



THE
GOD
WHO
SPEAKS



The Catholic Biblical Apostolate:

Scripture at the Heart of Discipleship

*We declare to you what
was from the beginning,
what we have heard, what
we have seen with our eyes,
what we have looked at and
touched with our hands,
concerning the word of life.*

1 JOHN 1:1

Celebrating, Living and Sharing God's
Word across England and Wales.

INTRODUCTION

Some two hundred years before St Jerome, St Hippolytus wrote:

There is, [brethren], one God,
the knowledge of whom we gain from the Holy Scriptures...
Whatever things the Holy Scriptures declare, at these let us look;
and whatever they teach, let us learn it;
and as the Father wills our belief to be, let us believe;
and as he wills the Son to be glorified, let us glorify him;
and as he wills the Holy Spirit to be bestowed, let us receive him.

From a treatise by St Hippolytus (c.150-c.236 CE)

For the last five years through the *God Who Speaks* project we have sought to encourage the Catholics of these countries to deepen their love of the Bible, to learn what it teaches, to believe what we have learnt, to glorify the Father in whom we believe, to do his will as revealed in the Son and by the power of the Spirit within us to witness to him in the world. The time has come to review that work, our aims and ambitions and celebrate what has been achieved.

With the mandate of our Bishops, we want to learn from, and build on all that we have created, collaborate with new partners, and ensure that Scripture is at the heart of our discipleship and the pastoral ministry of our lives and parishes.

Now through the more inclusive and far-reaching Biblical Apostolate we want to serve our dioceses in this journey, to support and resource people of all ages in their faith formation and inspire generations to come.

I encourage all Catholics in England and Wales to deepen their love of the Bible, and to find creative ways to encounter Christ in the Scriptures, that we may witness to the Word in the world. Join with us to share the joy of Christ's mission and be empowered by the Holy Spirit today – this is the Biblical Apostolate.

And may you be blessed,

† Peter M. Brignall

The Rt. Rev'd Peter M. Brignall
Bishop of Wrexham Diocese
Chair of the Catholic Trust for England and Wales
Lead Bishop of the Biblical Apostolate for England and Wales

PART 1 | Background and Context to the Catholic Biblical Apostolate



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT TO THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE

2020 was the 10th anniversary of *Verbum Domini* - Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation on 'The Word of the Lord' and the 1,600th anniversary of St Jerome's death. These dates motivated the Catholic Biblical Federation and some Bible Societies across the world to commemorate 2020 as the *Year of the Bible*.

With this context in mind, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales agreed to dedicate 2020 as a focus on Scripture entitled the *God Who Speaks* in partnership with and funded by Bible Society. We created a national *God Who Speaks* Committee and the 'Year of the Word' was launched on 30th September 2019 on the Feast of St Jerome.

Jesus said... 'I am the way, the truth and the life...'

JOHN 14:6

SHARED HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THE GOD WHO SPEAKS 'YEAR OF THE WORD'

Verbum Domini was a response to the 2008 Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, whose theme was 'The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church'. One of the goals of the Synod was to review the directives on Scripture found in the Second Vatican Council, especially in *Dei Verbum*, and to confront the new challenges of our day. We wanted to respond to this call now.

In reviewing recent papal teaching on Scripture from *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Verbum Domini* and the 2008 Synod in the light of today's mission to our Catholic Community, we saw the following hopes and opportunities:

1. A renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ in the Scriptures.
2. A renewed appreciation of the Bible in the liturgy, catechesis and theological studies.
3. Support for formators in proclaiming the Word and encounters with the Word.
4. Training and support for readers.
5. Extensive distribution of Bibles through communities, groups and movements.
6. Greater creativity in Scriptural digital evangelisation.
7. Greater collaboration with the Bible in the field of culture.
8. Renewed understanding of the relationship between the sciences and Scripture.
9. Renewed Scriptural engagement with the Church's social teachings.
10. Scriptural exploration with other ecumenical traditions and faiths.

OUR SUMMARY VISION

*Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."
Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.*

LUKE 24:44-45

Scripture is foundational to the life of the Catholic Church and so we wanted to **celebrate, share and live out** our faith through deeper Scriptural engagement.

- A) We wanted to create new and renewed encounters with Christ through the Scriptures.
- B) We wanted to achieve *transformation* in the faith and life of our Church and in the public arena through *evangelisation, education, creative arts and social action*.

