



Catholic Answers

SUMMER 2024 The Magazine of Apologetics & Evangelization

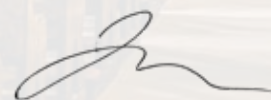
HOLY
BIBLE

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE AS A CATHOLIC

John Bergsma

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**THE MAGAZINE OF APOLOGETICS
AND EVANGELIZATION**

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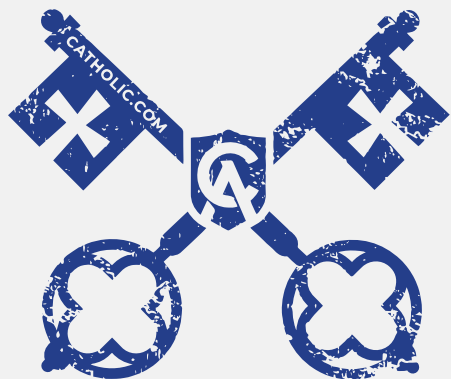
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Connect



SOCIETY 315

SOCIETY 315 UPDATE

Happy third anniversary to SOCIETY 315! Our humble club of monthly supporters began with a dream three years ago and is now standing proud at over 4,500 donors who together give about \$130,000 a month. The goal of SOCIETY 315 is to provide sustainable and reliable support for Catholic Answers operations—from *Catholic Answers Live* to *Catholic Answers Magazine*, and everything in between. Monthly donations help us plan for the future by providing realistic expectations of support in the months and years ahead. We rely entirely on the generosity of those who have been touched by our work and feel called to share their financial blessings with us.

Easter Monday saw the third installment of *Catholic Answers Live* + SOCIETY 315, and it was a great one! Once again, SOCIETY 315 donors had an exclusive opportunity to send questions for Cy Kellett and Joe Heschmeyer to answer during a special pre-recorded episode of *Catholic Answers Live*. Topics this time ran the gamut from the Real Presence to pagan holidays. Scan the QR code below to join the club and submit your own questions!

In the first quarter of the year, we sent over a dozen emails to SOCIETY 315 donors in select cities where Catholic Answers speakers were presenting. From Cy Kellett in Fargo, North Dakota, to Tim Staples in St. Leon, Indiana, SOCIETY 315 donors found out about exciting and enriching talks right in their own backyards. Joe Heschmeyer has made several appearances across the country including the Catholic Men's Fellowship of Northeast Ohio Conference. Here is Joe with SOCIETY 315 donor Paul Childers at that conference.

Join SOCIETY 315 at casociety315.com or scan the code below.





IN OUR OWN COMMUNITY

Active in our own backyard in San Diego, as well as around the country and across the world, Catholic Answers hosts monthly “Local Lectures” featuring some of the best speakers in the Catholic world.

Every month on a Friday, the apostolate hosts free talks generously hosted at San Diego’s St. Thérèse of Carmel Church that invite Catholic Answers supporters, the local parish community, and interested people across Southern California to come together for a night of apologetics and fellowship.

Each evening begins with a small reception and then jumps into the presentation, and the speakers we invite cover a wide spectrum of timely and interesting topics. Over the past two years, they have ranged from Catholic Answers apologists and staff members to the Avila Institute’s Dan Burke, *The Pillar’s* J.D. Flynn, the Institute of Catholic Culture’s Fr. Hezekias Carnazzo, and the Archdiocese of Sydney’s Monica Doumit. And so many more!

Thanks to our YouTube channel, these Local Lectures are accessible to everyone, not just Southern Californians! You can find and watch previous talks under the playlist, “Catholic Answers Talks.” Be sure to follow us on YouTube at [@catholiccom](#)!

Upcoming Local Lecture speakers include Fr. Simon Eshaki in July and *Catholic Answers Live* host Cy Kellett in August (Cy will speak about St. Peter as a model for Christian lives). If you are in Southern California, please join us at St. Thérèse of Carmel for these Local Lectures. We would love to see you!

If you are not local, however, keep an eye on our YouTube channel for the talks to be released online, typically a few months afterwards.

Special Note: If you are a Society315 member, you receive early access to all of the talks. Join Society315 today for this and many more perks!





2024 PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE WEEKEND

Each year, Catholic Answers hosts an exclusive and exciting event, the President's Circle Weekend, where major supporters of the apostolate join in a weekend of camaraderie and enrichment. This four-day weekend brings donors in close contact with members of our executive and apologetics teams, offering a unique opportunity for everyone to connect with the heart of Catholic Answers.

This year we gathered in beautiful Newport Beach, California, about two hours north of San Diego. The weekend was filled with many unforgettable moments that gave attendees dedicated time to build connections, share ideas, and immerse themselves in the vibrant spirit of Catholic Answers.

After a Thursday evening welcome reception, the 2024 event got going on Friday with a day trip to St. Michael's Abbey, where we experienced the beauty of the recently completed Abbey Church in the hills of Silverado Canyon and joined the Norbertine Fathers for Holy Mass and Vespers in a unique spiritual experience.

Our time at the abbey was followed by a beachfront dinner reception, generously hosted by a close friend of Catholic Answers.

Saturday included a talk from *Catholic Answers Live* host Cy Kellett, as well as time for the Catholic Answers executive team to share the latest news and vision of the work the apostolate is setting out to accomplish. This time also allowed President's Circle members to give constructive feedback and ask questions of the staff—something we greatly value as we strive to serve our supporters the best we can. Saturday concluded with dinner and the famous (and competitive!) Cy Kellett-led Catholic trivia contest.

President's Circle Weekend is open to donors in the President's Circle, which is comprised of those giving more than \$1,000 annually to the apostolate. For donors at the \$5,000 Morning Star level and above, attendance comes with no registration cost—a token of our appreciation for your exceptional support.



S RECAP

LOOK WHO STOPPED BY

Whether you're a longtime supporter or just considering joining our community, the President's Circle Weekend is your invitation to be a part of something extraordinary as you connect, learn, and contribute to the vibrant life of Catholic Answers. To discover more about the various President's Circle levels and attached benefits, or for any questions regarding this event, reach out to Brook at bsolis@catholic.com or scan the QR code below.



As you've seen in these pages before, Catholic Answers is regularly blessed by well-known Catholic personalities visiting our San Diego headquarters. Recently, two of our favorites—Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke and Msgr. Eugene Morris—not only stopped by but celebrated Mass in the Catholic Answers chapel.

On March 1, Monsignor Morris of St. Louis, who some of our readers may remember spoke at the 2019 Catholic Answers National Conference, was in town. He celebrated Mass for us and then appeared on the second hour of *Catholic Answers Live* for an "Ask a Priest" segment.

Then on March 4, Cardinal Burke was in the area on business for Wisconsin's Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which he founded in 1999 and now serves as chairman of the board. His Eminence celebrated Mass for us, toured the office and gave blessings to staff members, and blessed sacramentals. He then joined Cy on *Catholic Answers Live* where he talked about "Returning to Our Lady" and his nine-month novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe.



ALONG FOR THE JOURNEY

Catholic Answers' new Lenten series brought an apologetics flavor to the traditional season of penance and preparation

Every Lent, a season marked by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, Catholic apostolates seek meaningful ways to connect with supporters during this time for the faithful to reflect, repent, and prepare their hearts for Easter. This year, Catholic Answers embarked on a new effort to support its donor community.

The CA development team enlisted our well-known staff apologists including Tim Staples, Trent Horn, Joe Heschmeyer, Edgar Lujano, Cy Kellett, and Tom Nash to craft the “Lenten Apologetics Series for Donors.”

This exclusive series, launched on Ash Wednesday and concluding on Spy Wednesday, featured a weekly short-form video tackling various Lenten themes through an apologetics lens. Whether addressing the significance of wearing ashes and the practices of penance and fasting, or giving a closer look at cultural Hispanic Holy Week traditions, each video aimed to furnish viewers with a deeper understanding and appreciation of age-old customs.

Available to donors who have shared their email with us, the series was designed to fortify their faith, enriching the Lenten journey with insights illuminating the beauty and depth of these practices. Additionally, it empowered them to share this knowledge with others, encouraging dialogue about the essence of Lent and the reasons behind these traditions.

This initiative was just one more way for us to say thank you to our supporters for their dedication, reflecting a continuous effort to connect, engage, and acknowledge their pivotal role in our mission. We are eager to hear feedback as we contemplate future projects to further enrich supporters' spiritual journey.

If you enjoyed this Lenten series and wish to share your thoughts—or if you missed out—reach out to us at give@catholic.com. Likewise, if you would like to support our work but are not yet part of this vibrant community, you can find more information at give.catholic.com.



NATIONAL
Eucharistic
Congress

Connect

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ARE YOU GOING

to the **first** National Eucharistic
Congress in 83 Years?

CATHOLIC ANSWERS WILL BE IN INDIANAPOLIS THIS SUMMER! WILL YOU?

We've got our tickets. Do you have yours yet? Join us from July 17-21, 2024, in Indianapolis for the Tenth Eucharistic Congress—the first in over eighty years! It's going to be a phenomenal event with thousands of pilgrims in attendance.

You'll see and hear all the best speakers in the Catholic world including our very own Trent Horn and Joe Heschmeyer, who will host breakout sessions during the Congress. Come for spiritual renewal, come for Jesus Christ, come experience his love for you in the Holy Eucharist. Then go out and share his love with a world that so desperately needs the hope that can be found in Christ alone.

Be sure to look for our booth in the Expo Hall at the Indiana Convention Center. We'll have giveaways and books for sale, and Joe and Trent will be there to greet visitors and give free autographs. In addition, we hope to broadcast *Catholic Answers Live* from the Congress on Thursday and Friday.

Stop by and say, hi. We'd love to meet you!



DIALING IN

To exponentially grow our audience, Catholic Answers is focusing in on our most popular, our most accessible—and our highest potential—content.

If you keep up with the world of media like we do (not only Catholic media, but secular media), you have seen that change is the only constant. What was popular even five years ago has become cliché in some circles, and any media company worth its salt—including Catholic Answers, of course—is continually looking to stay on top of the most effective methods for reaching its target audience. This is even more important when your primary purpose is following our Lord's commandment to spread the gospel.

With that in mind, Catholic Answers has made a strategic decision to take a particularly focused approach to three key elements of our media mission: the *Catholic Answers Live* program and the *Counsel of Trent* and *Shameless Popery* podcasts hosted by Cy Kellett, Trent Horn, and Joe Heschmeyer, respectively.

Over the past twenty-five years, *Catholic Answers Live* has earned its place as the most popular program on Catholic radio, and the traditional radio airwaves continue to be essential to the program's availability and popularity. The future of this distribution method is in flux, however, and as a result, we are directing more resources—including staff like video manager Zach Maxwell—into maximizing the ways *Catholic Answers Live* can be distributed beyond terrestrial radio outlets. Heading up this part of the initiative are chief operating officer Jon Sorensen and director of radio John Vercillo.

"Right now, nothing we do connects us more with the Catholic Answers audience than *Catholic Answers Live* and Cy Kellett," said Sorensen. "But we need to do more to expand the program's reach beyond just the local radio towers. So, we analyzed where our effort has been spent the past few years, and we believe that by reducing the distractions for our team members on the radio side of the house, they can be more dialed in on *CA Live* and fully implement that part of the plan."

In addition to the ever-increasing popularity of *Catholic Answers Live*, one of the most exciting parts of the apostolate's expansion over the past several years has been the success of apologist Trent Horn and his *Counsel of Trent* podcast. Today, *Counsel of Trent* boasts 130,000 subscribers on YouTube with episodes that regularly have over 100,000 views. The most-viewed video has nearly 300,000 views.

Joe Heschmeyer, meanwhile, is the newest full-time apologist at Catholic Answers, and we believe his *Shameless Popery* podcast, which just got started in early 2023, has the potential for similar growth. On YouTube, Joe's podcast episodes often get over 50,000 views with his most popular tipping the scales at nearly 150,000.

How do we ensure this podcast element of the growth plan comes to fruition? To start, Catholic Answers is putting its money where its mouth is. We are in the process of hiring an experienced podcast producer in

AT OUR VERY CORE

Prayer is at the core of everything we do at Catholic Answers. You've likely encountered this sentiment in our donor communications and website messaging, and perhaps you have heard President Christopher Check or one of our other speakers express it at our events. But what exactly does this mean?

First and foremost, prayer infuses every aspect of our daily life at the Catholic Answers home office. From the commencement to the conclusion of each workday, our San Diego-based team engages in community prayer, anchoring our spirits in love of Christ.

A typical day at Catholic Answers often follows a schedule like this—9:00 a.m. Lauds in our chapel; 11:00 a.m. confessions with the priest celebrating Mass that day; 11:30 a.m. Holy Mass; 2:00 p.m. Rosary; 3:00 p.m. Divine Mercy Chaplet; and 4:45 p.m. Vespers to end the afternoon.

Though attendance at these prayer sessions is voluntary, the Catholic Answers chapel—where the Eucharist is always reserved in the tabernacle by permission of our bishop—consistently witnesses the devout commitment of our staff. Critical to our success in the midst of the fierce spiritual battle going on around us every day, we pray constantly for the protection of the apostolate, the fulfillment of our mission, and the spiritual fortitude of our team.

