

Holy Father, Your Eminences, Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

It is a great honour for the United Bible Societies to have been invited to send a representative to attend this XII Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops as a Special Guest and it is now my great privilege and joy to bring to this Synod the greetings and good wishes of the 145 national Bible Societies making up the Global United Bible Societies (UBS).

There are many references within the Lineamenta of the Synod to the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, which was one of the great fruits of the Second Vatican Council and the document which heralded such close cooperation between the Catholic Church and the UBS.

Dei Verbum gave Catholic Christians the explicit commission to work on Bible translations, and to do so in collaboration with their sisters and brothers of other denominations. *"Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful"* has resonated throughout the decades following its promulgation, resulting in cooperation between Catholics and Bible Societies in many areas of activity all over the world and in the participation of many, many Catholics as Bible Society members. The Instrumentum Laboris is surely right when it says such 'easy access' is a prerequisite for mission today. (In. Lab. p72).

Pope John Paul II, in an audience he granted to Representatives of Bible Societies in 2002 said, *"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."*

During the past 40 years, it has been gratifying to see 134 translations completed in collaboration with the Catholic Church. And yet, the task of translation is far from over.

It is surely to the shame of all Churches and all Christians that with 7,000 languages in the world, only in 438 of them is there a translation of the complete Bible. Yes, 2016 others have a portion of Scripture or a New Testament but this still leaves over 300 million people in the world without access to any word of Scripture in either their heart language or through an known international language.

When one adds the 2 billion people who cannot read, even if a text was made available, the size of the task yet to be completed in making the 'easy

access to sacred scripture' called for in *Dei Verbum* a reality, becomes clear. The Instrumentum Laboris lists some of the difficulties which makes translation and distribution difficult. (In. Lab. p61). One of the Synod fathers on Friday morning called for the intensification of the translation task. I am pleased to share with him and the Synod that the United Bible Societies is currently involved in over 646 Translation projects and is eager and willing to do more as funding becomes available. And in response to the very moving intervention by the Synod Father from Latvia, to say that last year the United Bible Societies distributed 26 million Bibles and 12 million New Testaments.

In chapter III of the Lineamenta, *The Word of God in Ecumenical Dialogue*, the question is asked, *"Is collaboration possible with the United Bible Societies(UBS)?* Collaboration between the Catholic Church at international, regional and local levels and national Bible Societies and the UBS has taken many forms over the years since the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) and the UBS earlier today signed a new *Joint Partnership on Biblical Ministry* to give testimony to the growing collaboration that the two organisations enjoy.

Yet another example, is the exciting project *'May They Be One'* - recently launched by the Bishops Conference of the Philippines in conjunction with the local Bible Society to put 5million Bibles in the homes of Catholics in the Philippines. I hope the Synod will affirm not only that collaboration is possible but that such collaboration should be extended.

The UBS, committed as it is to seeing God's Word - Accessible, Understood, Respected and Lived by all, - awaits eagerly the outcome of the Synod's deliberation on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*. Please be assured of our continuing prayers as you bring your reflections to a conclusion.

Revd Dr A. Miller Milloy
United Bible Societies, General Secretary

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