
CBF Newsletter

Catholic Biblical Federation

July 2004



Dear Friends of the Catholic Biblical Federation:

We normally employ our newsletter to introduce Bible-related projects or member institutions of the CBF and to inform you regarding the situation in particular countries and regions of the world. This will remain the basic purpose of these letters. The present edition of the newsletter departs, however, from this content line by way of exception, and indeed for a good reason: the CBF is looking back this year over its 35 years of existence to date.

*The CBF was founded on April 16, 1969. Even if this event occurred three years after the end of the Second Vatican Council, the CBF is nevertheless a direct fruit, a child, so to speak, of the Council. For the CBF was entrusted with the task of implementing the insights and decisions of the Second Vatican Council on Holy Scripture as the center of Church life, in accordance with the demands of the Conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum*.*

The CBF, which has since reached the age of 35 years, has now outgrown its childhood and adolescent years and become an adult; with its network of member institutions it now spans the entire world. The fundamental objective has remained the same: to help at every level to insure that the Word of God retain its due place at the center of the Church's life, so that the letter of the Bible can become a life-giving Word of God. Concrete circumstances have changed in part in the course of the thirty-five years. More than at the time of its founding we face challenges today from a growing secularization of Western society and more than then problems such as the ever growing gap between rich and poor, the scourge of AIDS or the increasing threat of fundamentalism demand concrete responses – through biblical pastoral ministry, among other things. But also more than ever the intensifying dialogue among cultures and religions, in a world that has become smaller than ever, poses a direct challenge to the way we use the Bible, and therefore to the CBF today.

A 35th anniversary is no cause for great celebrations, but it can be an invitation to grateful recollection, self-critical evaluation and hope-filled plans. The observations we have requested from acquaintances and friends of the CBF from all over the world, some of which you will find assembled in this newsletter, are intended very much in this sense. They are not meant to merely look back at the past and still less as a kind of enthusiastic self-congratulation. There is no reason for this, and the tasks that lie before us are too many and too great. But on the other hand, the commentaries can well serve as a word of comfort, as an encouragement and an expression of thanks to all those friends and benefactors who support and promote the CBF and its work. For without their moral and material support the CBF would not be what it is! I will never tire of stressing this point, and I add my own personal and sincere thanks. Precisely in times of great tasks and empty tills we are thankful for every form of solidarity and support.

With best wishes and warm greetings from the General Secretariat,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander M. Schweitzer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alexander M. Schweitzer
General Secretary

P.S. The recently deceased Cardinal Franz König was one of the personalities who contributed authoritatively to the founding of the CBF, and its first president. You will find his obituary in this newsletter.

To provide a life-relevant access to the Bible for as many people as possible – with this goal the CBF was founded in Rome on April 16, 1969. Much has been accomplished since that time. Thousands of women and men have become engaged in Bible work of the most varied kinds, in the well over 300 member organizations throughout the world. They translate the Bible into local languages in which no translation yet exists (and there are still far more than 3,000 such languages!). They train women and men, catechists, teachers, lay collaborators or future priests. They do serious research on the books of Scripture and produce biblical pastoral materials for community or classroom work. They develop new Bible-reading methods, e.g., for Bible circles in "small Christian communities", or offer biblical seminars and workshops. They contribute through social projects in education and community work, as well as through the production of periodicals, radio or television programs – and much more. The Catholic Biblical Federation – a vibrant network that creates bonds between people of all regions and nations. In the following pages, we would like to pass on to you something of the variety and vibrancy of the CBF and also to allow a few friends and supporters of the past 35 years to speak to you in their own words.

Sr. Maura Cho from South Korea is involved in biblical pastoral programs for young adults:

I would like to view the CBF as a bridge on which so many people of the Bible in our days have communicated. My hope and expectations for the future is that CBF opens its vision towards the new generation especially for young adults in this present time. From my experience there have been so many young adults who thirst and hunger for the Word of God. However, we have very few opportunities to provide for their spiritual needs in the field of the biblical apostolate. This lack of direction includes not only the materials but also the personnel. We have many capable young men who are eager to search the truth but it seems that there is no room for these young adults in CBF. I hope that CBF will provide for this in future. ■



Bible Day in Nanyuki, Kenya

Fr. Ignatius Chidavaenzi from Zimbabwe offers courses in biblical pastoral ministry and has translated the Bible into his native language:

The CBF is important to me because it is making God's Word effective in people's lives through its members. Hence, meetings are important, but not enough. They are for awareness. But we need also action, e.g. suggesting, promoting, supporting the writing of simple commentaries in local languages for youth and adults alike; simple courses, local public newsletters, radio and TV programs, programs for the deaf and blind, books or Bibles for them. ■

Fr. Gabriel Naranjo Salazar, cm, a Vincentian Superior in Colombia, is active in parish work in the barrios (city slum areas):

I have always been able to breathe new air in the CBF, to inhale an oxygen that refreshes, that nourishes the soul. I imagine this pure air resembles that breathed by the first Christian communities. For me; the CBF is a faith corner. A "corner" is not always a dark and narrow place where shameful feelings hide out. More often than not, corners are places where we put the things we value most. The Blessed Sacrament, for example, is often kept in a corner of a chapel or a church. What captivates us most is not always the open landscape, but a country corner. The gaudiest vase is located in the corner of a room. A waterfall or a cascade often emanates from a corner, as does the brightest light that illuminates an enclosure. We keep our most profound impressions "in a corner of the soul". I use this kind of language because God has given me with the CBF not only a professional relationship but an affective one as well. In it I have found a space to express and to nurture my faith, my human faith, as well as my Catholic faith – and not in the narrow confessional sense. ■



