

Franciscan Journey chapter 8

Scripture in OFS Life – Questions

1. Why is the Bible important to Franciscans?

Scripture, especially the Gospel, was the key element in the life of Francis. Following his example, i.e., the Franciscan way of life is a gospel life. Rule Article 4 calls us to go from gospel to life and from life to gospel. Going from gospel to life requires that we listen to and meditate upon the gospel message. With Francis, we are called to say, "This is what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart."

Why study Scripture?

A principal duty of believers is to be "configured to Christ"

- Not to be shaped by the word of God is to be shaped by the world
- "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ" – St. Jerome
- See John 5:39, 2 Timothy 3:15-17

Scripture is our main source of information about ...

- God (His nature, His will for us, what He has done for us)
- the nature of the human person
- the meaning of life

Scripture connects us to the larger picture

- Situates us in a definite story
- Links us with believers of all places & times

2. What insights did you get by reading this chapter on Scripture?

The most significant insight for me was the discussion on how to address people who take different approaches to Scripture, i.e., the discussion of fundamentalists, evangelicals, conservatives, liberals, et al. The need for dialogue with people of all approaches had not occurred to me before. I had not deeply considered how my own approach may have been influenced by people I have heard or read and whose opinions I have either respected or dismissed. The idea that Franciscans are called to bridge the differences in a desire to achieve unity was one I had not previously considered. This requires that we maintain relationships, listen, and show respect and reverence toward people who disagree with me. Open dialogue can open new insights.

3. Why do Franciscans embrace a sense of openness and welcoming in dealing with others who may not agree with us?

See #2. Respectful dialogue can lead to conversion, whereas arrogant arguments shut down communication that can lead to conversion.

4. Explain your understanding of what is needed for a good interpretation of Scripture. Why is this important?

A good interpretation of Scripture requires reading passages in the context of the entire Bible, understanding the intent of the author rather than a literalistic reading, prayer for guidance from the Holy Spirit, studying how the Magisterium of the Church has read that passage, and meditating upon how to apply that passage to my own life.

5. What attitude should we show in conversations with people who think differently than we do?

We should adopt an attitude of reverence, of respect, and of seeking truth together. We seek an open dialogue in which we exchange ideas and interpretations of Scripture, with the goal of learning from one another.

6. What is the value of labeling someone e.g. as conservative, liberal, fundamentalist, evangelical etc. How do Franciscans deal with such labeling?

There is no value in applying such labels -- labels tend to isolate us from one another and lessen the opportunity for insightful dialogue.

7. Name some "treasures" in your life. What value do they bring to you and the people in your life? Evaluate them to see what is worth keeping and what can be discarded.

8. Scripture reflection: John 1:1-18. What truth(s) about Jesus are contained in this text? Explain how verse 18 relates to our dedication to the Gospel?

John 1:1-18:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received

him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.' ") And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

Ignatius Study Bible: 1–18 The Prologue functions like a musical overture, introducing the main themes of the Gospel to be developed in subsequent chapters: light (1:4), life (1:4), darkness (1:5), testimony (1:7), faith (1:12), glory (1:14), truth (1:17). This network of images and ideas is held together around Jesus the Word, who is portrayed as the Creator and Redeemer of all things. Similar poetic passages are found in Col 1:15–20 and Heb 1:1–4.

1:1 In the beginning: John traces the origin of the Word into eternity past, where God the Son was present with God the Father before time itself began (17:5). • This opening verse of John is a direct allusion to the opening verse of the Bible. As in Genesis 1, the evangelist draws attention to light, darkness, life, and the spoken Word that brought all things into existence (1:1–5). It is implied that the universe, once created through the Word of God, is now being renewed through that same Word come in the flesh as Jesus Christ (1:14; Rev 21:1–5; Catechism of the Catholic Church [hereafter CCC] 241, 291). was with God: Distinguishes the Word from the Father. They are not the same Person, yet they share the same nature in the family of the eternal Godhead (17:25–26) (CCC 254–56). was God: Or, "was divine". This is the first and clearest assertion of the deity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (5:18; 10:30–33; 20:28) (CCC 242).

1:4 life: Earthly life is a gift that is given and sustained by God through his eternal Word (Heb 1:3). Ultimately, natural and biological life points beyond itself to the supernatural and divine life that Jesus grants in abundance to the children of God (10:10; 2 Pet 1:4; CCC 1997). This new life comes to us when we give ourselves to Christ in faith (3:16; 20:31), and Christ gives himself to us through the sacramental action of the Church (3:5; 6:53).