Meanwhile, as the Catholic Answers presence has spread across the country, many of our team members now work remotely, either fully or partially. As a result, we take every opportunity to join together in prayer virtually, including during departmental meetings and our bi-weekly staff meetings. Time is also allowed, of course, for remote employees to attend daily Mass and engage in devotions according to their own schedule.

Importantly, we place particular emphasis on the prayer intentions of our supporters. In fact, beneath the altar rests a basket where we collect each of the personal intentions shared with us. Each one is printed out, placed beneath the altar, and remembered in our prayers.

We earnestly desire to pray for you. Share your intentions with us by emailing give@catholic.com or calling Customer Service at (888) 291-8000. Please keep us in your prayers as well!

Texas, one who will work directly with Trent and Joe to maximize the potential of their two programs, both in terms of content and promotion.

“We couldn’t be more excited about the future of Trent and Joe here at Catholic Answers and, in particular, their podcasts,” said Sorensen, who is personally overseeing the podcast strategy. “One of our key demographics for growth at Catholic Answers is young people, and the listenership of both *Counsel of Trent* and *Shameless Popery* is heavily skewed in that direction. The future is very bright for both, and by extension, Catholic Answers as well.”

Not a listener of *Catholic Answers Live*, *Counsel of Trent*, or *Shameless Popery* yet? Find them on your favorite podcast app, search for them on catholic.com, or subscribe to their YouTube channels today!



PARISH CONNECTIONS

Catholic Answers has launched a brand-new Parish Partners initiative!

In an effort to better support clergy and parishioners across the U.S. with much-needed apologetics and evangelization materials, Catholic Answers is offering free content, product discounts, and economical pricing on bulk books and booklets at the parish level. It's all designed to help everyone grow in their understanding of the Faith, share the gospel, and more confidently explain what the Church teaches and why.

You will find more information in future issues of *Catholic Answers Magazine*, but you can help get your parish on board right away by connecting us with your pastor. Just message Peggy Stenbeck at parishpartners@catholic.com to get started!

Meanwhile, catechist Ozie Maldonado at U.S. Army garrison Fort Gregg-Adams in Virginia is using Catholic Answers materials to help fortify the intellects and spirits of our Catholic military members.

In the photos above, soldiers learn about the biblical and historical basis for the sacrament of confession and how to make a thorough examination of conscience with the help of our *20 Answers: The Sacraments* booklet.



ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Annalia Valdivia explains just what “digital marketing”—a critical part of the Catholic Answers strategy for sharing the gospel—is all about

Growing up in Southern California, my journey began with a background in psychology and social work. However, my career path took an exciting turn when I transitioned into the world of marketing, earning a certificate, and diving into roles as a digital marketer and program manager within the tech industry.

At Catholic Answers, my role was created last year to raise awareness of our apostolate and lead more souls to Christ, primarily through our website, catholic.com. As Digital Marketing Specialist, I plan and coordinate efforts to reach people based on online trends and interests. I create content using analytics and search engine optimization to make sure our website is easy to find and navigate. Our goal is to make it easier for people to find us online and to trust what we share. We also focus on creating helpful content that people want to read and share, which is a big part of how we reach and connect with people seeking the truth about the Catholic Church.

Using tech tools such as SEMrush, Google Analytics, and Hotjar, we learn what our readers are searching for and

how they interact with our website. For example, we learned that a lot of people search for “how to pray the rosary,” so I created content to help with that. We aimed to make that information easily accessible, using simple language and providing downloadable guides and videos. The goal was to help people pray the rosary but also to increase engagement and downloads, resulting in more users reading our articles, downloading our materials, and sharing them.

I’m dedicated to furthering the reach of Catholic Answers and optimizing our digital footprint in service of our mission to lead more souls to Christ. Additionally, as a fluent Spanish speaker, I am enthusiastic about new ventures such as exploring avenues for incorporating Spanish-language content, thereby extending our reach and impact, fostering deeper connections with people across the globe, and ultimately spreading the message of Christ and his Church.

OFF THE SHELF

Would you like book recommendations from Catholic Answers apologists and other team members for particular situations and life stages? Well, look no further! Over the next several issues, we will be posting lists of top picks here in Connect that will help get you—or someone you know—started.

This month’s list features books (in alphabetical order) suggested for . . .

Converts Who Have Just Entered the Church

The Art of Praying by Msgr. Romano Guardini (Christopher Check)

The Convert’s Guide to Roman Catholicism by Keith Nester (Trent Horn)*

The Faith of Our Fathers by James Cardinal Gibbons (Tim Staples)*

The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis (Jon Sorensen)*

Introduction to the Devout Life by St. Francis de Sales (Todd Aglialoro and Joe Heschmeyer)*

A Map of Life by Frank Sheed (Karlo Broussard)*

Theology for Beginners by Frank Sheed (Tom Nash)*

*Available at shop.catholic.com



Gabe Short

Donor Profile

I have been a practicing Catholic all my life, fortunate enough to have faithful parents who made my Catholic education a priority. I was able to become solidified in my faith, being confident in God's existence and the validity of the Catholic Church as the one Church instituted by Christ. Yet, I was somewhat in a Catholic bubble. Most of the people around me shared my beliefs, and I did not find myself sharing my faith with any non-Catholics.

This changed once I attended college. It was the first time I had been exposed to the many forms of Protestantism, and I found myself unable to adequately explain why people ought to be Catholic rather than join a different branch of Christianity. This is when Catholic Answers entered into my life. I had in my possession a copy of Trent Horn's *The Case for Catholicism*, which I had never taken the time to finish. When I discovered the book again, I was amazed at all the evidence—biblical and non-biblical—that addressed many of the assertions I was hearing from my Protestant friends in a rational way. This led to a greater hunger for understanding Catholicism fueled by a desire to address the many misconceptions I was hearing and plant the seeds in my friends' minds to lead them home.

I was delighted to discover that *The Case for Catholicism* was not the only resource available to me. Catholic Answers had an entire website full of articles addressing

hundreds of topics. I quickly began listening to *The Counsel of Trent* podcast, picking up Joe Heschmeyer's *Shameless Popery* and Jimmy Akin's *A Daily Defense* along the way. Their charitable and well-thought-out responses on their shows have enabled me to explore the richness of Catholic history, perspectives, and traditions, while simultaneously learning about the other forms of Christianity I have come across. This has given me the courage to engage in more theological discussions with others on my campus and has contributed to my involvement in leading Bible studies, assisting in the formation of students receiving Confirmation, and speaking at my Knights of Columbus council. It has also led to my family taking their faith even more seriously as their prayer lives and knowledge of Church teaching have grown since my introduction of Catholic Answers to them. I visit the Catholic Answers website regularly and always recommend its resources when people have further questions on a topic.

The impact Catholic Answers has made on me is why I decided to join SOCIETY 315. If Catholic Answers has been able to aid me in my faith life this radically, I can only imagine the good it can do for those who have not yet fully embraced the Church. I am happy to give what I have to support the noble mission of leading others to the fullness of the truth.

ON A MISSION!

Executive assistant Siobhan Cruz Kelly finds joy in many things—including a newly inspired effort to visit all of the famous California Missions.

Being a Catholic traveler is undeniably a gift. Every country, from Italy to Mexico, is full of endless religious art, history, and sacred cathedrals worthy of making a passport-required pilgrimage. It is possible that time or an expired passport might make these spiritual journeys few and far between. Thankfully, the length of a journey doesn't define a pilgrimage. Just ten miles from the Catholic Answers office is a perfect starting point for your next state-side pilgrimage: Mission San Diego de Alcalá.

California history is Catholic. The entire coast is lined with cities bearing the names of great saints, all leading up to our state capital Sacramento, that is, “The Most Holy Sacrament.” St. Junípero Serra, along with his fellow Spanish Franciscan missionaries, is largely to thank for establishing the twenty-one California Missions, the first of which was Mission San Diego de Alcalá in 1769.



Like many California natives, Siobhan Cruz Kelly visited these landmarks without much spiritual context or historical knowledge (apart from a fourth-grade Mission project). This changed on the last day of 2023. While exploring the gift shop at Mission San Fernando Rey de España, she came upon a “California Missions Passport.” Inspired by faith and, of course, the promise of stamps, she purchased the passport for the reasonable price of \$3.95 and started the journey up the coast to see all twenty-one missions. Each landmark shares a beautiful common thread of Spanish architecture, but what Siobhan appreciates the most about the five Missions she’s seen so far are the uniquely historic facts of each site—from the burial site of the first California martyr, Fr. Luis Jayme, to connections to famous literature like *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Next time you are in California, be sure to enjoy being a Catholic “tourist” and take the time to visit at least one of its Missions. Passport optional!



indulgences Overcome Endless Objections with this One Weird Trick! Cy Kellett

Anyone who regularly discusses the Faith with unbelievers knows that there are many kinds of unbelief. One kind that can drive the believer nuts is the “endless objections” kind. Rather than engage with the faith, the endless objector will rehearse again and again the many “foolish” things that a life of Faith would compel him to accept. After all, “How could I accept a religion that would want me to believe in talking snakes/Noah’s Ark/old-fashioned sexual ethics/God’s punishment of his own son/[fill in the blank]?”

The Christian in this conversation can feel compelled to respond to each and every particular objection. But he senses that the overarching problem is getting the objector to stop rolling his eyes long enough to consider the actual content of the Faith.

What to do?

Online, I saw an evangelist suggest that we simply tell the person, “You’re making excuses . . . attempting to justify yourself rather than bending the knee to Christ.”

This strikes me as a pretty good diagnosis accompanied by a hazardous prescription.

Even if (as seems likely) the person is using objections as excuses, that doesn’t mean the objections are “just excuses.” They are also actual questions. Accusing the person of refusing Christ, without giving him a reason to accept Christ, and without patiently addressing objections in a respectful way, seems unlikely to bear fruit.

Perhaps, by answering objections with good humor, the one sharing the Faith can build up trust. And as this trust is built, the Christian can ask questions, including, “Are you sure you are not just treating all of this as foolish to give yourself an excuse not to love God and neighbor as the gospel would require?”

Building relationships, establishing rapport, listening more than talking so the real obstacles can be discovered and removed—these are the hard works of sharing the Faith. We might want to offer our diagnosis of what is wrong with the other person, but, really, how likely is that to help?

What we want is an opening to share our faith, rooted in what Christ has done for us. We can’t force the other person to accept it. Most don’t. We, ourselves, mostly didn’t, until the day we did.

Another evangelist, replying to the one mentioned above, said he might ask, “Are you saying you would become a Christian except for that one, single objection?” This seems to me a better strategy. At least it requires the Christian to listen rather than accuse. Listening in such a way might provide, in time, an opening for a real discussion about who Christ is and what he means. At the moment the discussion moves away from the endless objections and on to the person of Jesus, the Christian is evangelizing.

The Protestant-Mormon Problem

Joshua Charles

One of the biggest “red pills” involved in my conversion was realizing that the vast majority of Protestants (including myself) had virtually the same theology of history as the Latter-Day Saints church (the Mormons), and we didn’t even realize it. I found the consequences of this to be extremely disturbing.

The LDS church teaches that after the death of the last apostle, the authority of the priesthood and the keys was lost. As a result, Christians fell into deeper and deeper error, and the true faith was lost. They call this the “Great Apostasy.” Many Protestants—often prevented from realizing it by historical ignorance—believe basically the same thing. This was one of the most sobering conclusions I came to in my final days as a Protestant, and it helped lead to my conversion.

Here’s why.

To have any religion whatsoever, you must, at minimum, have three doctrines:

1. How you join the religion (initiation)
2. How the members of the religion govern themselves, who has authority, and so forth (government)
3. How the religion worships whatever deity/deities it acknowledges

Without these three, it’s arguably impossible to claim you even have a religion.

On these three matters, the Church Fathers—the Christian leaders of whom we have any record from the earliest days of the Church through roughly the first millennium—are *unanimous*.

They unanimously believed in:

1. baptismal regeneration (how we become Christians),
2. apostolic succession (how the Church is governed), and
3. the sacrifice of the Eucharist (how Christians worship).

Giving as much credit as possible, Anglicans and (some) Lutherans are the two biggest sects who believe in items one and two. However, even if we say that all of them believed in both (which is not true), together they constitute only about twenty percent of worldwide Protestantism.

All Protestants reject item three (some Anglicans and Lutherans will quibble with this, but that’s for another article). Thus, the vast majority of Protestants reject all three of these fundamental Christian doctrines upon which the ancient Church was unanimous and which are absolutely essential to having a religion of any kind whatsoever.

That means the vast majority of Protestants (including myself at one time) must necessarily believe—whether they realize it or not—that from the very first generation after the apostles forward, all Christians got it wrong on how we become Christians, how the Church is governed, and how Christians worship. In other words, they must believe that Christians got the essence of their religion wrong, that it got worse and worse through time, and that this began right after the death of the last apostle, since every Church Father of whom we have any record is squarely opposed to Protestantism on these three fundamental doctrines.

