

The Word of God

A Research Survey for the Synod of Bishops 2008

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With thanks to :

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Methodology

Logistics

Discern carried out the survey on 'The Word of God' between August and November 2007. Once we received approval of the survey concept from the Archbishop we invited to a meeting to discuss the research project 80 people from all parishes who had helped Discern in the past. 50 or so of those contacted attended the briefing session which introduced them to the survey concept and asked them whether they were prepared to help us out on the project.

We looked at the questions that the Vatican is asking the Bishops and from these we prepared a survey questionnaire that would draw out the information necessary for the Bishops Synod on the Word of God. The questionnaire totalled 94 questions and we planned that the 50 voluntary interviewers would together carry out a total of 400 interviews on a random basis throughout Malta.

With a population sample of 400 interviews we would have been able to paint a very accurate picture of the Maltese population. These 400 people were randomly selected using the 2007 Government Electoral Register. In fact 800 names were chosen randomly in order that if it were impossible to contact certain individuals, there was always at least one substitute that could be interviewed.

Accuracy

In the end, 235 interviews were carried out and returned by the voluntary interviewers. This did not match the intended target of 400 interviews, however one must remember that the interviewees worked on a fully voluntary basis and we are extremely grateful for the time and effort that they could spare. We were not able or willing to pressurize interviewers into doing more work than they could, and we must again express our thanks and admiration for their great service.

Nevertheless, even with a total of 235 interviews, we can still feel confident that the survey gives a good representation of the Maltese population, where 'the Maltese population' is defined as all those people who are registered in the 12 electoral districts on the island of Malta in the Government Electoral Register 2007. The total population of the Electoral Register 2007 in the island of Malta (excluding Gozo) is 289,000. The random sample size is of 235 people. Therefore our results can be seen as accurate to with +/- 6.39% at the 95% confidence level.

This is to say that, in 95 out of 100 surveys of this format, we can be sure that the survey results are within 6.39% of the true figure. Therefore if for example 50% were found to be married persons in the survey, we can be 95% sure that the true number of married persons in the population is between 43.61% (i.e. 50 - 6.39) and 56.39% (i.e. 50 + 6.39).

Of course therefore the survey does not give complete accuracy, but with a confidence interval of 6.39% we can get a good impression of the Maltese population. The results of the survey are reliable.

Reading the Tables

The raw data from the questionnaires was carefully entered into an Excel file. Using Excel the data was processed with cross tabulation and this produced the tables which show the 'Count' column, which are the number of answers for each question, and the '%' column that shows the percentage of all answers to the question.

For example, Q.1:

Q.1 Do you believe in someone greater than man?

Q.1	Count	%
N/a	4	2
Yes	227	97
No	4	2
Grand Total	235	100

'Count' is the number of people who answered that question, e.g. 227 people said 'Yes', they do believe in someone greater than man.

'%' is the percentage of all interviewees who answered that question, e.g. 97% of those interviewed said 'Yes', they do believe in someone greater than man.

With the confidence interval of 6.39 % at the 95% confidence level we can say, with 95% certainty, that all percentages in this survey are within +/- 6.39% of the true population figure. For example, in Q.1, 97% of interviewees say that they believe in someone greater than man. We are confident then that between 90.61% (97 – 6.39) and 100% (97 + 6.39) of the Maltese population believe in someone greater than man.

Where 'N/a' is shown in all tables, one must read this as meaning that the interviewee answered 'I don't know' or 'No answer'. Therefore in Q.1, 4 interviewees either said that they did not know if they believed that there was someone greater than man, or alternatively they simply did not answer the question. These 'N/a' s are very significant to the survey however as they often imply a lack of knowledge or interest in the question and subject at hand. Therefore for example in the case of Q.1 we could understand that if they do not know or do not want to answer the question about their belief in someone greater than man, then they probably do not believe in someone greater than man. An 'N/a' answer is therefore often a significant answer in itself and it should not be easily dismissed.

Even though the questionnaire contained 94 questions, this report only analyses roughly half the questions and this is due to time constraints and due to duplication in some questions that produced similar answers. When time allows, Discern will analyse more of the questions and we produce a revised version of this report.

