 1972, after founding the Hong Kong Catholic Biblical Association (HKCBA) to promote the biblical pastoral ministry on the diocesan and parochial levels in 1973. Later in 1980, HKCBA joined the CBF as a full member.

Milestone Growth of Chinese Biblical Apostolate with Regionalization of CBF

After 15 years of development, the CBF furthered its growth through organization of regional workshops / meetings to place an emphasis on regional structures, following the conclusion of its Third Plenary Assembly (theme: "Would That All Were Prophets - Num 11:29) in 1984. The First CBF Asian Workshop for the Biblical Apostolate took place in Hong Kong in 1985, reflecting on the theme of the 1984 CBF Assembly in regional context. This first

biblical workshop in Asia engendered the concept of gathering Chinese-speaking communities for the Word of God initiated by Fr. Paul Tong, then Spiritual Director of the Singapore Catholic Bible Association (Mandarin-Speaking). Later in 1990, the birth of the United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association (UCCBA) took place. The UCCBA is a society of Chinese biblical associations and groups throughout the world, providing services for the biblical-pastoral ministry. Prior to the Second Chinese Biblical Workshop, the Hong Kong Catholic Biblical Institute (HKCBI) was founded with the assistance of SBF in 1988 – the year which the fourth Chinese Cardinal John Baptist Wu was made the fourth Chinese Cardinal by Pope John Paul II. In 1985 The HKCBI, affiliated to CBF in 1998, offers diploma courses and open programmes on sacred scripture in the Chinese language among the general faithful.

In 1985, CBF President since 1984 (until 1996) Bishop Alberto Ablondi (1924-2010), reading the signs of the times, went to China for three weeks. This was followed by a trip in 1991 of the then General Secretary Fr. Ludger Feldkämper SVD (1984-2000).

The Fifth CBF Plenary Assembly in Hong Kong in 1996 marked the first-time participation of mainland Chinese representatives in the Federation's events. It was significant that more than 170 delegates from 70 countries gathered in Hong Kong to pray for the territory's reintegration into China in 1997.

Ten years after Hong Kong has become China's first special administrative region, the UCCBA held its eighth meeting in Macau (theme "Experiences of Community Building with the Word of God"), in 2007, in commemoration of the 100th birth anniversary of Venerable Gabriel Maria Allegra OFM. Over 110 delegates (including 77 lay people) from 18 countries and territories took part.

During their *ad limina* visit in June 2008, Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong, Bishop John Tong of Hong Kong and Bishop José Lai, Macau, took special note of the loving words of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI: "Continue to support the Church of China. Don't forget that Christ is also the pastor of Chinese people. The

Church cannot remain silent about this Good News.” Providentially, the Final Statement of the 2008 CBF VII Plenary Assembly highlighted explicitly “a special focus on China as a priority” in support of the biblical pastoral ministry in Asia. To respond to the “great hunger and thirst” for the Word of God (cf. Amos 8:11) in mainland China, the CBF North East Asia sub region will focus on the following key areas to support the biblical apostolate in that vast nation of over 1.3 billion population. In addition, there is an idea to form a network to associate mainland Chinese who have undertaken biblical studies abroad. The objectives include supporting and promoting exchanges, encouraging young scholars and overseas studies, and upgrading Bible knowledge through research and publication.

Forging Ahead in Hope - Missioning for Biblical Pastoral Ministry

(1) Continuation of 4th FABC-CBF Asia Oceania Congress

Going forward as a region, we are to continue to fulfill the commitments made at the 4th FABC-CBF Asia Oceania Biblical Congress held in the Philippines in 2005, which commemorated the 40 anniversary of Dei Verbum.

(2) Focus on Chinese Biblical Apostolate and China Priority

The 9th UCCBA Congress will take place from 11 to 15 November, 2010 in Kuala Lumpur to reflect on the 55 Propositions and Final Message of the 2008 Bishops’ Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, under the theme “Living Out the Word to Spread God’s Kingdom”. The biblical assembly, which aims to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the promulgation of Dei Verbum and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity and to celebrate UCCBA’s 20th foundation anniversary, will gather some 120 ministers of the Word from Hong Kong, China, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Myanmar, Vietnam, Australia, Italy and Germany. Among the participants, there are some 80 lay people and China has the biggest delegation of 28 attendees. A bible reading community from Wenzhou, China, will address the topic with

witness sharing on “How Can the Laity Build a Word-Centered Church”. In view of the fact that three years have passed following the release of the Holy Father’s letter to Catholics in China in 2007, the UCCBA Congress has included two sessions on “How Does God’s Word Effectively Facilitate Reconciliation and Communion” for sharing by Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong and mainland Chinese participants, in relation to Proposition 8 “Word of Reconciliation and Conversion” of the 2008 Synod.

