



Season 3: Episode 10 | Archbishop Angaelos | A View of Scripture from the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London

Hello and welcome to Scripture Untangled, a podcast by the Canadian Bible Society. My name is Joanna LaFleur. I'm a friend of the Canadian Bible Society and I'll be your guide for today's episode.

On today's episode, we're featuring Archbishop Anba Angaelos, the Coptic Orthodox Bishop of London, and he's being interviewed by the UK Bible Society's Reverend Dr. Andrew Ollerton. So let me tell you a little bit about him. Archbishop Angaelos was born in Egypt and emigrated to Australia in his early childhood with his family.

After obtaining his degree in political science, philosophy, and sociology, he continued on to postgraduate studies in law while working in that field. In 1990, he returned to Egypt to the Monastery of St Bishoy in Wadi-El-Natroun where he was consecrated a monk by the late Pope Shenouda III and served as his private secretary until 1995 when he was delegated to serve in the United Kingdom. He was proclaimed the first Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of London in November of 2017, and he did that in Egypt and then was enthroned over the new diocese later in November 2017 at the Cathedral of St. George in England.

So please enjoy this episode, a really special one, as we dive into the Archbishop's remarkable journey of faith and share this episode with a friend or on social media with someone you know who would really connect with it. Enjoy.

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Andrew Ollerton: Well, welcome to this podcast. It's great to have you join us. My name is Andrew Ollerton.

I'm delighted today to be joined by Archbishop Angaelos, who is the Archbishop based in London for the Coptic Orthodox Church. Archbishop, thanks so much for joining us.

Archbishop Angaelos: Thank you, Andrew.

It's a real pleasure and a blessing to be with you and with all your viewers.

Andrew Ollerton: Now, I know you travel a lot, but as we speak, are you in Britain? Where are you at the moment? And where's home for you at the moment?

Archbishop Angaelos: So, I'm currently in London. I do travel a lot, and like most people, not as much as pre-COVID.

But I get a good balance of being here and traveling around the world for a variety of reasons. And it's a real blessing to be able to serve wherever God leads us.

Andrew Ollerton: Brilliant.

Well, listen, we'll get into particularly a conversation about Scripture. This podcast is Scripture Untangled. We're trying to help make sense of the Bible, untangle some of the knotty bits as well as some of the more exciting bits.

So, we'll get into that. But before we do, it'd be great to get to know you a bit more personally. Could you tell us, go right back to your upbringing.

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I understand I've done a little bit of homework, and I understand you, as we'd expect with the Coptic Orthodox Church, you were born and brought up in Egypt, is that right? But then emigrated shortly. So, give us a little bit of your backstory from childhood through to your teenage years.

Archbishop Angaelos: So, I was born in Egypt.

We migrated as a family when I was very young, I was five. And I grew up in Sydney, Australia for all of my teenage, adolescent years, my early 20s. I did my education there.

I was born into a Coptic Orthodox family. I attended church, like most young Coptic Orthodox Christian young people. And the church was really important to me growing up, spiritually and socially.

And I think we're very blessed in the Coptic Orthodox Church to have a very strong Sunday school movement and youth ministry arm, which means that children and young people are engaged from a very early age. And it becomes very much part of who we are and what we do. And of course, I think that must have been a significant part of the reason I received this calling to then leave Australia and go to Egypt to join the monastery.

Andrew Ollerton: Brilliant. And so was there a strong Coptic Orthodox Church and youth work in Australia as well in Sydney?

Archbishop Angaelos: There was. At the time, it was a much smaller community. I mean, at the moment, Sydney is probably one of our largest communities outside of Egypt.

Andrew Ollerton: Is it? Okay.

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Archbishop Angaelos: It is because there was significant migration to the United States and to Australia and also to Canada.

My father went to Australia in 1971, and we had followed him as a family in 1973. So, the 70s and 80s, a lot of people did migrate to Australia. And the church there was wonderful, it was dynamic, it was reactive, it served.

Of course, it was in its very formative stage. So, as a Coptic Orthodox community, we are quite young outside of Egypt. We're only 50 years outside of Egypt with some of our oldest communities.

And so that was still a very formative foundational stage. Now, communities tend to be larger and much better equipped.

Andrew Ollerton: And how well do they, those communities outside Egypt, how well do they preserve the sort of Coptic tradition? For example, would you in Australia have been learning the Coptic language and understanding the liturgy? Because am I right that in the Coptic Orthodox Church, the liturgy would be in the Coptic language, but with Arabic translation, if you're in Egypt, how does that work in Australia or London, for that matter, where you are now?