Religious Belief, Expectations and Activity

Q.1 Do you believe in somebody greater than man?

Q.1	Count	%
N/a	4	2
Yes	227	97
No	4	2
Grand Total	235	100

Q.2 Do you believe in God?

Q.2	Count	%
N/a	2	1
Yes	233	99
No	0	0
Grand Total	235	100

Q.3 What is your religion?

Q.3	Count	%
Catholic	231	98
Church of England	1	0
Evangelical	1	0
No religion	1	0
Buddhist	1	0
Grand Total	235	100

Q.4 Why do you think that the subject of “the Word of God” that the Bishops are going to discuss in the Synod, is important for Malta and Gozo today?

Q.4	Count	%
N/a	32	14
fast life, there is less faith, a need for the word of God	47	20
to understand God's plan for us	9	4
to bring young people closer to the Church	6	3
the word of God is a good guide and the base of faith	52	23
we are not taught enough	16	7
for them to recognize how to deliver it in a better way to the people	30	13
for them to continue strengthening our faith in God	32	14
for the family	2	1
because many religions have entered Malta	5	2
Grand Total	231	100

Q.5 What would you like to come out from the meetings of the Synod?

Q.5	Count	%
N/a	48	21
goodness and teaching of the word of God for all	70	30
more understanding of the word of God, through a delivery that is more alive and effective	50	21
change in the Mass, the homily will involve people more	9	4
that those who take their faith seriously increase, especially young people	31	13
that we bring more peace and love to the world	9	4
nothing	2	1
for the family	3	1
Bishops and the Pope will know more on the situation in Malta	12	5
Grand Total	234	100

Q.6 Do you take part in any activities in Malta or Gozo that involve the Bible?

Q.6	Count	%
N/a	1	0
Yes	46	20
No	187	80
Grand Total	234	100

Q.6b If so, what are they?

Q.6b	Count	%
N/a	190	81
Church and Mass	8	3
MUSEUM	7	3
a course at University/Bible course/Lectio Divina	6	3
Easter pageant	1	0
a Catholic community	16	7
prayer meetings	6	3
Grand Total	234	100

Q.7 Do you know if in Malta/Gozo there exist Bible study groups, or groups that use the Bible to pray?

Q.7	Count	%
N/a	9	4
Yes	175	75
No	49	21
Grand Total	233	100

Q.7a If you do know, how are they organized?

Q.7a	Count	%
N/a	144	64
singing, Mass and prayer	18	8
small groups studying the Bible, prayer and Lectio Divina	47	21
Legion of Mary	1	0
MUSEUM	5	2
the Bible Society	4	2

Neokatekuminat	5	2
Grand Total	224	100

Q.7b Could you say what they do?

Q.7b	Count	%
N/a	121	52
meetings with Bible study	65	28
prayer, reading, Mass, singing	44	19
they practice the Word of God with others	4	2
Grand Total	234	100

Knowledge of the Word of God in the Story of Salvation

Q.11 Which parts of the Bible do you find difficult to understand?

Q.11	Count	%
N/a	88	38
all of it	15	7
the Old Testament	57	25
the Apocalypse	18	8
the Virgin birth	2	1
the mystery of God and the Trinity	6	3
none	4	2
many parts	19	8
the humanization of God	1	0
the New Testament	3	1
Creation	4	2
the letters of St Paul	8	3
the Psalms	5	2
Grand Total	230	100

Q.12 What do you find difficult about them?

Q.12	Count	%
N/a	100	43
the stories are not always clear	50	22
interpretation of the Old Testament and relevance to the New Testament	18	8
the Virgin birth	1	0
a confusion of mystic figures	4	2
lots of killing, no mercy, wars	8	3
the depth and profundity	28	12
the words/language	20	9
it is difficult to live the Christian life and the message of the Bible	3	1
Grand Total	232	100

The Word of God and the Church

Q.14 Do you feel that the religious teaching that you receive is based on Scripture (the Word of God)?

Q.14	Count	%
N/a	4	2
Very much	168	73
Sometimes	51	22
Little	6	3
Not at all	2	1
Grand Total	231	100

Q.15 Do you feel that the Church gives Scripture the importance that it deserves?