We are called to continue to reflect and act on the following:

- 1) How can biblical pastoral ministry contribute to the reconciliation and restoration of unity between the “underground Church” and the “official Church” in mainland China?
- 2) What role can the UCCBA and CBF-Asia Oceania play in this?

(3) Regionalization to make God’s Word run through FABC-CBF structural set-up

For CBF Asia-Oceania, “regionalization” is further development and growth of the Federation, supported by constitutional spirit (Articles IX and X) and continued implementation of previous statements since Bangalore Assembly 1984. This means to facilitate incarnation of the Word (cf. Jn 3:34) by “placing emphases on the local churches” through the establishment and consolidation of regional structures, resulting from the recognition of diversity and plurality within the CBF.

Article IX: REGIONS AND SUBREGIONS

To achieve its purpose the work of the Federation is divided into four regions: Africa, the Americas, Asia-Oceania and Europe-Middle East. Each region may be subdivided into sub-regions.

1. Members of a sub/region are to work together to promote the biblical-pastoral ministry in their sub/region.

2. For a more effective functioning of the Federation on a local level and for facilitating the work of the biblical-pastoral ministry, the regions and subregions are encouraged to create and maintain their own structures and guidelines. Their coordination is entrusted to a regional and subregional committee.

Article X: APPOINTED OFFICERS

- 2.4 Sub/regional coordinators are to work together for the promotion of the biblical-pastoral ministry within their sub/region and, if necessary, may appoint a person within the sub/region to assist in the coordination of their work, without prejudicing any article contained in the Constitution.

Let's review some important milestones of the CBF which are leading more and more towards the direction of "regionalization", as guided by the Holy Spirit and also endorsed by the common letter of 7 December, 2009 of Cardinal Walter Kasper (former President of the Pontifical Council for Promotion of Christian Unity) and Bishop Vincenzo Paglia (CBF President) to the CBF members concerning the holding of an Extraordinary Plenary Assembly in mid-2011:

- 1984 - CBF III PA Statement contains the following priority.
Formation of continental and regional centres of the WFCBA (now CBF) where they do not yet exist and the establishing of liaison with the continental or regional federation of bishops' conferences such as SECAM, CELAM and FABC (3.1.1).

Recommendations to Bishops' Conferences (some highlights):

- Make the biblical apostolate a priority in pastoral practice, and encourage the pastoral use of the Bible (3.2.2)
- Provide adequate budgeting for the biblical apostolate (3.2.4)

- Endorse and encourage national and regional biblical centers by appointing full-time promoters, translators and other pastoral workers in the biblical apostolate, and encourage the foundation of institutes for training (3.2.5)

Looking back and looking forward, we will notice there are interesting “signs” to ponder on about the time and events about the CBF-FABC link grounded on the Word. This will throw light on our Asian-Oceanian reflection on the future of CBF in our regional contexts and concrete follow up to the Bishops’ Synod on the Word of God.

In 1984, the final statement of Bangalore Assembly highlighted the roadmap towards “regionalization” and the CBF link with FABC was mentioned. This development of regionalization was further concretized and CBF Coordinators were more recognized with an official status backed with constitutional rights in the 1990 Bogota Assembly. The 1984 final statement also included a prophetic recommendation: “propose to the Holy See a bishops’ synod on the biblical apostolate in the Church” (3.2.7). This was realized in 2008.

In addition, the Asia-Oceania Congress mentioned the following point as a priority in terms of follow up action in 1984: **“The group felt the need of having a Regional Secretariat for the coordination of the Biblical Apostolate (BA) in different countries of the area and for mutual animation and inspiration through an exchange of information and sharing.”** At that time, one concrete suggestion was put into action – a Desk be created at the level of FABC, which may, for the time being, be incorporated within the Department of Missions (now called the Office of Evangelization). The group also endorsed the proposal of FABC, initiated in 1981, to set up a section for BA.

