

# DEIVERBUM

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## Fundamentalism and Biblical Pastoral Ministry



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## Dear Readers:



The commonsense truth, mentioned by Jesus at the end of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, is both well-known and insightful: if someone wishes to build a house he should first of all attend to the foundations on which it will stand. Sandy ground means danger of collapse; rocky ground, on the other hand, guarantees stability. And what

is important for building a house applies to faith as well: one who does the will of God and follows the teachings of Jesus has a solid foundation which offers security and stability in the storms of the world (Matt 7:24-27).

A firm foundation, or fundament, will enable us to withstand any storm, however violent. This is what fundamentalism promises – even from its name. Against the anxiety caused by a world in which uncertainty, vicissitudes and temptations appear ever on the increase it offers what is supposed to be a sure remedy. Its recipe reads: "There is but one truth, and it is very simple – follow it, and things will be easy!" Fundamentalism promises security in that it offers a one-dimensional world, split down the middle, where only black and white, only good and evil exist. But is this really the kind of security that Jesus intends with his parable?

In all regions and religions of the world religious fundamentalism is a growing problem, as it is also within Christianity. Fundamentalism challenges us to reflect on how we use the Scriptures. If we lose sight of the historical character of the Bible and understand it only in the literal sense, if we begin to value the letter of Scripture more than its spirit, then there is a real danger that the Word of God will be silenced and the dynamic of salvation history, to which the biblical writings bear witness, will be lost. The Bible is then no longer a living sign of the ongoing dialogue of God with human beings, but only a rigid construct, a mere transcription of a divine monologue that took place in the far distant past.

The discussion with a fundamentalist understanding of the Bible ultimately comes down to how we understand the Bible, and by the same token how we understand our own relationship with God. To return again to the metaphor of house building – it amounts to the question: if God's Word is the foundation of our lives, what kind of a house do we

wish then to build on this foundation? A house in which everything is ruled by uniformity and regimentation, that consists of a single living room preserved as it is for all times, but in which the doors to all other rooms are closed or walled up, with a sign hanging on them: "do not enter"? Or a house that is spacious and wide open, that has a firm ground-plan to be sure, but whose inner life is vibrant – a house in which everyone who takes it seriously can find a place? A house over whose entrance stands the saying of Jesus from the Gospel of John: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places" (Jn 14:2)?

This issue of the *Bulletin Dei Verbum*, which we have entitled "Fundamentalism and Biblical Pastoral Ministry", is devoted to these and other questions. Its articles are intended to offer assistance on how to deal critically with a fundamentalist mentality. The essays cover a wide range of related topics, from basic analysis of the problems of fundamentalism, to the importance of the topic for the CBF, and beyond this to concrete suggestions for biblical pastoral work.

As is always the case, you will also find in this issue a number of reports from the life of the Federation. And perhaps you are also aware that the CBF was able to look back, on April 16<sup>th</sup> of this year, to 35 years of existence. No "round-number" anniversary to be sure, but nevertheless an opportunity to pause for reflection. A number of associates and friends of the CBF have taken this occasion to express their thoughts on the CBF as well as their expectations and hopes for its future. They stand as representatives of the innumerable women and men – of which you, dear reader, are one – who in these decades have worked together with us to insure that the task given us by the Council, which is the so-called "Magna Charta" of the CBF, will be translated into reality – the task, that is, to provide as great a number of people as possible with open and relevant access to the Bible as the Word of God in our time. (cf. *Dei Verbum* 22).

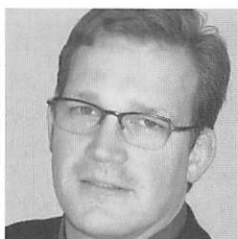
I wish you lively and stimulating reading!

Claudio Ettl



## Fundamentalism – A Challenge for Biblical Pastoral Ministry\*

Alexander M. Schweitzer



Alexander M. Schweitzer, General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation since 2002.

There is much talk of fundamentalism in the world today. The term is used in a great variety of senses, and at times somewhat mindlessly, or as a kind of rallying cry. The following reflections are more narrowly focused on religious fundamentalism, and indeed on fundamentalism in our own – Christian – ranks. Christian fundamentalism often makes use of the Bible: one more reason why it represents a challenge especially for biblical pastoral ministry, and by the same token for the Catholic Biblical Federation. In fact this topic is pertinent to the whole of the Catholic Biblical Federation and for this reason also occupies the center of its attention. In the Final Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of Lebanon the topic of fundamentalism appears as a leitmotif.

### Characteristics of Fundamentalism

Before entering into the specific challenges posed by religious fundamentalism to biblical pastoral ministry, and thereby to the CBF, I would like to explore a couple of general characteristics of fundamentalism. In doing so, I do not, of course, claim to be covering comprehensively, even by the remotest approximation, the anthropological, sociological, psychological, cultural or religious aspects of this highly complex phenomenon.

At the root of every form of fundamentalism lies fear: the fear of losing the safeguard of a strict system of values, thought, beliefs. The growing complexity of our lives, the increasingly frequent overlapping and mixing of cultures and religions, and the resultant feelings of insecurity could promote this kind of anxiety in our times, as could also the growing gap between rich and poor and the scourge of AIDS. To these challenges, fundamentalism offers an all too simple, one-dimensional solution: "Adopt this particular belief, this particular life-pattern, and you will be on the safe side." A Christian-biblical response to fundamentalism must take these anxieties and fears seriously.

One of the principal consequences of fundamentalism is violence. Christian fundamentalism practices violence

at a variety of levels: with respect to the Bible, in that it rejects its historical character and therewith also the notion of faith as a process, the need for translation and interpretation, the various hermeneutical methods required to access its meaning. It practices violence against human beings, in that it effectively rejects the human endowment of reason, of free will, and disallows any life-conception or individual spirituality that differs from its own. And, finally, it practices violence against God, in that it denies that God wills variety and fullness of life for His children (cf. Jn 10:10: "life in abundance"), in that it fails to accept freedom as a gift of God and claims, in effect, to know God's thoughts and purposes.

A fundamentalist use of the Bible is incapable of communicating the biblical message of pluralism and tolerance among human beings. The message of the Bible stands in plain contradiction to any form of fundamentalism. Christian faith, and along with it the way we use the Bible, is of its very nature historical, pluralistic and a dialogical process.

### 2. Fundamentalism and Biblical Pastoral Ministry

The term biblical pastoral ministry is here intended in a comprehensive sense, such as to include the scientific study of the Bible. This discipline is an indispensable part of biblical pastoral ministry and it is ordered to it (cf. *Dei Verbum* 23: "Catholic exegetes ... should devote their energies ... to an exploration and exposition of the divine writings. This should be so done that as many ministers of the divine word as possible will be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God"). If biblical pastoral ministry means preaching the Word of the Bible as Good News, as Word of God in a concrete life-situation, if it uses the Bible "like a mirror, in which the ... Church looks on God" (cf. *DV* 7), and if the pastoral use of the Bible includes the notion that one who reads it or prays it enters into dialogue with the biblical text, in the sense that one's own life-questions and experiences and the experiences and questions of the Bible mutually interpret one another, then fundamentalism has no place here. Understood in this sense, biblical pastoral ministry is rather a prescription *par excellence* against any temptation to fundamentalism.

Allow me to develop and systematize this line of thought a bit further. The following basic criteria describe a biblical pastoral ministry deserving the name.





• The biblical text is read in the social and personal context of the reader/prayer. Text and context are mutually interpretive; the key question with respect to the biblical text is: "What does this mean for me, for us?" This reading-in-context is supported by a variety of hermeneutical methods that have been developed especially in the course of the last few decades.

• The Bible is the book of the Church. This truly Catholic proper was re-discovered with the Constitution *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II. The Church as subject of interpretation is here understood in the broad sense of *sensus fidelium* and not merely in the more narrow sense of *magisterium*.

• The entire Bible is read in the light of the Christ event (prayerful reading, *lectio divina*, etc.)

• Translations of the biblical text into the vernacular and aids for inculturation in the broadest sense are necessary presuppositions for a reading in context.

• The acquired results of biblical science flow into biblical pastoral ministry.

These fundamental characteristics of a Catholic biblical pastoral ministry exclude an "idolatry of the book" (cf. the article by Lucien Legrand in this issue), an absolutizing of the letter. Such a use of the Bible is not one-sidedly intellectual-academic; it is not merely an explanation of the letter. But it is just as certainly not arbitrary or anti-intellectual. The results of historical-critical exegesis and other hermeneutical methods belong to the repertoire of biblical pastoral ministry. They are useful and indispensable for an interpretation that would take the Bible seriously as a testimony to the faith of many generations in their historical reality and therefore as a witness to the faith process. They help us to escape the pitfalls of a fundamentalist reading which does not take into account the historical and the pluralistic character of the Bible (cf. the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, I.F). They are not, however, the goal and endpoint of all biblical pastoral efforts. Such efforts always ultimately culminate in the question: "And what does this mean for me?" Biblical pastoral ministry takes place in a magnetic field situated between two poles: life and the concrete Christian community on the one hand, and the biblical text on the other. If it operates within this field of tension, biblical pastoral ministry becomes a powerful antidote to Christian-biblical fundamentalism.

### 3. Fundamentalism – a Challenge for the CBF

The Catholic Biblical Federation is aware of the challenge that Christian-biblical fundamentalism represents. But how does it react to this challenge *in concreto*?

A glance at the above-mentioned Final Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the CBF supplies a first insight. The first thing the Federation needs to do is to

reflect on its own past use of the Bible in a self-critical way. In the Final Statement, the CBF obligates itself to the "self-critique of our way of reading Scripture in the Church – individually and collectively". The Federation raises the question of whether, in the past, it might have used Scripture to legitimate arrogance, discrimination and violence with respect to others and whether it has always allowed "the Word to have its impact on the contexts of society" (cf. Lebanon Final Statement, III.1.4). In view of growing fundamentalist tendencies the CBF renews its commitment to promote plurality as a characteristic trait of the Bible (III.1.4) together with the development of contextual hermeneutics, to support the biblical education of laity and clergy and to commit itself to a dialogical reading of the Bible (III.1.5). The Federation supports "a plurality of methods and approaches which 'contribute effectively to the task of making more available the riches contained in the biblical text' [*IBC*, Introduction]." (III.2.2).

The second thing I would like to look at with you is the concrete work being done on the spot by the members of the CBF. The fundamental characteristics of a Catholic biblical pastoral ministry described above are not only a short description of the *raison d'être* of the CBF, whose chief task is to ensure at various levels that the insights and directives of the Second Vatican Council on Sacred Scripture as the center of all ecclesiastical life be implemented (as the conciliar constitution *Dei Verbum* demands). They also amount to a description of the concrete fields of activity of the Federation's member institutions. The translation of the Bible into local languages, the production of biblical pastoral materials, the conducting of courses for lay people and clergy, the development of Bible-reading methods, the elaboration of hermeneutical methods, research and teaching, evangelization and inculturation – the members of the CBF are active in very concrete ways, and on the spot, in every one of these fields and in others as well. In its work the Federation has already shown and must continue to demonstrate that a properly conceived biblical pastoral ministry does not succumb to any temptation to fundamentalism and that it offers the better alternative to any Christian-biblical fundamentalism.

It is, moreover, indispensable in this regard that people within the church be sensitized to the dangers of fundamentalism and to the important role of biblical pastoral ministry. This is happening at the moment – since the preparations for the celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the promulgation of the conciliar constitution *Dei Verbum* are underway – in the form of numerous events at the local and regional as well as world-wide levels. The topic of fundamentalism is always to be found on the agenda for these events.

Against this background, the response to the question as to how the CBF might react to the challenge of fun-



damentalism comes easy: it must take full cognizance of its task as promoter and advocate of biblical pastoral ministry in the Church at every level. It must loyally and courageously fulfil and – where possible – intensify its mandate to ensure that the Word of God is given its proper role at the center of the Church's life, that the letter of the Bible might become life-giving Word of God.

These brief reflections on the challenges of religious fundamentalism for biblical pastoral ministry and thereby for the CBF amount to no complacent look at the achievements that have occurred since Second Vatican Council and at the accomplishments of the CBF. However great these achievements and accomplishments might be, the challenges of today are equally great. With this in mind, my hope is that these lines – as well as this whole issue of the *Bulletin Dei Verbum* – will help to raise the consciousness level of its readers and offer them encouragement for the future. In order that we may make every effort to ensure that the letter of the Bible will become the life-giving Word of a God who wishes to be for us the fullness of life.

\* Revised version of a paper given at the IV South Asian Workshop of the CBF, which took place from December 1-3, 2003, at Sacred Heart Seminary in Chennai, India on the theme "Biblical apostolate in the context of religious fundamentalism".

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



## 35 Years of CBF



If I had to describe the CBF in a nutshell, I would say two things: the CBF is its members; 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. 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.