Q.15	Count	%
N/a	5	2
Yes	171	74
Sometimes	47	20
No	8	3
Grand Total	231	100

The Bible as the Word of God

Q.23 Do you feel that Christians today are looking to read the Bible with more enthusiasm?

Q.23	Count	%
N/a	6	3
Very much	18	8
Sometimes	112	48
Little	80	35
Not at all	15	6
Grand Total	231	100

Q.23b If so, why?

Q.23b	Count	%
N/a	186	81
they are caught up with their possessions, they do not find the time	10	4
the young are taught the Bible at school, faith is strong amongst the Maltese	1	0
you see many people with the Bible, reading and quoting it	5	2
interest in religion is falling	9	4
they want to learn more, they have a thirst	16	7
Grand Total	230	100

Q.26 What does the Bible mean to you?

Q.26	Count	%
N/a	6	3
I don't care about it	2	1
I see it only as a history book	16	7
I see it as the Word of God	201	87
I see it as an invention of the Church	5	2
Grand Total	231	100

Q.30 How do you view the Old Testament?

Q.30	Count	%
N/a	4	2
An old story that is not relevant for today	38	16
The story of salvation that must be explained	189	82
Grand Total	231	100

Q.31 What do you read most, the Old Testament, the New Testament or the Gospels?

Q.31	Count	%
N/a	51	22
All the same	45	19
The Old Testament	4	2
The New Testament	32	14
The Gospels	98	42
Grand Total	231	100

Q.35 Do you think that the Word of God is strengthening your faith?

Q.35	Count	%
N/a	9	4
Yes	184	80
Marginally	28	12
It is not making a difference	9	4
No	1	0
Grand Total	231	100

The Word of God in the Life of the Church

Q.43 In your daily life, how are you showing that you *know* the Word of God?

Q.43	Count	%
N/a	30	13
I do what God's wants of me and I love God	28	12
I try to avoid evil	5	2
I do what is good for me and for others	30	13
I try to practice it, to be an example	87	38
I pray every day	27	12
I go to Mass	13	6
I talk about it and I teach it	9	4
Grand Total	230	100

Q.44 In your daily life how are you showing that you *worship* the Word of God?

Q.44	Count	%
N/a	43	19
with prayer	68	29
Eucharistic adoration	5	2
I go to Mass	36	16
with a good example, I observe the Commandments	49	21
I live for God	8	3
I remember that after this life there is another life	2	1
I live a modest life	8	3
I say thank you to the Lord	5	2
I pass it on to others	6	3
I help my family and my neighbour	1	0
I listen to religious programmes	1	0
I read it everyday		0
Grand Total	232	100

The Word of God – Formation, Liturgy, Prayer

Q.47 Do you think that you are receiving a full and complete teaching of the Word of God in your community?

Q.47	Count	%
N/a	17	7
Very much	102	44
Sometimes	78	34
Little	26	11
Not at all	9	4
Grand Total	232	100

Q.47a If so, how?

Q.47a	Count	%
N/a	136	60
I am tied up with work/family	2	1
with the homily	26	11
activities of MUSEUM, communities, prayer meetings	25	11
the Mass	24	11
the media	9	4
Reading	2	1
study at school	3	1
with prayer		0
Grand Total	227	100

Q.55 Do you have a Bible at home?

Q.55	Count	%
N/a	2	1
Yes	192	83
No	37	16

Grand Total	231	100
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Q.56 Do you read the Bible?

Q.56	Count	%
N/a	18	8
Yes	96	42
No	116	50
Grand Total	231	100

Q.56a When and how do you read the Bible?

Q.56a	Count	%
N/a	109	48
I do not read it	8	3
when I find the time, when I need help	35	15
I read it a little	11	5
when I teach the children after school and at the MUSEUM	7	3
when I pray alone at home	14	6
every day for some time (15/20 mins)	36	16
in the morning liturgy	4	2
on the computer	1	0
I do not know how to read	4	2
Grand Total	229	100

The Word of God and the Life of the Believer

Q.69 Why do you think that when one looks to hoard for oneself a lot of material wealth, this prevents oneself from listening properly to the Word of God?

