

STUDYING THE HOLY BIBLE

BY REV. CHRISTOPHER J. POLLARD



*“Do you understand what you are reading?”
And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?”*

AN INTRODUCTION

Dearly Beloved,

For Love's sake, read the Bible.

When you hold the letter from your dear father whom you miss so much, you feel his presence. You read and reread his words of encouragement and wisdom. You enter into his mind as you imagine his heart pouring out onto paper.

For the love of God, read the Bible.

Reading the Bible comes naturally for some Christians and for others it is a painful task. Conversely, interpreting the Bible is an undertaking that some believers are too eager to do while others show wise caution. We should be eager to read the Bible and slow to ascribe meaning to difficult passages without being confident that we do so with understanding, according to their true meaning.

The account in *Acts of the Apostles* about the deacon Philip encountering the Ethiopian eunuch illustrates all this perfectly. The holy chamberlain loves reading Sacred Scripture and is equally eager to have it explained to him.

Perusing the Bible for wisdom or as literature has some value. Have fun with that!

The Christian, however, knows that the Holy Spirit is the author of Sacred Scripture. Fortunately, the Bible comes with its own directions (see "The Bible's Self-Contained Instruction Manual") and if we carefully attend to them, we will realize that understanding Sacred Scripture is a work of the Holy Spirit through the teaching of the Church.

Reading the Bible with the Church should not add confusion to an already complex task. The fascination we sometimes have for all things new can lead us astray. We should be eager to learn what has always been the Church's understanding of Sacred Scripture... and

what further insights are consistent with the Holy Spirit's gift. The Fathers of the Church and the best scholars of our time offer a great help. Please refer to these trustworthy resources for your own reading and discussion (see "Further Biblical Resources").

For the Catholics who think that Sacred Scripture is far removed from their every day experience, I suggest a study of the prayers that make up the Holy Mass (see [*The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: A Biblical Prayer*](#) the parish website (www.stjohncatholicclean.org/) under *Recommended Resources* in "Learn the Faith"). The prayer life of the Church is immersed in Scripture because the spiritual life of the Church is the heart of Christ. The liturgical life of the Church is the mystical dialogue between the Son and the Father into which we enter through the Holy Spirit.

Scripture has little value outside the Church because the Church is the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit brought forth Scripture through the Church and so the Church was alive and well during the first century as the New Testament was being inspired and over the next several centuries as the canon was discerned and recognized.

Listen to the Bible in the Church. Read the Bible at home. Open the Gospel to know Christ. Know Christ to love Him and the Father through the Spirit.

Oremus pro invicem!

Yours in Christ through Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rev. Christopher J. Pollard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large, connected letters.

Rev. Christopher J. Pollard
Pastor, St. John the Beloved Catholic Church

p.s. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Heb 13,8)

THE BIBLE'S SELF-CONTAINED INSTRUCTION MANUAL

CHRIST WANTS US TO UNDERSTAND SACRED SCRIPTURE

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24,27

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

Luke 24,45

UNDERSTANDING SACRED SCRIPTURE CAN BE DIFFICULT

But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God."

Matthew 22,28 / Mark 12,24

You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

John 5:39-40

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, for by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith. Grace be with you.

1Timothy 6:20

So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and

Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

2Peter 3,15b-18

THE CHURCH SPEAKS ON BEHALF OF CHRIST THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 16,15-19

After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. He who hears you hears Me, and he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him Who sent Me.

Luke 10,1.16

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you are to answer or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

Luke 12,11-12 / Mark 13,11

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

John 14,26

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed

on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

John 20,21-23

THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES THE CHURCH IN COMPOSING AND INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theoph'ilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

Luke 1,1-4

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

John 20,30-31

This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

John 21,24-25

First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God

2Peter 1:20-21

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

Romans 15:4

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2Timothy 3,16-17

PROCLAIMING AND TEACHING SCRIPTURE IS A CORPORATE WORK OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert road. And he rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of the Can’dace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.” So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this: “As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth.” And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus. And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?” And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azo’tus, and

passing on he preached the gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesare'a.

Acts 8,26-40

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

Galatians 1,15-19

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain.

But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. But because of false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage - to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me; but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised; only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do.

But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Galatians 2,1-14

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

1Timothy 3,14-15

Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching.

1Timothy 4:13

Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

2Timothy 1,13-14

BELIEVERS WHO KNOW SCRIPTURE THROUGH THE CHURCH
AVOID FALSE TEACHINGS AND FALSE TEACHERS AND
INSTRUCT OTHERS TO UNDERSTAND AND TEACH SCRIPTURE

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel - not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now

I say again, If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1,6-9

Anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; for he who greets him shares his wicked work.

2John 1,9-11

But 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 who 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, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2Timothy 3:14-17

To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.

2Thessalonians 2,15

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

2Thessalonians 3,6

Now a Jew named Apol'los, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aq'uila heard him, they took 9him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately. And

when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Acts 18,24-28

FURTHER BIBLICAL RESOURCES

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New Catholic Answer Bible, New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE) Our Sunday Visitor (2011) 2008 pages.

Catholic Scripture Study Bible: RSV-CE, Saint Benedict Press (2010) 1547 pages.

Navarre Bible Series, Four Courts Press (2006) 19 volumes.

ONLINE RESOURCE

Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition)
(bit.ly/BibleGateway_RSVCE)

Scott Hahn (<http://www.scotthahn.com/catholic-biblical-study/>)

FORMED.org (<https://formed.org/>)

St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology (<https://stpaulcenter.com/>)

Catena Aurea, St. Thomas Aquinas
The Gospel of Matthew
(<https://dhspriority.org/thomas/CAMatthew.htm>)

The Gospel of Mark

(<https://dhspriority.org/thomas/CAMark.htm>)

The Gospel of Luke

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(<https://dhspriority.org/thomas/english/CAJohn.htm>)

Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Index of Citations: Sacred Scripture” Libreria Editrice Vaticana (2000) pp. 689-720.

(bit.ly/USCCB_CCC_Index)

Catholic Answers

“Bible” (<https://www.catholic.com/bible>)

“Canon of Scripture”

(<https://www.catholic.com/canon-of-scripture>)

“Deuterocanonical Books”

(<https://www.catholic.com/deuterocanonical-books>)

“Sola Scriptura” (<https://www.catholic.com/sola-scriptura>)

Bible Study Resources

(<https://biblestudyfor Catholics.com/bible-study-resources/>)

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THEOLOGICAL WORK WITH SCRIPTURE INDEX

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In Conversation with God, Francis Fernandez, Scepter Press (1992) 7 volumes, 3800 pages.

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