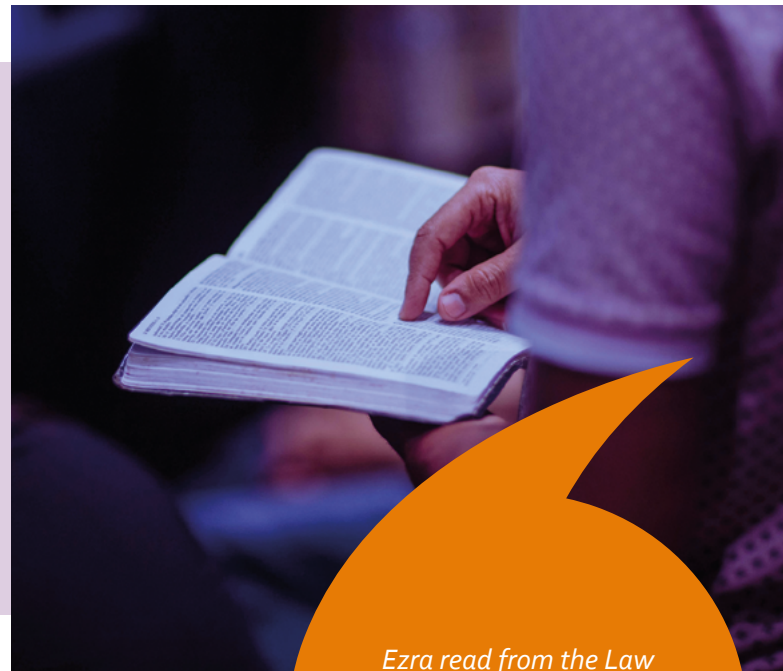
Our God Who Speaks outreach enabled us to:

- 1) Help influence the work of the Bishops' Conference and dioceses across England and Wales in their relationship with, and understanding of, the Bible at all levels and age groups.
- 2) Help influence and share creative models of Scripture engagement to the rest of the world through our website, social media platforms and monthly newsletters.

FOCUS AND INVITATION

We asked all our Bishops to interpret the Scriptures in the life of their diocese freely and in their own way, responding to three themes:

- 1) **Celebrating God's Word** – enriching our worshipping and spiritual community.
- 2) **Sharing God's Word** – enriching our evangelisation, formation and proclamation.
- 3) **Living God's Word** – enriching our social action and outreach.



Ezra read from the Law of God so that the people understood what was read.

NEHEMIAH 8:8

CELEBRATING GOD'S WORD

Whenever we celebrate the liturgy, the Scriptures are proclaimed. We listen to God speaking to us in the Church. In the sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours, and in our daily prayer and reflection, we encounter Christ; through our responses we deepen our participation, which transforms our lives. In discovering and renewing a genuine love for the Word of God, we nurture our relationship with Christ. Through the Bible, we meet Christ who is alive in his Word. We can listen to him speaking to us and guiding us in our daily lives.

Our dioceses told us that they celebrated God's word by:

- *Reading at Mass with confidence and understanding.*
- *Leading the Liturgy of the Word with children with imagination and faith.*
- *Supporting different formats and audiences for participating in the liturgy.*

LIVING GOD'S WORD

Your word is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path.

PSALM 118 (119):105



We not only need to hear and receive God's Word, we also need to put that Word into practice. Scripture shapes our actions, our choices and how we relate to God, to ourselves, to our neighbours and to our world. It guides all our relationships and how we live our lives.

Scripture teaches us how to live in society, to respect the wonder of creation, especially each human being, and to work towards the common good. The Scriptures inspire us to put faith into action, living God's Word and doing God's Word.

Our dioceses told us that they lived God's Word by:

- *Cherishing life at every stage.*
- *Using and sharing the world's resources fairly.*
- *Protecting the weak, the poor and the marginalised.*

SHARING GOD'S WORD

"You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth"

ACTS 1:8

With a renewed love of Scripture comes both the opportunity and desire to share it with others.

Through the Bible we discover who God is. We are shown what it means to live in relation with God and each other through a relationship with Christ.

God speaks to us today in a variety of ways. The Bible has inspired, and continues to inspire learning, culture, art, music and literature. It enables science and faith to build up mutual understanding through dialogue. It challenges technology and social media to open up new ways to encounter Christ in the world.

