



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO ACADEMICS OF THE PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL INSTITUTE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 100th ANNIVERSARY
OF ITS FOUNDATION**

Clementine Hall

Monday, 26 October 2009

*Your Eminences,
Most Reverend Superior General of the Society of Jesus,
Distinguished Rector,
Distinguished Professors and
Dear Students of the Pontifical Biblical Institute,*

It is with true pleasure that I meet with you on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the foundation of your Institute, created by my holy Predecessor [Pius X](#) to serve as already mentioned as a centre of specialized study of Sacred Scripture and related disciplines in the city of Rome. I respectfully greet Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, whom I thank for the kind words that he has conveyed to me on your behalf. I likewise greet the Superior General, Fr Adolfo Nicolás Pachón, and I welcome this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the Society of Jesus which, not without notable effort, has invested funds and human resources towards the management of the Faculty of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, the Biblical Faculty here in Rome and the branch of the Institute in Jerusalem. I greet the Rector and the professors, who have devoted their lives to study and research, in constant attention to the word of God. I greet and thank the staff, the employees and the workers for their esteemed collaboration, as well as the benefactors who have placed and continue to place the necessary resources at the disposal of the Pontifical Biblical Institute for the maintenance of its structures and for its activities. I greet all the former students who are spiritually united with us at this moment, and I especially greet you, dear students, who have come from every part of the world.

One hundred years have passed since the birth of the Pontifical Biblical Institute. In the course of this century, interest in the Bible has certainly increased, and much more importance has been given to the word of God in the life and in the mission of the Church, thanks to the [Second Vatican Council](#), especially through the Dogmatic Constitution [Dei Verbum](#) in the elaboration of which I was a direct witness, participating as a theologian in the discussions that preceded its approval. This has promoted an authentic spiritual and pastoral renewal in the Christian community, which has particularly concerned preaching, catechesis, theological study and ecumenical dialogue. Your Pontifical Institute has made its own significant contribution to this renewal, through scientific biblical research, the instruction of biblical disciplines and the publication of qualified studies and specialized magazines. Throughout the decades, various generations of distinguished professors have succeeded one another at this point I would like to remember, among others, Cardinal Bea who have educated more than 7,000 professors of Sacred Scripture and promoters of biblical groups, as well as many experts who are currently working in various ecclesiastical services in every region of the world. We give thanks to the Lord for this work of yours that aims to interpret biblical texts in the spirit in which they were written (cf. [Dei Verbum](#), n. 12), open to dialogue with other disciplines, with diverse cultures and religions. Even if it has known difficult times, it has been conducted in constant fidelity to the Magisterium, according to the purposes proper to your Institute, founded to: "*ut in Urbe Roma altiorum studiorum ad Libros sacros pertinentium habeatur centrum, quod efficaciore, quo liceat, modo doctrinam biblicam et studia omnia eidem adiuncta, sensu Ecclesiae catholicae promoveat*" (Pius X, Apostolic Letter *Vinea Electa*, 7 May 1909: AAS 1, 1909, pp. 447-448).

Dear friends, the occasion of your centenary represents a point of arrival and at the same time a point of departure. Enriched by your past experience, continue on your path with renewed commitment, conscious of the service to the Church that is requested of you that of bringing the Bible nearer to the lives of the People of God, so that they may know how to confront the unprecedented challenges that modern times pose to the new evangelization. The common hope is that the Sacred Scripture may become, in this secularized world, not only the soul of theology but also the source of spirituality and of vigour in the faith of all believers in Christ. Therefore may the Pontifical Biblical Institute continue to grow as a qualified ecclesial centre of higher quality study in the field of biblical research, employing modern critical methodologies. In collaboration with specialists in dogma and in other theological areas, may it provide a sound formation for future professors of Sacred Scripture so that, availing themselves of the Biblical languages and of the diverse exegetical methodologies, they may directly plumb the biblical texts.

The aforementioned Dogmatic Constitution [Dei Verbum](#), in this regard, emphasized the legitimacy and the necessity of the historico-critical method, outlining its three essential components: attention to literary genres, study of the historical context and examination of what is called *Sitz im Leben*. At the same time, the conciliar Document firmly maintains the theological character of exegesis, indicating the strong points of the theological method in the interpretation of the text. This is because the fundamental basis on which the theological understanding of the Bible rests is

the unity of Scripture, and this presupposition corresponds in its methodological path to the analogy of the faith, that is, to the comprehension of single texts based on the whole. The conciliar text adds another methodological indication. Since Scripture is one and the same, originating from one People of God, who has borne it throughout history, consequently, to read Scripture as a unified whole means to read it as a product of the People of God, of the Church taken as a place of vital importance, retaining the faith of the Church as a true interpretive key. If exegesis also seeks to be theology, it must recognize that the faith of the Church is that form of "sym-path \acute{y} " without which the Bible would remain a closed book; Tradition does not close access to Scripture but rather opens it. On the other hand, the final word in the interpretation of Scripture lies with the Church, through her institutional organisms. It is the Church, in fact, that has been entrusted with the task of authentically interpreting the written and spoken word of God, exercising her authority in the name of Jesus Christ (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 10).

Dear brothers and sisters, as I thank you for this welcome visit, I encourage you to pursue your ecclesial service in constant adherence to the Magisterium of the Church. Assuring each of you my support in prayer, I wholeheartedly impart to all, as a pledge of divine favour, the Apostolic Blessing.

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