Q.69	Count	%
N/a	40	18
material wealth must be secondary to the spiritual life	19	8
they will have too much material distraction to allow time to pray	71	32
they will be caught up their own affairs	44	20
it is easier for the poor to enter God's Kingdom and you cannot serve two masters	22	10
there are those who give charity with their money, it is not necessarily bad to be rich	15	7
because he thinks that he does not need anybody	13	6
(blank)		0
Grand Total	224	100

Q.78 Do you feel cold or indifferent towards the Bible?

Q.78	Count	%
N/a	22	10
Yes	17	7
Sometimes	66	29
No	124	54
Grand Total	230	100

Q.79 If you do feel cold, why do you feel this way?

Q.79	Count	%
N/a	183	81
I do not understand it, it is difficult	16	7
because I do not read it	20	9
because life is different to the Bible	6	3
I am not enthusiastic enough	1	0
Grand Total	226	100

Spreading the Word of God in Today's World

Q.80a For you personally, what helps you to listen to the Word of God?

Q.80a	Count	%
N/a	96	44
programmes on TV	11	5
programmes on RTK/Radju Marija	11	5
meetings in the parish/communities	10	5
faith that there is another life after this	2	1
the will to live well and better	15	7
the example of priests	7	3
Mass, the homily	33	15
meditation	3	1
regular prayer	7	3
faith in and teaching on God	24	11
Grand Total	219	100

Q.80b For you personally, what hinders you from listening to the Word of God?

Q.80b	Count	%
N/a	128	57
fast life/house work/family/stress/distractions	45	20
the media and TV	14	6
selfishness	2	1
other religions confuse us	1	0
the controversial rules of the Church	3	1
laziness	7	3
contradictory passages	2	1
nothing	9	4
life's problems and sickness	12	5
the homily of certain priests	3	1
Grand Total	226	100

Q.82 Do you think that the constant bombardment of different messages from the world, and from lifestyles contrary to Christian teaching, are confusing you in the renewal of your faith?

Q.82	Count	%
N/a	14	6
Yes	49	21
A little	53	23
No	116	50
Grand Total	232	100

Q.83 How must the Word of God be spread in these circumstances?

Q.83	Count	%
N/a	62	27
with more determination, conviction and clarity for life today	55	24
educational programmes for children and young people in the media	16	7
more sermons/teaching/meetings on the word of God	42	18
more broadcasting/films with a Christian inspiration	22	10
more charismatic presenters and priests	5	2
with the example of those who live it	22	10
with more worship of God and prayer for unbelievers	3	1
better Masses	2	1
Grand Total	229	100

Easy Access to Scripture

Q.84 The Vatican Council II says that “Christians should be able to turn quickly towards the Holy Scriptures”. How often do you read or listen to the Scriptures?

Q.84	Count	%
N/a	7	3
Everyday	48	21
Various times a week	39	17
Once a week	66	29
Various times a month	16	7
Once a month	6	3
Rarely	25	11
Nearly never	24	10
Grand Total	231	100

Q.85 In the past few years, did you increase your personal private reading of the Bible?

Q.85	Count	%
N/a	13	6
Yes	45	19
A little	36	16
No	138	59
Grand Total	232	100

Q.86 In the past few years, did you increase your reading of the Bible in a group?

Q.86	Count	%
N/a	19	8
Yes	33	14
A little	11	5
No	169	73
Grand Total	232	100

Q.87 In your family, do you read or pray with the Bible?

Q.87	Count	%
N/a	9	4
Yes	42	18
A little	33	14
No	147	63
Grand Total	232	100

Q.88 Do you know of the existence in Malta of the Malta Bible Society?

Q.88	Count	%
N/a	5	2
Yes	181	78
No	46	20
Grand Total	232	100

Reflections and Suggestions

Q.89a Do you think that Maltese Christians are living according to the Word of God?

Q.89a	Count	%
N/a	21	9
Yes	36	16
A little	140	60
No	35	15
Grand Total	232	100

Q.89b Personally are you living according to the Word of God?

