



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO MEMBERS OF THE EUROPE-MIDDLE EAST
REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE "UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES"**

*Hall of Popes
Thursday, 16 March 1995*

Dear Friends,

I am happy to extend a warm welcome to the members of the Europe–Middle East Regional Committee of the *United Bible Societies*. The fact that you are gathered here in Rome gives us this opportunity to meet and to reaffirm the importance of the service you render to the Biblical apostolate.

Your presence brings to mind what the Second Vatican Council said regarding the role of the Word of God in relation to Christian unity. The Council's Decree on Ecumenism tells us that the Scriptures are "a precious instrument in the mighty hand of God for attaining to that unity which the Saviour holds out to all humanity" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 21). Since the preparation and distribution of suitable editions of the Bible is a prerequisite to the hearing of the Word, the Catholic Church willingly co-operates with you in this field. The joint publication, *Guidelines for Inter-confessional Co-operation in Translating the Bible*, confirms and illustrates this. The good relations which exist between the United Bible Societies and the Catholic Biblical Federation is also very encouraging. In Europe and the Middle East, the area of immediate concern to your Committee, the participation of Orthodox Christians in the United Bible Societies' activities is a most significant and promising step forward on the path of ecumenical cooperation. For all that has been achieved so far, let us give thanks to God who "spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere" (cf. 2 Cor. 2:14).

It is almost a year since the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity published the revised *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*. There we read: "Veneration

of the Scriptures is a fundamental bond of unity between Christians... Everything that can be done to make members of the Churches and ecclesial Communities read the Word of God, and to do that together when possible... reinforces this bond of unity that already unites them, helps them to be open to the unifying action of God and strengthens the common witness to the saving Word of God which they give to the world" (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 183)

As we approach the Third Christian Millennium, the immense needs of humanity impel us to build on the solid rock of divine revelation, the Gospel, which is "the power of God leading everyone who believes in it to salvation" (Rom. 1:16). Since the lack of unity among Christians continues to hinder the growth of God's Kingdom, we must work all the harder to bring about the realization of the Lord's prayer "that all may be one" (Jn. 17:21). The same Holy Spirit who urges us to listen to the Word of God with reverence and to proclaim it confidently (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 1) is also the One who kindles in the hearts of Christ's disciples an ever more intense yearning for unity. May that be our goal, our prayer and our certain hope! May God abundantly bless you and the dedicated work which you do to spread his Word!

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