The CBF should always be an agency of service and not of power, of pluralism and not of uniformity, of "catholicity" rather than provincialism. The CBF should be organized ever more on a system of networks at all levels: that of formative experiences, that of interpretations and impressions, that of pastoral experiences, that of lectio divina, and that of exegesis, etc. The CBF will do well to maintain the principle that the Federation is its members, so as to insure its character as a well of exchanges and experiences, a bridge for the passage of the cultures and the varieties of faith conceptions. The Federation would be a great benefit to the Church if it would help to insure that the formation of future priests and future lay animators of the communities will be marked by the Word of God, and, finally, by the role of the Bible in the life and mission of the Church.

Fr. Gabriel Naranjo Salazar, cm, EC member





## Fundamentalist Interpretation of the Bible

*On April 23, 1993 – one hundred years after the Encyclical “Providentissimus Deus” of Pope Leo XIII, and 50 years after the Encyclical “Divino afflante spiritu” of Pius XII – the Pontifical Biblical Commission published a document with the title: “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”, in which it gives an overview of the various approaches to the Bible. The fundamentalist use of Scripture is among those subjected to critical examination. In the following paragraphs we cite the pertinent passages of the document (Section I.F).*

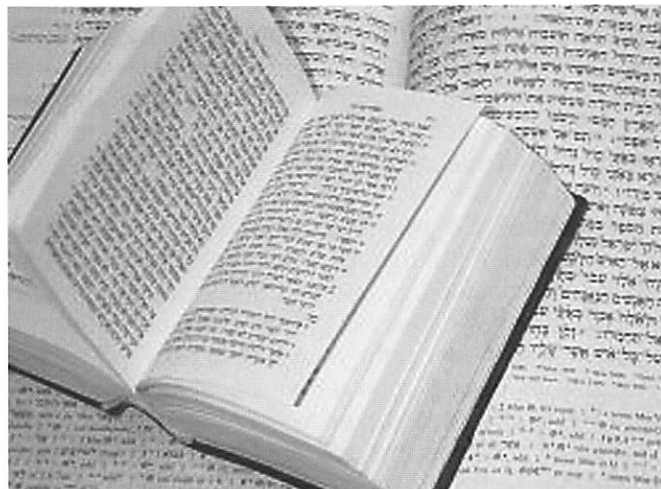
Fundamentalist interpretation starts from the principle that the Bible, being the Word of God, inspired and free from error, should be read and interpreted literally in all its details. But by “literal interpretation” it understands a naively literalist interpretation, one, that is to say, which excludes every effort at understanding the Bible that takes account of its historical origins and development. It is opposed, therefore, to the use of the historical-critical method, as indeed to the use of any other scientific method for the interpretation of Scripture.

The fundamentalist interpretation had its origin at the time of the Reformation, arising out of a concern for fidelity to the literal meaning of Scripture. After the century of the Enlightenment it emerged in Protestantism as a bulwark against liberal exegesis.

The actual term fundamentalist is connected directly with the American Biblical Congress held at Niagara, N.Y., in 1895. At this meeting, conservative Protestant exegetes defined “five points of fundamentalism”: the verbal inerrancy of Scripture, the divinity of Christ, his virginal birth, the doctrine of vicarious expiation and the bodily resurrection at the time of the second coming of Christ. As the fundamentalist way of reading the Bible spread to other parts of the world, it gave rise to other ways of interpretation, equally “literalist”, in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. As the 20th century comes to an end, this kind of interpretation is winning more and more adherents, in religious groups and sects, as also among Catholics.

Fundamentalism is right to insist on the divine inspiration of the Bible, the inerrancy of the Word of God and other biblical truths included in its five fundamental points. But its way of presenting these truths is rooted in an ideology which is not biblical, whatever the proponents of this approach might say. For it demands an

unshakable adherence to rigid doctrinal points of view and imposes, as the only source of teaching for Christian life and salvation, a reading of the Bible which rejects all questioning and any kind of critical research.



The basic problem with fundamentalist interpretation of this kind is that, refusing to take into account the historical character of biblical revelation, it makes itself incapable of accepting the full truth of the incarnation itself. As regards relationships with God, fundamentalism seeks to escape any closeness of the divine and the human. It refuses to admit that the inspired Word of God has been expressed in human language and that this Word has been expressed, under divine inspiration, by human authors possessed of limited capacities and resources. For this reason, it tends to treat the biblical text as if it had been dictated word for word by the Spirit. It fails to recognize that the Word of God has been formulated in language and expression conditioned by various periods. It pays no attention to the literary forms and to the human ways of thinking to be found in the biblical texts, many of which are the result of a process extending over long periods of time and bearing the mark of very diverse historical situations.

Fundamentalism also places undue stress upon the inerrancy of certain details in the biblical texts, especially in what concerns historical events or supposedly scientific truth. It often historicizes material which from the start never claimed to be historical. It considers historical everything that is reported or recounted with verbs in the past tense, failing to take the necessary account of the possibility of symbolic or figurative meaning.



Fundamentalism often shows a tendency to ignore or to deny the problems presented by the biblical text in its original Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek form. It is often narrowly bound to one fixed translation, whether old or present-day. By the same token it fails to take account of the “rereadings” (*relectures*) of certain texts which are found within the Bible itself.

In what concerns the Gospels, fundamentalism does not take into account the development of the Gospel tradition, but naively confuses the final stage of this tradition (what the evangelists have written) with the initial (the words and deeds of the historical Jesus). At the same time fundamentalism neglects an important fact: The way in which the first Christian communities themselves understood the impact produced by Jesus of Nazareth and his message. But it is precisely there that we find a witness to the apostolic origin of the Christian faith and its direct expression. Fundamentalism thus misrepresents the call voiced by the Gospel itself.

Fundamentalism likewise tends to adopt very narrow points of view. It accepts the literal reality of an ancient, out-of-date cosmology simply because it is found expressed in the Bible; this blocks any dialogue with a broader way of seeing the relationship between culture and faith. Its relying upon a non-critical reading of certain texts of the Bible serves to reinforce political ideas and social attitudes that are marked by prejudices – racism, for example – quite contrary to the Christian Gospel.

Finally, in its attachment to the principle “Scripture alone”, fundamentalism separates the interpretation of the Bible from the tradition, which, guided by the Spirit, has authentically developed in union with Scripture in the heart of the community of faith. It fails to realize that the New Testament took form within the Christian Church and that it is the Holy Scripture of this Church, the existence of which preceded the composition of the texts. Because of this, fundamentalism is often anti-Church, it considers of little importance the creeds, the doctrines and liturgical practices which have become part of Church tradition, as well as the teaching function of the Church itself. It presents itself as a form of private interpretation which does not acknowledge that the Church is founded on the Bible and draws its life and inspiration from Scripture.

The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life. It can deceive these people, offering them interpretations that are pious but illusory, instead of telling them that the Bible does not necessarily contain an immediate answer to each and every problem. Without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide. It injects into life a false certitude, for it unwittingly confuses the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations. ■

## 35 Years of CBF



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 inter-confessional cooperation.

The 135 national Bible Societies making up the UBS Fellowship, have relationships, both good and some not so good, with local manifestations of the CBF. Contact, cooperation and collaboration at the international level is extremely helpful in addressing some of the misunderstandings that thwart local and national cooperation with the resultant blunting of the witness and mission of both organisations. For me the CBF is the advocate of the Bible cause in the Catholic Church.

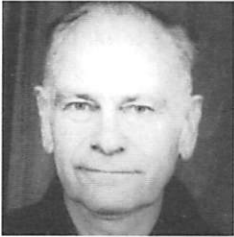
*Rev. A. Miller Milloy, Acting General Secretary of UBS (United Bible Societies)* ■





# Fundamentalism and the Bible\*

Lucien Legrand, mep



*Fr. Lucien Legrand, mep, is a professor of New Testament at St. Peter's Pontifical Institute in Bangalore, India. He has published numerous books and articles on biblical topics. He is currently teaching as a visiting professor in various institutions in Asia and Europe.*

Giving a keynote address is a risky proposition. Is it not arrogant to claim a priori holding the keys in front of a highly competent audience which is just about to share its expertise? At any rate it would be bad methodology to preclude the orientations and findings of several days of common research. I suppose that the purpose of the exercise is less ambitious. A key can just open the door, leaving it to others to enter and explore the quarters. Therefore let me propose a few opening thoughts on the topic that concerns us all, the rise of fundamentalism in the religious landscape at the dawn of the third millennium.

A further precision may be needed to specify the scope of these reflections. Fundamentalism is a worldwide and interreligious phenomenon. In different forms we meet it in all the religions, in Christianity as well as in Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and even in atheism. However, since we meet here in the context of the Catholic Biblical Federation, I take it that the question that concerns us is the challenge which fundamentalism, especially biblical fundamentalism, puts to our biblical apostolate. My opening remarks will therefore bear mostly on Christian biblical fundamentalism, diagnosing it and meeting its challenge.

## I. Diagnosis

### 1. A quest for security

Even though we limit our thoughts to Christian biblical fundamentalism, we cannot dissociate it from its global context.

Religious fundamentalism is no purely "spiritual" and religious phenomenon. It has deep socio-anthropological roots the analysis of which I leave it to more competent specialists in the field of human sciences. But even a theological assessment has to take into account that fundamentalism is the expression of a cultural crisis. In

the context of societies losing their traditional cultural points of reference, fundamentalism is the expression of a sense of loss. This is why fundamentalism is largely an urban phenomenon since it is in the cities that the cultural crisis is felt more acutely. Often this sense of disconcerted confusion results in a counter-cultural revolt against a world perceived as running amok. In Christian context, this pessimistic and antagonistic vision of the world finds an apocalyptic expression. Like their Jewish predecessors of old who shut themselves off from the rest of the world on the shores of the Dead Sea at Qumran, today aggressive forms of fundamentalism view themselves as pursuing "the war of the children of light against the children of darkness."

In a Christian setting these socio-anthropological roots have also ecclesiological dimensions. According to a survey made in 1996 by Jnana Vidhya-Deep (Pune), and submitted to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India on the motives attracting people, Christians and non-Christians, to Neo-Pentecostalism, "fellowship experience" and "non-authoritarian structures" are quoted as frequently as the "centrality of the Bible" or even more frequently as "pull factors" to the Pentecostal movement and away from their original churches.<sup>1</sup>

Fundamentalism appears therefore as the expression of a quest for security which is no longer provided by the surrounding society and religious establishment. In the "religions of the book," Islam and Christianity, this quest for security takes the literary form of an intensely renewed attachment to the book, Koran or Bible, which cements collective identity and gives secure answers to the bewildered soul. Interestingly in Hinduism, the same quest for security and affirmation of identity focuses on religious symbols, temple or statues. This is typically exemplified by the Ayodhya crisis, symptomatic of a certain Hindu revival, which lays the stress on the externals of their religion. This parallelism between the attachment to the letter and the book among Muslims and Christians and to religious emblems in Hinduism is revealing. Under different forms, in the written word for the religions said to be "of the book", or in objects of worship for religions more attached to visual symbols, we have the deep convergence of a search for tangible support when the world around seems to be falling apart.



## 2. The words and the Word

At the same time this convergence reveals the basically idolatrous veneer of fundamentalism, as it looks for security in objects rather than in the dynamic thrust they symbolize. Insofar as Hinduism is concerned, the present attitude of the Ayodhya movement stands out in sharp contrast with the great Hindu reformation movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which tried to revive the faith of their contemporaries from inside. Leaving the consideration of Islam to more competent people, I think that the parallelism between present day biblical fundamentalism and the contemporary Hindu fanaticism presents a kind of mirror image of the same tendency to find refuge in the materiality of religious objects while rejecting their symbolic thrust. This is the very definition of idolatry. The word seems to be too strong when applied to Bible devotion but this is what the Bible precisely tells us. Idolatry consists in finding refuge in man-made objects rather than in the transcending God to which they point. This is no Catholic contempt for the Scriptures. Actually the word "idolatry" is not mine. I borrowed it from a Protestant author putting on a par the double temptation, on the Catholic side, of "idolatry of the Church seen as owner and master of all truth" and, on the Protestant side, of "idolatry of Scripture, identified with the word of God."<sup>2</sup>

Fundamentalists blame Catholics for their "idolatry" of pictures and statues. Making the letter of the Bible an absolute is equally idolatrous. As much as image worship, it fails to perceive the reality beyond the signs, the Gospel beyond the gospels, the Word beyond the "letter written with ink" (2 Cor 3:3).

Luther himself had expressed similar views:

*The Gospel is not what is written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John ... It is the word concerning the Son of God ... The Gospel is not that which is in books and composed in letters, but rather an oral preaching, a living Word, a voice which resounds throughout the earth.*

Elsewhere he explains that the Scriptures are only the manger where Jesus lies. Without the manger he could not be found. Yet the straw is not the baby Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Christianity is not a religion of the Book. It is a religion of the Word, and not primarily of the word on ink and paper, as St Bernard said, of "a written and dumb word but of the incarnated and living Verb."<sup>4</sup> This does not mean that the Book has no place in the Christian economy. It belongs to it but in the realm of "signs", like the sacraments, the cult, and the life of the Church. It has a value, not in itself but only insofar as it leads up to the Verb himself. Jesus did not write. He was the Verb. As St Augustine says,

*The fruit of life is that we may reach eternal life where no longer is the Gospel read to us, but He who gave the Gospel will appear, without any pages to be turned, without the voice of a reader or of a commentator.<sup>5</sup>*

## 3. The Word and the Spirit

Paul himself puts it most concisely and forcefully: "The letter kills; it is the Spirit that gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). This is a weighty saying which opens itself to a number of interpretations. It applies also to our problem. Scripture without Spirit is just "letter written with ink," verbal fetishism as there is a figurative fetishism. To be really

## 35 Years of CBF



I would describe the CBF as an instrument of the Spirit of Christ in the emerging new era for building up a community of love around the Word of Love of the Father, going beyond all religious and other groupings.