Although these Protestants do not claim to believe that this is what happened, this is nonetheless the necessary conclusion if their doctrines are true, making their theology of history virtually identical with that of the LDS Church.

This is absurd for various reasons, but here is where it gets very disturbing.

If this is true—that the fundamentals of Christianity were essentially lost from the first post-apostolic generation, but have been available in one form or another for the 500 years since the Reformation—then this conclusion necessarily follows: what God in the flesh established in the first century was weaker than what men like Luther, Calvin, and others re-established in the sixteenth century.

I made the same objection to Mormon missionaries who visited me for several weeks. “If your religion is true,” I said, “then what Christ himself established was weaker than what Joseph Smith re-established.”

As disturbing as I found this conclusion about the nature of my own Protestantism, it was nonetheless true in light of the facts of history.

I realized that I had been deceived by a religious system that had surreptitiously claimed to achieve something greater than even the apostles had done.

Frozen Embryos Are Living Humans

Trent Horn

Back in March, in the wake of the Alabama State Supreme Court ruling that declared frozen human embryos are human beings under Alabama law, several memes began circulating online denying this fact of biology. One says:



This meme denies biology, first, because we know these embryos are human *because they have human DNA and human parents*. Many animal species go through the embryonic stage of life, and if an in-vitro fertilization (IVF) clinic put a non-human embryo in a mother's body they would be guilty of gross malpractice.

Second, we know these human embryos are alive because they are growing or able to grow by cellular reproduction. The cryogenic freezing process halts their growth, but not their capacity for growth. They are alive since IVF clinics recognize that accidentally-thawed embryos have died (and so cannot be implanted) while frozen embryos are still capable of growing.

Third, microscopic animals like tardigrades and rotifers have evolved an ability to survive being frozen (even for thousands of years). Humans do not have this ability, so it can only be accomplished through the use of technology.

When cells freeze, they form sharp ice crystals that destroy cells just like a knife pops a balloon. The reason frozen food tastes worse than fresh food is because the freezing process has already killed some of the cells in what you're eating. Collections of up to about a hundred human cells can be successfully frozen by using cryoprotectants that act as an anti-freeze to prevent cellular "freezer burn."

One day this could be used to preserve human organs, but for now those structures are too large and complex to undergo the necessary cryoprotection process to safely freeze them. The possibility that this problem will be solved in the future has even led some people to freeze their entire body (or even just their heads) after death, hoping that future medical science could revive them.

To summarize: our ability to keep very young human beings alive in conditions that would kill older human beings does not disprove that those young human beings are alive. Indeed, it proves they *are* alive. And if they are living, human beings, then we should treat them humanely. One way to do that would be choosing not to put these human beings into inhumane cold storage in the first place.

Spiritual Battle Isn't Flashy

Thomas Graf

Fr. Andrew Younan, a holy priest and friend of Catholic Answers, has a superb Sunday homily posted on YouTube with the title “God Works Slowly and Quietly.” In it, he examines the contrast in Matthew 7 “between God’s works and the works of evil,” and in doing so unearths some solid gold nuggets of practical advice for the spiritual life. I implore you to listen to the full eleven minutes yourself.

Broadly, Fr. Younan’s point is that the life of God in us, as illustrated by our Lord, grows like a tree—slow, boring, and needing persistent and mundane cultivation. In contrast, the enemy loves to distract us from that work with drama and bombast: “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” (Matt. 7:22). Here’s the part that resonated with me most:

“Spiritual battle!” People love the idea of spiritual battle. And there is spiritual battle, absolutely. You know what spiritual battle is? You’re mad at your brother, and your temptation is to, y’know, get into a fight, and you resist that temptation. That’s spiritual battle. It’s *so boring*. And that’s how God works: in these little, tiny, boring things.

Dead on. The language of “spiritual battle” or “spiritual warfare” can be misleading to modern ears. It makes sanctification sound like a flashy sword duel against cackling demons, with a tongue of fire on your head; but Fr. Younan and our Lord illustrate it quite differently. It’s a slow, steady, interior grind against your weaknesses. Praying every day, resisting temptation, and pursuing virtue. Taking up your cross. It bears repeating: that’s *boring*.

The devil is there, for sure, but for the 99.99 percent of us who aren’t as holy as a Padre Pio or Teresa of

Avila, he doesn’t need to do anything bombastic. In fact, he probably knows that tormenting us with *Exorcist*-like horrors would send us sprinting into the protective arms of our heavenly Father! No, it’s so much simpler: he just pokes and prods us at our weak points. As Fr. Younan says later, “You need to worry about your gossip and your envy and your pride. That’s where the devil’s attacking you.”

This resonates with me deeply for two reasons. First, I’ve experienced it. By the grace of God and solid spiritual direction, I pray almost every day now; but forming and maintaining that habit is *hard*. Every morning, it demands a new yes to God and no to myself. I have to battle my enslavement to Twitter and YouTube. On the days I win the battle and enter prayer, I’m usually pestered by mental distractions. And nearly every time, there’s no warm fuzzies or audible divine voice to immediately reward me. I enter, I sit with God, and I leave.

In the moment, it’s boring and I don’t “feel” like I’m getting anything out of it. But Jesus says that’s how the spiritual life grows, so I keep showing up; and every now and then, I look back at where I used to be, and I see how the tree has grown. It’s a humbling reminder of God’s slow, silent, tremendous power.

And that leads to the second reason: God renews the Church by raising up saints, which is why becoming a saint is the single most important thing any of us can do with our lives. But becoming a saint is *intensely* personal. It requires constant, regular self-reflection and self-denial. It requires asking God to let us see ourselves as he does. It requires total surrender to his will. It requires a hundred more things I don’t know yet. But how on earth can we do any of that if we spend all our time looking for a sword to fight the devil with instead of a grindstone?

Turning the Tables on a Protestant Prooftext

Emily Torres

Some Protestants are quick to use Ephesians 2:8-9 as an objection to the Catholic understanding of salvation, particularly when it comes to baptism. Take, for example, an argument by John MacArthur. Regarding the Catholic view of baptism, he claims:

The means by which justification is initially obtained is not faith, but the sacrament of baptism...As thousands of former Catholics will testify, Roman Catholic doctrine and liturgy obscure the essential truth that the believer is saved by grace through faith and not by his own works (Eph. 2:8-9). In a simple sense, Catholics genuinely believe they are saved by doing good, confessing sin, and observing ceremonies.

MacArthur and many more Protestants view the sacrament of baptism as akin to a “good work” or “ceremony.” This differs from the Catholic belief that baptism is a necessary instrument for receiving God’s sanctifying graces. Under MacArthur’s view, the Catholic view conflicts with Ephesians 2:8-9, which emphasizes salvation through faith rather than works.

Ironically, however, this very passage is actually *about* baptism. Here is Ephesians 2:8-9 in context:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even *when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ* (by grace you have been saved), and *raised us up with him*, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might

show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved *through faith*; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast (v. 4-9, emphasis added).

Now consider this passage in Colossians 2, which St. Paul wrote around the same time:

And you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also *raised with him through faith* in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, *who were dead in trespasses* and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made *alive together with him*, having forgiven us all our trespasses (v. 12-13, emphasis added).

St. Paul uses strikingly similar language in both passages. In each epistle, he describes how we are:

- dead in our trespasses,
- raised up with Christ through faith, and
- made alive together with Christ.

In Colossians, however, St. Paul specifies that all of this happens as a result of us being “buried with him in *baptism*.” Considering this, it is fitting to also interpret Ephesians 2:8-9 as referring to baptism, when we receive Christ’s sanctifying graces. Baptism is not a work, so that man may boast, but is the gift of God, as Ephesians describes.

Thus, Catholics shouldn’t be threatened by the Protestant’s use of Ephesians 2, but can instead take the opportunity to discuss the sanctifying graces of baptism. ■

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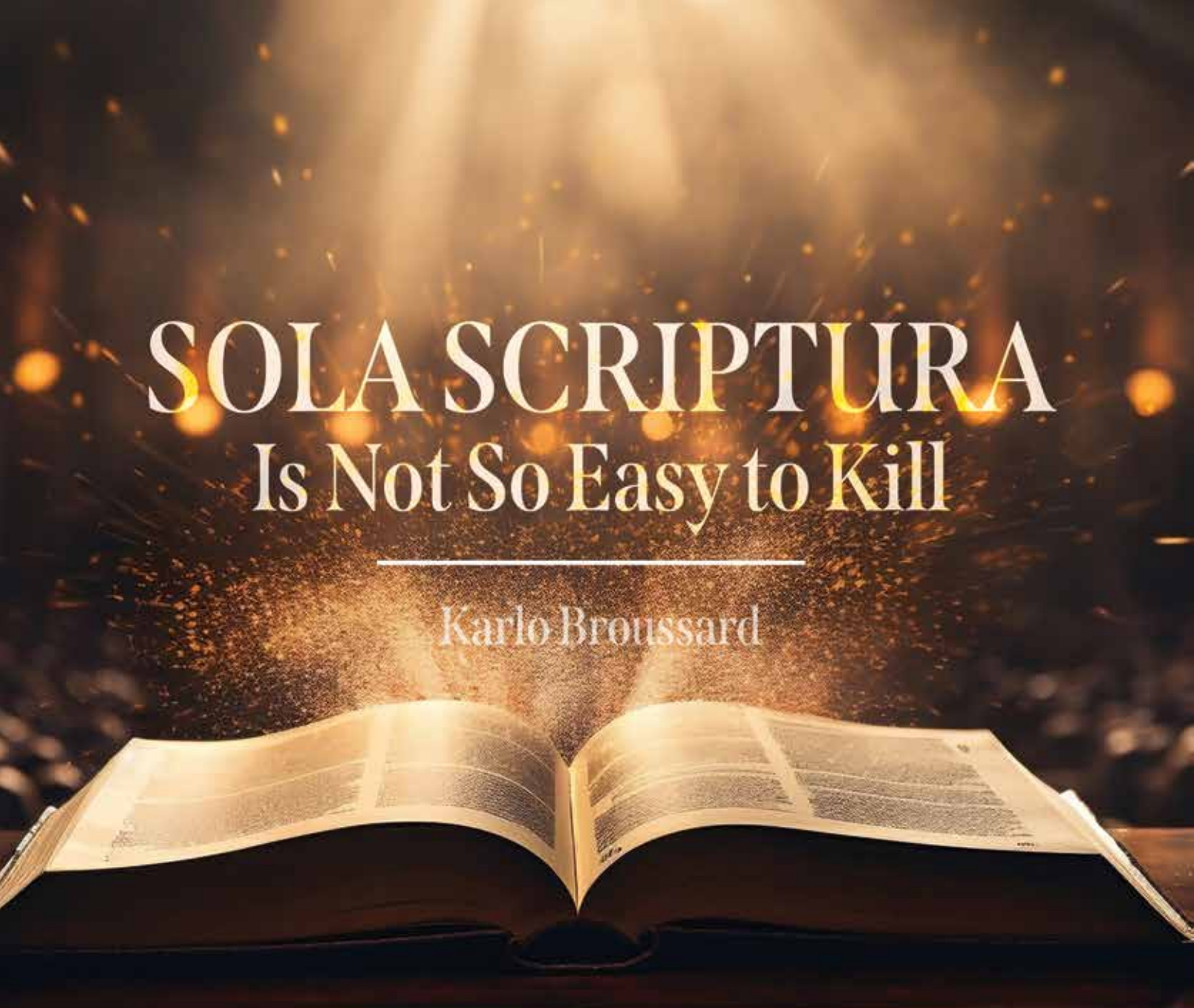
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SOLA SCRIPTURA Is Not So Easy to Kill

Karlo Broussard

When it comes to the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* (Latin, “Scripture alone”), Catholics have some popular rejoinders. One of the most popular is captured in the phrase, “Where’s *that* in the Bible?”

The idea here is this: for a Protestant, Scripture alone serves as the infallible source for Christian belief (the doctrine of *sola scriptura*). Anything not found within the confines of the written word should not be accepted as Christian doctrine. But this principle is self-defeating: since the belief of *sola scriptura* itself is not found within the confines of the written word, a Protestant must not accept it as a Christian doctrine. To do so would be to violate the principle of *sola scriptura*.

So the self-defeating nature of the argument makes it a slam dunk, right? Not quite.

A Protestant could counter and say, “Wait a minute! The Bible doesn’t have to *explicitly* say, ‘The Bible alone is our infallible source for Christian doctrine, and we shouldn’t accept as Christian doctrine things that aren’t in the Bible.’ It can be *inferred* from what’s present in the text.”

Take, for example, St. Paul’s instruction for us to hold fast to the traditions handed down by both word and written epistle (2 Thess. 2:15). Protestant apologists Geisler and MacKenzie concede that the apostolic traditions spoken of by Paul were binding for the first-century Christians because the apostles were the only ones who

had apostolic authority. But since they're all dead, so they argue, the only apostolic authority we have is the inspired record of their teaching. From this, Geisler and MacKenzie infer that the oral tradition-Scripture paradigm changed when the last apostle died, thereby leaving only the inspired apostolic writings (i.e., Scripture) for us to use as our infallible guide for Christian belief and practice.