Archbishop Angaelos: Our experience is very different to many other churches or communities.

The Coptic Orthodox Church, and I must say the word Coptic just means Egyptian, sounds exotic. But if you say Russian Orthodox or Greek Orthodox, people understand immediately. When you say Coptic Orthodox, it's not so apparent, but Coptic just means Egyptian.

And Christians have been in Egypt since the beginning of the first century when Saint Mark the Evangelist preached Christianity there. And the church has been under various forms of

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persecution throughout its history, which of course has been very painful, but has made us very resilient. And so, language for us is a vehicle.

Of course, we like to maintain Coptic, and we use it liturgically. But if you were to attend a typical liturgical Eucharistic service in Egypt, unless it's a very specific service or it's somewhere in a monastery or it's intentional, it would be predominantly in Arabic. It's some Coptic.

Here in the UK, we use a lot of English. We do some services that are entirely in English. Most services, you know, most of the more general services would be in a combination of English, Arabic and Coptic.

But so, language for us is a means to an end or an end in itself. It's a vehicle to presenting the word and the message rather than being protected at the expense of understanding.

Andrew Ollerton: Yeah, very good.

And in a sense, the Scriptures that we enjoy bear witness to that, don't they? They come in several languages and translation for us is not a problem in the sense of it's a recognition that God is not restrained to one linguistic tone. So no, that's really helpful. And just, I mean, I want to get back to your story in a moment, but just the story of the Coptic or Egyptian Orthodox Church.

So again, St. Mark comes to Alexandria, is that right? And preached the good news there. And that's the tradition of the founding of the Egyptian church as we would understand it. And then obviously, fast forward a little bit, fast forward a few centuries, and there is a sort of point at which the Egyptian Orthodox Church separates somewhat from the Greek Orthodox Church.

And those two churches, do they still sit alongside each other within places like Alexandria? And is that still the case? And how are relationships within those different traditions now?

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Archbishop Angaelos: So, terminology like Coptic Orthodox Church or Greek Orthodox Church is very nuanced in the world. When we're speaking about the first century, we are speaking about the Church of God. So, it was the one holy universal church.

And there were five centers of the church, one of which was Constantinople. And the other was Alexandria. And even at that time, to show you that the church was one, the titles of the heads of those Cs were not popes or patriarchs or catholici, they were bishops.

So, it was the Bishop of Rome, the Bishop of Alexandria, Bishop of Constantinople, Bishop of Jerusalem. And so, there was, as a response to heresies, false teachings, there was the calling of what we call ecumenical councils. The word ecumenical, *oikoumenē*, is universal.

And it would be the bishops of all the church, the whole church coming together. I almost made the mistake of saying bishops of the churches. They weren't churches.

It was the bishops of the church coming together. And we have the first was in 325 in Nicaea, and then Constantinople, and then Ephesus. The fourth council was convened in Chalcedon in 451.

And that is a council at which we were declared to have a faith that was not truly Christian. We were accused of not believing properly in the incarnate word, our Lord Jesus Christ, although it was our church fathers who taught of both the divinity and the humanity of Christ being in one indivisible nature. So, one of our fathers, St. Cyril of Alexandria, actually presented a metaphor, a symbol of this.

And he spoke about a cobbler working with heated iron. He said, if you get a bar of iron, put it in fire, the fire becomes part of it, and it becomes red hot. At that point, you cannot separate the metal from the fire.

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And he uses that example of the incarnate word being fully human, fully divine, coming together. The terminology that we use is in thought alone. So, you can distinguish them in thought alone, because we can think about the human and the divine, but in actual fact, they were, in the words of St. Cyril, the manifestation of the incarnate words in flesh.

So that's always been our understanding, but regrettably, those were misunderstood. And whenever I'm asked, I always say, at best, it was just bad linguistics, at worst, it was just very bad politics.

Andrew Ollerton: Yeah, yeah.

Well, that's so many of the unfortunate fracture points within the church's story. So many of them come down to linguistics and culture as well, don't they? But I have to say that analogy by Cyril of Alexandria, I've always loved that. And his writings generally, I actually studied a bit of his theology of deification many years ago, and I found that really inspiring.