Twenty-five years ago, the voice of Asia-Oceania already called for “regionalization” development for coordination and animation of the biblical apostolate. It was providential that Fr. Jacob Theckanath, FABC-OE Executive Secretary, brought this up again (like a prophet!) during our regional discussion in Dar es Salaam

in 2008, as we could see the noticeable benefits of BA growth in Latin America and Africa with full-time coordinators.

In his “Ecclesia in Asia” exhortation, former Pope John Paul II prophesied that the Third Christian Millennium will be a Millennium of Asia. For the pastoral implications of the 2009 IX FABC Plenary Assembly, we will continue to look for concrete ways to strengthen the CBF-FABC convergence and bond (between 2009 and 2012 both federations celebrate their 40th anniversary), especially relating to concrete follow up of the Bishops’ Synod on the Word of God.

XII. THE ORIENTATIONS FROM THE SYNOD ON THE WORD FOR BIBLICAL PASTORAL MINISTRY IN ASIA:

Interventions of Asian Bishops at the Synod on the Word of God

- Fr. Jacob Theckanath

Introduction

This presentation aims at highlighting some of the concerns and concrete suggestions for Biblical Pastoral ministry contained in the Interventions of the Asian Bishops and other Asian delegates at the Synod. Most of these are drawn from the Summaries of the Interventions. Not every idea expressed by the delegates nor all the interventions from Asia are included here. (There are other important points from other delegates which could not be included due to space constraints). It is helpful for those engaged in Biblical pastoral ministry to be aware of tasks for BPM as expressed by the Bishops of Asia during the Synod. Probably most of this will find an echo in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation.

Interventions of the Bishops

Encountering the Person of Christ

In this Synod a lot of emphasis is placed on encountering the person of Christ thorough the Word of God. Several Asian Bishops expressed this concern. This is in keeping with the Asian approach

to Sacred Scriptures. In fact in Asia one does not read scripture, but chants the verses so that the melody should take the word into one's depth. This is in view of facilitating the encounter with the word in the core of one's heart.

It is not so much knowing a book but knowing and relating to the Person of Christ. Reading the Bible, if done in faith, should lead to a call to conversion and transformation. (Bishop Pablo Virgilio S. David, Philippines)

Meanings of Scripture.

In this context it is not enough to focus only on the scientific analysis but we must search with the inner eye of faith and contemplative gaze. This is particularly required in the formation processes.

The Church in the patristic tradition emphasizes 2 aspects: ecclesial and spiritual. The latter is known by the "spiritual intellect". It is seen by the "inner eye of faith". Reasoning is not enough. Spiritual contemplation of the Word is required. Reading presupposes a state of prayer. Prayer illumines the mind to grasp what one reads. Reading of the Bible should lead to the Word, that is Jesus. (Bishop George Punnakottil, India)

Word and life

How do we, in practical terms, ensure that Scripture may permeate and animate the Christian life of the faithful? This is a subject that needs to be addressed again and again. As we read the word of God and begin to grasp that the Word is indeed at work in the ordinary happenings of daily life we see that this is something to be passed on to others. (Archbishop Joseph Mitsuaki Takami, P.S.S., Japan)

Contextual reading of Scripture

The Asian Bishops from the beginning of the formation of the FABC has articulated the challenge of understanding mission in Asia as triple dialogue - with the poor, with the people of various religions and the enduring cultures which is the air the people of Asia breathe.

Proper understanding of the Bible should consider and address the concrete situations of today. We need to approach the Bible in a spirit of humility; it enables us to value the interpretation of the Bible by the poor. There should be more interaction among biblical scholars and pastoral workers. Together they should search for methods of understanding and topics of study that would deepen the faith of our people in our own cultures. (Bishop Broderick Pabillo, Philippines)

Listening to the Word

The Church must form hearers of the Word. For this there must be a milieu of listening. three approaches for deepening the disposition for listening.