Furthermore, some might say the Catholic idea that these traditions are always binding is an inference that's not supported by the text. There's nothing in the text itself, it might be argued, that says Christians were *always* to depend on those oral traditions. Without such evidence, it would seem more reasonable to think we're left with only the inspired apostolic writings to be our infallible guide.

How might we meet these Protestant rejoinders?

Let's take the first target given to us by Geisler and MacKenzie. As I point out in my book *Meeting the Protestant Response*, it's problematic on two fronts.

First, it's unclear what the implication is. Does the claim that there is no more apostolic authority imply that no more revelation can be given, whether in oral or written form? If that's the case, then we agree as Catholics. Sacred Tradition for Catholics does not entail the belief that public revelation was given after the time of the apostles. The Catholic Church teaches, along with Protestants, that public revelation ceased with the death of the last apostle.

Now, if the implication is that there is no more apostolic authority to preserve what the apostles taught, then we have a problem, since the Bible and extra-biblical Christian sources make it clear that one way the Holy Spirit preserved the apostolic traditions was by leading the apostles to appoint men to succeed them in their apostolic ministry, and they charged such men to preserve what the apostles had taught. For example, before his death, Paul made arrangements for the apostolic Tradition to be passed on in the post-Apostolic Age. He tells Timothy: "What you have *heard* from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

We also have evidence from extra-biblical Christian sources that the apostles appointed men to succeed them for the sake of preserving what they taught. Clement of Rome's first-century letter to the Corinthians (c. A.D. 70) is one example. He writes in chapter 44,

Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned [bishops—at chapter 42], and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry.

Irenaeus of Lyons, a bishop of the late second century, affirms that the apostolic traditions were preserved in this line of succession from the apostles. Here's what he writes in his classic work *Against Heresies*:

It is within the power of all, therefore, in every church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] rave about (3:3:1).

For Irenaeus, the truth of Apostolic Tradition is preserved in the succession of bishops from the apostles. This is what we find in Scripture.

For these reasons, we can reject Geisler and MacKenzies justification for the claim that the oral tradition-Scripture paradigm shifted once the apostles died off. The apostolic authority didn't die with the apostles. It continued in the men they chose to succeed them, called bishops.

What about the second target given above: that there's nothing in Paul's affirmation of first-century Christians depending on oral traditions to say they would *always* be dependent on it?

The problem here is that the logic would equally apply to the written traditions, since Paul speaks of the oral and written traditions together as that which the Thessalonians need to maintain and stand firm in. If a Protestant thinks that the lack of an explicit exhortation to always stand firm in the oral traditions favors the oral tradition-Scripture paradigm shift, then he must be willing to say that Christians don't always have to depend on the written traditions (Scripture), since Paul says nothing in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 about Christians always depending on them. Perpetual dependence on the written traditions has to be inferred. And if we can do that, then we can reasonably make the same kind of inference for the oral traditions.

There's one last thing to say in response to the overall Protestant rejoinder: if some *sola scriptura* Protestants are open to doctrines being validly implied but not explicitly stated in Scripture, then they've got to be at least open to accepting all kinds of Catholic doctrines (e.g., Mary's bodily assumption, Mary's immaculate conception). Or at least, when they challenge doctrines like the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception, they have to jettison arguments whose foundation is anything like "it's not in the Bible." ■

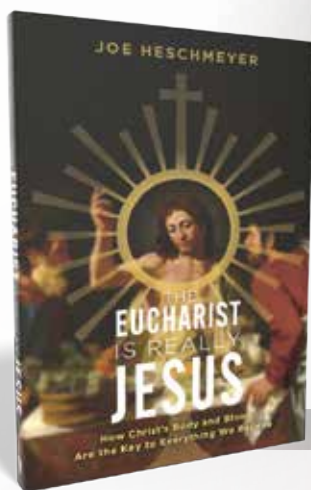
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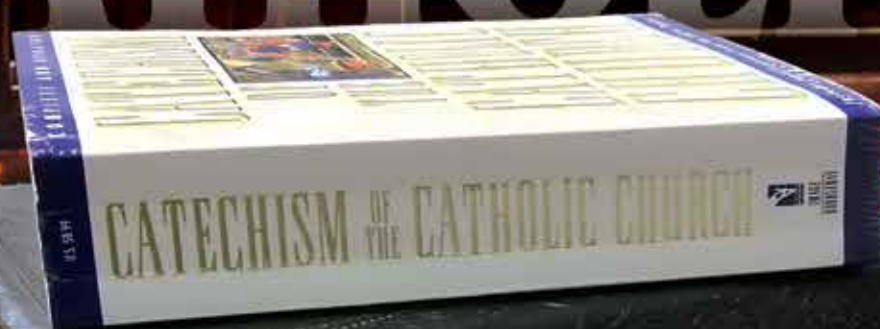
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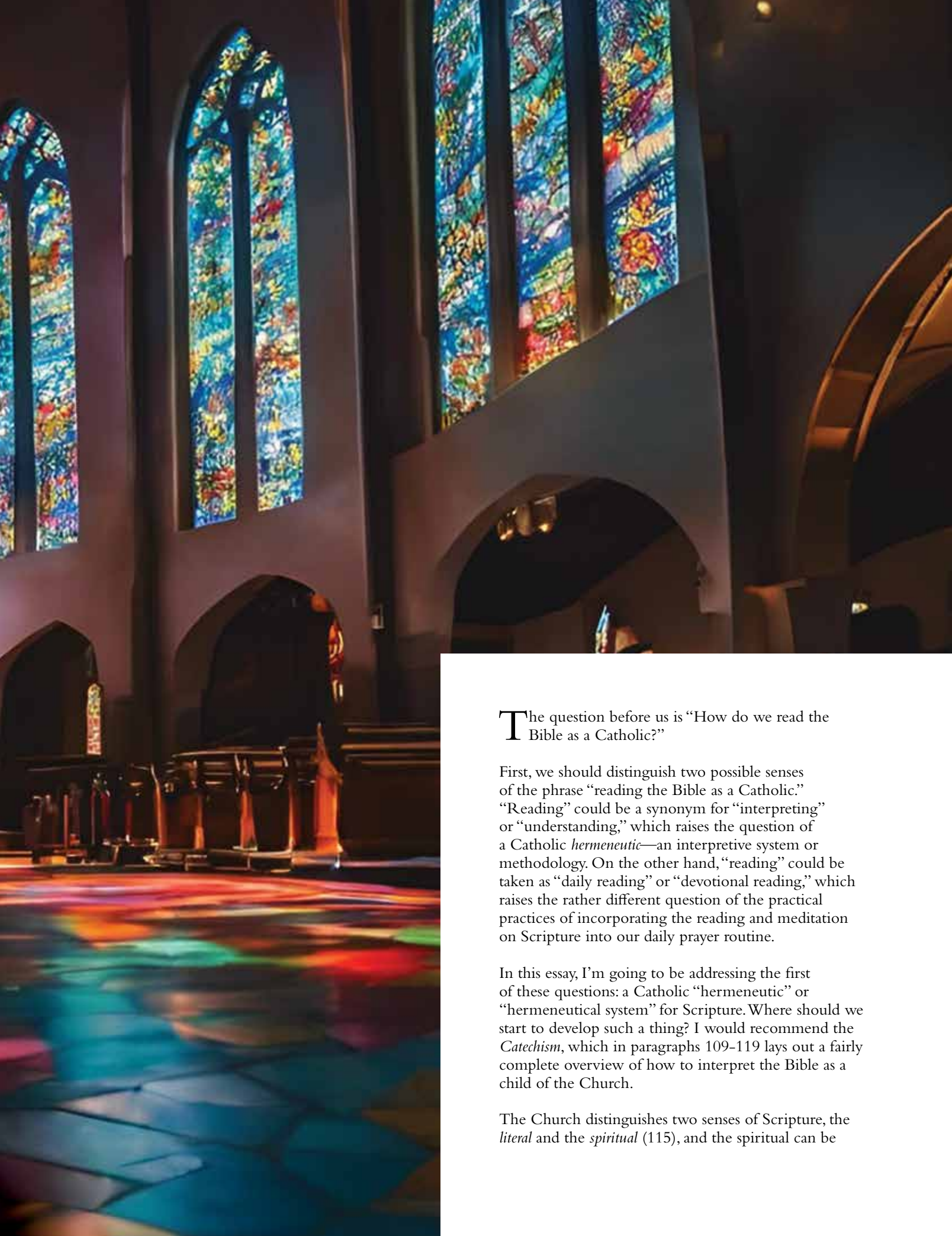
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John Bergsma

How to Read the BIBLE as a CATHOLIC





The question before us is “How do we read the Bible as a Catholic?”

First, we should distinguish two possible senses of the phrase “reading the Bible as a Catholic.” “Reading” could be a synonym for “interpreting” or “understanding,” which raises the question of a Catholic *hermeneutic*—an interpretive system or methodology. On the other hand, “reading” could be taken as “daily reading” or “devotional reading,” which raises the rather different question of the practical practices of incorporating the reading and meditation on Scripture into our daily prayer routine.

In this essay, I’m going to be addressing the first of these questions: a Catholic “hermeneutic” or “hermeneutical system” for Scripture. Where should we start to develop such a thing? I would recommend the *Catechism*, which in paragraphs 109–119 lays out a fairly complete overview of how to interpret the Bible as a child of the Church.

The Church distinguishes two senses of Scripture, the *literal* and the *spiritual* (115), and the spiritual can be

further subdivided into the *allegorical*, the *moral*, and the *anagogical* subsenses.

To get at the literal sense, we “must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm, and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words” (109). To get at the author’s intention, we must “take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating then current” (110). Then, as we explore the spiritual sense—the deeper meanings of the text placed there by the Holy Spirit—the *Catechism* lays out three *criteria* (i.e., principles of discernment) offered by the Second Vatican Council: (1) “Be especially attentive ‘to the content and unity of the whole Scripture’” (112); (2) “Read the Scripture within ‘the living Tradition of the whole Church’” (113); and (3) “Be attentive to the analogy of faith,” by which is meant “the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of revelation” (114).

To help my students master a systematic approach to interpreting the Bible that “covers all the bases”—gets at the four senses while respecting the three criteria—I have developed a six-step process for interpreting any particular Scripture passage that analyzes in turn the *historical*, *grammatical*, *rhetorical*, *canonical*, *liturgical*, and *magisterial* dimensions of the text. The first letters of these six aspects can be remembered by the acronym “**H**ow **G**ood **R**eaders **C**an **L**earn **M**eaning from the Bible.” We will discuss each of these aspects below.

The History

After the initial stage of familiarizing ourselves with a particular passage of Scripture (for example, the wedding at Cana, John 2:1-11) by reading it over several times and formulating in our mind some questions about the text and its meaning, the first stage of a more formal interpretive process is to study the historical (and cultural) background of a biblical text, *when it is possible to determine such matters*. (That is, sometimes we don’t know much about the background of a biblical text, and speculating about the possibilities can be fruitless or even misleading.) This follows the *Catechism*’s recommendation that “in order to discover *the sacred authors’ intention*,” we “must take into account the conditions of our time and culture” (110).

For example, a knowledge of Ancient Near Eastern culture during the time the Old Testament was written can be helpful in understanding the true meaning of certain passages. Take this law from Deuteronomy:

You shall not boil a kid [i.e., a young goat] in its mother’s milk (14:21).

What is the point here? Is it that mixing milk and meat is an offense to God? A little research into ancient history and culture will reveal that boiling a kid in its mother’s

milk was a magic ritual used in Canaanite sorcery. This helps us to understand the point of the passage: God doesn’t want his people to imitate the witchcraft practiced by their pagan neighbors.

Likewise, in the New Testament, a knowledge of the history and culture of the times is helpful. The Gospels, both in stories and parables, make frequent mention of the monetary unit called a *denarius*. This was a typical day’s wage for a common laborer. Knowing that helps us grasp the size and significance of the amounts of money discussed in certain parables:

After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard (see Matt. 20:2).

Here, the owner of the vineyard is acting in a fair and conventional manner: the denarius was the usual payment for a day’s labor, and he commits to give it to his workers. At other times, a knowledge of the history and culture may not change interpretation, but it allows us a greater appreciation of what the author is communicating. Take, for example, this statement of Jesus to the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:

I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth (vv. 15-16).

The city of Laodicea was notorious in the ancient world for its poor drinking water. Its water supply was brought from hot mineral springs many miles from the city. By the time it arrived in town, the water had cooled to lukewarm temperature, but still had a foul taste due to its high mineral content (especially sulfur).

In the modern day, there is a host of resources to get at the historical and cultural background of the biblical text. Most modern commentaries do a good job of this. There are also many excellent Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias that explore the historical context of the biblical world. We have to exercise care, however, because much “mainstream” biblical scholarship is colored by an anti-historical bias—the academic system in most developed countries encourages students in Scripture to be skeptical of the Bible’s claims, de-emphasize data that might support biblical historicity, and over-emphasize data that may challenge the Bible’s self-presentation. Thankfully, it usually does not take much reading to pick up the authors’ and editors’ attitude toward Scripture, and there are sufficient published resources out there by believing Jews, Protestants, and Catholics.

