

## LATEST NEWS # 382, December 7, 2006

### The following news concerns Belgium (Flemish).

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## Bible in the centre of public life in Flanders

**BELGIUM (Flemish)** — October and November were exciting months for staff at the Flanders Bible Society. From the launch of a Bible Tour to events to celebrate National Bible Weekend, the Bible was placed at the heart of daily life for many people in Flemish-speaking Belgium. And the Society is planning to ensure that its profile remains high.



Back in 2004, when *De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (NBV), the new interconfessional Dutch translation of the Bible, was launched (see *Latest News* #295), the Bible Society and the Roman Catholic Bible Foundation began discussing the possibility of securing long-term media interest in the Bible by staging a Flanders Bible Tour.

Their vision became a reality on October 28, when this initiative was launched at the Cathedral of Saint Michaels and Saint Goedele in Brussels. A large audience heard a performance by well-known Belgian singer Barbara Dex and the reading of the first verses of Genesis by Cardinal Godfried Daneels, Yves Leterme, the Prime Minister of Flanders, and leaders from the Protestant and Evangelical Churches. The Bible will now tour five provinces, including Brussels itself, over the next year. The whole Bible will be read during this time, both by and with the public, in locations selected to reach a broad spectrum of people: churches, libraries, town halls and even beaches. The Bible has been divided into six 'clusters', each containing passages from the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Psalms, and the readings will be accompanied by cultural events such as concerts and lectures.



Another initiative, an exhibition entitled *Expo Biblia*, has brought the Flanders Bible Society into partnership with the Francophone Bible Society of Belgium to place the Bible at the centre of the country's cultural life. The two Societies were requested to design the exhibition for the occasion of the International Congress for New Evangelism, which opened in the heart of Brussels on the same day as the launch of the Bible Tour. Presented in both Dutch (which is known in Flanders as Flemish) and French, the exhibition offers an insight into the history of the Bible and, through reproductions of 18 paintings by European artists ranging from Michelangelo to Rembrandt and Chagall, allows visitors to meet some famous Bible characters and to reflect on life's most challenging questions.



The exhibition attracted 4,500 visitors in just one week, a response which is encouraging Pascal Lauwaert, General Secretary of the Flanders Bible Society, to plan for its future with confidence.

“We were thrilled with the positive response to *Expo Biblia*,” he writes. “We are hoping that the exhibition will contribute to a wider knowledge of the relationship between the biblical stories and European masterpieces. *Expo Biblia* will now be used as a travelling Bible exhibition and may be booked by churches, parishes etc.”

The impetus created by NBV’s launch in 2004 was also the driving force behind National Bible Weekend on November 17-19. Although the new translation attracted much media attention initially, the Bible Society still faces a longer-term challenge: encouraging people to actually engage with the Bible. This year, the main Bible Weekend event was a Bible Festival at the Benedictine abbey in Zevenkerken, near Bruges. Here, the Roman Catholic diocese is building a ‘Bible House’, a Bible museum which, when it opens in spring 2007, will include an interactive Bible exhibition. Visitors were able to see the work in progress on the museum and to visit both *Expo Biblia* and *Arkventure Bible Xplorer*, a 25m trailer containing multimedia activities for children aged between nine and 12 (see *World Report* 402/22). At local level, the Bible Society encouraged churches to hold Bible Weekend events such as quizzes and meals under the themes “My words will last for ever” and “Let’s celebrate!” (627 words – BELGIUM.07.12.06)

*Photos:*

*BEL06DJ-5: Children visiting the Arkventure Bible Xplorer trailer as part of the Bible Festival staged by the Flanders Bible Society in Zevenkerken, near Bruges, during Bible Weekend in November 2006. (Flanders Bible Society/Pascal Lauwaert)*

*BEL06DJ-14: The Expo Biblia created by the Flanders Bible Society and the Francophone Bible Society of Belgium for the International Congress for New Evangelism in Brussels in October 2006. It will now become a travelling exhibition. (Wim Hendrix)*

*BEL06DJ-17: Yves Leterme, the Prime Minister of Flanders, speaking at the launch in the Cathedral of St Michaels and Saint Goedele in Brussels, Belgium, on October 28, 2006, of the Flanders Bible Tour, an initiative of the Flanders Bible Society. (Wim Hendrix)*

*BEL06DJ-4: Visitors to the Expo Biblia staged by the Flanders Bible Society and the Francophone Bible Society of Belgium as part of the International Congress for New Evangelism in Brussels in October 2006. (Wim Hendrix)*

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