

Report of the CCBI Plenary Assembly 12th to 18th February 2009, Mysore

We, the 116 member-bishops of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), gathered at Prabodhana, Mysore, from February 12-18, 2009, the year dedicated to St Paul, for the XXI Plenary Assembly, reflected on the theme: "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church", as a follow-up of the XII Synod of Bishops held in Rome in 2008. God has communicated himself down the ages in different ways: in creation, in the Word-made-flesh, in the inspired text of the Holy Bible as understood in the Church's Tradition. Our Plenary Assembly focused on the written Word, the Bible, as proclaimed by the Church in the fulfillments of her ministry.

THE CHALLENGES TODAY~ India is a land of saints and sages with a rich spiritual and cultural heritage of literature, beliefs and traditions. We appreciate, among other things, the respect our people have for sacred texts and their thirst for contemplation. We praise God for this "patrimony of the human family" (John Paul II, *The Church in Asia*, no. 6). Our gathering, however, takes place at a crucial moment in the life of our nation which - is facing many challenges: the effects, of the worldwide economic meltdown; the scourge of terrorism; the injustice of discrimination based on sex, caste and creed, etc. We are especially concerned about the phenomenon of religious fanaticism and intolerance which has led to repeated attacks and violence against the minorities in India. This near-crisis situation shows the importance of building our lives on the firm foundation of the Word. "The Word of God is the basis of everything, it is the true reality. And to be realists, we should count on this reality." (Pope Benedict XVI, Address to XII Synod of Bishops).

THE WORD IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH: The Church came into existence under the impulse of the Spirit, of the Risen Lord through the ministry of the Word. All the activities through which She fulfils her mission consist basically in the proclamation of the Word which is carried out in three stages: In the first place. The listener is confronted and invited to conversion: this is evangelization; Secondly, the listener is initiated into a community of faith and love: this is catechesis. Thirdly, the listener is constituted a witness of the Gospel through - the participation in the liturgy.

In the liturgy, people listen and personalize the proclaimed Word which has become a sacrament, transforming them and making them witnesses of Christ. The same Lord is present and active as word and as sacrament: during the Liturgy of the Word, the proclamation is: The Word of the Lord; during the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the proclamation is: The body of the Lord. Scripture is the foundation and the Eucharist is the culmination of the Church's proclamation and life.

Hence, at Holy Mass, the Lord Jesus is venerated in both" the Scriptures and the Eucharist. Vatican II, in its Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (DV) no. 21, affirms: "The Church has always venerated the Divine Scriptures as she venerated the

Body of the Lord insofar as she never ceases, particularly in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ. Such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life" (D V no. 21). Further, the Council affirms strongly: "Just as from constant attendance at the Eucharistic "mystery, the life of the Church draws increase, so a new impulse of spiritual life may be expected from increased veneration of the Word of God" (D V no. 26). Devotion to the Word of God is not just one of many devotions, beautiful but somewhat optional. It belongs to the heart and very identity of Christian life. The Word has an inbuilt power to transform lives.

"Indeed, the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit..." (Heb 4: 12).

As we bishops listened to the reports from different regions, we were pleased to learn that Catholic editions of the Bible in the main Indian languages are already available. We were heartened to note the many initiatives to make the Bible have its rightful place in Christian life. Several regions have - Bible Sundays, Bible festivals, Bible schools and so on. We are especially happy with the efforts to make the Word of God the mainspring of the Small Christian Communities (SCC). We appreciate the Ecclesial Movements for having popularised Bible reading among Catholics, creating in them a genuine hunger and thirst for the Word of God.

On the other hand, a number Catholics do not give due importance to the Word of God. - While we appreciate their receiving nourishment from the Eucharist, we lament their insufficient attention to the Word. There is a lack of a 'Bible culture' amongst Catholics as a whole. The situation is further aggravated by the poor quality of many homilies, which fail to break the Word relating it to the daily life of the people. We are aware that much more needs to be done to realize the desire of the Second Vatican Council "that by the reading and study of the sacred books ... the treasure of Revelation entrusted to the Church may more and more fill the hearts of people" (DV no. 26). With this in mind, the Bishops at the Plenary Assembly have committed themselves to carry out the initiatives mentioned below:

TASKS AHEAD: To make the Bible available in editions which are affordable in price and in different -formats, equipped with necessary and adequate explanations. To make this possible, we appeal to those who have means to contribute generously. We will explore the possibility of greater ecumenical collaboration in the translation and production of the Bible, especially in tribal languages.