But listen, we may lose a few of our viewers if we start talking about the hypostatic union too much, or Arius, or whatever it is. So, let's come back to your story. You're in Australia, surfing away, I'm sure, and enjoying the Coptic Orthodox or the Egyptian Orthodox community you're part of there.

And then you talked about, you got to the stage where you mentioned that you felt called, and out of that calling, you left Australia. Just pick up the story from there. What did you feel called to? How did that call come to you? And what did you do next?

Archbishop Angaelos: So just as a caveat, so I'm not misrepresenting anyone or anything, I've never surfed. But I mean, that's just by the by.

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Andrew Ollerton: Oh, that's a shame. I had an imagination of you surfing. I like that idea.

Archbishop Angaelos: With long blonde locks and on the surf.

Andrew Ollerton: That's exactly it.

Archbishop Angaelos: Didn't quite fit the profile. No, the calling was very, very strong. It wasn't a voice in my ear. It wasn't an apparition. It was just a strong feeling in my heart that that's what I wanted to do. I remember the time.

I remember the exact moment where I was sitting on the floor in my bedroom, reading through my law books. And I felt there and then, I felt called. There was no going back, close the book, put it down beside me.

And that was the end of it. Of course, having said that it's not that simple, because it is a lifelong commitment. You're leaving...

I migrated with my family. I was traveling 10,000 miles plus to join a monastic life. And I was the first member of our church brought up abroad to go back and join the monastery.

And so again, it was a test case for everyone, for myself, for the monastery, for my parents, for the church. And so, in retrospect, I could see God preparing step by step for that moment. But in actual fact, it was a single moment where I got that feeling and that calling and acted on it.

And then I went to Egypt. I was working until the very end, I was working and studying, went to Egypt. I joined the monastery of St Bishoy, which is in a place called Wadi-El-Natroun, Skete, which is halfway between, if any of your viewers know Egypt, it's on the desert highway, halfway between Cairo and Alexandria.

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That was a huge monastic area, where we're told when one of our popes in the early centuries went out, he was greeted by 10,000 monks and nuns. There were 50 major monasteries and 500 small settlements in that region. And the monastery that I am from, St Bishoy, is actually a fourth century monastery.

It's been standing since the fourth century. And it's had uninterrupted monastic life there since then. And so for me, it was an incredible feeling.

The smell of the buildings in the desert, the environment itself was something that I will never forget. And I remember one particular day, probably, I was there for six years, so probably five years into it, there's a tunnel at the back of the church that divides between the church and the factory where the monks would go and eat. And as I was walking in this tunnel, which I'd done hundreds of times over the five years, I suddenly got a shiver up my spine.

And I don't know why at that moment, it struck me that monks had been walking up and down that corridor for 1,500 years. And that's the sort of history we're dealing with. So yes, of course, it's spiritual, it's theological, it's liturgical, but it's also very human. It's very experiential.

Andrew Ollerton: Yeah. I think it's probably fair to say that for many of our viewers, our listeners who are more within the Protestant Western Church, actually, it's some of that depth of tradition and depth of history that we increasingly, I think, are drawn to and feeling the value of.

And the monastic tradition both within the Desert Fathers and then later is an extraordinary thing to be part of. You've obviously felt in quite a visceral way in that corridor, just the history that you are writing the next chapter of, but it goes back so far. Just tell us a little bit, I mean, I'm intrigued by, you know, so you're living in Australia, you know, a liberal democracy, a place where, you know, young people are pursuing the dream of freedom and all these things.

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And then you move from that out of choice through the call into a monastic lifestyle. What was that like? I mean, what kind of transition was that for you as a young man? And what did you struggle with? And what did you particularly relish?

Archbishop Angaelos: So, I honestly, I'm not trying to be heroic about this. And I'm not trying to make it overly flowery.

But I don't think I struggled at all. It was such an organic transition as far as I was concerned. And it was beautiful.

I enjoyed every moment of it. I was never there and sort of looked back and thought, no, no, I can't do this. Or I want to go back or any of that.

I never felt any of that. Of course, I was privileged because when I went, I was received by the late Pope Shenouda III, who was the Pope of our church for 40 plus years, and I served as his disciple and his private secretary for the six years I was there. So, I was also incredibly privileged to experience the church from two very different vantage points.

I was there in the monastery in the middle, literally in the middle of the desert. You know, 100 kilometers outside of Cairo in the middle of the desert with the monastic community and seeing the day to day living of, you know, waking up at four o'clock in the morning for midnight, what we call midnight praise, liturgical services, monastic life, but then also dealing with the Pope and being his secretary and his disciple and dealing with everyone from, you know, international statesmen to, you know, farmers who were there supporting us in the fields in the monastery. It was such a holistic experience.