I wish and pray that CBF may continue to keep alive its mission of "hearing the Word" in the world constantly widening its horizon in genuine openness and dialogue with the men and women of our times. I believe that if the Word of God, while keeping its moorings and roots in the book of the Bible, could come out of the book and meet the people of today, confronting the bad news of the world in which they live, making it become the Good News to all men and women in every sphere of their lives, it will become a source of new life for all peoples. Here in the East, we have to find a new way of evangelization, going beyond the traditional understanding that this Word had in the past and translating it in terms of creating a world that is free from all that is inhuman. I would dare say, in order to achieve this objective, we may have to go beyond the mere "religious" connotation and content of the Word and give it a greater human and social significance. That will result in the building up of the Kingdom of God, which ultimately is the goal of the proclamation of the Word and not merely the founding of a religion.

*Paul Puthanangady, sdb, EC member and South Asian subregional coordinator 1984-1990*



Word of God, the letter written with ink must be inhabited by the Spirit. It is so at the double level of composition and reception.

**3.1.** At the level of the *composition of the Bible*, we believe that the Bible has been “written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit” (*Dei Verbum* 11). This “inspiration” must not be viewed only as a static verbal divine guarantee. It is a dynamic thrust running through the entire process of composition of the sacred books. This is the insight gained by what is technically called “canonical criticism”<sup>6</sup> which succeeded “form criticism” and “redaction criticism.” This means that the process of development of the Scriptures is driven by a prophetic thrust that goes on complementing or renovating and even transmuting the old meanings. Scriptures are not a collection of fossilized texts. They are the expression of an ongoing history of revelation energized by the Spirit. Their main themes have a life of their own, carried by an unceasing prophetic actualization. Examples are many. For instance the “oracles against the Nations” in the Prophets are often capped by an “oracle of salvation.”<sup>7</sup> Two cases in point can be taken as particularly significant in the context of present-day fundamentalism: the temple and the land.

The theme of the *temple* looms large in both Testaments. The building and restoration of the Jerusalem temple cover a number of chapters (Ex 26-27; 1 Kgs 5-9; 2 Chr 1-9; Ez 40-48; Esd 3-6; Hag 2). Psalms express a touching devotion to Zion and its sanctuary (Ps 42; 84; 122, etc.). But, at the same time, prophets criticize a reliance on the temple disconnected from faith and justice (Jer 7:1-28; 26:1-24; Mic 3:9-12; Ez 8:1-10:22). They develop the theme of the temple not built by human hands (Is 66:1-4; Ps 50; Acts 7:48-51; 17:24-29). Thus purified, the temple can become a powerful symbol of a renewed life (1 Cor 6:19; 1 Pet 2:4f), society (1 Cor 3:10-17; 2 Cor 6:16ff; Eph 2:20ff) and universe (Rev 21) filled with divine love and glory by the power of the Spirit. Would all temple fanatics of any religions listen to such teachings of their prophets!<sup>8</sup>

The *land* is another much abused theme especially in the context of the disastrous conflict in present-day Palestine.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, as claimed by the partisans of the “Great Israel,” the land of Canaan has been given to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 26:3f; 28:13) and indeed “from the river of Egypt till the Euphrates” (Gen 15:18).<sup>10</sup> But Abraham himself must have pondered on the significance of this gift when, at the death of his wife, he did not own as much as the few cents of land needed to bury her (Gen 23:1-20). The successive wars, foreign occupations and exiles must have given similar food for thought to the descendants of Abraham. The prophets of the Babylonian exile particularly kept the faith of Israel alive by showing God’s power active all over the world (Ez 1; 11:14-16; Jer 29:4-

8), wherever there are “humble and poor people finding refuge in the name of the Lord” (Zep 3:12). The Jewish diaspora will focus its faith in God not on the land but on the Torah and on wisdom. The main thrust of the Acts of the Apostles consists in showing the Word of God growing out of Jerusalem and Judea, to reach Samaria and the ends of the world (Acts 1:8). Isaiah had already said: “*Out of Zion shall go forth the law and the Word of the Lord out of Jerusalem*” (2:3). This is not to deny the importance of the land for the people of Israel. But in biblical terms, the land is to be open, a receptacle of righteousness, kindness and humble abiding by God’s ways (Mic 6:8).

The same prophetic criticism can be seen in a number of other biblical themes like the holy war, the curse on foreigners (cf. Ps 137:8f), the covenant, the law, etc. Reading them out of their “canonical” prophetic context can lead to atrocities. In fact a literalistic reading of the Bible has been used to justify racism, colonialism, capitalism, anti-ecological exploitation of world resources, etc. “The letter kills”: Paul’s diagnosis is sadly illustrated by the history of Bible (mis)interpretation. Without taking into account the dynamic thrust of the Spirit embedded in the text itself, the letter of the Bible can be murderous. Like any idolatry, search for false security is deadly.

**3.2.** Whether it comes under the name of hermeneutics, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, actualization, reader’s response, any text is an open text. Reading is dialogue. Reading unfolds the potentialities of the text in the encounter with the variety of human individual and collective experiences. In a faith perspective, the believers, as prophetic people of God led by the Spirit, are entrusted with the responsibility of this encounter of the Spirit who inspired the Bible and “the Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions” (*Redemptoris Missio* 28). *Actualizing the Word of God* is a matter of the Spirit, which inspired the sacred text and its reader, meeting the Spirit at work in history. This is done through the variety of the prophetic charisms animating God’s people, reception, prayer, liturgy, Christian service and commitment, theological research, Magisterium, etc. Such is the meaning of tradition. It is not a foreign body added to the Scriptures. Neither is it a burden of old concepts weighing down upon us. It is the “growth of the Word” referred to several times in the Acts of the Apostles (6:7; 12:24; 19:20). The power of the Spirit unfolds the latent potency of the Word in its journey through history. All this is quite aptly summarized by the Pontifical Biblical Commission speaking of a “*dynamic pattern of interpretation*” that is found within the Bible itself and continues in the life of the Church”.<sup>11</sup>

It may be added that this “dynamic pattern of interpretation” is not proper to the Bible. It applies as well to all the great foundational texts, Koran, Vedas, Tipitaka, etc.



The question put to their readers is whether they will take their texts as static and fossilized symbols of the past or as vibrant sources of energy, whether they will be taken as conservative identity badges or as a source of light and strength to launch into the ever renewed creativity of the human adventure.

## II. Dialogue and challenge

Whichever may be the failings of fundamentalism, the fact is that it is there and that it exercises a great appeal on people. It is not enough to diagnose the problem. It must also be approached positively in a spirit of dialogue and as a challenge which questions us. Here also we must distinguish between the ideology and the people who uphold it. People are often better than their mental constructs. They must be approached as human beings, with empathy and sympathy for their concerns and their sense of insecurity. As for the ideology itself, it may embody positive values. As the saying goes, a heresy is a truth that has gone astray. But if it has gone its onesided way, it was often because, on the other side, it had been too onesidedly overlooked.

Again, I am not going to treat the question in its entirety. The sociological and ecclesial aspects of the question have to be addressed seriously and it would not be responsible on my part to consider them in an amateurish manner. Let us remain within the limits of our involvement in biblical apostolate, and share a few reflections on the challenge of fundamentalism as regards our attitude towards the Bible.

### 1. Believing in the Spirit

We may have the beautiful doctrine of the Holy Spirit outlined above but we do not have the monopoly of the Holy Spirit. Indeed many fundamentalists call themselves "Pentecostals" and make profession of total dependence on the Spirit.<sup>12</sup> We may have reservations on those manifestations of the Spirit but we know that "the Spirit blows where it wills" (Jn 3:8). We cannot deny a priori that it may blow also on that side. In a spirit of dialogue, we must be on the lookout for the work of the Spirit among the fundamentalists. In this area also, it is a matter of the Spirit meeting the Spirit.

The Spirit is at work in the individuals, in their moving attachment to the Bible and their eagerness to find in it comfort and guidance. It is at work also in their restlessness and anxieties, their quest for meaning in a confused and confusing world.

At the collective level, the Spirit is also at work in the cultural crisis and the countercultures lurking behind the various forms of fundamentalism. The work of the Spirit is also to be perceived insofar as these crises challenge the dominating cultures, often oppressive, their false

securities and false values. It may also be the Spirit who confronts our too well established ecclesiastical positions and clerical entrenched status. The Spirit is a Spirit of peace but it is the same Spirit who inspires disturbing prophets. Jesus brought peace but it was not the peace of self-righteousness.

The Spirit again is at work in an undeniable biblical enthusiasm and creativity from which we can draw a few lessons, some of which we may now consider.

### 2. Return to the text

As said commonly, Protestants read the Bible; Catholics, if at all, speak about the Bible. They have memorized large portions of it; we cannot quote a verse properly. It is true that their memorizing is often highly selective; they have their "canon within the canon", sometimes anti-Catholic. But at least the Word is part of their mental equipment to face life's problems. This may be the reason for which they are often conservative as regards Bible translations. They are understandably reluctant to lose the investment made in the memorizing efforts of their youth. We do not have this handicap. On the contrary, we are lost in the maze of various translations flooding the market. A solution might be to take one specific version as our preferred translation of reference. We could then compare it with other translations for further information and enlightenment. Anyway should we not incorporate a certain amount of Bible by-hearting in our catechesis? This would advantageously replace the questions and answers of our penny catechisms of old.

### 3. Return to the incantatory power of the text

Protestants quote the Bible; Catholics extract abstract themes supposed to be biblical. A typical example of this tendency to reduce the Bible message to abstraction can be seen in a certain type of homily, all too frequent. In his preparation, if any, the preacher reads the Sunday pericope, reduces it to a certain "theme" and goes on developing the theme without any further reference to the Bible text. If the Sunday pericope is about the "prodigal son", we decide that "the theme of today's Gospel" is God's paternal love, or the sacrament of reconciliation or contrition and launch into an oral dissertation on the selected topic. Still worse is the type of pseudo-homily that serves as introduction to the liturgy in which the Gospel passage, which has not yet been proclaimed, is presented under a few – or many! – abstract sentences often in the impersonal form of the indirect speech. "In today's Gospel Jesus says that we should, etc." or "Jesus speaks about, etc." Jesus, the great storyteller, is made to speak in the tedious tone of poor moralizing or lifeless dissertation. If in addition, we go on making a display of memory by quoting chapter and verse, we reduce the power of the Word to abstract algebra.





Words have an incantatory power, especially the words of the inspired prophets and the words of the Word. I am not advocating a kind of magic power of the Bible which would bring us back to the idolatry of the book. I just recall the insights of present-day biblical scholarship on rhetorical approach to the Scriptures. The distinction between “form” and “contents” is artificial. Very often the form is the contents as in poetry and in music. A page of Amos cannot be reduced to the flat “God warns us against injustice”; a psalm is not just “praise of the power of God”; parables of Jesus are not just the illustration of a theme, would it be “the love of God.” Authentic language has an evocative, creative power. Heidegger says that “language is the house of being.” In a Christian perspective, the Word is the house of the Spirit.

This is why in Hinduism the teachings of the *rshis* come in the form of *sloka*, of chanted poetry. In Hebrew, the verb *qara* means to read, to call, to invoke and cry. In fact the Jews, when reading the sacred texts, hum them and move their bodies. Sacred texts have a “poetical” tinge; which should not be lost by mere eye-reading and mental conceptualization. A “physical” reading in the Jewish style helps also to avoid pure abstraction of the text.

#### 4. Word celebrated

This physical and musical aura of the Word appears particularly in the liturgy in which the Word is celebrated. The symbolical atmosphere of the cult surrounds and awakens the symbolical import of the biblical text. In the cult, what academics call mythology takes its full value

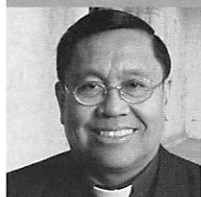
of poetical symbolism. The academe analyses the language which speaks of the “God in heaven” who “created heaven and earth,” “sent his Only Son” who “came down on earth” to “save it from the Evil One” and “will return at the end of time” and finds it full of mythological associations. But, in the cult, united with the mass of the people of God and in empathy with the little ones, we escape the inanity of pseudo-scientific questions and, entering the symbolical world of celebration, we encounter the Thrice Holy who is close to us and lifts us beyond our human meanness and darkness to lead us into His own wonderful Light.

