

## CHAT WITH CANADIAN FRIENDS OF THE SCHOOL (CFEB) NOV 2017

Fr. Olivier-Thomas Venard o.p., vice-director,  
with/for  
Fr. Jean Jacques Pérennès o .p., director  
*École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem.*

Thank you for inviting me tonight, I am thrilled to be with you, and I am extending special greetings from Fr. Jean Jacques Pérennès our director to fr. Darren Dias and all the board of the Canadian Friends of the *École biblique*. Fr. Jean Jacques had to be at the École these days, for the formal opening of our academic year (with fr. Timothy Radcliffe as our keynote speaker this year).

### Allow me to begin by mentioning several dear faces I could remember

which enriched our community in Jerusalem in recent years. You know some of them very well.

#### Students and Researchers who were sponsored by the *Canadian Friends Scholarships*:

The late **Wei Wang**, whose stay in Jerusalem 2012 was graced with his baptism, is certainly with us tonight in spirit!

**Sr Marie de Lovinfosse**, from 2014 to 2017, has been a smiling reminder of the Canadian Friends for three years at the École. She sent me an email 2 days ago explaining that she could not make it tonight because she will be taking her final exams for the doctorate in a few days, but sends her love to everybody.

**Agnes Choi** (2008), **Béatrice Bérubé** (2005) **Murray Watson** (2004-2005) who is member of your Board of Directors, **Aurélie Caldwell** (student in 2004), whose doctoral dissertation was published in our series *Etudes bibliques...*

#### Let us list also researchers whose stays were supported by you:

**Michael Brooks Johnson** (2016), **Derek Suderman** (2016), Dr. **Ronald Charles** (2015 and 2016), Dr. **Daniel Machiela** (2015), **Jordan Ryan** (2015), **Daniel Fischer** (2014), **Dr. Jeremy Penner** (2013), **Dr. Christian Eberhart** (2013) and **Pierre-Marin Boucher** (2008-2009).

#### Last but certainly not least, two Canadian senior scholars

Who are pretty much in touch with the École every year : Fr. **Michel Gourgues** and Rev. **Marc Girard**. Both are important contributors to our programme *The Bible in Its Traditions* — Michel has prepared all three *Pastoral Letters*, and Marc is finishing the first book of the *Psalter*. (Maybe the Canadian Friends could envisage at some stage to fund editors who will turn these online contributions on bibletraditions.org into printed books in our series at Peeters Publishing House?).

Another tremendous Canadian collaborator is Jean Jacques Lavoie, and we are in touch with Yvan Mathieu, Andrea Spatafora, Jean Doutre...

I wanted to cite actual people because of your name “Canadian Friends of the École biblique” — thank you for these friends that you sent to us — and because “the only true wealth is mankind” (Jean Bodin).

Speaking of wealth...

## ... What is the Present State of the École?

I will answer in 6 points.

1- EBAF is making a great effort to renew its **faculty and staff**, an effort made urgent by the retirement of 6 seniors of weighty scholarship (Jerry Murphy-O'Connor, Étienne Nodet, etc.). Despite the arrival of six professors, this effort must be continued (an archaeologist, assyriologist, and librarian are needed). The faculty is increasingly international, which is both an enrichment and a challenge. We are about 20 brothers, a few of them retired and a few of them students, from 12 different nationalities! While the French touch has to be maintained as our specificity in the Jerusalem environment, English has really become the second language for courses, seminars and public lectures.

2- We also have to **find a new audience**. The traditional public (young priests or nuns specializing in biblical studies) is dwindling. We have decided to become gradually a « doctoral school », so that the École remains a place of excellence for research interconnected with as many other doctoral schools as possible.

The Research Project *The Bible in Its Traditions* helps a lot in attracting new researchers from the younger generation through prestigious partnerships it has established in Paris (ENS, EPHE, École Nationale des Chartes, CSEM), etc. Little by little, Reception history has become a new scientific activity at the Ecole which must be developed alongside hard-core biblical studies, and this is an interesting new challenge.

One way of doing it is to “store” as precisely as possible the best results of our “forefathers” in *The Bible in its Traditions* database. Dr (in one week) Maureen Attali, an excellent historian from La Sorbonne, did a tremendous work in turning all the *Guide of the Holy Land* of Jerry Murphy-O'Connor into systematic notes along the Bible in our database (we dream of turning it, with photos, into a nice digital app for visitors and pilgrims). (Creating an excellent digital app costs about 30 000 euros.) And I hope to have found “la perle rare”, a brilliant young Semitist from the Ecole Normale Supérieure, to work in 2018-2019 on the Puech corpus, i.e., to inventory all the Qumran biblical variants that Émile Puech has been studying and noting his tens of articles and books in textual-critical notes alongside the Scriptures in our database. Émile has agreed to help us and I have already spent some hours with him working through his (long!) bibliography. For such stays of researchers we need funding (about 12 000 euros per academic year).

We are also beginning to make better use of the “physical” potential of the École by organizing summer schools on the Bible and archeology outside the academic year. (The 1st one in partnership with Domuni last July was a huge success, and next June we will have another one with Boston College, and we are planning a session on Qumran in 2019.)

3- We are still very grateful for your help in supporting the library, and the school also needs to continue **modernizing its infrastructure** (accommodation, IT, new facilities in the library such as subscriptions to digital journals, a decent cafeteria point, at some stage we will have to build new storage, etc.). And note that once we have the money, making things happen takes more time and energy in the Middle East than elsewhere!

4- Our modernization process also concerns our **publications**: thanks be to God we were eventually able to change our publishing house, after the accelerated decline of Gabalda. With Paul and Luc Peeters, we are in much better hands: the *Revue biblique* is online, we are present at the *SBL*, we launched a new subseries of the *Revue biblique* devoted to archaeological publications, the prestigious series *The Bible in Its Traditions* resuming the tradition of the glossa, and so on.

The **new website of the École** which sends a newsletter per month, the **blog of *The Bible in Its Traditions*** (one newsletter every other month), **PRIXM** (popular newsletter derived from *The Bible in Its Traditions* distributed to about 140000 subscribers every Sunday)... all this contributes to make the École better known, but the effort must continue. (We would like to launch international versions of PRIXM, and have already prepared much material especially to launch an English version, but we need some more funding before starting.)

5- These developments require **funds** which are increasingly difficult to find, especially because the small but real donations we got from the French Republic have declined (due to the diminution of the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and suppression of the traditional “réserve parlementaire”, money which a few MPs or senators triggered by friends of the École did use to help us.) The traditional contributions of the Associations of Friends (France, Canada, the US) are essential but do not suffice.

With the help of specialists, we have developed a strategic plan to increase sponsorships and patronages, but this will only start when we have the right person living with us who can be the interlocutor of the specialists when they launch a campaign.

6- I want to end with a very positive note. Despite its limited resources and fragility, the **École biblique remains a strong reference point** because of its stability in a quite unstable region, because of its flagship products (the Jerusalem Bible in the past, *The Bible in Its Traditions* today, the photothèque, the potential for archaeological excavations “at home” in our very own garden) and also because of the atmosphere of fraternity prevailing in the house which attracts international new young researchers to the Ecole.

Thank you for your attention, please ask any question you wish and invite yourself in Jerusalem. You be most welcome to visit our dear École!