

Greeting address



Exactly 40 years have gone by since the publication of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*. With this text the Second Vatican Council drew our attention to the primacy of the Word of God and as it were put the Bible back into the hands of all the faithful. The Council Fathers, well aware of the centrality of Sacred Scripture in the life of believers, insisted that all believers should regularly attend to this Word. And, after offering a few lines of theological reflection, they also pointed out the various approaches to the Bible. The text exhorts the faithful to "gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, with the approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church, are commendably spread everywhere" (DV 25). The conciliar Fathers were in fact well aware that "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ".

The influence of *Dei Verbum* on the life of the Church has been remarkable. Although the shortest of the conciliar texts, it is this document, together with the Constitution on the Liturgy, that has perhaps brought the most profound changes into the life of the Christian communities. And this has certainly been a great and important acquisition. But the conciliar Constitution reveals higher expectations than what has thus far been achieved. In fact, if the road already traveled has been very considerable, one must nevertheless acknowledge that much of what the document suggests remains to be done in order for the Bible to really become the ordinary book of prayer and of interior formation of the faithful. A single statistical fact will make the point: the great majority of practicing believers know the Bible only through the Sunday Liturgy and there are really relatively few who make it the daily nourishment of their lives. And perhaps the same would have to be said of the impact of the Bible on the pastoral life of our Christian communities. We could say that there is still "little Bible" in the ordinary lives of individual believers and in the communities.

Conjointly with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, with which it is institutionally linked, the Catholic Biblical Federation has wished to organize this International Congress in Rome to offer a contribution aimed at helping to renew the Church's proposal to place Sacred Scripture at the very heart of the lives of the faithful. With the memorial of the fortieth anniversary of *Dei Verbum* our hope is that we could once again take hold of the spirit that animated the conciliar Fathers in their grasp of the extraordinary value of Sacred Scripture and in the task of making it ever more familiar to all. The Catholic Biblical Federation has a particularly urgent sense of this task in light of the fact that it was born precisely in the aftermath of this conciliar Constitution with the specific purpose of helping the faithful to drink broadly and continuously from the inexhaustible fountain of life, which is the Bible. As many of you recall, it was Cardinal Bea himself, one of the protagonists of *Dei Verbum*, who, in order to avoid the danger that the study of the Bible be limited only to the ecclesiastical universities or benefit only a small group of scholars, urged that an organism be created, the Catholic Biblical Federation, so that the study of Sacred Scripture might be kept vibrant and alive among the Christian people.

It has been almost forty years now since the Federation has taken up the task of implementing above all chapter 6 of *Dei Verbum*, which reminds the faithful to make the Bible the book of their lives. With this Congress, which sees the participation of representatives from every part of the world, the Federation wishes to continue more energetically than ever the old task it took up right after the Council. In greeting all those who are taking part in this meeting, in particular those of our brothers and sisters of other Churches and Christian confessions, I have the feeling that the words John XXIII wrote when he was patriarch of Venice are truly applicable to all of us here: "If all the concerns of our pastoral ministry are dear to us and if we are aware of their urgency, above all we feel conscious of the duty everywhere and with sustained effort to rouse an enthusiasm for every manifestation of the divine book, whose essential function is to enlighten every moment of our journey, from infancy to the most advanced old age." This "enthusiasm for every manifestation of the divine book" which Cardinal Roncalli, the initiator of the Second Vatican Council, wanted to arouse in his time, is that of which we have need today as well, and which it is our hope and our prayer that this Congress will help to excite.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vincenzo Paglia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vincenzo Paglia

Bishop of Terni, Narni, Amelia (Italy)

President of the Catholic Biblical Federation