It was so formative, that I will never be able to give sufficient thanks to God for that experience. And it has really, without a doubt made me who I am today. You know, when you're the Pope, you're seeing the best and worst of everything, because you're seeing the great joys and the

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pivotal moments in history, but you're also seeing the struggles of problems that have to be sorted.

And I've seen all of that, and I've been part of all of that. And it's given me insight that I would never have received otherwise.

Andrew Ollerton: Brilliant.

And obviously, the monastic life, you know, brought even more strongly to you the sense of discipline and rhythm. Have you maintained that? You know, you obviously left that community context some time ago, but how have you maintained the practices that you learned there so that your life has a rhythm of spiritual input and investment, prayer, Scripture, etc.?

Archbishop Angaelos: Episcopal life is one of these oxymorons in Christianity, and especially in our church, where you take a monk who decided to give up his life in the world and go into the monastery and live in the desert. And then you take that monk, and you plant him right at the center of a community, a large community, and you ask him to not only live within it but be responsible for it and serve it.

And so it's a transition. But again, Andrew, I think the one thing we really need to be aware of in ministry, whether it's a vicar here in England or a monk in the middle of the desert, it's God's grace, first and foremost. Because when God calls us and gives us that incredible title of fellow workers, I mean, what have we done to deserve that? Fellow workers with God, as St. Paul puts it.

He gives us incredible grace to be able to do it, because how could we do it otherwise? And he gives us the right tools for the right job for his people. And we've got to remember that it is for his people. We are here as stewards in his field.

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And so, as you rightly say, I've been here in England for almost 30 years now. And so, yes, I started as a monk priest. So I was sent here as a monk priest, first and foremost.

I served a parish for four years, and then I became a bishop in 1999. And I was able to call upon all that experience, the monastic experience, the papal secretary experience, all of that, at my parish experience, to bring me into that episcopal role. And in terms of how I maintain my rhythm, another thing about life in ministry is you become everybody else's.

You are certainly not your own. And especially in our case, our parish priests are ordained as married men. But our bishops and our pope come from monastic backgrounds.

So we're celibate, which means I can dedicate my whole life to ministry. I don't need to partition or section anything off. It's all there for ministry.

And so I find, for me, the best time to spend time with myself and for myself is early mornings. I'm a very early riser. And ironically, I'm also a very late sleeper.

So I'm not sure how that works, but it does. And it's just those couple of hours in the morning that I have to myself, which allow me, I think, to be able to focus.

Andrew Ollerton: Very good.

Well, listen, let's turn to your relationship with Scripture and perhaps particularly to understand a bit more about the Egyptian or Coptic Orthodox Church's approach to Scripture. Let's start with just, you know, and I may reveal my ignorance here, but let's start with very basic questions like what's in the canon? What's in the Bible for the Egyptian Orthodox Church? Obviously, all of the Christian traditions include the 66 books that form the basis of the Protestant canon, but then the Catholic canon and the Orthodox canon, the books within the Bible are different. What about, what's your Bible like? What's in and what's out?

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Archbishop Angaelos: We tend to use either the New King James Version or something similar.

So we have the complete Old Testament and complete New Testament. We also, as you rightly say, use the deuterocanonical books. So those become part of our canon as well.

And we will tend to use them quite a lot in our preaching and our teaching. The Coptic Orthodox Church is a deeply, deeply scriptural church. So, we have a book of prayers, which is there, called the *Agpeya*.

And that's a book of hours. And there are seven hourly prayers that are said. So first hour, third hour, sixth hour, designating different stages of days.

So the first hour is creation. The third hour is the descent of the Holy Spirit. The sixth hour is the crucifixion, and so on and so forth.

Significant times. And each one of those hours will start with a prayer we've called the prayer of thanksgiving. So giving thanks to God on every occasion, every condition, for all things.

And then it goes into a psalm. So here is Scripture. And then it goes into a series of psalms specific to the hour.

Scripture again. Then it goes into a gospel reading. And then litanies after the gospel.

And so if you pray those seven prayers during the course of the day, you've covered all the psalms. You've covered gospels. You've covered a Pauline reading as well.

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So, what you'll find is many, many Coptic Christians will be able to learn and recite Scripture just because it's part of their daily experience. Regrettably, I'm not one of them. I'm not very good at learning.