Our dioceses told us that they shared God's Word by:

- *Witnessing to Christ in word and action.*
- *Reaching out to others.*
- *Forming disciples who know and love God.*

In the light of these three themes, we invited dioceses to continue to explore:

- In what good ways do we celebrate God's Word?
- Where might there be gaps? Is anyone excluded?
- What new ways and opportunities might be open to us?

OUR DELIVERY

The *God Who Speaks* national committee provided foundational resources for dioceses to use, to reach as many people as possible in their different regions. We also supported dioceses in creating further resources and initiatives appropriate to their needs.

INITIAL GOD WHO SPEAKS 'YEAR OF THE WORD' TIMETABLE AND OUTPUT

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

MATTHEW 28:19

The 'Year' began on 30th September 2019 (Feast of St Jerome) and was to run until the end of 2020. With the advent of COVID in March 2020, the initiative continued online with its new website – www.godwhospeaks.uk

After COVID abated, the *God Who Speaks* developed into a permanent platform for Biblical engagement across England and Wales, and globally through its website and social media.



Our original output consisted of:

1. Cardinal Vincent Nichols launching the initiative in the National Gallery with three videos.
2. *God Who Speaks* promotional brochures and prayer cards to all dioceses.
3. Free copies of Matthew's Gospel to all dioceses.
4. Official prayers for the Year and a Bible Sunday focus per year.
5. A website and e-news, updated monthly with resources, articles and information.
6. Social media platforms for digital Scripture engagement.
7. Physical and online resources, seasonal ideas and activities for schools and parishes.
8. *God Who Roars* toy lions to help promote St Jerome's story.
9. Creation of a network of diocesan Scripture Champions.
10. Small grants for diocesan-based Scripture projects.
11. Support and resources for reader and formator training across dioceses.
12. Regional Road Shows across England and Wales.
13. An artist commissioned to create a Biblical artwork to tour at the Regional Road Shows.
14. An art and bible video series.
15. A *God Who Sings* multi-lingual concert hosted in one diocese.
16. A signed version of Mark's Gospel for hearing-impaired communities.
17. Support and resources for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in applying Biblical understanding to its national work and policy making.



KEY SOURCES OF INSPIRATION



ST JEROME

Jerome's Commentary on Isaiah (Nn.1.2: CCL 73, 1-3)

Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.

DEI VERBUM, 1965

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. [21]

THE GIFT OF SCRIPTURE, 2005

A teaching document of the Bishops' Conferences of England, Wales and Scotland

The Scriptures offer us a way which is trustworthy, a way both ancient and new. They contain the challenge of the Christian vocation. They show us how to foster communities in which each person is respected and loved. They challenge us to live in a self-giving rather than self-centred way. [71]

VERBUM DOMINI, 2010

The word of God given to us makes us not only hearers, but also heralds so that we share in Christ's mission and are empowered by the Holy Spirit. [91]. The word that we receive is meant for all; it cannot be kept to ourselves. Since it is true, it belongs to everyone. [92]

EVANGELII GAUDIUM, 2013

The study of the sacred Scriptures must be a door opened to every believer. It is essential that the revealed word radically enrich our catechesis and all our efforts to pass on the faith. [175]

MISERICORDIA ET MISERA, 2016

The Bible is the great story of the marvels of God's mercy. Every one of its pages is steeped in the love of the Father who from the moment of creation wished to impress the signs of his love on the universe. [7]

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book'. Christianity is the religion of the 'Word' of God, 'not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living'. [108]

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.

1 JOHN 1:1

OFFICIAL PRAYERS TO THE GOD WHO SPEAKS

*Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.*

EPHESIANS 5:18-19



EXTENDED VERSION

Pilgrim God,
you walk alongside us
and speak to us throughout the Scriptures:
in the message of the prophets,
the songs of David
and the vision of Paul.

Your Son, Jesus Christ,
listens to our hopes and fears
and shows us how to live:
in our love of neighbour
our desire for justice,
and in our dying and rising each day.

Send us the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds
so that we may be your witnesses
throughout the world:
in our protection of the vulnerable,
our words and actions
and in our communion with the earth.
AMEN

V. Your word is our path and your truth is our light.
R. This day and every day.

Our Lady of the Annunciation PRAY FOR US.
St Matthew/Mark/Luke/John PRAY FOR US.
St Jerome PRAY FOR US.