This is the experience of the prayer movement. Unfortunately, liturgy and prayer have now been dissociated. The post-Vatican Council liturgical renewal is yet to produce its fruits and to restore the atmosphere of celebration surrounding the Word of God. We are still the victims of centuries of liturgy made inaccessible and left empty. At least, the old antiphons and responses could play the role of Christian *mantra* and *sloka*. We may have mixed feelings about them. They joined Bible and music and created a Gothic symbolic atmosphere. But they were in an esoteric Latin language and occasionally mixed with a questionable spirituality (*dies irae, libera me!*). They will have to be replaced by new “antiphons,” new Christian *slokas*. Some Indian bhajans have begun to play that role.

#### 5. The exegetical task

This is not the place to make an assessment of the historico-critical method.<sup>13</sup> For all its qualities of minute attention to the text, it has serious limitations. In short, it

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Through the CBF the Catholic Church has shown genuine earnestness in giving easy access to Sacred Scripture. We need a formal institution in the Church like the CBF in order to coordinate the efforts of all regions, all Bishops' Conferences, all other group initiatives to promote the Bible among the Catholic faithful.

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.

My hope for CBF in the near future is that all Episcopal Conferences of the Catholic Church will become members. The CBF will then become the Church focused on the Word of God. If the CBF receives more support from all Episcopal Conferences and other Catholic benefactors, its presence will be even better felt in the entire Church and its activities will become more concrete by initiating, for example, biblical translations and pastoral commentaries, which are wanting in many parts of the world. My other hope is that CBF will have more ecumenical ties with various Christian churches so that the dream of unity among us will slowly become a reality. In the Philippines the ECBA and the Philippine Bible Society have a lot of common projects that promote unity among all Christians.

*Bishop Arturo Bastes, svd, EC moderator*



is more about the Bible than on the Bible. "New Hermeneutics" tried to make up for these limitations but the dissociation between exegesis and hermeneutics betrayed a basic dichotomy in the approach to the text.

The Indian *dhvani* method, traditional in the interpretation of the sacred texts of Hinduism, is more homogeneous. Applying itself to the "resonance", the echo or suggestive power of a text, it moves without discontinuity from phonetics to grammar and to linguistic, from rhetoric to the nature of communication and of language, and finally from there to the indescribable nature of the *atma* or *purusa*.<sup>14</sup> Says Bhartrhari (Indian philosopher and grammarian, 7<sup>th</sup> century): "The beginningless and endless Brahman is the word-principle, which is imperishable; from the same evolves the world of meaningful objects, as a splendid creation" (*Vakyapadiya* 1:1).

The theory of *dhvani*, it seems to me, can be explained only when we presuppose that the whole world is an expression of the Inexpressible, the visible form of the Invisible and the time-table of the Eternal. The Inexpressible, the Invisible and the Eternal are not invented by *dhvani*. *Dhvani* helps to discover them.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly this approach finds a parallel in the new rhetoric approach of Western exegesis in its various forms of Bible as literature which also constitutes a return to the text itself and to the dynamics of the word.

We may hope that new generations of Asian Bible scholars, trained in the new literary methods of the West and familiar with their Hindu and Buddhist exegetical tradition, will be able to show the way to an exegesis that will bring out the Asian impact of the biblical text. This will call for hard work but, as Soares Prabhu concluded in one of his papers, "surely the time has come to set about this task."<sup>16</sup>

This change of exegetical paradigm should have an effect on Bible teaching at all the levels, from Bible courses to the laity to seminary teaching and post-graduate programs. We should reconsider the ratio given respectively to courses of "general introduction" and initiation in reading the biblical text itself. The aim is to guide the students to their own contact with the biblical text itself, equally free from literalism and abstract theologising.

## 6. Giving the Bible back to the people of God

The long and short of the challenge put to us by the success of Christian fundamentalism is that it is a call to give back the Bible to those to whom it belongs, the people of God. This is no demagogic populism. Neither does it mean giving free vent to anarchical free and fanciful interpretation. The "people of God" is a well articulated reality. As described by St Paul, the Spirit inspires

a variety of charisms and *diakonia* which must relate to each other in the communion of the one body (1 Cor 12:4-13).

This variety and interdependence could be represented in the form of a polygon the cohesion of which depends on the strong mutual interlinking of all the sides. The sides represent the various gifts and forms of *diakonia* animating the body: prayer, prophetism, mission, leadership, developmental and liberative action, wisdom, reflection, knowledge (under which comes our exegetical skills), etc. In the centre of the polygon is the Word of God. Permeating the whole reality and the entire world round about is the Spirit. Each section of the whole is in a *koinonia* relationship with the others. For instance the service of leadership in the *magisterium* and the charism of scholarly knowledge are to recognize each other.<sup>17</sup> Both *magisterium* and scholarship have to relate in shared responsibility towards the needs, promptings and insights of the other forms of *diakonia*.<sup>18</sup> Biblical scholarship in turn has to remember the responsibility of communicating the fruits of its research to the common believer through well graded but competent forms of biblical information. Reciprocally the Bible scholar ought to be aware that his questioning of the text, implicit or explicit, is conditioned by the secular and religious culture received from the ambient world. Rightly did Pope Paul VI, in a discourse to the Biblical Commission, encourage the exegete to go beyond research into some 'pure primitive text' to remember that it is the Church, the living community, which 'actualizes' the message of Scripture for contemporary man.<sup>19</sup>

I suppose that the role of our Federation consists in facilitating this exchange between these different forms of listening to God's Word. The challenge of biblical fundamentalism consists in re-activating this exchange, opening the channels of communication between the various ways of listening to the Word. Fundamentalists may be tempted to overlook the *diakonia* of leadership and knowledge, duly listed by Paul (1 Cor 12:8). They remind us that we may have been too blind to the other forms of the gifts of Spirit who distributes them to each as He wills (1 Cor 12:11).

## 7. To the world

Finally from the Church to the world. A prediction which I have heard attributed to different personalities declared that the "third millennium would be eminently religious." This prediction has begun to come true but not in the expected way. The "religious millennium" made a thundering entry with September 11, the ethno-religious conflicts of Western Asia from Afghanistan to Israel, the religious tensions in Southern Asia, from Pakistan to India and Indonesia. Asia has again turned out to be the "mother of all religions" but not in the way we might have liked.



In this context, it is important to define our position. There was a time, in the days of the cold war, when a kind of sacred union between religions and religious people was advocated against the “onslaught” of atheism, materialism, laicism, etc. This does not correspond any longer to the present day situation neither is it consistent with the teachings of the Bible. Prophets like Amos and Isaiah remind us that religions, even “true” ones, can be idolatrous (Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-27; Is 1:10-17; Ps 50) if their cult does not respond to the divine requirement “to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God” (Mic 6:8). It is the approach of sectarians to view themselves as waging a kind of apocalyptic battle against a fiendish satanic world. The Good News invites us rather to look at the fields already “white for the harvest” (Jn 4:35; Mt 9:37), to begin the harvest sown by the Spirit, all over the world, among all peoples, beyond all religious and non-religious systems, and to gather with joy those fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, generosity (Gal 5:22; cf. 6:8-10). It is the attitude of Jesus admiring the faith of the Canaanite woman and of the Centurion. It is strategy of the Good News, of love and not aggressiveness, of confidence and not of fearful anxiety, of peace and not of war. It is the base of the spirit of dialogue. It is not a manifestation of weakness or of resigned compromise as suspected by fundamentalists. Neither is it sly tactics of conversion as alleged by other sectarians on the opposite side. It is simply the spirit of the Gospel, the spirit of Assisi, the spirit of love as described by St Paul: “patient and kind, ... not arrogant and rude. It does not insist on its own way, does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right...; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:4-7).

If it is weakness, it is the weakness of love, the weakness of God which is stronger than any human might, and than any violence (1 Cor 1:25). It is the supreme force released in the world by the Good News, the force that nothing can defeat and that “makes us more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14): this is the source and goal of all biblical apostolate. “God so loved the world” (Jn 3:16): this is the response to any fundamentalist sectarianism.

\* A lecture given during the IV South Asian Workshop of the CBF which took place from December 1-3, 2003, at the Sacred Heart Seminary in Chennai, India, under the motto “Biblical apostolate in the context of religious fundamentalism”.

<sup>1</sup> P. Parathazham, “Neo-Pentecostalism in India. Preliminary Report of a National Survey,” *Word and Worship*, 29 (1996), 81-101, summarizing chart on p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bouttier, *Visages de l'Évangile*, Genève: Labor et Fides, 1993, 26. In his Preface, the author's colleague, D. Marguerat echoes the same concern, denouncing the “illusion that, through the words of the Bible, God would speak directly to each one, which is the typically Protestant form of an idolatry of Scripture” (p. 10).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by R.H. Bainton in P.R. Ackroyd (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Cambridge: CUP, 1970, 20.

<sup>4</sup> *PL* (Mignes Patrologia Latina) 183, 86B.

<sup>5</sup> *In Jn* (In Ioannem) 22,2.

<sup>6</sup> See concise description in the PBC Document on *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Rome 1993, in E.D. Murphy, *The Church and the Bible, Official Documents of the Catholic Church*, Bangalore: Theological Publications of India, 2001, §§ 1757-63.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance, the universalistic oracles of Is 19:18-25 which conclude and transform the oracle against Egypt in 18:1-19:17 into a promise of universal salvation. The best case is probably found in the addition of the Second Isaiah

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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 people 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.

*Sr. Maura Cho, solph (Sister of Our Lady of Perpetual Help), Korea*





to the oracles of the First Isaiah: the prophetic warnings of ch 1-39 are now to be viewed in the light of the "good news" announced by the "prophet of Consolation." The historico-critical approach could just identify such texts as "later additions." Canonical criticism sees them as an important aspect of the global structure of the texts.

- <sup>8</sup> Hinduism has such prophets. I am grateful to Mr Jyoti Sahi for an example taken from the Lingayat tradition of Karnataka. "We are told of an incident in the life of the great Shaivite mystic Basavanna who lived from A.D. 1105-1167, founding the Vira Shaivite movement of Bhakti, or devotion to the One God. Basavanna had gone to a temple at a Sangam (confluence) of the river Krishna in South India. There he developed a devotion to the Lord of the Meeting Rivers. He experienced the embrace of the Lord Shiva, but after 12 years he had a dream that he should leave this Holy place. But Basavanna had become so attached to this temple that he could not bear the thought. Then Shiva appeared to him in the shape of a Linga enthroned on the heart-lotus resting on the tongue of the Bull. Basavanna took this Linga into his hand, and sung the following devotional song:

*Your wideness is the wideness of the world,  
The wideness of the firmament,  
And further still Your feet go deeper than the underworld.  
Your crown is higher than the universe!  
You, Linga, who are imperceptible,  
Past understanding, unlimited, incomparable  
But coming here into the hollow of my hand!  
You shrink to almost nothing, light and tiny,  
O Lord of the meeting rivers!*

After this experience, Basavanna was freed from all places. From then on he had no need to worship the Immovable Linga in the temple, for he carried his God in his own body" (from an unpublished lecture delivered at St George's Church, Oxford).

- <sup>9</sup> Much debated also. See M. Prior, *Zionism and the State of Israel: a Moral Enquiry*, London: Routledge, 1999; G.M. Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003; See also the recent document of the Pontifical Commission on *The Jewish People and their Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Dec 2001).

- <sup>10</sup> The claim of absolute right over the entirety of biblical Israel is not limited to ultra-Zionists only. It is also voiced by fundamentalist Christians. Reacting against the Vatican call for the internationalisation of Jerusalem, a group of Irish evangelical Catholics declared: "If you take into account what the Bible says, Judea and Samaria are an integral part of what God has given to the Jewish people" (*Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 29, 1999). See M. Perko, "Jerusalem in Slavery. Christian, the Bible and Contemporary Israel/Palestine," *Catholic International* 14/3, Aug 2003, 81-86.

- <sup>11</sup> *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, chapter III, in Murphy, *The Church and the Bible*, § 1850.

- <sup>12</sup> An appraisal of the Pentecostal movement can be found in S.J. Anythonisamy, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Neo-Pentecostalism," *Vidyajyoti. Journal of Theological Reflection*, 61 (1997), 82-94; 161-169.

- <sup>13</sup> See a balanced assessment in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, in Murphy, *The Church and the Bible*, §§ 1729-34. A more radical estimate of "the failure of the method" in the Indian context is given by George M. Soares Prabhu, in "Towards an Indian Interpretation of the Bible," *Collected Writings* 1, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999, 208-214 where the method is criticized as "ineffective" (208-211), "irrelevant" (211-212) and "ideologically loaded" (pp 212-214); cf. also "The Historico-critical Method. Reflection on its Relevance for the study of the Gospels in India to-day," in *Collected Writings* 2, 1999, 1-48, especially 6-9. 38; "Interpreting the Bible in India today," *Collected Writings* 4, 2001, 3-13.

- <sup>14</sup> On the *Dhvani* interpretation of the Bible, cf. the special issue of *Bible Bhashyam* V/4, 1979; T. Manickam, "Cross Cultural Hermeneutics: The Patterns of Jaimini, Bharthari and Sankaracharya," *Indian Theological Studies* 21/3-4, 1983, 250-267; id. "Biblical Hermeneutics: An Indian Approach," in A. Thottakara (ed.), *Indian Interpretation of the Bible*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2000, 115-132, A. Amaldas, "Dhvani Method of Interpretation and Biblical Hermeneutics," *Indian Theological Studies* 31/3, 1994, 199-217.

