



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING
SPONSORED BY THE BIBLE SOCIETIES**

Monday, 22 April 2002

Dear Friends in Christ,

In the peace of Easter, I am happy to welcome "you [who] have been born anew... through the living and abiding word of God" (*1 Pt* 1:23). The Bible Societies exist to open the inexhaustible riches of Sacred Scripture to all who will listen; and that is a noble Christian service, for which I give thanks to God.

For many years, your Societies have been engaged in translating and distributing the text of Scripture, an essential part of proclaiming Christ to the world. For it is not just words which we must speak: it is the Word of God himself! It is Jesus Christ, promised in the Old Testament, proclaimed in the New, whom we must present to a world which hungers for him, often without knowing it. It was Saint Jerome who declared that "ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ" (*Commentary on Isaiah*, Prologue). Your work then is above all a service of Christ.

The urgency of this task demands that we commit ourselves to the cause of Christian unity, for division among the disciples of Christ has certainly impaired our mission. Your meeting therefore draws together members of different Churches and Ecclesial Communities, united in the love of the Bible and in the desire that "listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter..., which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 39). Whatever differences remain between us, the promotion of the Bible is one point where Christians can work closely together for the glory of God and the good of the human family.

The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 was a splendid occasion for all Christians to rejoice in

celebrating the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, not just as a past event but as an enduring mystery. It is my fervent hope that this momentum will continue to inspire Christians to a still deeper love and knowledge of the Holy Bible, thus encouraging the work of the Bible Societies. Praying that Christ himself will "touch your ears to receive his word and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father" (*Rite of Baptism*), I gladly invoke upon you the abundant blessings of Almighty God, whose word endures for ever.