PRAYER TO THE GOD WHO SPEAKS

Creator and Source of all, you spoke to Moses calling your people into life.

He asked for your name and you revealed your mystery.

'I am who I am, who I will be, where I will be'.

Your divine life, beyond our inadequate images,

beyond our fragile attempts to know and control.

And gradually, through your prophets, you opened our minds and hearts
to the immensity of the mystery of your creative mercy.

Word made Flesh, you came among us to open up a way and a life

true to your mystery and true to our desire;

a Word that both speaks in our hearts

and through the vastness of your cosmos.

Holy Spirit, from the first Pentecost

you enabled us to hear the Word in our own reality

and respond to it among companions from every race and tongue.

Provoke us now to return to that divine word in Creation,

that Word en-fleshed in Jesus,

that Word spoken and recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

Touch our minds and hearts today as we read alone,

as we proclaim in the liturgy, as we study together

and, inspired anew, help us to become that Word

for all who seek the way, the truth, and the life.

AMEN

David McLoughlin



PART 2 | Where is the Catholic Biblical Apostolate now?

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?

JAMES 2:14

Since 2019, the national *God Who Speaks* committee has developed its remit substantially but there is a way to go to fully embed Scripture in dioceses across England and Wales. The wider Biblical Apostolate which puts Scripture at the heart of discipleship is a gospel imperative for everyone, and no one should be excluded. Our *God Who Speaks* branding and platform are a central resource from which to help more Catholics engage with the Bible more deeply, and we continue to seek new partnerships and ways to share the Good News.



Our godwhospeaks.uk website has continued to create new monthly content, commissioned new writers and topics, and responded to queries on many biblical issues. With an increasingly global following, our website and social media communities enable us to grow in our digital evangelisation and Biblical outreach.

We have created and delivered a huge range of events, courses, articles, talks, conferences, videos, podcasts, seasonal resources and activity challenges across the dioceses.

After taking the commissioned artwork by Pete Codling – ‘Little Bits of God’ – on tour around dioceses we secured its permanent home in Sacred Heart Church, Battersea. We made several interactive videos of the artist and artwork available on our *God Who Speaks* website.

We have partnered with ecumenical and interfaith networks to ensure visibility across different faith communities and beliefs, such as with Parliament,

the Society of St Gregory, Art & Christianity, and various educational, art-based and disability networks and hubs.

We are committed to an arts-based approach to Bible engagement, to developing our resources for neurodivergent communities and to fostering deeper Scriptural engagement with key social justice issues.



‘Little Bits of God’ on display in St John’s Cathedral, Portsmouth. © Mazur/cbcw.org.uk

Many dioceses, Catholic networks and organisations have independently implemented a vast range of Scriptural activities, events, training sessions and resources under the *God Who Speaks* branding. We want to continue to encourage these initiatives and welcome feedback from as many places as possible to ensure greater effectiveness in our support.

The biggest and most consistent output across England and Wales has come from Catholic schools (mainly primary schools) who continue to be our most engaged stakeholders.

While COVID has changed the way we participate in everyday life, including Church, it has provided new online opportunities to reach more people worldwide. In response to COVID we wrote a Biblical resource to help people pray and engage with Scripture in their homes and for those who are regularly housebound – 'Room for God: At home with the sacred'. Nevertheless, in person rather than virtual engagement remains central to our mission.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

MATTHEW 4:4



We have continued to partner with Bible Society as our key funder, and this has included leading or contributing to events, creating online and print-based Bible resources, and relationship-building between Bible Society and the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Pope Francis' global Synod has instigated new ways of being Church that are still being explored and discovered, and which may influence our mission over the next few years.

The Catholic Biblical Apostolate is at a unique point in our journey since:

- 1) Our brand is better known but there are many stakeholders who are yet to know of us.
- 2) There is a growing hunger and need for accessible Scripture resources in the UK and worldwide.
- 3) We are further embedding the Biblical Apostolate into the Catholic Bishops' Conference.
- 4) The new Lectionary provides exciting opportunities for creative Scriptural engagement.
- 5) Pope Francis instituted the Sunday of the Word of God in 2020.
- 6) We are interdisciplinary in our approach and reach (through the arts, environment, law, philosophy, science, social justice and well-being).