Our concern is listening in faith...in holistic listening. But God does not only speak. God also listens especially to the just, widows, orphans, persecuted, and the poor who have no voice. The Church must learn to listen the way God listens and must lend its voice to the voiceless. (Bishop Luis Antonio G. Tagle, Philippines)

God spoke his Word, especially for the sake of the poor. To them Jesus proclaimed God's Reign. Incredibly, rich in a marvelous mosaic of ancient cultures and religions, we in Asia are nevertheless a continent of the poor. Our profound sense of transcendence and harmony is being eroded by a globalizing secular and materialist culture. But the Word of God in Asia is calling to the Father in the Holy Spirit thousands of small communities of the poor. And the poor in turn are heeding God's Word. In so doing they are building a "new way of being Church" - really an old way - the way of the early Jerusalem community

(see Acts 2:43-46 and 4:32-35).... They listen to the Word of God, reflect on the Word, pray over the Word, and discern together how to apply the Word to their daily lives. They are Basic Ecclesial Communities, renewing families, parishes and dioceses into vibrant communities, witnessing to the Word of God. They are communities of solidarity and fellowship at the grassroots, effectively challenging in their own little way the modern culture of secularism and materialism. (Archbishop Orlando B. Quevedo, O.M.I., Philippines)

Word- Mission in Dialogue

As God is dialogue with the world through his Word, so the mission of the Church needs to be understood in terms of dialogue. People to whom we carry the Good News are to be seen as our dialogue partners. We need to speak and listen, to give and receive. Missionaries engaged in mission at the frontiers and at the margins of our society can be the “hearing aid” of the Church, as they seek to listen to people in their struggles, in their cultures and beliefs-in their aspirations and hopes. (Rev. Father Antonio Pernia, S.V.D., Philippines)

Seminary Formation

The academic approach to teaching Scripture should be contemplated with methods that are related to the culture and life situation of the people. Creative methodologies such as Bibliodrama should be part of the curriculum. An Asian way of reading the Bible, taking into account the rich cultures and contexts of Asia, is an going process at work. The profound spiritual sense of the Word accessible to the Asian soul should be communicated in a relevant manner (Bishop. Arturo M. Bastes, S.V.D., Philippines)

SCCs. Lectio Divina

Small Christian Communities make the word of God as the core of their life. Lectio Divina should become a feature of these

communities. Modern communication technology too is needed to proclaim those who have not heard the 'Good News to the poor'. (Bishop Joseph Prathan Sridarunsil S.D.B., Thailand).

Common Lectio Divina can help towards greater unity among Christians (Bishop. Felix Toppo, S.J., India)

Reading the Word and Lectio Divina (praying the Word) are two sides of the one act. Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are best suited for promoting Lectio Divina (Bishop. Rayappu Joseph, Sri Lanka).

Proclaiming the Word

Our main concern should be to make the Word reach where it has not been heard, and to concrete realities of life such as politics and science media and entertainment and the secularized areas, into studies of conflict and injustice. We should develop closeness o communities that have great values and practices that are close to ours. The Asian values of the enduring religions of Asia can become a potent means for bringing the Word to such communities (Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, S.D.B., India)

People listen to the word of God on radio (radio *veritas* etc.) and find their way to Catholic Church. The media therefore has great effect and we should use it to proclaim the word in the situation of persecutions Christians find consolation and strength in the word of God thus available to them. (Bishop Joseph Nguyen Chi Linh, Vietnam)

Word of God and the "Seeds of the Word"

As in some countries the revealed Word has not reached. But there we should discover the abundance of the "Seeds of the Word" (Semina Verbi) in the cultural wisdom of peoples. (as in Chinese Wisdom). The younger generation in these cultures should be helped to absorb the traditional values and practices of virtues. In our ministry of bringing cultures we should follow the example of Divine patience, and great space needs to be given to the

preparatory Word of God (Card. Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun, S.D.B., Hong Kong, China)

Word and Liturgy

The Oriental liturgical traditions place great emphasis on the Word of God. Such emphasis can contribute much to the laity in their effort to live the Word in life-contexts (Abp. Baselios Cleemis Thottunkal, India).

Bible and Family

Bible programmes suited for the families need to be evolved. One such programme is “Family Bible Quiz”. Such events help families to experience the transforming power of the Word and the Holy Spirit. They can promote Biblical Spirituality facilitating inter-corporation of the Word (Ms. Elvira Go, Philippines).