1:5 light ... darkness: Symbolic of the struggle between good and evil (1 Jn 2:8–11). Jesus himself is the true light (1:9) that drives away death, deception, and the devil (1 Jn 3:8). Other contrasts in the Gospel include flesh and Spirit (3:6), truth and falsehood (8:44–45), heaven and earth (3:31), and life and death (5:24).

1:6 John: John the Baptist, who fulfilled a divine mission to Israel (1:31) but was not the divine Messiah (1:20). Emphasis on John's subordinate role to Jesus runs throughout the Fourth Gospel, suggesting that one of the aims of the evangelist is to win over the remaining band of John's disciples who had not yet accepted Jesus (3:25–30; 5:36; 10:41). Support for this is found in Acts 19:1–7, where we learn that a contingent of John's followers lived in Ephesus—the same city that tradition links with the publication of the Fourth Gospel. See introduction: Author.

1:10 the world: One of several concepts in John with multiple meanings. The world can refer (1) to the universe created by God (1:10), (2) to the fallen family of man in need of redemption (3:17), (3) and to the sphere of the devil that opposes God and hates the truth (15:18–20).

1:11 received him not: Jesus' ministry to Israel was often resisted and sometimes rejected (8:56–59; 10:31; Lk 4:28–30).

1:12 believed in his name: i.e., believed that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and the eternal Son of God (20:31; 1 Jn 5:1, 13). Names are inseparable from persons in Semitic thinking. So, for instance, the Lord himself is invoked when his name is called upon in worship (Gen 4:26; 12:8) and when covenants are ratified by swearing an oath in his name (Gen 21:23; 24:3). **children of God:** By the grace of divine generation we are filled with divine life and reborn as sons and daughters of the Father (1 Jn 3:1, 9). This transformation requires faith and takes place in Baptism (3:5–8; Gal 3:26–27) (CCC 2780–82).

1:13 not of blood ... flesh ... man: Three means or processes that bring about natural birth into the world, i.e., women, the sexual impulse, and men. John is stressing that natural birth does not establish us in a supernatural relationship with God. • A similar cluster of ideas is found in Wis 7:1–2, where human existence is said to depend on the blood of prenatal gestation, the pleasure of marital relations, and the seed of man.

1:14 the Word became flesh: Asserts the mystery of the Incarnation. It means that Christ, who is fully divine, eternal, and equal in being with the Father, came from heaven to earth and entered history as a man. The word "flesh" signifies all that is natural, earthly, and human (3:6; 6:63; 1 Jn 4:2) (CCC 423, 456–63). **dwelt among us:** The Greek means that Jesus "tabernacled" or "pitched his tent" among us (Rev 21:3). • John is making a link between the Incarnation of Jesus and the erection of the wilderness Tabernacle in the OT (Ex 25:8–9). The Tabernacle, once the architectural expression of Yahweh's presence in Israel, is a prophetic image of Jesus dwelling in our midst as a man. Likewise, as the Wisdom of God once tabernacled in Israel in the Torah of Moses (Sir 24:8), so Jesus is the embodiment of divine Wisdom in the flesh (1 Cor 1:24). See word study: Word. grace and truth: Equivalent to the "mercy and

faithfulness" of God celebrated in the OT (Ex 34:6; Ps 25:10; 89:1; Prov 20:28; CCC 214). his glory: The magnificence of God's presence and Being once visible in the fiery cloud that indwelt the wilderness Tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35) and later the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). The glory of Christ is veiled behind his humanity and becomes visible only when he manifests it through his miracles (2:11; 11:40) (CCC 697).

1:15 ranks before me ... was before me: The preeminence of Jesus over John is deduced from his preexistence. Although his ministry followed that of John, his life with the Father predated the foundations of the world itself (1:1; 8:58; 17:5).

1:16 grace upon grace: Or "grace in place of grace". As implied in the next verse, the graces of the Old Covenant have been superseded by the blessings of the New (1:17; CCC 504).

1:18 No one has ever seen God: God is pure spirit and thus invisible to human eyes (4:24; 1 Tim 6:16). Even still, the face of the Father can be seen in the face of Christ, who is the visible image of the invisible God (14:9; Col 1:15). Only in eternity will we see God as he truly is (1 Cor 13:12) (CCC 151). the only-begotten Son: A significant textual variant reads "God, the only begotten", which directly asserts the deity of Jesus. The reading followed in the translation can (1) refer to the eternal generation of Christ within the Trinity or (2) mean "unique" and "precious", as Isaac was the beloved of his father, Abraham (Heb 11:17) (CCC 444).

Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture - There is a special power in the words with which John begins his Gospel. What makes this hymnlike Prologue to the Fourth Gospel so profound is John's vision of the Word of God, in relation to whom all creation and history exist and have meaning (see Col 1:15-17). The divine Word was with God the Father from all eternity, was at work in creation and in the history of Israel, and then became †incarnate in Jesus. The Prologue is thus a summary of God's dealings with the world before and in the incarnation of the Word, Jesus.

The Prologue begins with the eternity of God (1:1-2) and moves to the creation of the world (1:3-5). John then recounts the divine Word's activity in the world and particularly in the history of his people Israel (1:6-13). We are then given to contemplate the incarnation: the Word of God becomes a human being in Jesus without loss of his divinity. The incarnate Word completes the Father's plan of salvation when, through his cross and resurrection, he fully reveals the Father and opens the way for humanity to enter eternal life with God (1:14-18). The rest of the Gospel plays out these themes introduced in the Prologue.

Reflection and Application (1:1-18)

John's Prologue presents the mystery of the incarnation: God became human in Jesus. This mystery infinitely surpasses human comprehension. The history of Christianity offers many instances of intellectual and spiritual shipwrecks that occurred when the mystery was not respected. In the early Church, on the one hand, some were so taken with the divinity of the Word that they minimized or denied the genuineness of Jesus' humanity. These gnostics (who have modern New Age successors) attempted to spiritualize Jesus and make of him some sort of benign force in the universe, thus denying his real humanity. On the other hand, some have not accepted Jesus' divinity but considered him a good man, a great religious teacher among many others.

In order to hold on to both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus, we need to become better acquainted with his living reality as he is present in our everyday lives. We can strengthen our grasp of his incarnation and deepen the experiential dimension of our faith by taking a few simple steps. First, we can spend time in prayer every day and during that time read the Bible (praying John's Prologue is a great place to start). Second, we can guard our minds from the busyness and anxiety that distract us by making time for silence in our day. Reducing our consumption of mass media helps us to avoid the excess of information that only confuses the mind and paralyzes the will. Third, we can open ourselves up to the will of God, for as St. Paul declares, "This is the will of God, your holiness" (1 Thess 4:3). Fourth, we can live a life that takes the incarnation of our God seriously by attending Mass, frequenting the sacraments, and finding a way to care for the poor, for they are Christ among us in a special way: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt 25:40).

Sacra Pagina - The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel is one of the most celebrated passages in the New Testament. The Johannine symbol of the eagle depends upon it. More importantly, it expresses the major christological beliefs of Christianity: the Word preexisted creation with God; creation was through the Word; divine filiation is possible for believers; Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God, the Word become flesh; he shares in the divinity of God, yet he has taken on the human condition totally; Jesus is the unique, once-and-for-all revelation of God in the human story; the perfection of God's earlier gift of the Law to Moses takes place in and through Jesus Christ. Despite this intense focus on christology that has marked the use of the Prologue over the Christian centuries, at the heart of this passage lies a theology. What the Prologue says about Jesus depends entirely upon what the author wants to say about God's having been made known in and through Jesus Christ.

The product of a Christian experience that looks back with respect to its Jewish origins, the Prologue has to be understood in the light of the traditional understanding of

the God of Genesis and the God of Sinai. The obvious link between Genesis 1 and the opening of the Prologue sets the stage. Before there was anything, there was God. John 1:1 affirms that there was also the Word. The role of the Word, as with any word, is to be uttered. The Word that was turned toward God makes God known, and this revelation has consequences for creation and the darkness of the human situation. It is now possible to become children of God. It is not as if God has never shown any concern for the ambiguity of the human situation. In former times he made himself known; he revealed his glory (Exod 19:16–25) through the gift of the Law on Sinai, through Moses (Exod 20:1–26). The Prologue affirms that Christians have access to the perfection of this former gift. They can see the revelation of the glory of God in his Son, Jesus Christ. God has gifted us twice. His former gift of the Law through Moses has been perfected in the fullness of his gifts in and through Jesus Christ. Only the Son has ever seen God, and the story of his life will tell the story of God's loving action within the human story.