- <sup>15</sup> F.X. D'Sa, "Dhvani as a method of interpretation," in *Bible Bhashyam* V/4, 1979, 293-4 quoting in note the parallel text of Rom 1:20.

## 35 Years of CBF



We regard the CBF as central coordinating office for the world-wide biblical pastoral network. Even more significant is how CBF supports the local churches in their promotion of biblical pastoral ministry. We at Church in Need, Koenigstein and also our project applicants hold CBF's project evaluation efforts in high esteem. The progress made in Africa in recent years due to CBF and BICAM commitment is very encouraging.

Dr. Helmut Steindl, Director Project Department, Church in Need, Koenigstein, Germany





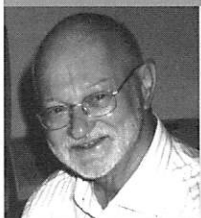
<sup>16</sup> G. Soares Prabhu, "Commitment and Conversion," *Collected Writings* 4, 47.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, London: Chapman, 1982: "I do not think that the members of the Magisterium can speak authoritatively about matter of theology or Scripture unless they have elementary competence in the field, either by their own learning or by consultation" (p. 48). An example of such cooperation can be seen in India in the regular meetings between Bishops and Theologians organised by the Doctrinal Commission of the CBCI. On a larger scale, in Asia, we have the fruitful functioning of the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) and of its various commissions. But in both instances, we could expect a greater in-put of biblical competence. The humorous assessment of an outside observer made some 20 years ago remains basically valid today. "Biblical studies are not seen as a top priority on the agenda of Asian Theologians... Certainly theological soloists in all continents reach virtuosity more easily in fields like speculative theology than exegesis" (M.R. Spindler, "The Biblical Factor in Asian Theology," in *Exchange* 11/32-33, 1982, 77f).

<sup>18</sup> This sense of shared responsibility with the people of God is particularly evidenced in South American Liberation theology and exegesis. G. Soares Prabhu regretted the absence of this dimension in Indian exegesis ("Commitment and Conversion," *Collected Writings* 4, 47).

<sup>19</sup> Address to the Biblical Commission on March 14, 1974 in Murphy, *The Church and the Bible*, § 936. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, speaks of a "*singularis conspiratio*" between "the bishops and the faithful" (DV 10). Can this *conspiratio* be translated as "shared inspiration"? ■

## 35 Years of CBF



What do I associate with the Federation? The joy which the Word of God creates; friendship and comradeship with so many companions active in spreading the Word; the knowledge that the Bible has become source of life and hope for people from all cultures and walks of life; the awareness that precisely the primary target group of the scriptural message, the poor and lowly, have competence to read and interpret the Word for themselves; that we are still at the beginning phase in discovering the richness and abundance of wisdom of God's Word by way of intercultural reading of the Bible ...

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.

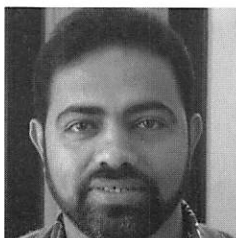
My hopes and dreams for the future of CBF: That a grateful glimpse to the past may lead to confidence in what is in store for the future. That, at least, is what I have learned from my own personal history. Yes, much remains to be done! However, 400 years of relative negligence of Holy Scripture cannot be caught up with in 40 years.

*Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, svd, SSD, CBF General Secretary 1984–2000, now CBF coordinator for the subregion Rome* ■



# The Approach of the Fundamentalist

Jolly Mudakkampurath, svd



*Jolly Mudakkampurath, svd, is a priest and director of biblical pastoral ministry in the archdiocese of Accra, Ghana.*

## 1. Features of biblical fundamentalism

Proponents of a biblical fundamentalism emphasize that the Bible is the Word of God, that it is without error, and that it is to be interpreted literally in every detail. In general, we show a fundamentalistic approach to the Bible when:

- ... we say that the Bible is the Word of God, when by this we mean that God's is the only voice we hear when we read the Bible. We downgrade the human author as one who simply wrote down dictation; we imply that the human author's own genius, limitations, personal interests are of no importance. It is true that Catholics give authority to God as the primary author of scripture but they do not neglect the contribution of the secondary human author. These authors, while employed by Him, made use of their powers and abilities (cf. *Dei Verbum* 11).
- ... we say without qualification that everything in the Bible is true in the sense only of historical and scientific truth. There are other types of truth besides these. We are rather to say with Vatican II that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation (*Dei Verbum* 11). We are not to look for historical or scientific truth in the Bible when its human authors were not in a position to give it and did not intend to do so.
- ... we say, "The Bible says..." as sufficient authority for a position that we argue. By saying this, we treat the Bible as a single book of equal authority throughout and we presuppose that there is no growth of revelation or morality in the Bible. We forget that these books also contain some things which are incomplete and temporary (*Dei Verbum* 15). We should rather say, "We read in Genesis" or "in Mark" or whatever the particular book is which we are quoting.

## 2. Doctrines of fundamentalism

In 1895, the American Bible Congress defined five points of fundamentalism (verbal inspiration of scripture, the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, the doctrine of vicarious expiation, the bodily resurrection at the time of Christ's second coming). Nowadays it is useful to be able to recognize other points which figure prominently in the teaching of fundamentalist sects and evangelists.

### 2.1 The proximity of the end of the world

In Christianity there have always been movements predicting the end of the world. Despite the fact that they have always been wrong in the past, their message continues. They quote many texts from Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation. They misunderstand the nature of biblical prophecy which is more interested in expressing what God might think of the present rather than in predicting the future, and the meaning of apocalyptic literature which is a literature written to give encouragement in a present crisis rather than a prophecy of doom for the future. And they overlook clear statements like that found in Mk 13:32 which states that the day or hour of the end is known only to the Father.

### 2.2 Anti-communism and anti-Islam

Before the end of the Cold War, the forces of evil were identified with communism. Biblical grounds were found for this through the identification of Russia with the Magog of Ezekiel 38-39. The beast of Revelation 13 has the feet of a bear, and the bear is a traditional symbol of Russia. With the end of the Cold War, a new enemy was found in the biblical pages, namely Islam. In contrast to the Catholic attitude to Islam, explained in Vatican II decree on Non-Christian Religions, "Upon the Moslems, the Church looks with esteem ... they adore one God ..., they revere Christ as a prophet, ... they honour Mary" (*Nostra Aetate* 3), the fundamentalists speak of Moslems as "under Satan's control" or in "Satan's bondage".

### 2.3 Health and wealth

These are preached as the right of every believer. After all, Christ bore our sicknesses (Is 53:4-5) and if we are sick, it is because we do not believe sufficiently. "Everything you ask and pray for, believe that you have it already and it will be yours" (Mk 11:23-24). And according to Mk 10:30, "there is no one ... who will not



be repaid a hundred times over ... now in this present time...". Strict adherence to such doctrines means that we will take no steps to improve health care, to ensure child inoculation, efficient sewage systems, clean water. And we will do nothing for the poor, because it is their own fault for not believing sufficiently.

## 2.4 Attitude to the world

It is written in 1 Jn 2:15, "You must not love this passing world". From similar texts, one Christian correspondence course, used in Africa, teaches, "Satan's world system includes commerce, politics, religion, education, entertainment, world kingdoms, world organizations and many other things". So to enter into the world of business or politics is to enter into Satan's realm. The words of Christ in Mt 25:31-46 which call for involvement with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned are overlooked. Another text from John, "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son" Jn 3:16) is ignored, as is the Catholic teaching found in Vatican II, "The joys and hopes and the sorrows and anxieties of people today, especially of those who are poor and afflicted are also the joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties of the disciples of Christ" (*Gaudium et Spes* 1).

## 2.5 Obedience to authority

Paul wrote in Romans 13:1, "You must all obey the governing authorities." This verse is often quoted uncritically and out of context, in order to inculcate uncritical obedience to human authority, however corrupt that authority may be. It was a favorite verse of slave owners in America. Certainly the attitude of a Christian to civil authorities should be positive, but there may be instances where, with Peter, Christians must say, "Obedience to God comes before obedience to men" (Ac 5:29). When human rights are abused and obstacles are put in the way of the practice of religion, then the words of Elijah to King Ahab in 1 Kg 21:18-29 and of Amos before the authorities in Am 3:9-11; 7:10-17 should be remembered.

Taken together, such attitudes run counter to many of the stances taken in modern Catholic Social Teaching. Christians have a duty to look after the world that God, The Creator, has given into their trust; our attitude to other religions is to be one of dialogue and not confrontation. We have to assist our fellow human beings in their striving for health and be ready to share our wealth. We are to take part in civil life and to remind the authorities of the values of the Kingdom of God.

## 3. Responding to the fundamentalist

It is very difficult to argue with fundamentalists because of the presuppositions they make. For example, they claim that because the Bible is the Word of God, attempts to apply human methods of study to it amount to blasphemy.

They are indeed to be commended for their enthusiasm to preserve key doctrines of Christianity. But they try to do this by a doctrine about the Bible which contradicts a truly biblical understanding of the world.

By refusing to admit the human element in the origins of the biblical books, they fail to do justice to the doctrine of the Incarnation itself, in which the divine truly associated with the human. God truly became man at a particular time and in a particular place. In His Word, God used human instruments.

The Bible teaches in many places about the protection and guidance of the Holy Spirit which Christ promised to his followers (Jn 16:13; Ac 1:8; Rom 8:9); thanks to this Spirit, a genuine tradition has formed which helps us to understand and apply the words of the Scripture, and this understanding has found expression in our creeds and Councils which the fundamentalist ignores. The fundamentalist pays no attention to the role of the Church or community and puts great emphasis instead on the salvation of the individual. They overlook the fact that it was the Christian Church that produced the New Testament and adopted the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The gospels emerged out of particular Christian communities and not vice versa.

Fundamentalists, as they grow in human knowledge and develop in their education, may well sooner or later see the inadequacies of their approach, but because they have identified their Christianity with this particular way of understanding it, they risk drifting away from Christianity altogether.

## 4. Two texts for practical use

### 4.1 Genesis 1: the first account of creation

The fundamentalist takes this account of the beginning of the world as literally true, holds that Moses himself wrote it, and takes it as a literal account, even though it is hard to reconcile with the findings of science. In contrast, Catholic scholars, together with scholars of other mainline churches, do not believe it to be a factual account, but a retelling of a story familiar in Babylon 600 years before Christ. The writers were Israelite priests during the exile of Israel in Babylon. They wrote in this way not to teach scientific truth, but to reassure their audience familiar with the creation myths of the Babylonians of vital religious truths:

- Of the goodness of the One God: the world did not come about by chance but was created by a benevolent God.
- Of the dignity of humanity: the world was prepared for its coming by a wise and good king. Only when creation was ready to reach him was man created



and woman shared his dignity. Then these humans were given responsibility for this world.

- Evil had its origins not in God but in human freedom and choice.

#### 4.2 Daniel 7: an example of apocalyptic literature

The fundamentalist would take the details of this chapter as literally and historically true, and would look for their fulfillment, even in our days. Because the time described was the time of the Babylonian exile (6<sup>th</sup> century BC), it is presumed that the chapter was written in this period. Catholic scholars in contrast together with those of other churches recognize here the “literary form” of *apocalyptic*, a crisis literature intended to reassure its readers that God is still in control of events, that evil will be dealt with in His plan. The symbols of this literature include animals, celestial events and strange periods of time. Its unknown author wrote for his own times, the crisis that Israel underwent in the time of King Antiochus Epiphanes IV (BC 165) and claimed the authority of a hero long dead.

In the passage we read of the past history of Israel in terms of strange beasts: the lion with eagle’s wings is a code for the Babylonian Empire, the bear for the Medes, the leopard for the Persian Empire, the beast with ten horns, the Seleucid Kings, including Antiochus Epiphanes, the persecutor of the readers. The account is accurate as concerns the author’s own generation. The author comforts his afflicted readers with his vision of the figure coming of “one like a son of Man”. By this figure, he probably had in mind faithful Israelites of his own day. In the gospels Jesus used the title of himself and this seems to have been the early Christian understanding of the figure.

#### 5. Questions for reflection and discussion

The following questions may be helpful for workshops and courses dealing with biblical fundamentalism.

- Fundamentalist Christians are multiplying in Africa and elsewhere. How do you explain this and what do you consider the remedy?
- Those who have tried to discuss with fundamentalists, often get nowhere. Why should this be?
- How far is the issue of fundamentalism relevant for Catholics? Have you come across it in your own experience?
- Do you know any other texts besides those quoted of which a fundamentalist reading is unacceptable? ■

### 35 Years of CBF



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.