Formation of Priests, Religious

Many people, especially simple and the poor have a deep hunger for the Word of God. To meet this challenge Priests, Consecrated persons and educated laity should develop knowledge of and familiarity with the Bible. Lay movements are becoming effective instruments for sharing the Word of God (Archbishop Evarist Pinto, Pakistan).

Bible and Laity

The laity have a role to play in the area of understanding and interpreting the Word of God in a relevant manner. God not only speaks the Word; but he also listens. In a similar way the leaders in the Church should listen to the laity especially, the poor and the oppressed. Efforts should be made to make them truly enlightened. They should be empowered through Biblical Catechesis, in small Christian Communities (SCCs), lay Associations and movements. Greater resources (financial and

personnel) should be put in the service of the formation of the laity (Bishop Antony Devotta, India).

Biblical Formation of the Laity and Children

Formation of the lay faithful in the word of God should be more than transmission of knowledge. It must be life-transforming and should aim at enabling them to combat structures of sin. Such formation should include the Church's social teaching. We should invest human and financial resources in the formation of educators. Church leaders should examine life-styles and possessions to fall in line with the word of God and the social doctrine of the Church. For the Church should become a visible sign, witness. (Prof. Thomas Hong-Soon Han, Korea)

Parents have an indispensable role to communicate to children the faith through the Word of God. (Prof. Rafael Chianarong Monthienvichienchai, Thailand)

Mary and Biblical apostolate

Mary, as the "key to the understanding of the Word of God" is a help not only in the biblical pastoral care or in the development of the people's devotion, but also in all other areas in connection with the Word of God and the Bible.

The theme of our Synod "The Word of God in the Life and the Mission of the Church" would not have been considered deeply enough without Mary.

The Mother of God - the Mother of the Church - is teaching us to receive and accept the Word of God, live according to it, and also proclaim it in its entire fullness with courage; avoiding compromises with the world (Archbishop Tomash Peta, Kazakhstan).

The word and the Holy Spirit

The question is: how to make the KERYGMA and the proclamation of God's living word more accessible to the faithful? How can this KERYGMA - this encounter with God's 'word' - be a real dialogue between Christ Himself and the faithful? The answer is recognition of the presence of the Holy Spirit in this Proclamation of God's living word. It is the Holy Spirit that empowers each baptized Catholic with gifts and charisms that are in turn contributions to the local Church.

There is a call for Bishops and Parish Priests to try to be open to these realities in the local community of the faithful. And it is in these small group communities on the parish level that the Word proclaimed can become a living entity. Gradually the faithful in these communities can be celebrated together the Liturgy of the Hours and community celebrations of the Sacrament of Penance (with individual confessions). In this context the Scriptures are intimately united with the Liturgy as a sign of God dialoguing with His people especially in the Eucharist. (Bishop Peter Liu Cheng-Chung, Taiwan)

Bible and Situation of Injustice and Corruption:

A small minority is becoming rich and majority is becoming poorer. The Word of God calls us to justice and integrity in public life. The Church, a tiny minority, makes significant contribution in the areas of education, health and social services. In these areas, the church has to live its solidarity with the poor and uphold justice for all, especially for the poor in the light of the Word of God.

The Word of God invites for Inter-Religious Dialogue: According to the Council, the Church rejects nothing which is holy and true in these religions. They often reflect a ray of truth (NA 2). Hence the Church enters into dialogue with them.

As the Holy Father, Benedict XVI said, dialogue between Muslims and Christians is a vital necessity on which on future depends in a large measure. (Bishop Bejoy Nicephorus D'Cruze, O.M.I., (Bangladesh))

Homily

The common practice of extracting abstract themes for homily is unfit for preaching the word. People are hungering for the word for experience and not for excellent ideas. Jesus spoke in stories and parables and made people feel the touch of God in their lives. People want of experience the freshness and directness of the word of God. Memorised texts in the homily can make the word proclaimed the liturgy come alive. Therefore for preaching a biblical homily a certain amount of learning by-heart is necessary. Just like bl. Virgin Mary the preachers need to ponder the words themselves for a long time, their heart ought to become a library of the world. A concrete directory for Biblical homily will be of great help for the pastors. (Bishop. Vincent Ri Pyung-Ho, Jeonju, Korea)

Conclusion

The above sampling of interventions of our bishops gives us an insight into the concerns of the local Churches of Asia. Those who are called to BPM need to discern priorities, with the light of the Holy Spirit. May the Word animate us all.

