

## Key events in the history of your institution

The Catholic Biblical Association of Great Britain was founded in 1940. After decades of hesitation and fear the biblical movement was gaining courage. The CBA was intended to share among Catholics the insights of new research and discoveries about the Bible. An enormous boost was given to the development and sharing of biblical studies with the publication in 1943 of Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, described by Raymond Brown as the *magna charta* of modern biblical studies. It was of course Cardinal Augustin Bea who was the driving force for the encyclical, and he will also have a crucial role at Vatican II.

In these early years, before the Council, the CBA published *The Catholic Commentary on Scripture* (in 1953) and work began at an ecumenical level with the *Revised Standard Version Bible*. The Catholic edition eventually came out in 1966, the same year as the English version of the *Jerusalem Bible*. The RSV with its long history going back to the Protestant King James Bible was already archaic in style, and it was no surprise that English and Welsh Catholics embraced the JB, which was the first Catholic Bible in modern English.

Of course it was the Council, in its Constitution *Dei Verbum*, which gave the impetus needed to return the Scriptures to the heart of the life of the Church. It will be from the Council that the CBF will be born firstly as the *World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate* – founded in 1970, with the important support of the CBA. The CBF, as you know, has as its mission to implement chapter 6 of *Dei Verbum* on 'Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church', and more recently to recognise the Scriptures as the driving force for all that the Church does.

The CBA of course became a member of the CBF and continued in these years to put on conferences and to produce *Scripture Bulletin*.

Fast forward to 1999, and preparing for the new millennium the English and Welsh bishops decided that Scripture should be given more prominence. The Bishops' Conference took up full membership of the CBF, and decided to prepare a teaching document on the Bible.

In 2005 *The Gift of Scripture* was published and presented at the CBF Conference in Rome, celebrating 40 years of *Dei Verbum*.

All kinds of initiatives sprang from the publication of this document.

In 2010 with the publication of *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict's document which came out of the Bishops' Synod on the Word of God, a new Scripture Working Group was formed at the Bishops' Conference, with financial support from Bible Society.

The Group produced a study guide to *Verbum Domini*, entitled *The Word of the Lord*, and organised a national conference in 2012, and another in 2015 to mark fifty years of *Dei Verbum*.

So you see there have been these landmark events, but of course the work was going on at diocesan and parish level, producing resources, gathering people together around the Word of God.

To bring us right up to date the Bishops decided to follow the lead of the CBF as it celebrated fifty years in 2020. In England and Wales 2020 was a Year of the God who Speaks, and the activity continues not least because the pandemic has disrupted some of the plans.

### **Essential initiatives today**

Well, in addition to the continuation of the Year of the God who speaks, the Catholic Biblical Association has begun to livestream events, with Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP, speaking on the 'Joy of the Gospel' and Dom Henry Wansbrough on 'The Adventures of a Biblical Translator'. Dom Henry draws on decades of experience, which culminated in the 2019 publication of the *Revised New Jerusalem Bible*. **(Revised New Jerusalem Bible)** These events are available on [www.whatgoodnews.org](http://www.whatgoodnews.org)

The second initiative we are working on is the promotion of the recent document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled *What is Man? A Journey Through Biblical Anthropology*. The Commission is made up of twenty biblical scholars from all over the world who, at the request of the Pope, take a particular subject for their study, and produce a teaching document. The English translation of *What is Man?* is about to be published by London publisher Darton, Longman and Todd.

On 20<sup>th</sup> March Professor Nuria Calduch-Benages, member of the Commission, will give a livestreamed presentation of the document. Just go to [www.whatgoodnews.org](http://www.whatgoodnews.org) at 11 GMT (12 Roman time).

## **What are the challenges of today?**

We share the aim of the CBF, that Scripture should animate all the pastoral activity of the Church. We live in unprecedented times. The pandemic has produced multiple crises and multiple challenges. The Scriptures provide inspiration and answers to so many of our current questions. Pope Francis in *Laudato si* has already pointed out the scriptural basis for our role in caring for creation. Gen 2:15 'God placed us in the garden to work and care for it.' We are called to be 'brothers and sisters': *Fratelli Tutti* points repeatedly to new ways of relating to others, particularly to those in the greatest need. Deut 10:19: 'care for the foreigner for you were foreigners in Egypt.'

The real difficulty is to make our voices heard amid so many other voices. The solid biblical training of those who teach and preach is always a priority. Even today there are those who fear the Scriptures and do not welcome the insights of Catholic biblical scholarship, and those who want the Bible to remain a dusty old volume with old-fashioned language, which we might hear at Christmas carol services. We know from people all over the world that when the Bible is taken seriously it changes people, and it changes situations. That is why the initiative of Pope Francis to set up the Sunday of the Word of God is so welcome. We had a wonderful webinar recently with speakers from across Europe. New technologies are making so many new things possible. We really must help people to read and understand the Scriptures as living words showing us the way to life.