Q.89b	Count	%
N/a	8	3
Yes	170	74
A little	50	22
No	3	1
Grand Total	231	100

Q.89c What do you suggest could be done for Christians to live the Word of God?

Q.89c	Count	%
N/a	57	25
forget work/entertainment and think of the spiritual life and Christ	6	3
media broadcasting	14	6
by everyone carrying their cross, helping each other	14	6
reflection on and conversion in our lives	10	4
more help for single parents, Bible communities	2	1
more listening, teaching and explanation of the word of God in a clear way	72	31
there is a need for holy priests and lay people, living and reflecting the word of God	12	5
stopping those who do wrong, that which is wrong must be declared	5	2
more attendance of Mass and prayer groups	13	6
the priests should mix more with the parishioners	6	3
they should take the Holy Family as model, families should unite more	3	1
more interesting Mass	10	4

communities for young people and lay persons	7	3
Grand Total	231	100

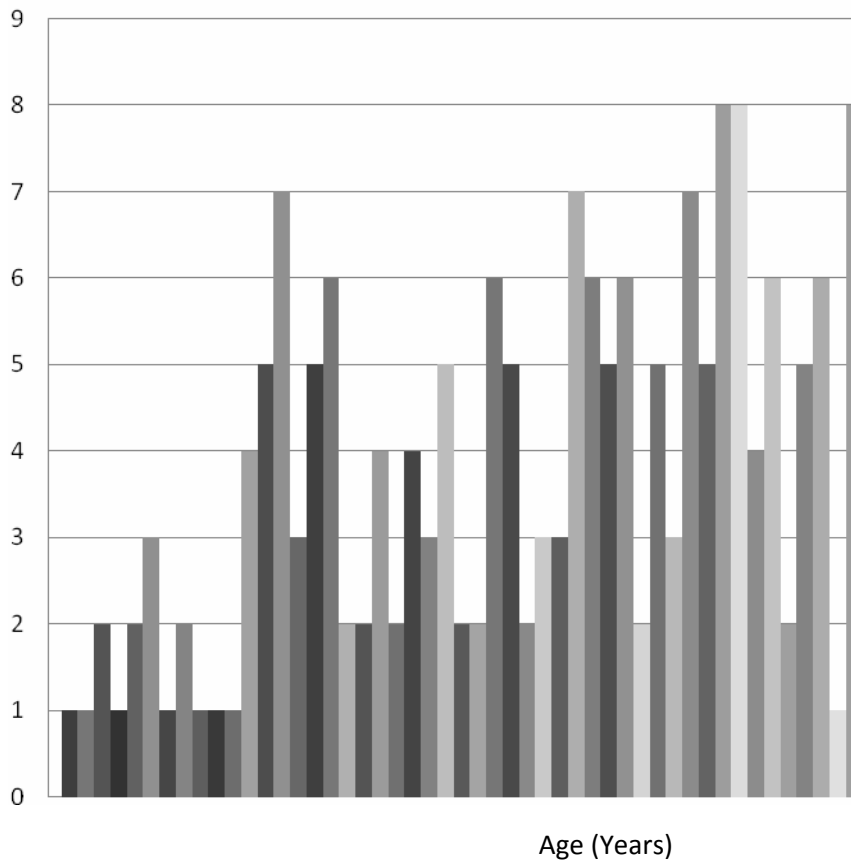
Personal Data

Q.91 Sex

Q.91	Count	%
Male	109	46
Female	126	54
Grand Total	235	100

Q.92 Age

Age Distribution of Respondents



Average Age of Respondents
51.2

Q.93 Education

Q.93	Count	%
No school	5	2
Primary	66	28
Secondary	88	37
Technical	13	6
Post secondary	16	7
MCAST/Polytechnic	8	3
Teachers' training college	8	3
University	31	13
Grand Total	235	100

Q.94 Occupation

Q.94	Count	%
Still at school/studying	4	2
Unskilled	12	5
Skilled	38	16
Office work	23	10
Teacher	13	6
Managerial	12	5
Professional	17	7
Unemployed	4	2
Pensioner	67	29
Housewife	45	19
Grand Total	235	100