XIII. FINAL STATEMENT

Introduction

From 4-8 November, 2010, we, one hundred and one participants, animators of Biblical Apostolate (11 Bishops, 39 Priests, 17 Sisters and Brothers and 34 lay women and men) from 21 countries gathered together at the Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand for the 5th Biblical Congress and III Bishops' Institute for Biblical Apostolate (BIBA III), organized by the FABC Office of

Evangelization in collaboration with the Asia-Oceania Region Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF).

Inspired by the Message of the XII Plenary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, we chose the theme: "With the Word of Life on the Roads of Asia and Oceania". Our motto was: "The Word may run and be glorified" (2 Thess 3:1) and our goal, to discern the paths for Biblical pastoral ministry (BPM) in the light of the Synod, as reflected in its Message, the Propositions and above all the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (The latter was released only two days after this our word event). In view of the Congress, we studied the Message and Propositions of the Synod as well as the Synod interventions of the delegates from our region.

Called to be Hearers and Heralds

Dei Verbum of Vatican II awakens us to our very identity: to be "hearers and heralds" of the word. We renew our conviction that the gift of the word is for the hope of the world. As men and women committed to BPM, it is our task to recognise the hunger for the word (Amos 8:11) in the hearts of Christians and of other people. They express this hunger through the quest for happiness, meaning, depth and bonding. Therefore it is of utmost importance that we are captured by the newness of the word in Christ. God has not only spoken the word, but his Word has become flesh and therefore the Word is ever new, here and now. A transforming encounter with this Word is the first and indispensable requirement for our mission.

In the house of the Word, the Church, something must happen: the face of the Word must become Asian among Asians, Oceanian among the Oceanians, of course, with all the diversities. The Divine Word will have to make a home in every culture so that our own cultural barriers will fall apart and make way for the house of the Word where all are brothers and sisters, united and empowered by the Spirit, called to be hearers, bearers and witnesses of the word.

Our gathering together, our encounter with the word in liturgy and *lectio divina*, Biblio-drama and word-filled dance awakened us

to the need to be redirected in our journey, as it happened to the disciples on the Emmaus road (Lk 24:13) : from fear to courage, from grief into joy, from our comfort zones to the roads of Asia and Oceania. We know that the roads of the word will be diametrically opposed to the roads of the 'world'. We cannot call them the roads of the word if our itinerary is not imbued with courage and joy, a whole new spirit that emerges from hearing the voice, recognising the face, and staying in the home of the word. (Message of the Synod)

The resonance of the word on the Roads of Asia Oceania

An important feature that should characterize the messengers of the Word is the ability to listen to the voice of the word in all its varied expressions, and of the dialogue partners on our roads. We have to become the effective "hearing aid" of the Church on mission, capable of recognizing the "seeds of the word" all along our region.

The Word in the life of the Church

There is an ever growing hunger for God's Word among the laity. This is a great sign of the times that calls forth an adequate and urgent response. What they are longing for is the powerful word that is spiritually nourishing, experiential, life-related, and transforming, leading to a deep personal encounter with the Word become flesh. They look for it in the liturgy of the word in celebrations, especially of the Eucharist. Those who proclaim the Word in the liturgy should make the entire communication Biblical. Words of Scripture must come alive, not mere ideas and themes. There is an urgent need to form every one entrusted with this task to become effective communicators of the life-giving word. Without familiarly with and even knowledge of the scriptural texts themselves, the ministers of the word will not be able to meet this challenge of our times.

Formation of the ministers of the Word

Therefore a word-centred formation requires that the compartmentalization of theology and Scripture should give way to the integral approach in which Scripture becomes the soul of theology and other related subjects. This can happen only through a systematic collaboration of Scripture scholars and theologians to promote an integral formation in which various disciplines and spiritual direction all will be Bible-based, Bible-related and word-experiencing.

When such a thrust affects formation at all levels of clergy, religious and laity, an adequate response to the hunger for the word will be possible. Another critical challenge is to make every form of faith-formation truly Biblical at all stages of growth of persons and groups in the Church.