The Grammar

After researching the historical background of the text, we move on to analyze its grammar. Grammar comprises at least two aspects: the meaning of words (*lexicon*) and their arrangement (*syntax*).

Obviously, knowing the meaning of words is important to the exegesis of a text! That is why, in order to do serious exegesis, it is necessary to master the languages in which Scripture was written: Hebrew (and a little Aramaic and Greek) for the Old Testament, and Greek for the New. When we don't know the original languages, the best we can do is compare many translations and consult several commentaries that discuss the meaning of individual words. More recently, many excellent websites permit the student to “drill down” into the original language of the text and extract a great deal of information.

Three Sites to Get Started

1. blueletterbible.org
2. scripture4all.org
3. biblehub.com

Here is an example of when the meaning of words can make a difference in interpretation. Older translations of John 14:2 used to say, “In my Father’s house are many *mansions*.” But the Greek word *monai* actually means simply “dwellings.” Thus, more recent translations render it as follows: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places” (NABRE). There is an important difference. When we translate with *mansions*, the emphasis seems to be placed on the *luxury* of our heavenly accommodations. But when the proper word *dwellings* is used, we see that Jesus is emphasizing not the luxury of heaven, but simply the fact that there will be room for us there, and we will be in communion with him.

The second element of grammar is *syntax*—that is, how words are arranged. Again, it would be ideal to learn the original languages. Otherwise, we are again dependent on translations and commentaries.

Many verses have syntactical difficulties or ambiguities. For example, in John 7:37–38, the RSV renders the following:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, “If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

But many scholars would argue that the sentences of the Greek should be divided as follows:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, “If any one thirst, let him come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

Whose heart flows with water? The first way, it sounds like the believer’s. The second way, it sounds like Jesus’. Historical research comes into play here as well. The “last day” of the Feast of Tabernacles was when the Jewish people began to pray to God for rain. It makes sense that Jesus would rise on this day to emphasize that he is truly God, the source of life-giving water. For that reason, I think the second translation is preferable.

The Rhetoric

After grammar, we look at *rhetoric*: all the higher-level literary features of a text beyond simply the meaning of the words and their arrangement. As the *Catechism* says, we should pay attention to “the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating then current.” The study of rhetoric includes an analysis of at least the following: the *genre*, *structure*, and *literary devices* of a passage.

“Genre” refers to the *kind of literature* that a given biblical text is: history, poetry, hymn, psalm, proverb, parable, apocalyptic, and the like. A great number of interpretive mistakes are made by confusing genres—reading poetry, for example, as if it were history. Take this description of God from Psalm 18:8, literally translated:

Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him.

Does God really look like a fire-breathing dragon? Of course not. This is not historical or scientific writing; it is *poetry*, which uses images to communicate meaning.

“Structure” refers to the way a text is arranged as a whole. A common structural device in biblical literature is *chiasm*—arranging a text so that the first and last elements correspond, the second and second-to-last correspond, and so on. But there are many other structural patterns as well.

The structure of the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1–12) shows something about their meaning. The Beatitudes consist of eight main statements of blessing and then an epilogue. The first (“poor in spirit”) and last (“persecuted”) of the eight main beatitudes promise the reward of the “kingdom of heaven” (see Matt 5:3, 10). This is an ancient structural device called an *inclusio*, where an author begins and ends on the same motif or concept. It generally shows what is the most central or important point among all the things the author says, so in this case, we can say the “kingdom of heaven” is central to the Beatitudes, and therefore they can be thought of as “qualities of kingdom citizens.”

Finally, the analysis of rhetoric includes identifying and understanding literary devices. “Literary devices” cover a broad range of ways that words are used in artistic, unconventional, or non-literal ways. One literary device is *hyperbole*—making an overstatement for the sake of emphasis:

Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven (Matt. 23:9).

And yet there are at least eleven places in the New Testament in which the apostles themselves call themselves or other men “father” in both a biological and spiritual sense. The Church has always realized that Jesus was speaking non-literally here, using a provocative hyperbole to emphasize that all fatherhood ultimately comes from and resides in God.

Most commentaries will do a good job of discussing the various rhetorical aspects of the text (genre, structure, literary devices). When doing your own research, it is helpful to have a list of common literary devices to look for, and such lists are available on websites like

www.literary-devices.com.

Canonical, Liturgical, Magisterial

Investigating the historical, grammatical, and rhetorical dimensions of the text mostly helps with determining the *literal sense*, and these flow naturally from what the Church says about it (see CCC 110, 115). The next three dimensions—the canonical, liturgical, and magisterial—relate more directly to the spiritual sense(s).

The *canonical* dimension of a text is the position and role of the text within the context of the whole canon of Scripture. This dimension has been neglected both in traditional Christian commentary (the Fathers and the Doctors) as well as in modern (post-Enlightenment) academic commentaries. Nonetheless, the *Catechism* calls us to be attentive to the “content and unity” of all Scripture, so doing a thorough canonical analysis of a text is non-negotiable in the process of interpretation.

First, we should examine the passages that immediately precede and follow the one we are studying. This helps us grasp the immediate context. For example, the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:2-12) are immediately preceded by a remark that Jesus “went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him” (v. 1, ESV). The ascent up the mountain to teach reminds us of Moses. Also, sitting was the authoritative posture of the teacher in Judaism—rabbis sat to teach. So Jesus assumes the posture of Moses the teacher before proclaiming the Beatitudes.

Second, we can analyze the place of our passage in the *section of the book* where it occurs. Matthew arranges Jesus’ activities and teachings into five large blocks, each ending with a sermon. The first and largest block (Matt. 3-7) ends with the Sermon on the Mount (5-7), where the Beatitudes have the first and most prominent place. They pair with the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the man who built his house upon a rock (Matt. 7:24-27). This alludes to Solomon, the greatest man who built the greatest house (the temple) on the largest rock (the Temple Mount) in Israel’s history. The theme of the Beatitudes is the kingdom of God, and the concluding parable is about being like God’s greatest king.

Third, we should examine the role of our passage in the context of the whole book. Is your text related to other texts? Does another passage later or earlier in the same book speak to the same issues as your text, and if so, does that cast light on the significance of your text? For example, in the Gospel of John, the Blessed Mother appears only twice—at the wedding at Cana and at the foot of the cross. One event begins Jesus’ ministry; the other event closes Jesus’ ministry. Mary’s presence at both ties the events together and suggests (1) there is something important about Mary relevant to Jesus’ ministry and (2) the wedding at Cana and the cross are somehow related. When we read the two passages in light of each other, interesting correlations start to appear, and we discover *nuptial* images in the account of Jesus’ crucifixion.

Finally, we must examine the text within the context of the Bible *as a whole*. This is what the *Catechism* means when it says to “keep in mind the content and unity of all of Scripture.” To do this well, the reader needs to (1) understand what place in the *divine economy* the text has and (2) be aware of related texts both earlier and later in the canon. (Related texts are texts that speak on the same subject, or perhaps serve as a source for the present text, or use the present text as a source.)

Let’s give an example of interpreting a text within the Bible as a whole.

When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house (Deut. 24:1).

Does this verse imply that divorce is acceptable for God’s people? To answer that, we first have to be aware that Deuteronomy was written by Moses after struggling for forty years with the people of Israel and their rebellious ways. In several places, it has laws that have a clearly lower standard—especially from a moral and liturgical standpoint—than laws that were spoken earlier at Sinai. Then we have to be aware of what Jesus says later on the same subject:

He said to them, “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Matt. 19:8).

Here Jesus holds up the creational model of one man, one woman, for life, as being the divine intention, not the concessions introduced by Moses due to the Israelites’ stubbornness for forty years in the wilderness. We also should ponder the following verse from an Old Testament prophet long preceding Jesus:

For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel. . . . So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless (Mal. 2:16).

The point is this: we cannot simply read Deuteronomy 24:1 and apply it directly to modern life. When we interpret it in the context of the whole canon of Scripture, we see that God does not desire divorce, though for a time he allowed Moses to permit it for hard-hearted Israel. Why did God permit it? The rabbis said it was to prevent spousal abuse or even murder among the Israelites.

So we can see how a *canonical analysis* of the text rather directly responds to the *Catechism's* criterion of keeping in mind the “content and unity” of Scripture. But next the *Catechism* insists on *keeping in mind the living tradition* of the Church, and many theologians have emphasized that the *liturgy is the privileged expression of the Church's living tradition*. Therefore, we can gain spiritual insight into the meaning of a text by observing its use within the liturgy.

Thus, when interpreting a text, it is always wise to examine if and where it is used in the Church's liturgy, which usually means checking the index to the lectionary (both weekday and Sunday/Holy Day) and the Liturgy of the Hours, which is theologically an “extension of the eucharistic liturgy.” If possible, checking its use in the Church's other rites (Byzantine, Ruthenian, Maronite, Syro-Malabar, etc.) is also helpful.

A striking example of the liturgy's assistance in interpretation is Song of Songs 3:1-5. This text is read for the feast day of St. Mary Magdalene, and it is paired with John 20:11-18, the account of Mary finding Jesus at the tomb after his resurrection. When we examine both texts in light of each other, striking parallels emerge. In both cases, we have a woman going out in the dark to find her “beloved,” and so forth. The liturgy shows that the ultimate meaning of Song of Songs 3:1-5 points not to human romantic love, but to Jesus, and to finding him who is our true beloved.

The final step of scriptural interpretation is to review the teaching of the Magisterium about the text. As *Dei Verbum* and other magisterial documents have stated, the ultimate interpreter of Scripture is not the guild of biblical scholars (who never completely agree among themselves anyway), but the Church's teaching authority. Therefore, it is necessary to see if the meaning of a given text has been defined authoritatively by the Magisterium at some point in Church history.

The teachings of the Fathers are also weighty, and can even be infallible if there is a consensus among them. The teachings of the Doctors, the popes, and the saints should also be consulted, as they are significant witnesses to Tradition and the way the Holy Spirit has guided the Church to receive God's word through history.

Discovering where and when Church authorities have spoken about any particular text is not always easy, but one excellent if not yet exhaustive resource is a website hosted by the Congregation for the Clergy: www.bibliaclerus.org.

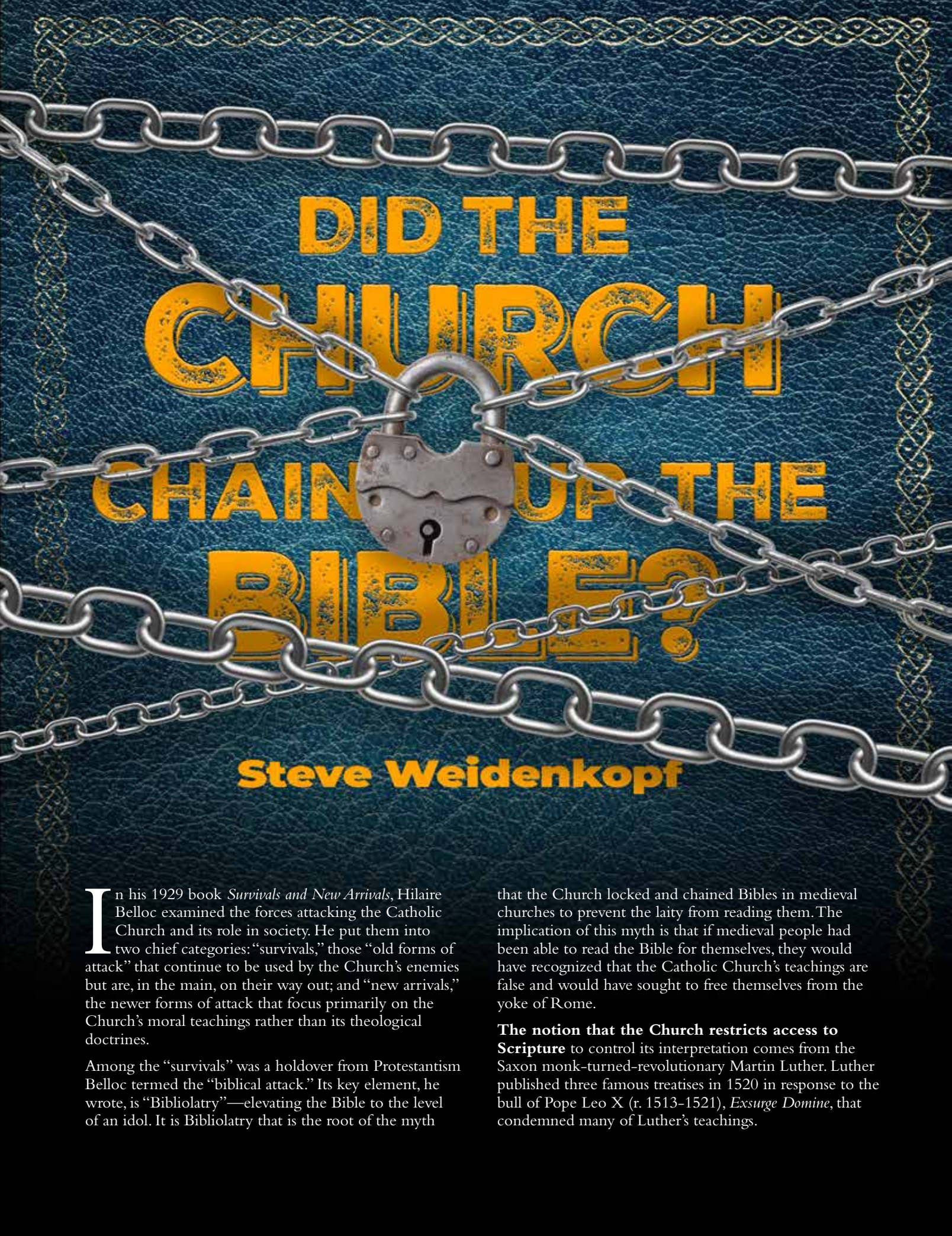
It allows us to search an electronic database of Patristic, medieval, and magisterial documents for references to a specific text. There are also software packages like Verbum that permit electronic searching of a large library of the Fathers, Doctors, and saints, along with papal and conciliar documents.