*Ignatius Chidavaenzi, EC member 1984 -1990*





## Life of the Federation

### AFRICA

#### Kenya: Meeting of the CBF Coordinators in Nairobi

From February 11 to 18, 2004 a meeting of the CBF coordinators took place in Nairobi, Kenya. Nine of the subregional coordinators attended, as did the General Secretary of the CBF, Alexander M. Schweitzer, and the former coordinator of the subregion of Southern and Western Europe, Dr. Thomas Osborne, who was present as a resource person for the management seminar. During the first part of the meeting, the representative of the African region in the Executive Committee of the CBF, Archbishop Kaigama from Jos in Nigeria, was also present.



The first two days of the meeting were conceived as a management seminar. Besides the development and practice of fundamental techniques of project planning and execution, attention was especially paid to concrete aspects of management in the work of the coordinators of the regions and subregions. A general job description for CBF coordinators, as well as individual job descriptions specially tailored to the different realities of the individual regions and subregions, were also prepared. These clarifications will be helpful for the further concrete work of the Federation and for future generations of coordinators. But the discussion also provided an opportunity to deal in depth with the question of the CBF structures, especially its communication channels, as well as with that of the resources of the individual regions and subregions. The next two days stood under the motto "Encounter with the Local Church". The participants drove to Nanyuki, a city at the foot of Mt. Kenya, where they took part in a Bible Animation Day in the parish of Christ the King. Through reports from the various regions of the world that they represent the CBF coordinators were able to communicate to the approximately 3,000 participants how as Christians they are part of a great world-wide family. However, the members of the CBF were first of all on the receiving end of things and they were completely overcome by the African vibrancy and directness of style that made this celebration of the Word of God an unforgettable experience for them.

In the afternoon the group made a trip to the Benedictine community of "Our Lady of Mount Kenya", where among other things they offer a Bible track entitled "Bible on the



Ground“ which is growing all the time and also continues to develop in terms of its conceptual framework. At the present time “Bible on the Ground“ draws many thousands of students per month. In the evening there was an opportunity to meet and converse with Catholics from Nanyuki; for many of the participants this was a first opportunity to learn something first-hand about the life and concerns of the people in this part of Africa. The highlight of Sunday was the celebration of Mass in the open air, which was organized by various song and percussion groups and was characterized by liturgical dances, as well as a magnificent display of color and spontaneity.

On the following two days time was made available to address the question of the different realities in the individual CBF regions and subregions. This was done by way of short reports by various participants, immediately followed by discussions. Participants were then able to tackle some open topics of the first two days and to proceed with some planning that had not gone beyond its initial stages. Among these topics were the information-flow within the structures of the CBF, questions regarding membership in the CBF and the clarification of the role of the coordinators in this regard, the cooperation between the coordinators and the General Secretary, the collaboration of the coordinators in project assessments for the funding agencies and the presence of the subregions and regions on the internet, especially on the CBF website. Finally, time was also scheduled for discussing general CBF concerns, such as the implementation of the priorities of the last Plenary Assembly, Africa as a regional priority, and the celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Dei Verbum* in 2005.

Eucharistic celebrations framed the entire meeting. The opening Mass was led by Archbishop Kaigama, who welcomed the participants on African soil and set the tone for the days to come. The work days began with a *lectio divina* in common, organized in turns by the participants themselves. And in the closing Mass the contributions of the CBF coordinators in the form of dances, songs and the proclaiming of the Bible readings in various languages, as well as the presence of the Nuntius in Kenya, Bishop Giovanni Tonucci, as chief celebrant, once again turned the attention of the participants outwards to the world, to the various local churches, from which the participants come, and to the CBF and its universal ecclesial function as a world-wide network for biblical pastoral ministry.

In sum, one could say that the meeting of the CBF coordinators was marked by result-oriented efforts, intensive exchange and contacts with one another and with African reality and a marvelous spirit of fellowship and solidarity. Particularly worthy of note are the concrete results of the meeting which will be of assistance to work in the subregions and regions, between the General Secretariat and the regions and subregions, and the identity-forming function of the meeting, which gave the participants new ideas and renewed energy for their work as office-holders in the Catholic Biblical Federation.

(Report: Alexander M. Schweitzer)



## **The Biblical Apostolate in Rwanda: Summary and Evaluation**

*On behalf of the Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM) Moïse Adeniran Adekambi, deputy director of BICAM, made a visit to Rwanda to get an overview of the situation of the biblical pastoral ministry in that country. In the following paragraphs we document excerpts from his report.*

### **The feature: Tumenye Bibiliya**

The field of the biblical apostolate in Rwanda is occupied today by the biblical school called “Tumenye Bibiliya”. We were impressed with the organization of this school, the involvement of the local bishop, the organization and the structuring of this pastoral experience. Its outcomes are no less impressive: 7,000 certificates granted since 1997, the



presence of the school in all the parishes, the “centrales” (a local term that means “secondary stations”) and basic communities, the publication of handbooks in the language of the country, the commitment and generosity of the animators, etc.

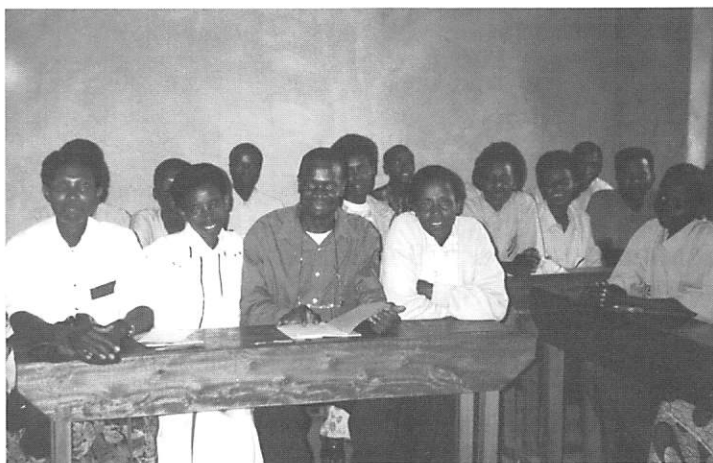
But its most eloquent fruit is that which has been produced in hearts. This is illustrated by the following few comments, made in response to our question posed to the people we met in Kabgayi: “What has Tumenye Bibiliya done for you?”

- “With Tumenye Bibiliya, we have learned to read the Bible – not like the Christians of some sects who don’t read it right, for example, their distorted reading of Revelation.”
- “The Bible enables those who study it to change their lives, their attitudes in their relations with their neighbors. To study the Bible is to study how to live.”
- “One who studies the Bible knows what is happening in the Church. One is on the inside, an insider in the Church.”
- “One who studies the Bible tries to live according to what the Bible says, teaches this to others, and keeps other people from going to the sects.”
- “One who studies the Bible becomes familiar with the history of salvation.”
- “The biblical school was born at a time when Rwanda was having many problems. The school has taught us to live this difficult post-war phase.”

We are happy to note that the method is beginning to spill over the borders of the diocese of Kabgayi. And, in our humble opinion, we should be making every effort to insure that the other dioceses and parishes of the country can also benefit from it.

### **The needs expressed and/or observed**

The first need is that related to the supply of Bibles itself. Many people complete the biblical school program without having been able to buy themselves a Bible. At the moment, a Bible costs about 6 US dollars, which is more than the participants can afford. It was one of these students who brought the problem to light: “Because of our poverty, we are unable to



buy a Bible, the most fundamental tool...” We had the number of people counted who didn’t own a Bible. It was 41 out of the 80 people present! Later we were to learn from the coordinators, and then from the local bishop, that the first who finished the program did have Bibles. But nowadays this is no longer possible. Every effort is being made to acquire a Bible for each basic community.

The second problem is that of the diocesan animators and coordinators. Most, if not all of them, have to go around on foot to the different Bible groups, and they are giving the courses on an honorary basis. The Vicar General of Kabgayi expressed his desire to be able to afford to offer them bicycles for their travels. To the amount this would cost would be added the cost of their formation, as is the case in the parish of Rugango. We were particularly struck by the insistence with which the parish priest himself was requesting to receive this formation, even if only by attending sessions of three to six months.

A third complaint concerns the lacking publication of popular and instructional manuals. In the same line, a request for literature related to the Bible was several times expressed.



Other needs that have been expressed are those related to computer equipment and academic collaboration.

### **Offers to the bishops and responses obtained**

We expressed to the bishops the desire to see the experience of Tumenye Bibiliya "developed, refined, established" and experiencing "a greater influence within the country as well as at the continental level". We are committed to foster this expansion, "provided there are personnel and structures that we can count on at the national and the diocesan levels". Our desire was made clear: "If we have one request to express it is the need felt at base level for a more systematic and organized biblical apostolate. Our most fervent desire in this area", we continued, "is that each of the dioceses that does not yet have a coordinator or a commission for the biblical apostolate will come to have one."

The second concern expressed to the bishops was that of the membership of the Episcopal Conference of Rwanda in the CBF, above all with reference to a person serving as contact person. Initiatives followed for the biblical pastoral ministry by the press and the re-establishment of the translation team. Note these last two suggestions were made in the absence of the bishops. After having listened to our concerns, the President of the Episcopal Conference asked the bishop responsible for the biblical apostolate to meet with us in order to find solutions to the problems raised. This meeting took place.

This was the last meeting of our visit and the results can rightly be viewed as its official fruits. In fact, the true fruits of our work are those men and women of all ages, students of "Tumenye Bibiliya" biblical school, whom we met and who showed us what a transformation the study of the Bible can bring to the life of an individual, a people and a society.

May the Lord bless the work of all those who are engaged in this apostolate, bishops, priests and laity.

## **ASIA / OCEANIA**

### **Sri Lanka: General Secretary Visits Bishops' Conference**

In December, 2003 the General Secretary of the CBF accepted an invitation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka to visit the country. At the meeting in the capital, Colombo, a number of the country's bishops took part, as did the superiors of the religious communities active in Sri Lanka. The Bishops' Conference joined the Catholic Biblical Federation already in 1972 and thus numbers as one of its oldest members.

The participants at the meeting reflected primarily on the role of the Bible and of biblical pastoral ministry against the background of the present situation in Sri Lanka. It became clear how urgent it is for priests and catechists to continue their training, what a central role in the life of the Sri Lanka Church the so-called "small Christian communities" play and how absolutely essential is the training and ongoing education of their leaders. Moreover, deep thought was given to the question of what a meaningful pastoral approach with the Bible should look like, so that biblical pastoral work can become at once a remedy for fundamental-



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ism and a point of departure for dialogue among Christians and with other religions. In the course of this exchange it became clear for one thing that the Bible already holds an important place in the lives of Christians, particularly in the "small Christian communities". After all, Bible groups and various Bible-reading methods, which insure a life-relevant use of the Bible, have long been practiced in many places. On the other hand, one could not overlook the challenges that still face the Church of Sri Lanka, both with regard to the training of its priests and faithful, and in light of the religious tensions and the necessary dialogue in the religious, as well as in the socio-political realms.

In a meeting between Msgr. Vianney Fernando, Bishop of the diocese of Kandy, and the CBF General Secretary the following concrete measures were agreed upon:

1. The Bible in Sinhalese, the language of the majority of the inhabitants of Sri Lanka, should finally be made available at an affordable price. The present cost is unaffordable for many Sinhalese-speaking Christians.
2. In the year 2004 a Bible Sunday or a Bible Weekend should be established, first of all in the diocese of Kandy; later, this event should serve as a model for other dioceses of Sri Lanka.
3. A pastoral commentary on the Sinhalese Bible should be written, taking into account the cultural and socio-political context of Sri Lanka. This should first be published separately and later, with a planned new edition of the Bible, together with the biblical text as a pastoral Bible.
4. The Bible Study Resources Centre in Kandy (see below), an Associate Member of the CBF, should continue to be expanded. The mid-term goal is to create similar centers in other dioceses of Sri Lanka and a countrywide network.

So the meeting with the bishops and religious superiors contributed not only to increasing an awareness of the importance of responsible biblical apostolate ministry but also produced concrete results.

*(Report: Alexander M. Schweitzer)*

### **Education, the only antidote to fundamentalism – the Bible Study Resources Centre in Kandy**

An Associate Member of the CBF, the Bible Study Resources Centre in Kandy, is also engaged in the battle against Christian fundamentalism. It does this by giving interested Christians – above all those in leadership roles – ready access to various materials on the Bible and on biblical pastoral ministry and it also creates the framework of conditions for their use. The center keeps on store among other things various Bible editions, biblical reference works, Bible atlases, scientific and pastoral commentaries, Bible concordances, posters, software for Bible studies, audio and video tapes, slides and films. At the present time five computers are available at the center for on-the-spot use of Bible software and in addition to these video-recorders and a presentation room for training courses.



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All the materials can also be hired out. An Internet Bible Course in Sinhalese was launched a few weeks ago, and a similar course in Tamil is in preparation, in collaboration with the coordinator of the CBF South Asian subregion. In addition, the center will offer training sessions for groups upon request.

A central preoccupation of the Bible Study Resources Centre is the ongoing education of people in positions of responsibility in the Church. Beyond these it appeals to all interested Christians and even non-Christians as well. So it numbers among its regular customers not only professors and seminarians of the National Catholic Seminary located nearby, but also representatives of the "small Christian communities." As the first and thus far the only center of its kind in Sri Lanka, the Bible Study Resources Centre also appeals to interested Christians from the whole country. And in recent months the first non-Christians have begun to find their way into the Center.

