



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO A DELEGATION
OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ROMANIA**

Thursday, 31 May 2001

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Professors,
Distinguished Gentlemen,*

1. *"As for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (II Tm 3,14-16).*

The Apostle Paul addresses these words to young Bishop Timothy, placed at the head of the Church in Ephesus, reminding him of the importance of Sacred Scripture in the proclamation of salvation in Christ. From the earliest Christian antiquity, the Bible was the book that shaped many cultures and national alphabets were sometimes created for its translation.

The Orthodox Church in the Romanian principalities was well aware of this when she provided for the first translations of the Bible in the national language, so as to make it more accessible to the faithful. In the second half of the 18th century, the first complete Romanian edition of Sacred Scripture, known as the *"Bible of Bucurestu"* (1688), went out of print. In the meantime notable changes had occurred in the national language. Thus a new edition became necessary; a great and erudite monk, Samuil Micu, of the *"Scoala Ardeleana"* tackled the task with competence and enthusiasm. The publication took the name of the city of Blaj where it was printed by Bishop Ioan Bob in 1795.

2. This new translation was not only adopted by the Greek Catholic Church in Transylvania, but also by the Orthodox Church. Thus all Romanians used it to spread faith in Christ. So it was that the same texts were echoed and re-echoed in the liturgy, further developing the common theological language.

Moreover, given the great literary quality of this work, it made a remarkable impact on the culture of the entire nation, as happened in Poland, for example, with the translation of the Bible by the Jesuit, Fr Jakub Wujek.

Considering the importance of the "*Bible of Blaj*", a real monument to faith as well as a literary monument to the Romanian language, I wanted an edition of it to be prepared by a group of distinguished scholars, under the patronage of the Greek-Catholic Metropolis and of Romania's most senior cultural authorities, to be printed in the Vatican as a gift of the Holy See.

I also wanted to reconfirm the age-old closeness of the Roman Pontiffs to the Romanian nation. I always carry in my heart the memory of my visit to your country and the affection that I was shown by both Catholics and Orthodox. I remember the people's cry at the Eucharistic celebration in Podul Izvor Park: "Unity, Unity!". This is the spiritual yearning of a people asking for unity and willing to work to obtain it. The enthusiastic faces and fraternal gestures of that historic meeting are indelibly printed in my mind. They are now part of history. Thus, just as that journey brought us closer on our way towards unity, I hope that the reprinting of the "*Bible of Blaj*" will be another step towards the full communion of Christ's disciples.

3. "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth" (Dt 11,18-21).

The Word of the Lord must first of all be lived. It must penetrate all the places where man lives and works. For this to happen, the Church is called to preach it forcefully and clearly, using both the traditional means and those offered by the new technologies.

I invite Pastors and faithful to make the Bible their daily spiritual food. I urge them to meditate and pray using the words of Sacred Scripture which, after the Eucharist, must form the centre of ecclesial and family life. Only in this way will they always find the inspiration and divine strength they need in order to stay faithful to Christ while witnessing to the world.

I therefore greet you with great joy today, Mr President, together with everyone who cooperated in

the reprinting of the Bible of Blaj. I thank those who sponsored the initiative and those who supervised the various phases of its concrete implementation.

I also hope that the reprinting of the "Bible of Blaj" will recall this urgent need, to which pastoral programmes and the formation of the clergy must give priority. Thus the Catholic Church, which can be justly proud of her contribution to the life of the Romanian people down the centuries, will continue to make herself useful to the nation.

In spirit I present this new edition of the Bible to the Christians of Romania, and I call upon Mary, the listening Virgin and Mother of unity, to watch over the footsteps of the entire Romanian people. To this end, I cordially assure each one of my prayers, and very gladly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.