We will bear in mind the bidding of Vatican II that editions of sacred Scripture, provided with suitable notes, be prepared for the use of people ; of other faiths, adapted to their , circumstances (DV no. 2). To energize our Regional and Diocesan Bible Commission and to establish, where possible, Regional Bible Societies. To make our own homilies more Scripture-based and life oriented. This presupposes that our own lives are Word-centred. To ensure that seminarians are taught to read Scripture as the Living Word of God, acquiring an experiential knowledge of the Word as the Church has always interpreted it - and thereby become effective proclaimers of the Word. The Second Letter to Timothy

reminds us:” All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction and for training in righteousness" (3: 16). To exhort the consecrated men and women who share with us the ministry of the Word to make their lives a convincing witness to the Gospel, and to transform their institutions into centers of proclamation of the Word of God. To organize ongoing formation courses for our priests to help them update themselves in the Sacred Scriptures and to inter-relate, in the fulfillment of their ministry, the Word, Eucharist and life. To avoid the danger of a literalist interpretation of the Word, often called "biblical fundamentalism; we encourage our lay faithful to become familiar with and to interpret the written Word of God in keeping with Catholic Tradition.

Our goal is that every Catholic should have a Bible. Hence, we urge everyone to acquire a copy of the Bible, handle it with reverence and read it regularly. To ensure that the Word of God is properly proclaimed at the Eucharist, and that. All the externals linked with the act of proclamation highlight the importance of the Word. We will take care, for example, that in our parish a church, the word is read from a well bound Lectionary (not from-a leaflet) placed on a suitable lectern, and that the- lectors are trained to proclaim the Word audibly, distinctly and meaningfully. To utilize, as the Message of the XII Synod of Bishops recommends, the mass media and, in particular, the E-media in the service of the Word. To foster even more initiatives, such as:

- ❖ The practice of Lectio Divina (meditative reading of Scripture). Pope Benedict XVI affirms: "If the practice of Lectio Divina is promoted with efficacy, I am convinced that it -will produce a new spiritual springtime in the Church." Other methods of reading and praying the Holy Bible are also encouraged.
- ❖ Meaningful use of the Word of God at all meetings and on all occasions, such as imparting blessings and administering sacraments and sacramental.
- ❖ . Enthronement of the Bible in every family. In particular, we encourage the use of the Word of God in family prayer, having, for example, the Rosary interspersed with readings from the Bible. The family is the place where the Word is reflected, prayed over and shared.
- ❖ . Popularizing the Bible through the use of quizzes, magazines, Bible festivals, dance, dramas, folk art, exhibitions, penitential services, Bible study camps etc.
- ❖ Ceremonial handing over of the Bible to children and youth on occasions like First Holy Communion and Confirmation. We strongly request especially parents to ensure that their children from their earliest years become increasingly familiar with the Bible.
- ❖ APPEAL: We address you, our lay faithful: We are happy to note the thirst for God's Word which is in the hearts of so many of you. We rejoice that some of you are already engaged in teaching the Word, and we will organize courses so that

many more can be trained to conduct Bible classes in small groups on different occasions. We want to ensure that, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, you encounter Jesus in the Word, allowing your hearts to burn and leading you finally to the breaking of bread and the community and to mission (d. LK 20: 13-35)

We address you particularly, our young people, so dear to the Church. The Holy Father exhorts the youth: "I urge you to become familiar with the

Bible..." In the Bible, you will find the strength to face the challenges of daily life and to remain close to the Lord Jesus and to the Church.

We address you, our consecrated men and women: You are called to show forth Christ with ever-increasing clarity to believers and non-believers (Vatican II, Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 40). *Vita Consecrata* affirms so aptly: "Consecrated persons will be faithful to their mission in the Church and the world, if they renew themselves constantly in the light of the word of God" (no. 85). We invite you to come forward in large numbers with rekindled zeal for God's word, to share, according to your charism, in the ecclesial community's mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.

We appeal to you, our priests, and coworkers in the Lord's vineyard:

Vatican II reminds you that your first task is to preach the Gospel to all. You owe it to the people to share with them the truth of the Gospel in which you rejoice in the Lord (Vatican II, Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 4). Recall what you were told at your ordination:

"Believe what you read, preach what you believe and practice what you preach" (Rite of Ordination to the Diaconate).

CONCLUSION: As we conclude our Plenary Assembly, we turn to Mary, our Mother, the one who heard the Word, treasured it in her heart and said her perfect "yes" to the Word and brought the Word to the world.

Through her intercession, may we, indeed, with the apostolic Church proclaim: "Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

"The secret to success is to start from scratch and keep on scratching."

- Dennis Green