Andrew Ollerton: I'm sure lots of people would be encouraged to hear that. You have a weakness. That's good.

Archbishop Angaelos: I don't learn well off by heart. Maybe the liturgy, because I've done it so much. But if you ask me to recite huge chunks of Scripture, I will read them.

But I find learning them off by heart not simple. And then in terms of Scripture itself, it's used foundationally in everything. In our preaching, in our Bible studies, of course, in our fellowship meetings.

That goes back to our history because I think, as we said earlier, we lived with persecution for centuries. And so when what is at your core, your faith is threatened, you hold on to it so much more. And when you lose hope in the world around you, you hold on to the source of that hope, which is our Lord Jesus Christ, which is our Heavenly Father, which is the Holy Spirit.

And that all comes together in Scripture. Another, I think, huge contribution was, as I said, the late Pope Shenouda, who very much like what we're experiencing now with the passing of the Queen in England. Many people here have never known anyone except the late Queen.

Many people in our church never knew anybody except the late Pope. And he was deeply Scriptural because there are limited translations. Of course, we have a myriad of translations in the West, but in the Middle East, there are a limited number of translations of the Bible.

And so all of them seem to be the Van Dyck particular translation of the Bible, but there will be different shapes and sizes. So, he would very typically say, yes, the verse, it's on page 300 in the

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top left-hand corner, because his monastic life also meant that he read the Scriptures often, daily. And because we all came up in that school of thought, everyone has almost absorbed it.

And so, you tend to find that that continues to run in the veins of most Coptic Christians, which is the love of Scripture and the reliance on Scripture.

Andrew Ollerton: And that sort of deep sense, I mean, I really resonate with what you said there about the church under pressure, so often being the church that knows what's valuable the best. Priorities are really sharpened, aren't they, when you're persecuted? And I think I spent time in Cairo just a few months back with some leaders from across the Middle East, and it struck me just both in their own lives, but also in the context they're ministering and how thirsty they are for God's Word and how much more it means.

I find it deeply challenging, actually, I have to say. In fact, I've stayed in touch with a couple of the people from there just because I felt like they could teach me so much about how to value Scripture and truth. Because in this liberal context that we're in, Western church, it's so easy to blend with the culture.

There's no luxury for that so often in these leaders. So I really resonate with that. Now, obviously, one of the differences, let's just tease out some of the differences.

One of the sharp points of disagreement in the Reformation between the Protestant and Catholic church was around the role of tradition. So, you have, in a sense, often a very similar wording regarding the Scriptures, but a much stronger value placed on the role of tradition in the Catholic church. But just in terms of the Coptic Orthodox or Egyptian Orthodox church, how does that work? How would you understand the tradition of the church alongside Scripture to interpret Scripture? What sort of language would you use in terms of both the trustworthiness of Scripture, but also the infallibility or whatever terminology? What makes sense to you about Scripture and tradition?

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Archbishop Angaelos: So, I think just for the sake of your viewers, when we say the word tradition, it's not cultural tradition.

It is capital T tradition, which is Apostolic Tradition. So basically, it is the writings of the fathers of the early church, which were an interpretation, exposition of Scripture. So, for us, as Coptic Orthodox Christians, Scripture sits alone as divinely inspired.

It is the divinely inspired Word of God. Unchallenged, unchallengeable, it is there. Tradition is teaching, exposition, explanation, whatever we want to call it, of that Word of God.

And we have such incredible church fathers like Saint Athanasius, who as a deacon started to formulate the Creed that started in Constantinople and finished in Nicaea. We have Saint Cyril, as we said. We have Saint Didymus the Blind.

We have so many other incredibly rich theologians who have exposed and explained Scripture for us. And we do rely on their teachings. We rely on their readings.

But I think there's a very big misconception in the West as to how we view Apostolic Tradition. It is incredibly important to us, but it is not at the same level as the Bible itself, as Scripture itself. That sits alone.

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Andrew Ollerton: Yeah, very helpful. And I do think that's a misconception. I have to say that's been my misconception until relatively recently.

But actually, as you spend time reading some of the early Church Fathers, as well as more recent theologians within the Orthodox tradition, you realize for many that's simply a parody that isn't a reflection of your commitment. So it's really good to talk that through. Can we turn the corner then? I know you have a real heart for, so we're staying on the Scripture theme, but I know you have a real heart for young people and young people engaging with Scripture.