We want to continue to do the following to enrich our Catholic Biblical Apostolate:

- Pray and reflect daily.
- Enable more people to encounter Christ through the Scriptures.
- Help to break down barriers to deeper Bible engagement.
- Articulate our faith through biblical, spiritual, catechetical and theological reflection.
- Serve, support and offer Biblical perspectives on national Bishops' Conference work.
- Celebrate the *Sunday of the Word of God* every January (Third Sunday in Ordinary Time).
- Model creative and inclusive engagement across all dioceses.
- Build partnerships across ecumenical and inter-faith channels.
- Develop our relationship with Catholic schools and benefit from their expertise.
- Develop our partnership with Bible Society to increase our mutual biblical reach.
- Liaise with the Catholic Biblical Federation as an international information provider.
- Keep up to date with and disseminate Vatican developments and writings on Scripture.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

JOHN 15:5

We have five priority areas between 2025-2030:

1. MEDIA

Develop our *God Who Speaks* website and inspire our social media communities.

2. ARTS

Increase our creative approaches to the Bible through a wider range of art-based initiatives, including the *Cloud of Witness Interfaith Art Exhibition and Competition* in 2025.

3. LITURGY

Create resources to accompany the new Lectionary and other liturgical opportunities.

4. TRAINING AND EVENTS

Through our Scripture Champions' and Influencers, develop our network and expertise more effectively.

Offer resources, events, training and support to dioceses and agencies, including hosting a Bible and Culture Conference for our Scripture Champions and Influencers.

Serve, support and offer Biblical perspectives on the national Bishops' Secretariat work.

5. REACHING NEW COMMUNITIES

Develop further interdisciplinary approaches to engaging with the Bible, including resources for our neurodiverse communities.

OUR UNIQUE SELLING POINT

No other Catholic initiative in England and Wales that includes all dioceses is focused on such a holistic, coherent and dynamic approach to the Bible.



OUR CHALLENGES

*"Have you not read this Scripture:
'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes'?"*

MARK 12:10-11

The Church must always seek ways and means to provide access to the Bible to all the Christian faithful, so that its saving message through encountering Jesus Christ may inspire and enrich their faith and daily living.

In the 21st century this mission and its Scriptural application includes engaging with a far greater variety of formats, channels and emerging technologies. These include neurodiverse-friendly resources and digital evangelisation.

With over 6 million Catholics in England and Wales and 850,000 children in Catholic schools, we have unlimited opportunities to open up the Bible for all age groups so that:

- 1) Scripture is at the heart of our dioceses and national Bishops' Conference work.
- 2) There is demonstrably greater Scripture confidence in the Catholic community, leading to deeper and wider discipleship and faith application.
- 3) There is a visible witness of Catholics influencing local and national cultures through creative, inclusive Scripture engagement and social action.

- 4) The next generation of Catholics are inspired to become Scripturally-rooted leaders within and beyond their dioceses.

To address these challenges:

- We need to secure stable funding sources from 2025 – 2030.
- We need to understand our Church-based structures and opportunities.

In each diocese there are multiple stakeholders to collaborate with including:

- Liturgists, lectors and Eucharistic ministers; catechists and accompaniers;
- Other lay leaders, formators and chaplaincies;
- Families and individual believers;
- Schools, colleges and universities; theologians and Bible scholars;
- Youth services; Justice and Peace networks; other focus groups, communities and experts;
- Clergy and seminaries; the Religious; and other ecclesial movements;
- Ecumenical and interfaith partnerships.

Creative collaboration is key to our ethos and success.

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE

With Scripture at the heart of discipleship we serve the Catholic dioceses and agencies of England and Wales through:

- 1) Inspiring a love of reading the Scriptures.
- 2) Breaking down barriers to engaging with the Scriptures.
- 3) Providing a dedicated website, training and events.
- 4) Creating Biblical resources which are inclusive, interdisciplinary and collaborative.

- 5) Enabling creative encounters with Christ through multiple formats and platforms.

- 6) Serving, supporting and offering Biblical perspectives on national Bishops' Secretariat work.

Website: www.godwhospeaks.uk

Social Media:

www.facebook.com/GodWhoSpeaks
www.instagram.com/thegodwhospeaks

Fleur Dorrell, Biblical Apostolate Manager
fleur.dorrell@cbcew.org.uk

ADDENDUM

Papal Documents from 2010 which influence our understanding of the Biblical Apostolate.

