



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
WORLD CATHOLIC FEDERATION FOR THE BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE**

Monday, 7 April 1986

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. It is a pleasure to welcome to the Vatican the members of the Executive Committee of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate. Coming as you do from many different countries, you and your colleagues are able to make a significant contribution to the Church's mission of evangelization. You help the Church to respond faithfully to the mandate of our Risen Saviour: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you".

2. The 1985 Synod of Bishops, in confirming, celebrating and giving fresh impetus to the achievements of the Second Vatican Council, directed particular attention to the centrality of the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church. The Final Report of the Synod stated that the Dogmatic Constitution "Dei Verbum" had been too "neglected" in the twenty years following the Council, and it deserved a more profound consideration and implementation. May I suggest, dear friends in Christ, that you can be of special assistance in efforts aimed at responding to this challenge.

In addition to an attentive re-reading of "Dei Verbum", there is also a great need for the solid formation of ministers of the word of God, of all who teach and preach the Gospel of salvation. As the Synod participants said in the Final Report: "Evangelization is the first duty not only of the Bishops but also of priests and deacons, indeed, of all Christians" .

3. How do we prepare others to collaborate in the Church's work of catechises and evangelization? Certainly we must begin by inculcating a reverential love for the word of God: for

the Incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the inspired word contained in the Sacred Scriptures. We must foster a love which is firmly rooted in faith, which believes, with Saint Paul, that God's word "is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified".

Ministers of God's word – priests, deacons, catechists and other lay people – should be immersed in the Scriptures through constant reading and diligent study, accompanied by prayer. As far as possible, they should be acquainted with the insights of modern biblical scholarship. Attention must be given to the literary forms of the various biblical books in order to determine the intention of the sacred writers. And it is most helpful, at times crucial, to be aware of the personal situation of the biblical writer, to the circumstances of culture, time, language and so forth which influenced the way the message was presented.

At the same time, an adequate formation for the biblical apostolate directs attention to the unity of all the books of the Bible and takes into account the living Tradition of the Church. In this way, it is possible to avoid a narrow fundamentalism which distorts the whole truth and also possible to resist the temptation to place one's personal interpretation above or even in opposition to the authentic interpretation of God's word which belongs exclusively to the Bishops of the Church in union with the Pope.

4. The apostolate in which you are engaged is both exciting and challenging. It demands hard work and perseverance. It requires study and prayer. At all times, it is personally engaging, for "the word of God is living and active". Like a two-edged sword it cuts through all pretence and deceit and prepares the way for conversion. "The living and abiding word of God" is at work in both the messenger and the recipient, shedding on both the life-giving light of truth. Ultimately, the proclamation of God's word leads to the Eucharist, and in the Eucharist it reaches its fullest and most effective expression. There exists an intimate bond between the Sacred Liturgy and the Church's evangelising efforts. Whoever wishes to engage in the biblical apostolate, then, should be imbued with a fervent love for the Eucharist and for the entire liturgical life of the Church.

I leave you with these few thoughts, and I assure you of my warmest encouragement and of my prayer "that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph". May Christ, the Living Word of God, be your joy and your strength. May he fill your hearts with his peace.

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