And you're obviously working within a context where Scripture is embedded within the liturgy, within the prayers, as you've described. It's such a rich tradition of Scriptures, the warp and weft, the very fabric of the faith. But obviously, younger people still have, particularly perhaps those who are living in more Western secularized contexts, still have both perhaps some questions about Scripture, as well as not always those rhythms in place in their life.

So let's start with the challenge, and then we'll come through to what you see as opportunities. But what are you seeing as the challenge of the role of Scripture among young people that you're passionate and working for?

Archbishop Angaelos: I think if you speak to many of your colleagues of Bible Societies around the world, the challenge we all face in a variety of reasons is that people are just reading less. Of anything, whether it's Scripture or anything else, even fiction, people are reading less.

And so, the challenge is to introduce people to Scripture and keep it in their lives. And that needs very different formulations and formations now. More and more, we hear audible Bibles.

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People will listen to Scripture. We'll see animated Bibles. We will see children's Bibles.

It's becoming more and more specific. And I think that's a very good thing, as long as... You know, I've seen some alarming translations. I've seen some alarming portrayals of Scripture.

So, I don't think having infinite creativity is really the answer as well, because we need to be true to the message of Scripture. And as I said, we believe Scripture to be divinely inspired. So, it's not up to us to change any of it.

But the way we present it can be different.

Andrew Ollerton: And you're pretty willing to embrace the various technologies. I know you have some fantastic content on YouTube that some of our viewers can check out.

This is a podcast that we're recording. So how do you see... I mean, I think you've already answered this in one sense. But do you have any more thoughts about how we work with, without dumbing down, how we work with the kinds of technologies and platforms that young people are engaged with and how we embed Scripture within those channels?

Archbishop Angaelos: So yes, for instance, as you said, we talk about YouTube, we talk about the various social media platforms.

I myself was on Twitter before Twitter was cool, you know, so a long time ago, because I was at an ecumenical meeting here in London, someone, you know, explained this social media platform, I looked at and thought that would work really well for pastoral outreach. And since then, which is probably about 10 years ago, I will send that at least a tweet every day with some sort of teaching or, or sharing of a verse or sharing of a passage or sharing of a patristic quote,

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or sometimes it's something funny, or sometimes there's something alarming that I'm commenting on. And I think I find that a very good vehicle.

Of course, there's a lot of, you know, very regrettable stuff that happens on social media. I'm trying to choose my words very well. But you know, there is vitriol, there is insult, there is unkindness, ungraciousness that happens, which is a regrettable, it shouldn't.

But for the vast majority of people who use it, you know, it can be used positively. So I think, like anything, it is a means to an end, it is a vehicle, it is a conduit, and we should be able to use it. To give you an example, when we hit the beginning of the pandemic, I was on one of the committees here in the UK of church leaders talking about this.

And so I had an understanding that things were going to start shutting down the churches. Now, we never actually fully closed the doors of our churches, we would stream liturgical service from every parish on a Sunday. At the time, we could only have two people in there, I'd be two priests or a priest or a deacon.

And then within a week, we had taken the whole church online, from liturgies to Bible studies, to fellowship meetings, to prayer meetings to Sunday. When we did a bit of a study, a few months in, it was seven months in, I remember, we had done 70,000 online hours, it was 10,000 online hours a month, between all of our parishes, that suddenly found this incredible tool that you know, if we had wanted to do this by committee, it would never have happened. And yet, as a necessity, it happened.

And I remember saying back then, and sort of stuck in my mind, this is the responsiveness of the church. You know, in the first century, when people couldn't meet to worship, they went into the catacombs. 21st century, we went up into the world wide web. So, same understanding, but you know, the Gates of Hell shall not overcome.

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Andrew Ollerton: Come on. I've not heard that comparison before between the catacombs and the internet, but I love it.

Archbishop Angaelos: And it meant that we were still able to pray, we were still able to gather, we were still able to share fellowship, we were still able to outreach to each other at a time when we couldn't physically touch or be with each other. But it was wonderful to be able to still have that ministry going strong. And of course, even post pandemic, some of that has stayed.

So now it's very easy when we're doing this online. If we had done this four years ago, it would have seemed a little bit strange. But now it is just so normal, because we do it on a daily basis.

Andrew Ollerton: Yeah, brilliant. And you're tweeting on a daily basis. I'm really impressed with that, actually, that takes some rhythm and stamina.

