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Catholic Biblical Association no longer accepting grant requests

by Jerry Filteau

WASHINGTON -- A brief notice in bold on its Web page for grants says it all: "The Catholic Biblical Association sincerely regrets that, owing to financial restraints beyond its control, it has to suspend any new grants as of now. We hope in the near future to reinstate these grants, which are an important part of our work."

Since 2008, when the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops quit giving the Catholic Biblical Association of America a 25 percent share of royalties for the New American Bible (*NCR*, Aug. 20), the association has been forced to reduce its grants for scholarship and research drastically. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine board, which administers the copyright on the New American Bible, consists of the bishops who form the Administrative Committee of the bishops' conference.

The 25 percent share for the biblical association was based on a 1963 agreement and had been in effect since the New American Bible was first published in 1970.

Since 2003, the association had used royalty income to provide more than \$40,000 a year to assist travel and living expenses for a visiting professor at each of the world's two papally chartered biblical institutes, the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and the École Biblique in Jerusalem.

In 2010 there were no such grants.

The professorship grants began in 1969, and among early beneficiaries were such world-renowned scholars as Frs. Bruce Vawter, Raymond E. Brown and Carroll Stuhlmueller. The full list is available on the association's Web site at cba.cua.edu/grants.cfm.

The association began granting full scholarships to doctoral students in biblical studies in 1984. From 2000 to 2008, the association's scholarship grants averaged about \$98,000 a year. In 2009 that dropped to \$53,730, and in 2010 it was \$38,400. The scholarships typically cover three to four years of graduate study, including a living stipend as well as full tuition.

The association's Web site shows its last scholarship at The Catholic University of America in Washington ended in 2007; at Indiana's University of Notre Dame in 2009; and at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif., this year. The only one still pending is at Fordham University in New York, where Catherine E. Petranj is studying under a scholarship that began in 2007.

Memorial stipends to help with living costs of other graduate students in biblical studies, initiated in 1987, have helped more than 75 students. Currently students who had initially received a stipend prior to the royalty cutoff are eligible for renewal; no new applicants are being considered.

The association had been offering up to two fellowships a year for members engaged in postdoctoral research projects; the last such fellowship awards were given for the 2008-2009 academic year.

The biblical association had been helping to fund archeological digs that could help shed new light on biblical times, but the last of those were for two digs in Syria -- \$12,000 for Tell Qarqur and \$9,000 for Tell Mozan -- in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2009.

Benedictine Fr. Joseph Jensen, the association's executive secretary, said when the royalties were cut off, the association continued to honor its then-current grant commitments, even though in fiscal 2009 it had to run up a significant deficit in order to do so.

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That year it gave out nearly \$208,000 in total grants and had a budget deficit of about \$175,000.

In the fiscal year that just ended this June, grants were down by two-thirds -- to \$67,497 -- and the association managed to bring in a more balanced budget with income exceeding expenses by about \$33,000.

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