Checking these authoritative witnesses to the Church's interpretive tradition is crucial for ensuring that we interpret within the *living tradition* and the *analogy of faith*, the “coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of revelation.”

The Big Picture

Once you have analyzed the Scripture passage in question from the historical, grammatical, rhetorical, canonical, liturgical, and magisterial perspectives, you should be in a good position to articulate its literal sense (the meaning of the words according to the intent of the author), the allegorical sense (the meaning it takes on in light of Christ and the new covenant economy), the moral sense (its significance for our behavior as disciples of Christ), and the anagogical sense (the way the passage leads us to contemplation and union with God).

Within the life of the Church—whether in preparing homilies or class lessons, participating in Bible studies, or giving public talks—rarely will it be both possible and necessary to follow every step laid out here comprehensively, unless perhaps the reader is writing a commentary. However, it is helpful for all Catholics, laity, religious, and clergy, to have a vision for the process necessary for responsible interpretation of Scripture from the heart of the Church. I hope I have succeeded in laying out such a vision here. ■



DID THE CHURCH CHAIN UP THE BIBLE?

Steve Weidenkopf

In his 1929 book *Survivals and New Arrivals*, Hilaire Belloc examined the forces attacking the Catholic Church and its role in society. He put them into two chief categories: “survivals,” those “old forms of attack” that continue to be used by the Church’s enemies but are, in the main, on their way out; and “new arrivals,” the newer forms of attack that focus primarily on the Church’s moral teachings rather than its theological doctrines.

Among the “survivals” was a holdover from Protestantism Belloc termed the “biblical attack.” Its key element, he wrote, is “Bibliolatry”—elevating the Bible to the level of an idol. It is Bibliolatry that is the root of the myth

that the Church locked and chained Bibles in medieval churches to prevent the laity from reading them. The implication of this myth is that if medieval people had been able to read the Bible for themselves, they would have recognized that the Catholic Church’s teachings are false and would have sought to free themselves from the yoke of Rome.

The notion that the Church restricts access to Scripture to control its interpretation comes from the Saxon monk-turned-revolutionary Martin Luther. Luther published three famous treatises in 1520 in response to the bull of Pope Leo X (r. 1513–1521), *Exsurge Domine*, that condemned many of Luther’s teachings.

In *An Appeal to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, Luther exhorted Emperor Charles V and the German nobility to reject papal authority and establish a national German Church in opposition to Rome. He argued that Rome had built three “walls” around itself to maintain its hold on Catholics. He identified these walls as the following false teachings:

- 1) that the spiritual power is greater than temporal power;
- 2) that only the pope can authentically interpret Scripture; and
- 3) that only the pope can call an ecumenical council.

He warned the German nobility that they must be aware “that in this matter we are not dealing with men but with the princes of hell.”

To Luther, the belief that the pope is the only interpreter of Scripture (which is not in fact Church teaching but rather Luther’s erroneous understanding of it) was “an outrageous fable” and is not rooted in the only authoritative source of divine revelation that Luther recognized, Scripture itself. Instead, he put forth the idea that all Christians should be able to interpret Scripture for themselves, a doctrine that would lead to a multitude of rival Protestant denominations.

It is widely believed that, to facilitate the lay reading of Scripture, Luther was first to translate the Bible into German. He was not. The first Bible in the German vernacular was produced in the eighth century at the monastery of Monse. By the fifteenth century, there were 36,000 German manuscript Bibles in circulation, and a complete printed Bible in the German vernacular appeared in 1529, five years before Luther’s translation was published. In short, the Church made Scripture accessible to laymen long before Luther and the Reformation did.

There is, in fact, a sense in which the Bible is the product of the Catholic Church, as it was the bishops of the Church who decided which books circulating in the fourth century would be considered canonical. Indeed, the Church took

great pains throughout its history to guard, defend, and preserve Scripture. Pope St. Damasus I (r. 366–383) first took up the task of publishing a vernacular version of the Bible, and he employed his brilliant yet irascible secretary St. Jerome (342–420) to accomplish the task. Jerome learned Greek and Hebrew to properly translate the word of God into the vernacular Latin.

His translation, which became known as the Vulgate, was not well received in North Africa, where a riot erupted over his version of the book of Jonah. Widespread acceptance of the Vulgate in the Church took time. Perhaps part of the resistance can be attributed to the long memory of the Church. Jerome’s new translation came less than a hundred years after Diocletian initiated the Great Persecution. One of his edicts mandated the surrender of all copies of the sacred writings, an event so destructive that its memory remained with the Church long after the persecution ended. The Church maintained a great respect and love for the sacred word, as evidenced by the efforts of monks to preserve it.

The sixth century was witness to the activity of a uniquely saintly man who renounced his worldly life to become a hermit. His reputation for holiness attracted many followers, and soon thereafter Benedict of Nursia founded a monastery at Monte Cassino. Benedict’s vision for his monks was rooted in the idea that monasticism was a “school of divine service” in which the monk committed himself to a life of obedience focused on a routine of work, prayer, study, and self-denial. Benedict’s monks preserved and maintained Western civilization through their painstaking work of copying ancient Greek and Roman manuscripts, as well as devoting time to copying and illustrating Scripture.

Working in the scriptoriums of Benedictine monasteries in the Middle Ages was not easy. It took nearly a year to copy a Bible manuscript. The process was laborious and wearisome; as one monk recorded, “He who does not know how to write imagines it to be no labor; but though three fingers only hold the pen, the whole body goes weary.” Any

copying work the monk did not finish during the day had to be completed at night, even in the cold winter months.

Bibles were not only copied but richly and beautifully illuminated with elaborate images. Bible illumination began in the fifth century with Irish monks who painstakingly prepared the skins of calves, sheep, or goats into vellum that was used for the manuscripts. The famous Lindisfarne Gospels manuscript, copied and illuminated in the eighth century, was the work of one scribe who used 130 calfskins and took five years to complete the work. The amount of labor that went into each copy of the Bible led to preventing their theft either by locking them in containers or chaining them to desks. In other words, these were security measures, not efforts to keep Scripture from the faithful.

Indeed, protecting an expensive Bible by securing it allowed greater, not lesser, access to it. Moreover, the Bible was usually placed in a public area of a church so those who could read could peruse its pages. The first mention of this protective policy occurs in the mid-eleventh century in the catalogue of St. Peter's monastery in Weissenburg, Alsace, where it was recorded that four Psalters were chained in the church. Note, too, that this practice was not exclusive to the Catholic Church: Protestants also did it, as evidenced by the chaining of the Great Bible (also known as the Chained Bible) published by command of King Henry VIII of England in 1539.

The Real Story

The Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* led to the myth that the Catholic Church kept the word of God from the faithful to maintain its authority; the chaining of Bibles in medieval churches was seen as evidence of this. It also led to the false claim that Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German was the first such vernacular edition; in fact, there had been many vernacular editions preceding Luther's, including St. Jerome's Vulgate.

It was the Church that, far from suppressing the Bible, determined the canon of its books and then preserved and authoritatively interpreted the written word of God throughout its history. Catholic monks painstakingly preserved the sacred writings and beautifully illustrated them throughout the medieval period. These priceless manuscripts were chained or locked up in churches not to prevent their use but to protect against theft, thus allowing greater access to them, which was standard practice in both Catholic and Protestant churches until the printing press enabled mass production of Bibles. ■

The Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* led to the myth that the Catholic Church kept the word of God from the faithful to maintain its authority.

WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE CHURCH TODAY?

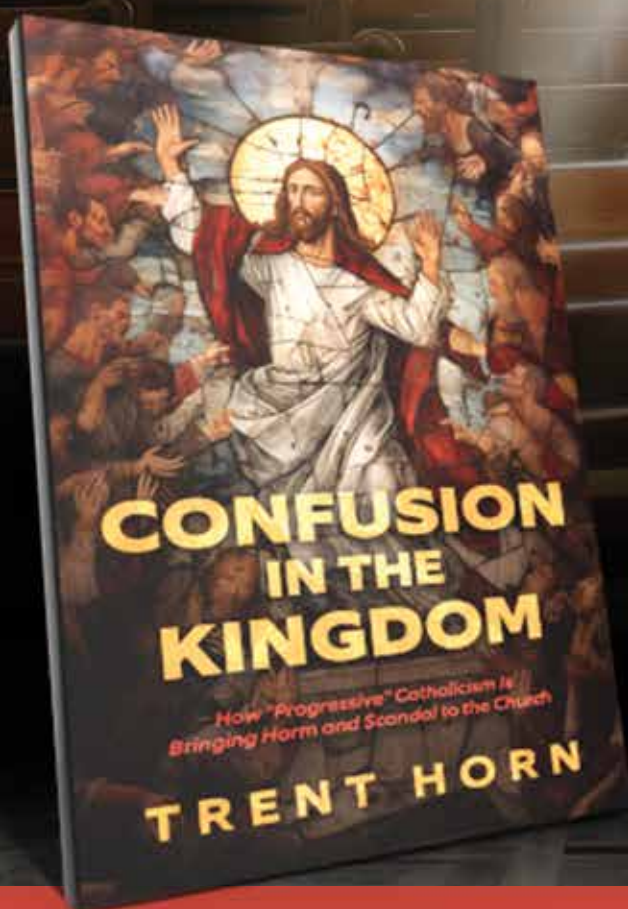
There has always been variety within the Catholic family—different ways to pray, different approaches to the supernatural mysteries, different moral and doctrinal emphases to meet the challenges of every age and place. But always united in the one recognizable Faith.

These days, however, all those harmonized differences of the past have given way to a cacophony of dissent, fracturing Catholic unity and pitting the body of Christ against itself. The world, which used to see the Church as an unshakeable rock of certainty (even when it hated us!), now looks at the many self-proclaimed liberal or “progressive” clerics, leaders, and influencers and isn’t sure anymore what Catholicism actually teaches and doesn’t teach, permits and forbids, blesses and condemns.

And not just the world—many Catholics, too, are looking at this mess and throwing up their hands.

In *Confusion in the Kingdom*, apologist Trent Horn (*Why We’re Catholic*) helps you make sense of the present chaos by examining the factions of progressive Catholicism and their beliefs, showing why they’re not representative of Catholic orthodoxy and exposing the harm and scandal they have caused.

Even better, he explains how to argue against those liberal errors you’re most likely to encounter on social media or at a family gathering. Whether it is in matters of doctrine, political and social teachings related to justice and the common good, or the many areas where liberal Catholics want to rewrite traditional Christian teaching on sex and the family, if there’s a progressive Catholic notion causing confusion, Trent is there to shine on it the clear light of perennial truth.



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A Catholic at a
NON-DENOMINATIONAL
Bible Study

STEVE RAY

Every day, Catholics are invited by coworkers, neighbors, and even family members to “ecumenical” Bible studies. Should they go?

Certainly, all of us would benefit from more study of Scripture, but as someone who has been a part of a number of Protestant Bible studies—I’ve even taught them—I discourage Catholics from attending them because of the foundational premises and principles in operation at these studies.

Protestants are delighted to have Catholics attend their Bible studies, but it is often not because they want to hear and discuss the Catholic perspective on Scripture. Instead, they see it as an opportunity to bring them to the “true gospel”—to evangelize them, to get them saved. In many cases, though certainly not all, the non-denominational Bible study is the Trojan horse that infiltrates the Catholic’s mind and succeeds in drawing him away from the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church—to join a Protestant group. Most of us have a family member or friend who has been affected in this way.

An unwary Catholic who steps into the Protestant Bible study usually does so with no intention of leaving the Catholic Church. He just wants to study the Bible. The Catholic usually has a hard time finding a good and welcoming Bible study in Catholic circles—but this is changing.

First, although the Bible study may call itself “non-denominational,” Catholics and Orthodox are not usually included under this umbrella. They may be invited, but you’ll rarely find them in leadership.