Church service in Venezuela

Fr. Franz-Josef Ortkemper is Director of the Katholisches Bibelwerk (Catholic Biblical Association), Stuttgart, Germany:

Exactly a year after I took office as Director of the Catholic Biblical Association in Stuttgart came the

meeting of the CBF in Bogota, which I experienced as very moving. The paper given by Carlos Mesters at that meeting I found really inspiring, as I did the open and forward-looking atmosphere of the meeting. Since that time it has become clear to me how important the CBF is for the solidarity of Catholic Biblical Associations world-wide, for mutual exchange, mutual stimulation in our work. I think of the many people I came to know, especially during the meeting in Bogota, who are inspired by the Bible. I realize that I am not alone with my problems here in Germany. To my surprise I have noticed how almost all Bible workers in basic communities have difficulties with the hierarchical church. They complain of the lack of financial assistance, but above all of the lack of moral support. A worldwide problem. Even more so, I find it striking how little Bible work is cherished and fostered by the hierarchy. My impression is that although the hierarchy does nothing to hinder Bible work, neither is it particularly fostered or promoted. ■



Bible course in Mumbai, India

Cecilia Chui from Hong Kong is CBF subregional coordinator for Northeast Asia:

A particularly memorable event in my life-journey with CBF was the hosting of the V. Plenary Assembly in Hong Kong in 1996, one year before the territory's reintegration into China. It was such a grace-filled experience to welcome more than 170 delegates from 70 countries to reflect on the theme of "Word of God – Source of Life". In the third millennium, I hope that CBF will make wider contributions in promoting inculturated and contextual reading of the Bible. More varieties of biblical formation programs for people at all levels of the Church will be made available. More biblical pastoral materials which take into account the cultural and socio-economic situation of our world will be developed (VI Plenary Assembly in 2002, Final Statement III/2.4; 2.5; 4.1). Also, I dream that CBF will have stronger affiliation with China in sharing the responsibility of "opening the treasures of the written Word of God to all who will listen" in the future. ■

Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, svd, (Rome), was CBF General Secretary from 1984 to 2000:

The letters CBF represent a short formula for me: Catholic – in the original (non-confessional) meaning: all-inclusive, world-wide, universal church, intercultural, missionary; Biblical – in the sense of biblical pastoral ministry, providing food for thought, making attentive to the "sheer sound of silence" (see 1 Kings 19,12) in our lives; enabling an encounter with the person of Christ (see Acts 8,35); Federation – autonomy and cooperation; networking: giving and receiving; sharing of experiences and resources etc. My hopes and dreams for the future is that a grateful glimpse to the past may lead to confidence in what is in store for the future. That, at least, is what I have learned from my own personal history. Yes, much remains to be done! However, 400 years of relative negligence of Holy Scripture cannot be caught up with in 40 years. ■

Mons. Arturo Bastes, svd, heads the Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate in the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines:

The CBF is like a dynamo coming from the Holy Spirit to generate energy for the association of bishops, priests, religious, lay leaders, who are inflamed with the challenge of distributing the spiritual wealth and power of God's Word among the people, who need strength to go on in the difficult journey to the Kingdom. ■



Youth Bible Camp in Cebu City, Philippines

Rev. A. Miller Milloy from England is Acting General Secretary of the United Bible Societies (UBS):

I see the CBF as extremely committed to biblical mission among the Catholic faithful. I see it trying to be relevant to the issues and challenges of the day. I see it being prepared to challenge its structures and procedures and processes to ensure ongoing effectiveness. I see it very open to interconfessional cooperation. ■

Daniel Kosch from Switzerland, biblical scholar:

The Catholic, and by this I mean the world-wide and comprehensive unity in diversity has taken on not only one but many faces for me through the CBF: lay, religious, priests, bishops, members of many different cultures, nationalities and language communities, representatives of different spiritualities and theological traditions – all of these have marked and continue to mark the life of the CBF.

The CBF has thus become a mirror of the Bible itself, with its 72 books, its numerous and highly varied characters and narratives, with the great lines of hope for redemption through Jesus Christ, of trust in the one God, and of love for the poor and disadvantaged, but also with the tension-filled multiplicity of different world and life experiences. ■



Bibliodrama – bringing the Bible into play

A Pioneer in the biblical apostolate: On the Death of Cardinal Franz König

Cardinal Franz König passed away on 13th March, 2004 at the age of 98. The Federation's history carries his indelible imprint, as Cardinal König played a significant role when its foundations were being laid and in the execution of his office as first CBF President (1972–1978).

At the Second Vatican Council König was one of the highly influential personalities who left their mark on the Council. He was particularly active here in promoting the idea of a Church that would be open to the needs of modern society. In 1965 Pope Paul VI entrusted him with the direction of the newly established Secretariat for non-believers. Cardinal König contributed significantly towards the goal of overcoming the isolation of the Church in the communist realm. He established a variety of contacts with the neighboring Eastern European churches and was the first "Western" Cardinal to travel to Eastern Europe. He deserves particular credit, too, for his accomplishments in the realms of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.



The Bible and the revival of the biblical pastoral ministry in the Catholic Church promoted by the Council were also among the Cardinal's principal concerns. For this reason he did not hesitate to assume the office of President of the CBF (then still the WCFBA), which he held till 1978. Until the very end he showed great interest in the CBF's concerns and development.

All his life, he was in many respects a "pontifex", a bridge-builder. In spite of all his ecclesiastical offices and assignments Cardinal König remained first and foremost a shepherd of souls. "For me it is important to commit oneself to the truth, to the Word of God, but always in conjunction with the power and strength that resides in love of people". This is how he himself once put it, commenting on the motto he chose as a bishop, borrowed from Eph 4:15: "Veritatem facientes in caritate" ("doing the truth in love"). ■