



Tramore Parish

The Word of God

The Bible is the Word of God – a book for everybody, not just for scholars and theologians. God speaks to every one of us.

The Word of God – refers both to the Bible, and to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God the Son (Jesus). “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14).

The Word of God is Scripture. The Word of God is Jesus. This close association between God’s written word and his eternal Word is intentional and has been the custom of the Church since the first generation. *“All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ, ‘because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ.’”* (CCC 134)

The inspired word (the Bible) represents the eternal Word (Jesus) in several important ways.

As the Son of God, Jesus is divine, as well as human. The written word of God, however (Bible) is not divine, but divinely inspired. This makes the Bible unique in world literature, just like the Incarnation of Jesus is a unique event in world history.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate. In his humanity, he is like us in all things, except for sin. As a work of man, the Bible is like any other book, except without error. Both Christ and Scripture, says the Second Vatican Council, are given *“for the sake of our salvation’ (Dei Verbum 11) and both give us God’s definitive revelation of himself. We cannot, therefore, conceive of one without the other: the Bible without Jesus, or Jesus without the Bible. Each is the interpretive key to the other.”* (S. Hahn)

St. Jerome: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” (c.f. CCC 133)

So, when we approach the Bible, we approach Jesus, the Word of God, and in order to encounter Jesus, we must approach him in prayerful study of the inspired Word of God, the Sacred Scriptures. All of Scripture is Christ speaking to us.

There are three key stages to the story of salvation in the Bible.

- (1) God at work in the world – in the life of Israel; this is the story of the Old Testament
- (2) God at work in the world – in the life of Christ; this is the story of the four Gospels
- (3) God at work in the world – in the life of Christians; this is the story of the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament Epistles

The Acts of the Apostles

Author & Date

It is generally accepted among most scholars today that the Acts of the Apostles was written by St. Luke, author of the third gospel. This tradition goes back to the second century, and is supported by Church fathers such as Irenaeus (AD 180), Clement of Alexandria (AD 200), and Eusebius (AD 325). There are strong reasons for attributing it to St. Luke:

- (1) Acts begins by referring to the author's earlier work, i.e. the Gospel, and is dedicated to the same person – 'Theophilus' – 'Lover of God.'
- (2) The same concern for the sick is displayed in Acts, just as in St. Luke's gospel (Luke was a physician, c.f. Col. 4:14)
- (3) A careful reading of Acts shows that its author was an eyewitness to several of the events recounted – the famous 'we' passages, as a member of St. Paul's missionary team (c.f. 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).

The most likely date that St. Luke wrote the Acts was around AD 63. It was soon after Paul's house arrest in Rome (early 60s) but before the fire of Rome and persecution of Nero (AD 64) a significant event which Luke doesn't mention. Neither does he mention the destruction of Jerusalem with the temple in AD 70. In all likelihood, these events had not happened yet.

Structure

There are a number of ways that Acts can be structured. Here are three:

- (1) Chapters 1-12 focus on Peter's leadership role in establishing the Church, and chapters 13-28 narrate the missionary efforts of Paul in expanding the Church.
- (2) The book begins in Jerusalem (East), and ends thirty years later in Rome (West).
- (3) Acts follows geographically the mandate of Jesus in Acts 1:8. First, the apostles preach in Jerusalem (chs. 1-7), then in Judea and Samaria (chs. 8-12), and then all throughout the Roman world (chs. 13-28).

The open-ended conclusion in chapter 28 with Paul still preaching the gospel is symbolic; it makes the book a fitting prologue to the rest of Church history, a worldwide spread of the gospel that is still ongoing today.

Content

The Book of Acts traces the first thirty years of Christian history from the Ascension of Jesus in Jerusalem to the imprisonment of Paul in Rome. Luke's intention is to continue the story of Jesus throughout the life and mission of his first disciples.

Though Luke was a careful historian, whose findings have been shown to be accurate and reliable in modern research, "*Acts is far from being a lifeless chronicle of facts and figures. Luke has given us an artful narrative filled with inspiring heroes, moving speeches, and daring adventures*" (S. Hahn).

Readers will notice that the title 'Acts of the Apostles' seems strange, given that Luke gives most of his time recounting the efforts of Peter and Paul. But we can take the term 'Apostles' in a broader sense, i.e. beyond the 'Twelve.' 'Apostolos' – one who is sent, by the Holy Spirit, who is the primary actor in Acts. In fact, the book could be appropriately called the 'Gospel of the Holy Spirit,' since it recounts the marvellous works of the third Person of the Trinity through human co-operation. Those 'apostles' sent to do the Spirit's work include figures we will meet such as Peter, James, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Titus, Priscilla and Aquila. So the term 'Acts of the Apostles' is still fitting, in this broader sense.

The key theme that unlocks the meaning of Acts for us is the Holy Spirit who works through human means to build up the Kingdom of God through the Church on earth, which grows and spreads from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, to the Gentiles, and out towards the ends of the earth. This is Luke's primary motive in recounting these happenings. Luke shows us that, even in the face of opposition, neither prisons nor persecutions nor plots could thwart the spread of the Gospel through the power of the Spirit.