Extracts from the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation 'Verbum Domini' of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, 2010 [72-75].

The Word of God In The Life Of The Church

Encountering the word of God in sacred Scripture

72. If it is true that the liturgy is the privileged place for the proclamation, hearing and celebration of the word of God, it is likewise the case that this encounter must be prepared in the hearts of the faithful and then deepened and assimilated, above all by them. The Christian life is essentially marked by an encounter with Jesus Christ, who calls us to follow him. ... With the Synod Fathers I express my heartfelt hope for the flowering of "a new season of greater love for sacred Scripture on the part of every member of the People of God, so that their prayerful and faith-filled reading of the Bible will, with time, deepen their personal relationship with Jesus".

Throughout the history of the Church, numerous saints have spoken of the need for knowledge of Scripture in order to grow in love for Christ. This is evident particularly in the Fathers of the Church. Saint Jerome, in his great love for the word of God, often wondered: "How could one live without the knowledge of Scripture, by which we come to know Christ himself, who is the life of believers?". He knew well that the Bible is the means "by which God speaks daily to believers". ... Jerome's counsel ... can also be applied to us: "Read the divine Scriptures frequently; indeed, the sacred book should never be out of your hands. Learn there what you must teach". Let us follow the example of this great saint who devoted his life to the study of the Bible and who gave the Church its Latin translation, the Vulgate, as well as the example of all those saints who made an encounter with Christ the centre of their spiritual lives. Let us renew our efforts to understand deeply the word which God has given to his Church: thus we can aim for that "high standard of ordinary Christian living" proposed by Pope John Paul II at the beginning of the third Christian millennium, which finds constant nourishment in attentively hearing the word of God.

Letting the Bible inspire pastoral activity

73. Along these lines the Synod called for a particular pastoral commitment to emphasizing the centrality of the word of God in the Church's life, and recommended a greater "biblical apostolate", not alongside other forms of pastoral work, but as *a means of letting the Bible inspire all pastoral work*". This does not mean adding a meeting here or there in parishes or dioceses, but rather of examining the ordinary activities of Christian communities, in parishes, associations and movements, to see if they are truly concerned with fostering a personal encounter with Christ, who gives himself to us in his word. Since "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ", making the Bible the inspiration of every ordinary and extraordinary pastoral outreach will lead to a greater awareness of the person of Christ, who reveals the Father and is the fullness of divine revelation.

For this reason I encourage pastors and the faithful to recognize the importance of this emphasis on the Bible: it will also be the best way to deal with certain pastoral problems...

Where the faithful are not helped to know the Bible in accordance with the Church's faith and based on her living Tradition, this pastoral vacuum becomes fertile ground for realities like the sects to take root. Provision must also be made for the suitable preparation of priests and lay persons who can instruct the People of God in the genuine approach to Scripture.

Furthermore, as was brought out during the Synod sessions, it is good that pastoral activity also favour the growth of *small communities*, "formed by families or based in parishes or linked to the different ecclesial movements and new communities", which can help to promote formation, prayer and knowledge of the Bible in accordance with the Church's faith.

The biblical dimension of catechesis

74. An important aspect of the Church's pastoral work which, if used wisely, can help in rediscovering the centrality of God's word is catechesis, which in its various forms and levels must constantly

accompany the journey of the People of God. Luke's description (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35) of the disciples who meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus represents, in some sense, the model of a catechesis centred on "the explanation of the Scriptures", an explanation which Christ alone can give (cf. *Lk* 24:27-28), as he shows that they are fulfilled in his person. The hope which triumphs over every failure was thus reborn, and made those disciples convinced and credible witnesses of the Risen Lord.

The *General Catechetical Directory* contains valuable guidelines for a biblically inspired catechesis and I readily encourage that these be consulted. Here I wish first and foremost to stress that catechesis "must be permeated by the mindset, the spirit and the outlook of the Bible and the Gospels through assiduous contact with the texts themselves; yet it also means remembering that catechesis will be all the richer and more effective for reading the texts with the mind and the heart of the Church", and for drawing inspiration from the two millennia of the Church's reflection and life.

