

## African Catholics stress importance of Bible in faith life



Catholic African leaders met in Malawi earlier this week for an assembly dedicated to the Bible and to increasing the place of scripture in the lives of the continent's faithful.

"The Word of God serves as a guide for faith and human activities and gives believers a style of life guided by the Holy Spirit in order to live the mystery of Jesus Christ according to Christian vocation," the assembly observed.

"The Bible is a source of inspiration and faith in the family, among the youth, religious communities and societies when revitalized through daily prayers."

The thirteenth plenary assembly of the Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar took place Sept. 17-23 in Malawi at the Archdiocese of Lilongwe's St. Anthony Major Seminary in Kachebere. The meeting's theme was "Letting the Bible inspire all pastoral activities."

Dozens of assembly participants from the Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar gathered, coming from as far as Egypt and South Africa. Many bishops responsible for the biblical apostolate joined them, as did representatives of the Association of the Panafrican Catholic Exegetes and other priests, vowed religious, and laity.

Topics at the gathering included the Bible as an “action book” for pastoral work, Benedict XVI’s post-synodal apostolic exhortation “Verbum Domini,” how to advance the apostolate amid the diversity of Africa, and biblical interpretation in dialogue with African culture.

One speaker reflected on lay people’s concerns for democracy, good governance and development, while another examined youth formation and the impact of modernity and unemployment among youth.

The assembly focused on several goals for “strategic actions,” including an increase in familiarity with the scriptures through lectio divina, Bible sharing groups, catechesis, and the liturgy. One speaker stressed the need to “evangelize the evangelizers,” while another focused on how to increase the availability of the Bible in translation.

The gathering said that the biblical apostolate is an “effective tool” against “the invasion of sects and misinterpretation of the Bible.” However, it lamented that this apostolate is not fully developed in many parts of Africa.

The assembly listed several threats to Christian practices, such as fundamentalism, “political Islam,” and “bad governance.”

The assembly resolved to strengthen networking and collaboration among Catholics working in the biblical apostolate and to give “special attention” to the pastoral biblical formation of Catholics. It resolved to promote the formation of biblical associations and to provide these groups with “all necessary help and guidance based on the Bible.”

The meeting pledged to discern the challenges of contemporary society, especially to respond to the questions and concerns of youth. It resolved to use modern technology to teach scripture in a way that will “capture the interest” of youths and to make the Bible available in local languages.

Every bishops' conference should promote biblical formation, the assembly recommended. These

conferences should set aside a specific period of time for reflection on the Bible, such as a special Bible Week or Bible Month.

Bishop Joseph Zuza of Mzuzu, in Malawi, delivered a goodwill message to the participants. Father Yves-Lucien Evaga Ndjana, the director of the biblical center, gave the keynote. Archbishop Julio Murat, apostolic nuncio to Malawi and Zambia, presided at the assembly's opening Mass.

The assembly thanked supporting organizations, which included Aid to the Church in Need, Missio Aachen, and the Pontifical Council Cor Unum.

It entrusted the meeting's outcome to the Virgin Mary, "Mother of the Church and Queen of Africa."

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