So just tell me now, so obviously, you're drip feeding, if you like, you're drawing people in through social media channels and so forth. But imagine now that you, I know you travel quite a bit, and you speak to youth events and youth gatherings, sometimes amongst others. So imagine there's a room full of young people in front of you, and you're wanting to excite them, inspire them, ground them in Scripture engagement.

You know, what sort of approach have you found to be effective? What angles of approach or what topics of youth would you tend towards that just capture the hearts and the imagination of young people for today?

Archbishop Angaelos: I think we massively underestimate young people. Their depth, their desire to know, their search, their relationship with God, a thirst and hunger. And what I found is, the more you challenge young people, the more they rise to the challenge.

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And I always, you know, liken it to if you have an infant, who's just learning to crawl. If everything is at floor level, that infant has no reason to reach up and get up.

Andrew Ollerton: Very good. Yeah.

Archbishop Angaelos: The more you have something that is at a higher level, the more we'll reach up and struggle to stand up and then stand up and take steps and walk. We have a tendency to try to dumb things down for young people, because we're afraid of losing them.

But I actually think the greater threat of losing them is realized through dumbing things down, and not challenging them enough. Because, I mean, people now are much more tuned in, and astute, and knowledgeable, in many ways. And if we don't challenge that, if we don't provide for that, they will see the message as superfluous.

Andrew Ollerton: I really appreciate that. I really like the analogy of something to reach up towards, something to, if you like, strain towards, something higher that's within your grasp, but is going to take some reach, some effort. Give us some examples of how you've done that.

How do you put before young people an appropriate challenge? Because I think you're right. I think we do underestimate sometimes what young people can take on. We have a daughter who's 14 now, and sometimes she'll ask me to help her with her homework.

And I'm like, I can't. I don't understand the maths you're doing, or the biology that you're doing. It's beyond me.

So we mustn't dumb down and patronize. But give some examples with Scripture now. How do you help young people reach up for something higher?

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Archbishop Angaelos: I think everything. As I said, Scripture is embedded in everything we do. So, when I'm speaking to young people, and you said you've seen some stuff online, it will be predominantly Scriptural verses.

It will be verses from the Bible. And because I believe that it speaks so clearly in so many ways. But I also, what I like to do, and I see light bulbs going off in the room, where what I like to do is to take Scripture and show how applicable it is to our current setting.

And people suddenly think, well, actually, we've never read that before. Because basically, what people do is they read Scripture in a box. And it's over there.

And it's the Bible that I take off the shelf and read. And then I go and live life. They don't realize that Scripture actually plays into life.

And if we look at the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, His example, the way He lived and what He challenges us to, and we see for almost every situation in our lives, there is some sort of parallel that we can draw inspiration and strength from to be able to live properly and do what is right.

Andrew Ollerton: I agree. And I think that really what you're saying, I think is absolutely spot on.

That is, we need to help people see the relevance again, don't we, of God's Word, and that it's not something that you just look at. It's something that you look through to see all of life framed with God's vision. And that is, once people experience that, I've just found for young people, that is such an inspiring way to approach Scripture.

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So I love that. So listen, I want to just get a couple of, as we wrap up, a couple of pieces of advice. I want you to imagine first that you're speaking to a young person.

Archbishop Angaelos: I am speaking to a young person. What are you talking about?

Andrew Ollerton: I'll take that. I'll settle for that.

Yeah, not as young as I used to be. But anyway, younger than me, even younger than me, they're in their teens. Let's say it's a sort of 15, 16-year-old and they don't know the Bible particularly well, but they want to get into it.

What would your advice be? Where should they begin and how should they take on the challenge of Scripture?

Archbishop Angaelos: I suppose one of the worst things they could do is just read the Bible on their own, because it's not necessarily going to make a lot of sense some of the time, or any sense some of the time. So, it's always good to read with someone as part of teaching a Bible study, or read with a resource, and that is age-specific. So, it exposes Scripture in a particular way that makes sense.

I would also say to take it in small chunks. As lovely as, you know, reading the Bible in a year is, for many people it's not very satisfying because you're reading huge chunks of Scripture. And your aim is to get through it and to read it.

And of course, it has an effect, but it may not land as much as we'd want it to. So I'm always a great fan of starting with small steps, small passages. Consistency and continuity are really important.

Andrew Ollerton: Yeah, very good. So, in community and with consistency.

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Archbishop Angaelos: Absolutely, and as much as possible daily.