The biblical formation of Christians

75. In order to achieve the goal set by the Synod, namely, an increased emphasis on the Bible in the Church's pastoral activity, all Christians, and catechists in particular, need to receive suitable training. Attention needs to be paid to the *biblical apostolate*, which is a very valuable means to that end, as the Church's experience has shown. The Synod Fathers also recommended that, possibly through the use of existing academic structures, centres of formation should be established where laity and missionaries can be trained to understand, live and proclaim the word of God. Also, where needed, specialized institutes for biblical studies should be established to ensure that exegetes possess a solid understanding of theology and an appropriate appreciation for the contexts in which they carry out their mission.

For the full document:

www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html



**Extracts from the Apostolic Exhortation
'Evangelii Gaudium: On the Proclamation
of the Gospel in Today's World' of the
Holy Father, Pope Francis, 2013. [39,
129, 133-34].**

39. Just as the organic unity existing among the virtues means that no one of them can be excluded from the Christian ideal, so no truth may be denied. The integrity of the Gospel message must not be deformed. What is more, each truth is better understood when related to the harmonious totality of the Christian message; in this context all of the truths are important and illumine one another. When preaching is faithful to the Gospel, the centrality of certain truths is evident and it becomes clear that Christian morality is not a form of stoicism, or self-denial, or merely a practical philosophy or a catalogue of sins and faults. Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others. Under no circumstance can this invitation be obscured! All of the virtues are at the service of this response of love. If this invitation does not radiate forcefully and attractively, the edifice of the Church's moral teaching risks becoming a house of cards, and this is our greatest risk. It would mean that it is not the Gospel which is being preached, but certain doctrinal or moral points based on specific ideological options. The message will run the risk of losing its freshness and will cease to have "the fragrance of the Gospel".

129. We should not think, however, that the Gospel message must always be communicated by fixed formulations learned by heart or by specific words which express an absolutely invariable content. This communication takes place in so many different ways that it would be impossible to describe or catalogue them all, and God's people, with all their many gestures and signs, are its collective subject. If the Gospel is embedded in a culture, the message is no longer transmitted solely from person to person. In countries where Christianity is a minority, then, along with

encouraging each of the baptized to proclaim the Gospel, particular Churches should actively promote at least preliminary forms of inculturation. The ultimate aim should be that the Gospel, as preached in categories proper to each culture, will create a new synthesis with that particular culture. This is always a slow process and at we can be overly fearful. But if we allow doubts and fears to dampen our courage, instead of being creative we will remain comfortable and make no progress whatsoever. In this case we will not take an active part in historical processes, but become mere onlookers as the Church gradually stagnates.

133. It is not enough that evangelizers be concerned to reach each person, or that the Gospel be proclaimed to the cultures as a whole. A theology – and not simply a pastoral theology – which is in dialogue with other sciences and human experiences is most important for our discernment on how best to bring the Gospel message to different cultural contexts and groups. The Church, in her commitment to evangelization, appreciates and encourages the charism of theologians and their scholarly efforts to advance dialogue with the world of cultures and sciences. I call on theologians to carry out this service as part of the Church's saving mission. In doing so, however, they must always remember that the Church and theology exist to evangelize, and not be content with a desk-bound theology.

134. Universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing this evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way. Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture, even in those countries and cities where hostile situations challenge us to greater creativity in our search for suitable methods.

For the full document:

www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html



Extracts from the Encyclical Letter '*Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home*' of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, 2015 [65-69 and 96-100].

II. The Wisdom of the Biblical Accounts

65. Without repeating the entire theology of creation, we can ask what the great biblical narratives say about the relationship of human beings with the world. In the first creation account in the Book of Genesis, God's plan includes creating humanity. After the creation of man and woman, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was *very good*" (*Gen* 1:31). The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness (cf. *Gen* 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, "who is not just something, but someone..."

66. The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to "have dominion" over the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:28), to "till it and keep it" (*Gen* 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. *Gen* 3:17-19). It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence. This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature.

67. We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man "dominion" over the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the

Bible as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (cf. *Gen* 2:15). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. "The earth is the Lord's" (*Ps* 24:1); to him belongs "the earth with all that is within it" (*Dt* 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (*Lev* 25:23).

68. This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world, for "he commanded and they were created; and he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds and he set a law which cannot pass away" (*Ps* 148:5b-6). The laws found in the Bible dwell on relationships, not only among individuals but also with other living beings. "You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and withhold your help... If you chance to come upon a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting upon the young or upon the eggs; you shall not take the mother with the young" (*Dt* 22:4, 6). Along these same lines, rest on the seventh day is meant not only for human beings, but also so "that your ox and your donkey may have rest" (*Ex* 23:12). Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.