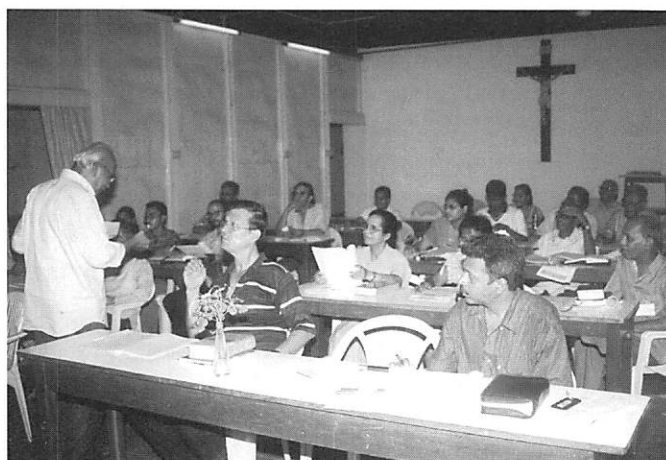
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### India: Silver Jubilee of the Catholic Bible Institute in Mumbai

The Catholic Bible Institute (CBI) in Mumbai, also popularly known as the "Bible College", is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. A number of special courses have been announced to celebrate this event. Among these were four week-long residential courses given by Fr. Raja, sj, a former member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, and by the staff of the Institute during the month of May at Vinayalaya, Andheri, on the Kingdom of God, the Gospels, Acts and Revelation, and the Letters of the New Testament. A total of 101 students from all over India participated. Richly nourished with excellent teachings and filled with joy, they returned to their various home dioceses. Besides three lectures daily and a group-sharing, the participants had a truly beautiful experience of community living and praying together (morning praise, noon Eucharist, and evening holy hour), as also of creative bibliodrama at nights. To help the participants prepare their own presentations, a group of village catechists led by Fr. Sadhu Shilananda, sj, were invited from Patna, and they spent a few nights putting on very down-to-earth and socially relevant biblical skits in Bhojpuri/Hindi. Other activities which are being prepared to celebrate the Silver Jubilee are a Correspondence Course in the Hindi and Konkani languages, several weekend biblical retreats and a training course for parish lectors.

The CBI was founded in 1979. Its first Director was Fr. Fio Mascarenhas, sj, who was succeeded by Fr. Rufus Pereira. The present Director, Dr. Renu Rita Silvano, ocv, who later earned a doctorate in theology from Rome's Angelicum University, was a member of the first graduating class 1979/80. For the first several years after CBI's foundation, the regular course on the whole Bible consisted of a ten-months residential program.

Since 1995, in order to make it possible for more lay students to attend, the course has been modified to a more intensive two months live-in program, held twice every year. Students attend six classes daily from Monday to Saturday. Two oral exams, one each on Old Testament and New Testament, and two papers on biblical themes ensure the quality of the certificate. Community life includes the daily Eucharist, evening prayer with sharing, recreation, etc. Past students from many dioceses of India, as well as from other countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, Singapore, Holland, Great Britain, Mauritius





and the USA, are now rendering excellent service to the Church in their respective areas, sharing God's Word in parishes, Small Christian Communities, prayer groups, and wherever they are called. Other shorter seminars and weekend biblical retreats have also been organized for a large number of lay people.

The Institute's programs draw their inspiration from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) and the Pastoral Constitution on "The Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*). The objective is to form Catholic laity (priests and religious sometimes attend) on two levels: on the personal level, that they may grow in authentic discipleship – *If you make my word your home, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (Jn 8:31); and on the service level, that they be equipped for a Catholic interpretation of the Word of God – *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ* (Eph 4:12f).

The Institute is able to offer its various courses free of charge due to the great generosity of many benefactors from India and abroad. The various services of the Institute rely much on the prayer-support of a large number of well-wishers. Readers of this Bulletin, too, are kindly requested to pray for the Institute.

(Report: Renu Rita Silvano, ocv)

□

### **The Philippines: Third Arnoldus Youth Bible Camp Held in Cebu City**

From May 17 to 21, 2004 the Third Arnoldus Youth Bible Camp (YBC) was held in the beautiful city of Cebu at the St. Arnold Janssen Parish Church in Alumnos, Basak. The theme of the YBC was "Word of God: Source of Peace and Hope for the Youth". It was convoked and celebrated as an interprovincial and inter-Arnoldus family event, meaning nationwide. Initiated by the Philippines Central Province of the Missionaries of the Divine Word (SVD), the Divine Word Biblical Center acted as the Secretariat and organizing body.

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The YBC aims to build youth fellowship centered on the Bible among Arnoldus youth leaders and to help them be nourished by the Word of God. It also intends to form youth leaders become youth biblical animators and set up networking among the Arnoldus youth biblical animators in the SVD and SSpS (Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters) Philippine provinces. The camp was a five-day creative journey with the Word through activities, conferences, celebrations, dialogue, sharing, reflection and quiet times. As the participants relive the history of the past and learn the story of our salvation, they discover the continuing presence of God within themselves in their own situations.

Although a typhoon prevented some potential participants from coming and posed problems for the others in getting to the venue resulting in a delay in the program, it was possible to start the opening ceremonies on the day planned with a creative Bible Enthronement from four corners. The Sacred Scriptures remained enthroned throughout the duration of the Bible Camp and all the activities therein revolved around this core.

On the second day Fr. Magdaleno Fabiosa, svd, the Provincial Superior of the Southern Province gave the keynote conference with the theme of the YBC: "Word of God: Source of Peace and Hope for the Youth" during the whole morning. He challenged the participants with his talk entitled: "How will the Word of God be the source of peace and hope for the youth?" The conference included topics such as: God's dream, human sin and its consequences, God's intervention in the Old and New Testaments, God's unconditional love, listening to the Word of God, the effects of living the Word of God... the Word of



God as the source of peace and hope for the young. After the talk and discussions there was an Encounter with the Word and, in the evening, participants met for a cultural night.



The program for the third day contained an Exodus Walk and a city tour as well as a bibliodrama experience "Dancing the Word of God". One of the highlights of the meeting was the talk "Healing through the Word of God" given by Fr. Arlo Yap, svd, which took place on the fourth and final day. The talk centered on forgiveness and letting go of unpleasant memories (e.g. a broken home) and was very well received by the youth who felt liberated when they experienced the healing of their woundedness through the Word of God. The camp ended with a final liturgy and the closing ceremonies. A Sinulog dance (a religious indigenous dance of the people from Cebu) was performed for the group by the parishioners of Basak.

The YBC was a daring "national" project which at first encountered many problems and reservations. The participants arrived in a metropolitan city, yet the St. Arnold parish on reclaimed ground in a swamp area is a place where humility is still a lived virtue. The warmth and hospitality of the parishioners and their hunger for the Word of God could be conspicuously felt. The parish youth was present with their rising excitement to join the event and the compound was alive with parishioners coming to their church for the daily celebrations of the Word and the Eucharist, or simply to the parish office or the feeding and health centre. At the end of the Bible Camp participants and organizers were able to state that the YBC had exceeded all expectations.

*(Report: Fr. Dominador O. Ramos, svd)*







## Newsflash

### Africa

- ❑ The **Catholic Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM)** has moved its offices from Nairobi, Kenya and relocated to Accra, Ghana, with effect of 1st July, 2004. New BICAM address: BICAM, SECAM Secretariat, P.O. Box 9156 KA, 4 Senchi Str., Airport Residential Area, Accra, Ghana. E-mail: [bicam@internetghana.com](mailto:bicam@internetghana.com) and [bicam@africaonline.com.gh](mailto:bicam@africaonline.com.gh); BICAM website remains the same: <http://www.bicam-cebam.org>
- ❑ **Sr. Adenike Regina Oka, ssma**, is the new national promoter of the Catholic Biblical Apostolate in Nigeria.

### Asia/Oceania

- ❑ **Fr. Joseph Fung** became the new President of the United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association (UCCBA), Hong Kong, effective January, 2004.
- ❑ **Cecilia Chui**, CBF subregional coordinator for Northeast Asia, now serves as liaison/secretary of the Biblical Servicing Centre of the United Chinese Catholic Biblical Association (UCCBA), Hong Kong.
- ❑ **Fr. A. Peter Abir**, CBF subregional coordinator for South Asia, has transferred to the Tamilnadu Biblical, Liturgical and Catechetical Centre (TNBCLC) at Tindivanam, India and now serves as their Director.
- ❑ The **Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate (ECBA)** in the Philippines celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in July, 2004.

### Americas

- ❑ The **Centro de Estudos Bíblicos (CEBI)** in Brazil, an ecumenical organization for the promotion of Bible studies and biblical projects, celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in July, 2004.

### Europe

- ❑ **Fr. Gérard Billon**, Director of Service Biblique Evangile et Vie in Paris, France has succeeded Fr Joseph Stricher as CBF subregional coordinator for Southern and Western Europe. Fr Stricher had to give up his office for health reasons.
- ❑ **Fr. Eric Englert, osa**, took up office as President of the German funding agency, Missio Munich, on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2004, hereby succeeding Prelate Dr Konrad Lachenmayr who held this office for the last twelve years. Prior to his new post, Fr Englert (51) was Provincial Superior of the German Province of the Augustinians for twelve years.
- ❑ **Fr. Bernd Klaschka (57)** is the new Director of the German funding agency for Latin America, ADVENIAT, in Essen, hereby succeeding Prelate Dieter Spelthahn (65) who held this office for fifteen years. Prior to his new post, Fr Klaschka spent eleven years in Mexico.
- ❑ **Bishop Vincenzo Paglia**, CBF President, has been appointed Chairman of the Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue of the Italian Bishops' Conference.
- ❑ **Fr. Tim Lenchak, svd**, took over as new Rector of the Collegio del Verbo Divino (Divine Word Missionaries) in Rome on 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2004. His successor as SVD biblical coordinator on the generalate level is Fr. Guido Tisera, svd, from Indonesia.
- ❑ **Fr. Wim Wijtten, svd**, will be leaving the Pontificio Collegio San Pietro Apostolo as he has been assigned to Leuven, Belgium, as of 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2004.
- ❑ **Fr. Tomás Langerica, svd**, will be giving up his position as Director of the Publishing House Editorial Verbo Divino in Estella, Spain after more than twenty years as he has now been appointed Business Management Advisor for the Spanish Province of the Divine Word Missionaries. Successor to the position of Director of the Publishing House Editorial Verbo Divino in Estella is **Fr. Adolfo del Valle, svd**, previous Business Management Advisor for the Spanish Province of the Divine Word Missionaries. ❑



## In memory 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).

Bishop Vincenzo Paglia, CBF President, writes in his letter of condolence to the Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn:

*"Deeply saddened we learn of the death of your predecessor to the office of Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Franz König. As one of the founding fathers of the Catholic Biblical Federation and as its first President (from 1972 to 1978) Cardinal König remains connected to the CBF in a very special way.*

*The meeting I had with him last year remains very vivid in my memory: his whole personality was an embodiment of the spiritual and pastoral momentum stemming from the Second Vatican Council. Also after the elapse of his term of office as President he remained linked to the CBF showing great interest in its further concerns and development. This was the reason for his consent – Deo volente – to attend the Congress organized by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity together with the Catholic Biblical Federation on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Dei Verbum which will take place in Rome in September 2005. He was to be the guest speaker at the solemn opening. God's Will has chosen otherwise and He has now called His faithful servant home. R.I.P.*

*Cardinal König's memory will remain unextinguished in the Catholic Biblical Federation and will be held in honour now and in future. May our activities help to bring to fruition his desire for the Word of God to find an ever more firmly rooted place in people's hearts."*

*In the following pages we publish a few excerpts from the opening talk given by Cardinal König at the Plenary Assembly of the CBF in Malta under the title "Interpreting Life". Reading this text today we can only marvel at its ongoing relevancy. The clarity of his assessment of the situation in society and in the Church and the perspectives Cardinal König draws from this analysis for the biblical pastoral ministry are every bit as valid today as they were 25 years ago.*

### To Interpret Life

Cardinal Franz König †

The road ahead of us is conditioned by several factors. Pope Paul VI reminded us in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that we must remain faithful "both to the message, whose servants we are, and to the people to whom we must transmit it living and intact" (EN 4)

#### Faithful to the message

What does faithfulness to the message and faithfulness to the people imply? We recognize that the Word of God contained in Scripture (*Dei Verbum* 24) is the inspired written proclamation of communities witnessing to their experience of God actively involved with them in working out their total destiny. Not only did God communicate His reconciling summons and unifying power through the very events of their history (*Dei Verbum* 2), but He did so in the context of a Covenant which remains valid for all generations. What He did *then*, He promises to accomplish also *now*.

This is one of the distinguishing elements of the Judeo-Christian revelation, and our faithfulness to the entire scriptural message must be interpreted in this historical perspective.



