

## **SVD and Biblical Pastoral Ministry (BPM) in Africa**

"Listening to the Word of God is the most important thing in our lives"  
(John Paul II, Angelus, 18 July 2004)

John Paul II based this statement on his own personal experience. When we look at the first lines of the Dei Verbum Constitution and its teaching specially in chapter VI we see that his statement goes along the same lines.

When we speak about the BPM we need to keep this statement in our mind at all time. Listening to the Word of God is the most important thing in BPM. Few years after Dei Verbum Constitution was proclaimed the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) was created to help implement the pastoral goals of the Constitution. CBF is made of National Bishop's Conferences and organisations dedicated to the Ministry of the Word of God. Our confreres have been involved in activities of CBF from the very beginning of its existence. We are proud of our contribution to CBF and BPM in the life of the Church. There is no doubt that BPM have given the SVD a new self understanding as Divine Word Community. As the Church moves forward since Vatican II it is more and more nourished by the Word of God. The Church rediscovers the power of God in her life. Recent Synod on the Word of God testifies to this reality.

As missionaries and ministers of the Word we are aware of the hunger for the Word of God among the people that we are sent to. The question needs to be asked: How are we prepared to respond to this need? We have achieved some success in organising courses, publishing biblical materials, etc. But, is the Ministry of the Word the center of our missionary activity? Is our spirituality and our formation helping us to fulfil our mission? I do not want to criticise either formation or structures of our Society. We can be proud of many aspects of our community life and spirituality. However there is need to find means by which we can become true Ministers of the Word.

As a zone within Society we have a structure of zonal and local coordinators of BPM. This coordination is meant to help us to share our ideas and resources. As a zonal coordinator I have been unable to extend our sharing beyond meetings of BPM coordinators that were held in Angola and Ghana. I acknowledge that both meetings were very important for me. I was reassured in my ministry and I have been given more ideas on how to go ahead. During these meetings there was a lot of sharing among the participants. These were very fruitful, the best proof of this are our several projects:

- the Dei Verbum Courses in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Congo;
- work of our centers (Cebilo, Christ the Redeemer in Togo, Good Shepherd Biblical Pastoral Centre in Ghana, Centres for BPM in Bandundu and Kinshasa
- Congo, ILizwi Centre in Zimbabwe as well as our participation at the Lumko Institute and Mater Dei Pastoral Centre in South Africa)
- publishing houses (Verbum Bible and above mentioned centres).
- radio Ciloba in Kinshasa that focuses its programmes around the Word of God;
- participation of confreres in the activities of CBF at all levels: regional, national and diocesan;

- some confreres serve in diocesan seminaries (Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe) and other religious institutes teaching Scriptures.
- our houses of formation have in their programmes space and time that is dedicated to the Ministry of the Word.

All these above mentioned programmes are great achievements to our communities and confreres that are involved in them. Even though we are far away from each other geographically sharing our experiences benefits us all and at times it leads to sharing of our human and other resources. Fr. Gerard O'Collins sj, former professor of Gregorianum University was asked about his seven wishes for the Church of the third millennium. First and most important for him is that Catholics were people of the Bible. He says that the wish of Dei Verbum Constitution was that the Church was renewed spiritually by the Word of God. He sees that the biggest obstacle in achieving this goal are priests who in their proclamation are not nourishing the faithful with the Word of God. His question is: Are we the people of the Word?

This is a great challenge for us. How do we make the listening to the Word and its Ministry the centre of our lives, how can we help each other in this respect with our initial and ongoing formation?

I feel that I was not able to animate well enough to my confreres at the Provincial level as Provincial and lately as Mission coordinator. What are the reasons for that? We are good to go to others where our focus is, but we find it difficult to address our confreres. There is also an issue of Zonal coordination. I failed to do my duties for various reasons and there was a plan to hold a meeting of the provincial coordinators last year. As I have mentioned before I see such meetings as most fruitful and animating to the coordinators. I hope that we will succeed to have another one soon and hopefully we will be able to look for a more workable plan of action.

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