69. Together with our obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes: "by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory", and indeed, "the Lord rejoices in all his works" (*Ps* 104:31). By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws, for "the Lord by wisdom founded the earth" (*Prov* 3:19). In our time, the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of

human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish. The German bishops have taught that, where other creatures are concerned, “we can speak of the priority of *being* over that of *being useful*”. The Catechism clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things”.

VII. The Gaze of Jesus

96. Jesus took up the biblical faith in God the Creator, emphasizing a fundamental truth: God is Father (cf. *Mt* 11:25). In talking with his disciples, Jesus would invite them to recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures. With moving tenderness he would remind them that each one of them is important in God’s eyes: “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God” (*Lk* 12:6). “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them” (*Mt* 6:26).

97. The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things: “Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest” (*Jn* 4:35). “The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but once it has grown, it is the greatest of plants” (*Mt* 13:31-32).

98. Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed: “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?” (*Mt* 8:27). His appearance was not that of an ascetic set apart from the world, nor of an enemy to the pleasant things of life... He was far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter and the things of the world. Such unhealthy dualisms, nonetheless, left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history and disfigured the Gospel. Jesus worked with

his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship. It is striking that most of his life was dedicated to this task in a simple life which awakened no admiration at all: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” (*Mk* 6:3). In this way he sanctified human labour and endowed it with a special significance for our development. As Saint John Paul II taught, “by enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity”.

99. In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: “All things have been created through him and for him” (*Col* 1:16). The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) reveals Christ’s creative work as the Divine Word (*Logos*). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word “became flesh” (*Jn* 1:14). One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy.

100. The New Testament does not only tell us of the earthly Jesus and his tangible and loving relationship with the world. It also shows him risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (*Col* 1:19-20). This leads us to direct our gaze to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father, so that “God may be everything to every one” (*1 Cor* 15:28). Thus, the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.

For the full document:

www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html



Extracts from the Apostolic Letter 'Aperuit Illis' of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, 2019 instituting the Sunday of the Word of God. [3 and 4].

"He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45)

3. Consequently, I hereby declare that the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time is to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God. This *Sunday of the Word of God* will thus be a fitting part of that time of the year when we are encouraged to strengthen our bonds with the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity. This is more than a temporal coincidence: the celebration of the *Sunday of the Word of God* has ecumenical value, since the Scriptures point out,

for those who listen, the path to authentic and firm unity.

4. The Bible cannot be just the heritage of some, much less a collection of books for the benefit of a privileged few. It belongs above all to those called to hear its message and to recognize themselves in its words. At times, there can be a tendency to monopolize the sacred text by restricting it to certain circles or to select groups. It cannot be that way. The Bible is the book of the Lord's people, who, in listening to it, move from dispersion and division towards unity. The word of God unites believers and makes them one people.

For the full document:

www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190930_aperuit-illis.html

Extract from the Apostolic Letter 'Scripturae Sacrae Affectus' of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, 2020 on the 1,600 anniversary of the death of St Jerome. [30].

Jerome teaches us that not only should the Gospels and the apostolic Tradition present in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Letters be studied and commented on, but that the entire Old Testament is indispensable for understanding the truth and the riches of Christ. The Gospel itself gives evidence of this: it speaks to us of Jesus as the Teacher who appeals to Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms (cf. *Lk* 4:16-21; 24:27.44-47) in order to explain his own mystery.

The preaching of Peter and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles is likewise rooted in the Old Testament, apart from which we cannot fully understand the figure of the Son of God, the Messiah and Saviour. Nor should the Old Testament be thought of merely as a vast repertoire of citations that prove the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, only in light of the Old Testament prefigurements is it possible to know more profoundly the meaning of the Christ event as revealed in his death and resurrection.

Today we need to rediscover, in catechesis and preaching, as well as in theological exposition, the indispensable contribution of the Old Testament, which should be read and digested as a priceless source of spiritual nourishment (cf. *Ez* 3:1-11; *Rev* 10:8-11).


For the full document:

www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20200930_scripturae-sacrae-affectus.html





 /GodWhoSpeaks

 @thegodwhospeaks

godwhospeaks.uk