Protestants think of themselves as people who live by a book, not hampered by human tradition. They think of Catholics as, at best, followers of traditions for whom the Bible is secondary. That is a huge misconception:

Protestants are also people of tradition. No one reads the Bible objectively. People who claim to “just read the Bible” really read it through the eyes of a tradition they’ve already accepted, whether that be Fundamentalist, Calvinist, Pentecostal, Baptist, or one of many others. Everyone depends upon tradition, but not everyone recognizes it.

“Bible Christians,” based on their tradition, study the Bible with these premises:

- There is no binding authority but the Bible alone.
- There is no official binding interpretation or interpreter.
- The Bible is perspicuous (i.e., easy to understand) and can be interpreted and understood by anyone.
- An individual can and should read the Bible and interpret it for himself.

Catholics, based on Sacred Tradition, study the Bible with different premises:

- The authority of the apostles and the Church preceded the Bible, and the Tradition of the Church is an equally infallible authority (2 Thess. 2:15; CCC 80–83). The Bible is part of the apostolic Tradition.
- The authoritative interpretation of the Bible is the prerogative of the Catholic Church (1 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 18:17; CCC 85–88).
- The Bible is not always easy to understand (2 Pet. 3:15–16) and needs to be understood within its historical and contextual framework and interpreted within the community to which it belongs.
- Individuals can and should read the Bible and interpret it for themselves—but within the framework of the Church’s authoritative teaching and not based on their own private interpretation (2 Pet. 1:20–21).

These basic differences place the Catholic and Protestant worlds apart even though they are opening the pages of the same book and accepting it as an authoritative revelation from God. The Catholic position is biblical and has been espoused from the first days of the Church. The Protestant position is unbiblical and is of recent origin. The Catholic is in full continuity with historical Christianity; Protestants are in discontinuity.

Catholics attending a non-denominational Bible study need to be aware of these differences and be ready not only to filter out false conclusions, but also to guard themselves against the false underlying assumptions (e.g., that everything has to be found and proven explicitly in the Bible).

Catholics who are unaware often begin to adopt a Protestant mentality without knowing they are doing so, gradually learning to suspect the Catholic Church and trying to prove everything from the Bible.

A Figure of a Figure

To illustrate this, let's take a closer at 1 Peter 3:18-21 and how it relates to baptism. Protestant commentaries on Scripture admit that it is one of the most difficult passages of the Bible to interpret.

For example, James McCarthy says in his book *The Gospel According to Rome* that "when Peter says that 'baptism now saves you,' he is speaking of the typological, or symbolic, significance of baptism. . . . It [the word *figure*] tells us that what follows, 'baptism now saves you,' is a figurative illustration that complements the symbolism of a preceding figure" (331-332).

As I note in my book *Crossing the Tiber*, it seems that McCarthy is saying that baptism is a figure of a figure instead of the fulfillment of a figure. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature offers a different and more straightforward interpretation: "Baptism, which is a fulfillment (of the type), now saves you, i.e., the saving of Noah from the flood is a . . . 'foreshadowing' and baptism corresponds to it [fulfills it]" (75).

"This much," McCarthy concludes, "is clear: it does not support the Roman Catholic doctrine."

The Catholic interpretation explains the passage quite comfortably without twisting the text from its clear meaning, accepting the literal meaning of the text, and complementing the rest of New Testament teaching. It is difficult for McCarthy to interpret because he comes to the passage with a handicap: his Fundamentalist preconceptions.

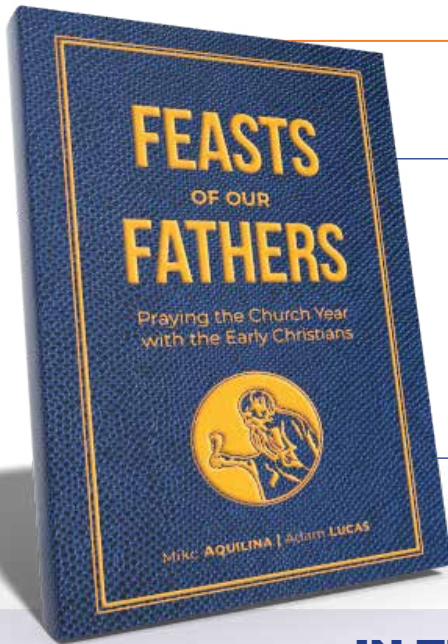
Catholics: Seen but Not Heard

We have only scratched the surface. Other examples of passages that are difficult for Evangelicals—and where unwary Catholics attending a non-denominational Bible study can be misled—are Matthew 16:18-19, John 5:28-29, John 20:23, Colossians 1:24, and James 2:24.

Catholics often find non-denominational Bible studies appealing because of the warm, serious, loving, and family-like environment. Being used to reverence and quiet devotion, Catholics find the welcoming and chatty nature of these gatherings refreshing and new. But there is such a thing as an ecumenical Bible study that doesn't allow knowledgeable Catholics to participate in leadership or where the Catholic perspective is not equally presented and discussed with respect. In a truly ecumenical Bible study, the Catholic interpretation and teaching is not treated as substandard or heretical.

Also, the Catholic Church is not a "denomination" (which means "to take a new name"); it is the Church. Those who are in schism, who break away or subsist apart from it, are denominations or sects. The Church is not. It is the Church.

There's still a long way to go to get Catholics to the point of scriptural study that Protestants have achieved. But it is happening . . . and you can help. ■



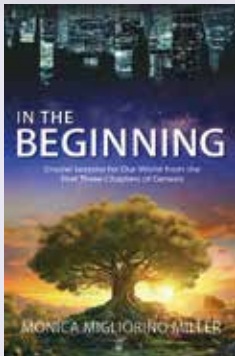
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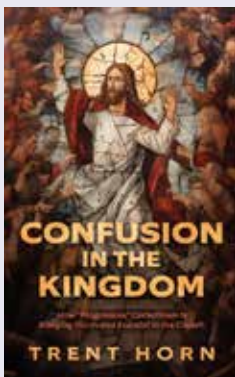
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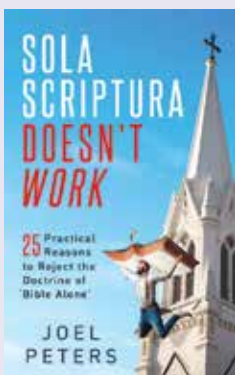
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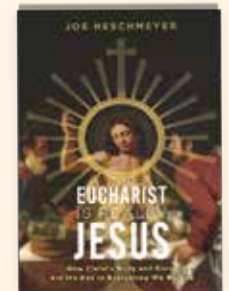
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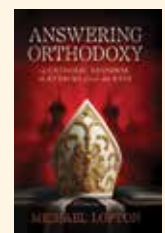
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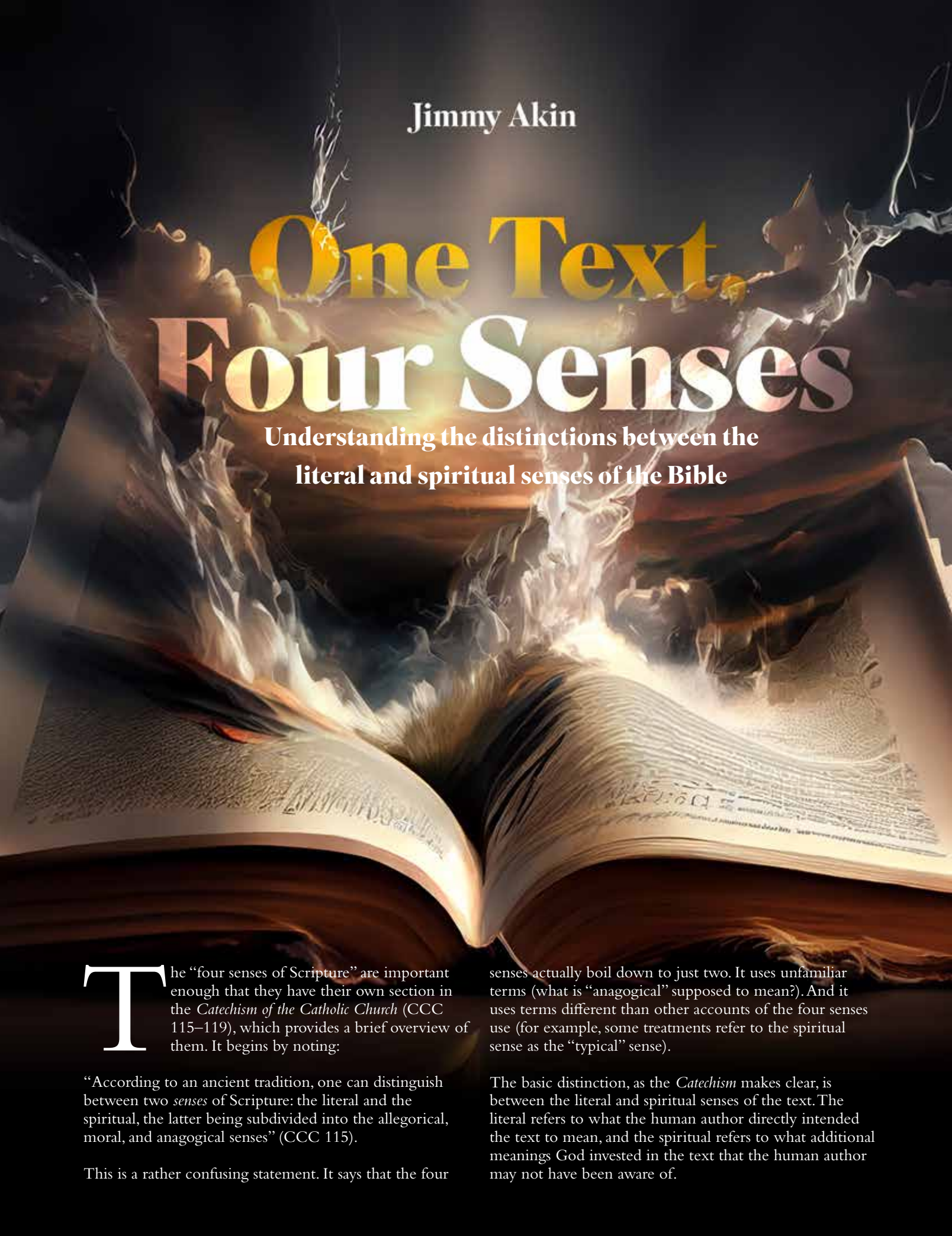
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Jimmy Akin

One Text, Four Senses

Understanding the distinctions between the
literal and spiritual senses of the Bible

The “four senses of Scripture” are important enough that they have their own section in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 115–119), which provides a brief overview of them. It begins by noting:

“According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two *senses* of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses” (CCC 115).

This is a rather confusing statement. It says that the four

senses actually boil down to just two. It uses unfamiliar terms (what is “anagogical” supposed to mean?). And it uses terms different than other accounts of the four senses use (for example, some treatments refer to the spiritual sense as the “typical” sense).

The basic distinction, as the *Catechism* makes clear, is between the literal and spiritual senses of the text. The literal refers to what the human author directly intended the text to mean, and the spiritual refers to what additional meanings God invested in the text that the human author may not have been aware of.

The Literal Sense

The *Catechism* explains the literal sense by stating that it is “the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: ‘All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal’” (CCC 116; cf. ST I:1:10 ad 1).

The caution that all other senses are based on the literal is intended to exclude errors that have been committed in the history of biblical interpretation.

Some—to avoid problems caused by the apparent literal sense of some passages (such as when God commands the Israelites to kill Canaanites indiscriminately)—have tried to dismiss the literal sense as unimportant and only a vehicle for the spiritual sense, in which more palatable lessons can be seen. Others have proposed highly speculative allegorical interpretations that seem completely detached from the literal sense of the text and may even contradict it. Or sometimes so much attention is paid to the spiritual meaning of a passage that its literal sense is overlooked.

The *Catechism* thus calls attention to the primacy of the literal sense as the foundation of sound interpretation.

How is the literal sense discerned? What are “the rules of sound interpretation” to which the *Catechism* refers?

The starting point is the words of Scripture themselves. What do they say?

Here we have a problem. It is clear that people do not always mean what their words say. If I tell you to “roll out the red carpet” because of the imminent arrival of some VIPs, I do not literally mean to unroll a carpet that is red. That phrase is an idiom that is not meant to be taken literally. You have to look beyond what my words themselves say in order to figure out what I mean.

The same thing happens in Scripture, as when the biblical authors refer to God’s power by speaking of “the arm of the Lord.” Apart from the Incarnation at least, God does not have an arm, yet this is a regular Old Testament idiom for God’s power.

Some interpreters—particularly in Fundamentalist Protestantism (which frequently opposes the idea that there is a spiritual sense of the text)—have a marked preference for verbally literal readings. Sometimes they suggest rules of interpretation such as “If the literal sense makes sense then seek no other sense.”

There is a significant degree of truth to this rule. Most of the time we do express ourselves literally, but this perception is not altogether reliable because the idioms of our native language are so second nature to us that we often use them without us or our listeners realizing that something non-literal has been said. The preceding

sentence contains an example. None of us really have a “second nature,” but if you are a native English-speaker, you probably didn’t notice the metaphor.