You know, if you miss a couple of days, it's fine, but that consistency and continuity is really important, and the support. I'll give you one quick story of one of the monastic fathers who went to his father, his guide, and he said, I'm trying to read my Bible, but it makes no sense to me. I'm getting nothing out of it.

He said, okay, take this basket, and I want you to go down to the river, and I want you to bring water back in it every day. Because it's one of those very typical monastic stories, which, you know. So, the monk goes down, obviously fills the basket with water, comes back, and because it's a basket, by the time he's back, the water has seeped through, and there's no water there.

And he does this a few days and goes back to his guide and says, listen, what did you mean from this? And he said, look in your basket and tell me what you see. And he said, it looks clean. He said, exactly.

You may not have retained the water, but the water has constantly cleansed your basket. So, although the words of Scripture may, you know, fly straight through us, or we think they have no effect, in actual fact, in and of themselves, they have a cleansing effect, and an inspirational effect. Even if we can't see it, or we don't experience it, it's happening there.

So consistency is really important.

Andrew Ollerton: Lovely. The washing of the word.

I love that. Now, switch modes. You're now in front of, it's not the young person, but let's say, I don't know, a church leader or someone with responsibility now.

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And what would you say to them about how to engage young people particularly with Scripture, but generally in this important moment that we're in, where we have this, what's being called the open generation, these young people who perhaps don't have our issues or former generations' issues about the Bible. They're coming to it fresh. What's your advice to that church leader or small group leader, perhaps?

Archbishop Angaelos: I would say be open, be genuine, be, in common speak, be real.

You know, I think it's important. And one blessing I've had is in serving young people, they challenge you to be down to earth and real. I've got to be able to give answers.

I've got to be able to explain. I've got to be able to give an account for whatever joy or hope or faith or anything, as the Scriptures say, I'm giving them. They'll say, because they will say why, they're not going to smile at me sort of, you know, politely and think, no, they're going to say, why? Why are you saying that? And what does it actually mean? And we have to be ready to respond.

And you know what, as a church leader, as a servant, I would go back to the words of St. Francis of Assisi, who says, preach the word and if need be, speak. So I think we teach, and of course we have to teach and preach, but we teach a lot more through our actions and example than we do through our words and our writings.

Andrew Ollerton: Yeah, very good.

An authentic example for the next generation. I love that. It's been such a fun conversation.

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We've covered some ground from your birth in Egypt and surfing experience in Australia. I can't quite get over that. Anyway, and all the way through to your monastic period in Egypt and now in London.

And I've just been really blessed again by your heart for God's Word and God's people and young people in particular. I think you're right, there's been too many parodies, haven't there, of people within the Christian church not understanding each other. And I'm sure everyone who's listened today has a much richer understanding of all that it means to be part of the Orthodox tradition.

So thank you for joining us. I wonder if you would be just happy to offer a short prayer of blessing over all of our listeners, all of our viewers, and especially that they would experience the joy and the truth of Scripture in fresh ways.

Archbishop Angaelos: Of course, I'd be honoured and blessed.

But before I do, may I just say how wonderful it's been to speak with you and to be able to share these thoughts. I'm not a writer, I'm a speaker, because I really believe that communication is important. And I think, you know, where we can, the more people see Christians conversing and dialoguing, the more they can see the Spirit of God working.

And that's incredibly important, because the world will constantly throw at us the negativities and the conflicts and the contradictions, and we'll not speak about a conversation like this unless we put it on a pedestal. And that is what our Lord, you know, says very clearly, that we do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel. Our light needs to be on a lampstand, that it may give light not only to the whole house, but to the whole world.

So thank you for this opportunity. Blessings to you and your colleagues, and to all of your viewers.

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Andrew Ollerton: Thank you.

Archbishop Angaelos: Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time and we thank you for this opportunity of being able to share your word. We ask your blessings upon my brother Andrew and all his colleagues.

Your blessings upon all those who will view this work. We ask your Lord to bless your world and send your peace into so many regions that are in need of that peace and that peace alone. We ask your blessings and strength upon your church around the world, that we may do your will, serve your children and be light, your light, to all those who are in need.

Bless us as we go from here. Guide our steps and our thoughts and our hearts and our deliberations. And bless everything we do, that it be for the glory of your name and the service of your children.

We ask you this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Andrew Ollerton: Amen. Archbishop Angaelos, thank you so much for joining us.

Archbishop Angaelos: Thank you, Andrew. Blessings to you.