### Faithful to the people

The second factor of evangelization has reference to our faithfulness to the people to whom we address that message. Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of the people with whom we search for the contemporary meaning and expression of that message. Because it is the whole People of God who participate in a “remarkable common effort” (*Dei Verbum* 10) in this process. Moreover, they do so from the standpoint of their particular cultures and historical circumstances. These elements vary from country to country, and from generation to generation. It is valid to say then, that just as there is a hierarchy of individual truths within the inner unity of Christianity (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 11), which allows for an historical variety of doctrinal emphasis, so there exists also a hierarchy of priorities, issues and questions to which the evangelizing Church must address itself. These questions, which vary from one moment of history to another, are made manifest by the “signs of the times” (Mt 16:3).

### Cultural alienation

It is in this perspective that we can best understand Pope Paul’s warning that “the split between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 20).

The questions we are addressing to ourselves will have meaning for today’s evangelization of modern society to the degree that they correspond to these various factors, namely: To our faithfulness to the revealed witness of God’s role in mankind’s present history; to our faithfulness to the people with whom we are searching for contemporary signs of God actually promoting His Kingdom; and to our faithfulness and respect for the cultural framework in which this two-fold process is taking place.

### Solidarity

Such conditions place changing demands on us as evangelizers. We certainly cannot content ourselves with the question: How can we translate and distribute more Bibles? Nor dare we even limit ourselves to a search for the most effective methods of popularizing the findings of exegetical research. The availability and suitability of the biblical text is without question a primary requirement. Similarly, the objectivity and relevant explanation of the original inspired message must be communicated as accurately as possible. But an additional element is equally essential for an authentic announcement of the Word.

## 35 Years of CBF



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 this encounter, these friends from all parts of the world showed solidarity with us, Hong Kong people, as we were about to enter a new phase of life under a new political dispensation.

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.

Cecilia Chui, subregional coordinator of Northeast Asia



Pope Paul said soberly: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 41). Evangelizers, or better, the evangelizing community witnesses to God's saving will and healing presence within their society by sharing the life and destiny of those around them and by their solidarity with movements promoting the integral liberation and development of that people. There is one world history in which we are all involved. There is a single universal human community of which we are all members. If these are not shaped by the Gospel, we have failed in our mission! God's unequivocal "YES" (2 Cor 1:19–20) to the common destiny of all of his children has been definitively proclaimed in Jesus Christ, "the first among many brothers" (Rm 8:29). If we deviate from the proclamation of this unifying hope (Jn 11:52) or fail to witness to it by a contradictory lifestyle or by lack of commitment in solidarity with our society, we betray the radical fraternity revealed in Jesus Christ.

### **Clarifying our priorities**

Under these circumstances we are obliged to clarify our evangelizing priorities, since these will determine in practice how our faithfulness to the Gospel and our faithfulness to the people will express themselves. The fact is evident that neither church membership nor religious piety and sacramental practice can be considered adequate objectives for our evangelization task.

The central kerygma of Christ's own proclamation encompassed much more, namely, the Kingdom, which he always described in terms of human relationships and mutual responsibility. Jesus announced this reality in uncompromising terms: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and to announce that the time has come to proclaim the Lord's year of favour* (Lk 4:18-19).

How is this proclamation to be translated into our planning, our methods and our cultural-historical perspective? Does our understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven include a restructuring of society according to the requirements of the jubilee year of the Lord, which Christ declared is not to become a permanent condition? Those stipulations which we find in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus require the emancipation of all the people. They prescribe a radically conditioned ownership of property and goods and a responsible use of natural resources. These requirements are complemented by a mutual sharing of God's truth and love within the whole community.

### **The Gospel today**

Can our proclamation of these biblical themes have any significance apart from condemning the de facto exploitation and suffering of today's People of God? For example, two-thirds of the world's population is being dehumanized daily by hunger and poverty. Are they excluded by some divine decree from participation in the world's resources, or is this simply due to human selfishness? Historians assure us that we are witnessing the greatest migration of peoples in human history, victims of political decisions and of the struggle for power. And what echo is heard in our Gospel message from the muffled cry for prison reform, the rights of women in society and in the Church? What plea is voiced for the sacredness of unborn life and for the priority of peace over war in national budgets? This is the vocabulary for a dynamic equivalent translation of the Gospel today in very modern language!





Cardinal Franz König was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1905, the eldest son of a family of farmers in Warth (diocese of St. Pölten) in Austria. After studying philosophy and theology, as well as the ancient Persian religion and language, he received his doctoral degree in philosophy in Rome in 1930 and his doctorate in theology in 1936. In 1933 he was ordained a priest. Thereafter he served as chaplain in his home diocese. In 1945 König qualified as a university lecturer in religious science and Old Testament.



In 1952 Franz König became bishop of St. Pölten and in 1956, of Vienna. He was named a Cardinal in 1958. 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.

At the time of his death, König was described by Pope John Paul II as "a man of peace". 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").



## Bertolt Brecht – A Bridge to Understanding the Bible in Argentina

*As a reaction to the editorial of our last issue, we received the following reader's letter:*

In the early 1970s – in Argentina a military dictatorship had just fallen – I was invited to an evening with friends. When the host, an Argentinian poet, learned that I was from Germany and was also a theology student, he observed in an aggressive-overbearing tone that Bertolt Brecht had a special place in his library: "But you, coming as you do from capitalistic Germany, and a seminararian as well, certainly wouldn't know him."

"Lord, let me keep my composure", I thought to myself. "On the contrary. We are not such fanatics as that. Brecht is even obligatory reading in German schools", I replied.

A stunned silence.

Moreover, it would be well for him to follow the example of Brecht, I continued, for he, too, was anything but a fanatic. Although he was a "Marxist", the Bible was for him a treasure trove. The poet looked at me even more astonished.

"Just compare, for example, 'The Good Woman of Sechuan' with Genesis 18 or 'The Trial of Lucullus' with the final judgment scene of Matt 25. Or the 'Caucasian Chalk Circle' with the judgment of Solomon in 1 Kings 3". Our discussion continued in this way for the whole evening, and at the end he gave me two of his unpublished poems as a present.

When years later I was teaching Old Testament on the Faculty of Verbo Divino in Buenos Aires I thought back to that evening. Attending my lectures were also a number of literature students who had to take part, because theology was obligatory, but who really had no interest in the Bible at all. Brecht always offered me a good opportunity in such situations to start up a discussion with these students. The very distancing effect of Brecht made the interpretation of the texts interesting in comparison with the Bible. When we took up the "Caucasian Chalk Circle", for example, the students got into a heated discussion on whether the strongest bonds were those of blood or those of love. For here in Argentina Roman law is more marked than in Germany. This is why the adoption laws are also so grotesque, in the sense that children carried to full term, but unwanted, are widely subject to underhanded commercial trafficking. There were also many, and widely differing opinions over the comparison of Brecht's "The Trial of Lucullus" with Matt 25:35ff.

Years later, still during the military era, we staged the "Trial of Lucullus" in a parish setting. I got a period of involuntary "vacation" out of this, very much according to the famous saying of the rabbit: "Of course I'm not afraid of anything, but I do know how to run!"

So I enjoy looking back to this time. Brecht constituted a bridge, so to speak, to the Bible. I wonder if this ever would have occurred to him? ■

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# International Congress "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church" Rome, September 13 – 17, 2005

## Preliminary Program

### Tuesday, Sept. 13

#### *Solemn opening*

- Service of the Word (Inthronization of the Bible)

#### *Theological keynote address (by Card. Kasper)*

- "Dei Verbum Audiens et Proclamans": The Word of God Reverently Heard and Proclaimed with Faith

#### *Opening of the exhibition*

### Wednesday, Sept. 14

#### *Motto: "40 Years of Dei Verbum"*

#### *Historical keynote address*

- "40 Years of Dei Verbum. From Dei Verbum to Novo Millennio Ineunte": The reception process in view of the change of paradigm

#### *Reports and discussions in four continental groups*

- The implementation of DV on the ... continent

#### *Panel & discussion in thematic groups*

- Exegetical versus Fundamentalistic Approach to the Bible – The contribution of exegesis to the pastoral ministry
- Reading the Bible as Word of God – prayerful reading rediscovered
- Reading the Bible in Context – Word of God and inculturation

### Thursday, Sept. 15

#### *Motto: "The Word of God and the Church"*

#### *Pastoral keynote address*

- The Centrality of the Word of God in the Life of the Church – Biblical animation of the entire pastoral ministry

#### *Panel & discussion in plenum*

- Sacred Scripture and Christian Unity

#### *Panel & discussion in thematic groups*

- Sacred Scripture and Catechesis
- Sacred Scripture and Liturgy
- Sacred Scripture and Family
- Bible and Mass Media

#### *Forum*

- Creative Ways of Proclaiming the Word

### Friday, Sept. 16

#### *Motto: "The Word of God in the World of Today"*

#### *Panel & discussion in plenum*

- The Bible: Sacred Scripture for Jews and Christians

#### *Panel & discussion in thematic groups: The Word of God and Interreligious Dialogue*

- The Word of God in the dialogue with Islam
- The Word of God in the dialogue with Hinduism
- The Word of God in the dialogue with Buddhism
- The Word of God in the dialogue with new religious movements

#### *Panel & discussion in plenum*

- Bible and Justice & Peace

#### *Panel & discussion in plenum*

- Bible and Culture

### Saturday, Sept. 17

#### *Visit of the Tombs of Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul I*

#### *Papal Audience*

#### *Concluding Eucharistic Celebration*

*Bishops and representatives of Bishops' Conferences, delegates from CBF member organizations, representatives from groups involved in biblical pastoral ministry and special guests from partner organizations and other churches and ecclesial communities will participate in the Congress.*

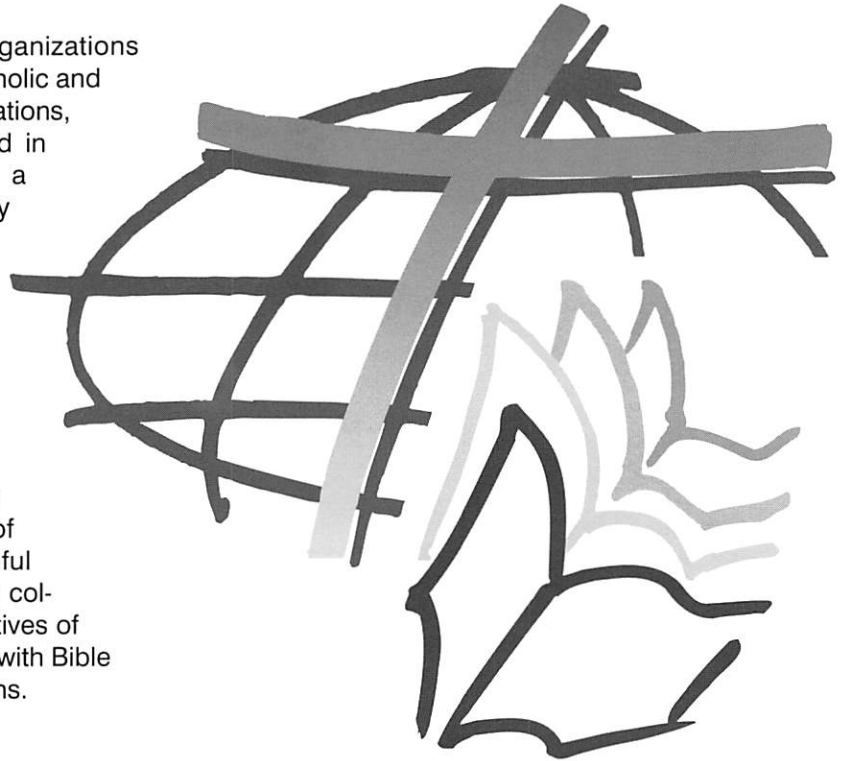
### Special thanks go to the following persons and institutions for their photos:

Moïse Adeniran Adekambi: 23; Church in Need: 17; David Feldkämper: 34; Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation, Pfalz: 7; Lucien Legrand, mep: 9; Miller Milloy: 8; Paul Puthanangady: 10; Dominador O. Ramos, svd: 28; stephanscom.at/Archbishopric Vienna: 33; all other photos: CBF archives.

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to the ministry of the Word of God. At the present time, the CBF membership includes 91 full members and 227 associate members coming from a total of 126 countries.

The activities of these organizations include the preparation of Catholic and interconfessional Bible translations, the propagation of Bibles and in general the promotion of a deeper understanding of Holy Scripture.

The CBF promotes the biblical pastoral activities of these organizations, provides a forum for the world-wide sharing of experiences in this field, searches for new ways of bringing the joy of God's Word to the faithful throughout the world. It seeks collaboration with the representatives of biblical scholarship as well as with Bible Societies of various confessions.



In particular, the CBF works towards the promotion of the reading of the Bible within the context of concrete life situations and the training of ministers of the Word in this direction.

At the beginning of the third millennium Holy Scripture can be viewed as the great textbook of humanity. Especially in times like this the reading of the Bible not only helps the Christian community to grow in faith and love, but it can and should also offer to the whole world those words of brotherhood and of human wisdom that it so desperately needs. This is the great challenge that the Catholic Biblical Federation sets for itself.

**Vincenzo Paglia, Bishop of Terni-Narni-Amelia, Italy, President of the CBF**