



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO CONFERENCE ON BIBLICAL LANGUAGE
AND MEDIA**

Monday, 28 September 1998

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the International Study Conference on the theme: "Biblical Language and Contemporary Communication", organized by Lux Vide. I thank Dr Ettore Bernabei, President of the Lux Company, for his courteous words to me on behalf of you all. I extend a cordial greeting to everyone present, scholars in biblical exegesis and experts in the modern means of social communication, who are taking part in this interesting congress.

Your visit offers me the welcome opportunity to express my esteem and appreciation for your professional commitment to studying and spreading the biblical message among a broader public by the powerful means of communication, in particular through cinema and television. This is a service of high human and spiritual value, which deserves to be increasingly broadened and enhanced. For this reason, an international study conference on the subject cannot fail to arouse interest. Providentially, it is one of the many hermeneutical efforts which at various levels today are leading to ever new ways of expressing the sacred text in contemporary form.

2. When the meeting between divine Revelation and the modern media is conducted with respect for the truth of the biblical message and the correct use of technical means, it bears abundant good fruits. On the one hand, it means elevating the *mass media* to one of its noblest tasks, which in some way redeems it from improper and sometimes trivializing uses. On the other, it offers new and extraordinarily effective possibilities for introducing the general public to God's Word communicated for the salvation of all mankind.

It should immediately be noted that the nature of Sacred Scripture has two basic features which differ from one another but are closely connected. They are, on the one hand, the absolutely transcendent dimension of God's Word, and, on the other, the equally important dimension of its inculturation. Because of the first characteristic, the Bible cannot be reduced

to human words alone and, therefore, to a mere cultural product. However, because of the second characteristic, it inevitably and profoundly shares in human history and reflects its cultural co-ordinates.

Precisely for this reason — here is the important consequence — the Word of God has “the capability of being spread in other cultures, in such a way as to reach all human beings in the cultural context in which they live”. This is what was fittingly recalled in the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s Instruction on *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Part IV, B, Vatican City 1993, p. 117), which says specifically: “The ever increasing importance of the instruments of mass communication (‘mass media’) — the press, radio, television — requires that proclamation of the Word of God and knowledge of the Bible be propagated by these means. Their very distinctive features and, on the other hand, their capacity to influence a vast public require a particular training in their use. This will help to avoid paltry improvisations, along with striking effects that are actually in poor taste” (ibid., Part IV, C, 3, p. 125).

3. This providential meeting between the Word of God and human cultures is already contained in the very essence of Revelation and reflects the “logic” of the Incarnation. As the Council stresses in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*: “The words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men” (n. 13).

This general principle finds a particular application in the mass media. It is a question of aiding the shift, or more precisely, the transposition from one form of language to another: from the written word, largely dormant in the hearts of believers and in the memory of a great number of people, to the visual communication of cinematic “fiction”, apparently more superficial, but in some respects even more powerful and gripping than other languages.

In this regard, the efforts repeatedly made down to the present day, which include your own professional work, are worthy of attention because in many cases they have attained a remarkable artistic level. I am therefore pleased to express my heartfelt appreciation of this renewed cinematographic interest in both the Old and New Testaments, especially since, despite its various, inevitably partial cinematic interpretations, your intention is to present the Bible in its integrity. It helps to keep alive in people that “hunger” and “thirst” for the Word of God which the prophet Amos said continues to grow on the earth (cf. Am 8:11).

Mindful of the Apostle’s words, “only that in every way ... Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice ... and I shall rejoice” (Phil 1:18-19), I hope that your service of promoting an ever greater dissemination of the biblical message will continue with renewed commitment, with the intention of producing works which can combine the artistic aspect with profound religious inspiration, and which can arouse in the audience not only aesthetic admiration but also interior participation and spiritual growth.

Therefore, as I entrust you and all your activities to the heavenly protection of Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word, I assure you of a constant remembrance in my prayer and cordially bless you all.

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