Youth

The youth have a hunger for depth in their relationship with God, authenticity of life and a desire to share what they experience in their life. Therefore Word of God should come alive to them. The word of God should not only be brought to the youth in ways that appeal to them visually, in music and dance, but they can become powerful channels for the word to reach other youth who are deeply influenced by a secularistic and consumeristic culture and values contrary to the Gospel. The face of the word in Jesus must become powerfully alive in their life. Any form of BPM for youth should take this into consideration.

Women

BPM should promote and encourage the service especially of women, that following the example of Mary Magdalene- who could well become the patroness of BPM – they make their unique contribution to the apostolate of the word, and witness to the Risen Lord. Women's experience and perspective of the Word will make a significant contribution to BPM.

Word for Social transformation

Predilection for the poor is a characteristic feature God (cf. Mt 25:31-46). Jesus' ministry reveals this in a very radical manner (Lk 4:18-19). "The word of God willingly received, generates abundantly in the Church charity and justice towards all, above all towards the poor" (proposition 11). Any and every form of Biblical apostolate needs to be imbued with this thrust. Indeed, if the word does not bring all-round transformation, personal, societal and structural, it is not the word well received.

Biblical Eco-spirituality

Given the massive impact of climate change in our continents Biblical pastoral ministry should engage in promoting a holistic ecological vision of the Bible. It is an urgent task to integrate eco-spirituality as an important component of Biblical spirituality, and BPM as a whole.

Small Christian Communities (SCCs)

Time and again, delegates of Asia at the Synod emphasised the need to establish and nurture Small Christian communities formed by and centred on the word. In these communities the word comes alive both in their gathering and in their growing commitment to live the word and to unleash its transforming power. Thousands of these communities all over our region would want:

1. That those who lead such communities have much more formation and skill to get to the heart of the meaning of the Scriptural text and then to apply it to the situations of life.
2. For the members themselves there be for deeper Biblical formation. The training and materials for such formation should be simple and adapted to the laity and their life context
3. The animators of BPM get a deeper knowledge of the SCCs, participate in and word and contribute in the area of Gospel sharing methods.

Bible and Communication

The new communication, in relationship to the traditional one, has created its own specific and expressive grammar and, therefore makes it necessary not only to be technically prepared, but also culturally prepared for this task. But the voice of the divine word must echo even through the radio, the information highway of the internet, the channels of “on line” virtual circulation, CDs, DVDs, podcasts etc. It must appear on all television and movie screens, in the press, and in cultural and social event’s (*Message*, II). We need take to heart this appeal of the Synod.

China Priority

In the emerging scenario of greater openness to Christianity in China and the great opportunity such a great nation of rich cultures and traditional values offers, Biblical pastoral ministry should be a pastoral priority for the churches in our region, and especially for the CBF.

Regionalisation of Biblical Pastoral Ministry

The project of a full-fledged Regional set - up is to be carried further to make its full realisation possible with the support of the Continental Conferences of Asia and Oceania. Insertion of the CBF into the FABC will give a great boost for the BPM in our region, as it is in Africa and Latin America.

Mary the Model for BPM

Mary, the Mother of Jesus is our model as disciples. Her attentive, contemplative treasuring the word and her courageous obedience, proclamation and witness to the Word can energize us as we go with the word of life on the roads of Asia Oceania.

Conclusion

The word became flesh and walked on the roads of Palestine. The word has to become flesh – in us, here in our people of Asia and Oceania, now in our times.

Today, the very same Word wants to walk on our roads to seek out the poor of every kind who are open to welcome the Good news. For there is a deep hunger for the word of life. As those who share the Word and Bread of life, we are empowered by the Spirit to become the strange traveler of Emmaus on every road, every nook and corner of Asia and Oceania- to seek out the poor who are open to welcome the word, who long to hear the voice of the Word, to see the face of the word, to belong to the fellowship in the House of the Word and to walk with him on his road. This is our privilege. This is our life's mission.

Note: By Fr. Jacob Theckanath, Executive Secretary, FABC-OE

Seven papers and the final statement are published in this issue. For the sake of limiting this issue of FABC Paper 132b to 96 pages some of the papers have been shortened. The first six papers were published in FABC PAPER No. 132a in December, 2010. All the papers will be published in a forthcoming book by the FABC Office of Evangelization.

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