The “if the literal sense makes sense” rule also is unreliable across cultures. Suppose you were from another culture and applied it to the English phrase “roll out the red carpet.” Would a literal reading “make sense” (and not be wildly implausible)? Yes, it would. People do sometimes roll out red carpets—which is why we have the idiom in the first place.

But applying the rule would lead you astray. You would conclude that more red carpets are being rolled out than is actually the case. The fact is that sentences often “make sense” when taken in a literal manner even though this sense does not capture what their author intended. To capture the latter, you need to be familiar with the culture of a people rather than just being able to translate its language.

Because ancient Israel had a different culture than ours, the “if the literal sense makes sense” rule is not always a reliable guide when dealing with the Bible. Further, since God can do anything, many things in the text might “make sense” when talking about God even though they would not make sense if we were talking about anybody else.

This is a regular problem for biblical interpreters. They will be reading along in the text and encounter something strange. “Is it a symbol, or is it a miracle?” they ask themselves. This may not be easy to answer, for when God is involved, things could happen that otherwise would be flagged as clear symbols.

Are the six days of creation really literal twenty-four-hour periods or a symbol of divine work, however long it took? Did Jesus really turn bread and wine into his body and blood, or is it just a figure? Did a great red dragon really sweep a third of the stars out of heaven with his tail, or does that symbolize something else? Are these symbols or miracles?

One cannot simply assume that they are all literal. Neither can one assume that they are all symbols, which is what liberals often do when the text reports something Christians historically have seen as miraculous. God does do miracles—the authors of the Bible recognized this—and you won’t figure out what they mean if you approach the texts expecting to see a symbol whenever something strange is recorded.

We must not prejudice the question one way or the other. We must pay attention to the Faith and to try to learn how language was used at the time, in the tongues and cultures of the Bible, and then say to ourselves, “What did the author most likely intend when he said this?”

The Spiritual Sense

By definition, the spiritual sense of a text involves something more than what you could derive from a verbal reading of it. The spiritual sense is discerned by looking past the text itself to the people and events it records.

Thus the *Catechism* notes, “Thanks to the unity of God’s plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs” (CCC 117). In other words, the selection of certain things for inclusion in Scripture points toward other spiritual realities that are part of God’s plan.

The *Catechism* singles out the moral sense as one of the three traditional subdivisions of the spiritual sense and notes that “the events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written ‘for our instruction’” (ibid.; cf. 1 Cor. 10:11).

In 1 Corinthians 10:11, the apostle is discussing passages from the Pentateuch in which the Israelites sinned and were punished by God. He then says, “Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come.”

Here, Paul recognizes what we (and the *Catechism*) would classify as the moral sense of the text—that is that we must not sin or we also are liable to be punished. This message goes beyond what the words of the text say, but it is nevertheless likely that the human author intended this very message to be understood by his readers (including his immediate readers, not just those “upon whom the end of the ages have come”).

Reading moral messages from Scripture can be tricky but is fairly non-controversial. The other two traditional divisions of the spiritual sense—the allegorical and the anagogical—are much more controversial. In these cases the meaning seems to go well beyond anything that the human author could be expected to envision. Yet New Testament authors such as Paul clearly draw out such meanings.

The early Christians inherited from late Judaism a tradition of seeing allegorical meanings in the pages of Scripture, meanings that went beyond what the words of the text themselves conveyed.

Paul provides one of the clearest examples of this in Galatians 4:21–31, where he draws an analogy between the Old and the New Covenants and Abraham’s wives Sarah and Hagar. The concubine Hagar was a slave, and Paul saw in her a fitting symbol of the bondage of the Old Covenant, while he found in Sarah, the free woman, a fitting symbol of the liberty of Christ.

The allegorical method of reading the Old Testament was common in contemporary Judaism, though even if it had not been, Paul’s use of it here would have been sufficient to cement its place in Christian biblical interpretation. He even uses the term *allegory* for what he is doing, saying “these things are allegorized” (Gal. 4:24, my translation).

Elsewhere, Paul finds Old Testament elements that are images of New Testament realities. For example, in Romans 5:14, he notes that Adam “was a type [Greek, *tupos*] of the one who was to come”—that is Christ. This contributed to the development in Christian biblical interpretation of typology, the study of Old Testament things (*types*) that could be seen as images of New Testament things (their *antitypes*).

If one were to read the text of Genesis and simply stick to what it says, he would not conclude that Adam is a foreshadowing of a future Christ. Neither would one conclude that Sarah and Hagar symbolize two covenants, neither of which had yet been made. Christians thus found themselves recognizing more than one sense in the sacred text—the sense of what the text itself says and a greater sense that goes beyond this.

The *Catechism* notes regarding the allegorical sense: “We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ’s victory and also of Christian baptism” (CCC 117).

In cases like these, the Old Testament type in question (the crossing of the Red Sea) already has found its antitypes (Christ’s victory and baptism). In other cases biblical realities seem to be types of things for which the antitype has not yet come.

Thus the *Catechism* notes regarding the anagogical sense that “we can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem” (ibid.).

Because the allegorical and the anagogical senses both involve typology, it is tempting to see them as fundamentally the same kind of sense, a key difference between them being whether we are living before or after the antitype that the sign points toward.

This points to the fact that the division of the spiritual sense is, to some degree, arbitrary. There are other ways in which it could be divided. The literal sense also could be subdivided. In the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas Aquinas considers a number of possible subdivisions for the literal sense (see ST I:1:10). ■



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Since in-vitro fertilization (IVF) creates lives, how could anyone think it's wrong?

The wrongness of IVF often gets obscured by people pointing to the children who came from IVF and assuming that their intrinsic goodness validates the method that brought them into existence. Children who came into existence through adultery, fornication, rape, prostitution, or via surrogacy are just as intrinsically good, but that doesn't mean that the way that they came into the world is good or should be defended.

Arguments against IVF include that human embryos are often purposefully destroyed in this process when they are not implanted, which is the direct killing of innocent human beings. The documentary *Eggsploitation* exposes how college-aged women, who are often struggling financially, are coerced by offers of tens of thousands of dollars to donate their eggs, even at great risk to themselves. IVF also frequently relies on women acting as surrogate wombs to birth these embryos. Pope Francis, in a January 8 address, called for a global ban on surrogacy, saying, "I deem deplorable the practice of so-called surrogate motherhood, which represents a grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material needs."

Another practical argument against IVF is that there is no objective way to stop its use at just infertile married couples. The United States once tried to make contraceptives legal only for married couples, but the

right of single people to have what married people can access was later upheld in the 1972 Supreme Court case of *Eisenstadt v. Baird*. So there's nothing to keep an unmarried man from contracting for a sperm donor and an egg donor, have embryos created from that in IVF, use a surrogate womb to gestate the child, and then have the child delivered to the consumer.

The most basic reason that IVF is wrong is because children have a right to come into existence in their mother's body and be protected from coming into existence in a laboratory, where they might be shipped off to their mother's womb, or a stranger's womb, or to cold storage indefinitely. The *Catechism* says, children have "the right 'to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents,' and 'the right to be respected as a person from the moment of [their] conception'" (2378).

—Trent Horn

What do you think of sedevacantists' claims that heretical anti-popes have invalidly reigned for decades?

One of the dangers of sedevacantism is that it can become a kind of universal acid that eats through the entire papacy, not just recent modern popes. For example, sedevacantists who focus on moral scandals among cardinals and the curia in the last forty years as evidence that the papacy is vacant would also disqualify several medieval popes,

especially those who reigned during the infamous pornocracy of the ninth and tenth centuries. This time period included the infamous cadaver synod of Pope Stephen VI, where he put the corpse of his predecessor Pope Formosus on trial. If they focus on theological errors that allegedly invalidated past popes, then they are going to end up no different from Protestants who try to find similar errors in all the popes, not just modern ones.

For example, they would end up invalidating popes like Honorius, whom a later ecumenical council (Constantinople III) sought to condemn as a heretic for failing to stop the Monothelite heresy, although Pope Leo II, as head of the council, did not confirm the condemnation. By creating enough gaps in papal succession through these arguments, all of apostolic succession would be threatened. The examples can be multiplied but, once again, my big concern is that the logic of sedevacantism and its desire to unseat recent popes could be

weaponized against the entire papacy.

Sedevacantism is basically Protestantism dressed up in a Catholic costume. It claims to be faithful to Tradition, but how can that be when prominent sedevacantists say that the faithful just have to stay home on Sunday and pray the rosary? How much more unfaithful can you be to Catholic Tradition than by saying that the Holy Eucharist, along with Christ's visible Church, has disappeared from the face of the earth? At this point, there is no path for Christ's Church to be restored from this alleged apostasy, which is why many of them say that we must be near Christ's Second Coming and the end of the world. But what's more likely: that this apocalyptic sect correctly discerns the end times even though Christ said that no man knows that, or that they are simply leading people away from the Church which has faithfully persevered for 2,000 years?

—Trent Horn



Who created Jesus' human soul? Also, how is Jesus not both a divine person and a human one? Finally, who resurrected Jesus from the dead?

Concerning the question of who created Christ's human soul, the answer is all three persons of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The reason is that all three persons have the same the divine will. To be more precise, all three persons are *identical* to the divine will. Consequently, whatever the Father wills, the Son and the Holy Spirit will. Whatever the Son wills, the Father and the Holy Spirit will. And whatever the Holy Spirit wills, both the Father and the Son will as well. Since Christ's human soul is a created effect of the divine will, it follows that all three persons of the Trinity created Jesus' human soul.

Now, the reason why two persons are not present in Jesus upon the union that the Word of God establishes with Christ's human nature is because the union with the Word is not accidental but substantial. This means the union is such that the Word of God is the single subject of action in the human nature of Christ. It is *he*, the Word, who acts through two natures: human and divine. Theologically, this is necessary for Christ's human acts to have infinite value, especially his death on the cross. Only if Christ were a divine person acting in his sacrifice on the cross could the cross be a cause of our salvation.

Finally, to the question of who resurrected Jesus, the answer is same as above: all three persons of the Trinity. Given that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all identical to the divine will, and the resurrection of Jesus' corporeal life is an effect of the divine will, it follows that the Resurrection is an effect of the causality of all three persons of the Trinity.

—Karlo Broussard

Revelation 22:18–19 says that anyone who adds or removes from “the prophecy of this book” will forfeit his share in the tree of life (eternal life). Does this mean that anyone who commits this sin is forever damned?

The first thing to note is that “the prophecy of this book” refers to John's revelation and not the Bible itself. Often, this text is appealed to as evidence that the Catholic Church is damnable for “adding” books to the Bible (referring to the seven additional Old Testament books that Catholic Bibles have in contrast to Protestant Bibles). Putting aside the historical question of whether the Catholic Church actually “added” books to the canon of Scripture as opposed to Protestants taking away such books, this text isn't speaking about the canon of Scripture as a whole. Rather, it's referring to the book of Revelation. Consequently, this text can't be used against either the Catholic Church or Protestants in this way.

Now, concerning the actual question of whether someone would be forever damned, the answer is no. John's statement in Revelation 22:18–19 takes the following form: if you commit sin X, then you will not go to heaven. This doesn't mean that sin X is unpardonable. For example, St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 that drunkards will not enter the kingdom of heaven. But this doesn't mean that the sin of drunkenness is unpardonable. The assumption underlying Paul's statement is that drunkenness is a sin that *if not repented of* will send a person to hell. If a drunkard truly repents of his sin, then he can be forgiven.

Similarly, just because eternal damnation is the consequence of the sin of taking away from John's prophecy, it doesn't mean that the sin cannot be pardoned. Taking away from the prophecy is a sin that can send someone to hell on the condition that they don't repent. But like in the case of drunkenness, if the person who takes away from the prophecy truly repents, then that person would receive the forgiveness of sin.

The only sin that cannot be pardoned is the final rejection of God's mercy, what we call final impenitence (CCC 1864). God will not reject anyone who sincerely turns to him since all are made for him. To do so would be to violate his own nature, which he cannot do.

—Karlo Broussard

If St. Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:12, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent,” why does the Catholic Church have female catechism teachers?

The text of 1 Timothy 2:12 does not indicate that women cannot teach *at all*. This is obvious when you consider that the same St. Paul specifically instructed the Corinthian church concerning how women were to teach properly in the community in 1 Corinthians 11:5: “But any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head.”

Some can be confused by Paul's use of “prophesies” here, but remember: to “prophesy” for Paul does not only mean to predict the future as the prophet Agabus did in Acts 11:27–28; rather, its more common meaning is to “proclaim the mind of God,” which is what a teacher is called to do. Thus, women are called to “prophesy” as all Christians are, because every baptized person is a member of the universal priesthood of believers (see 1 Pet. 2:5–9; CCC 1268).

Moreover, this becomes even clearer when we understand that, in 1 Timothy 2, St. Paul was about to delineate the qualifications for bishops and deacons in the next several verses and following 1 Timothy 2:12 (see 1 Tim. 3:1–13). Thus, properly understood, it means that women cannot

teach in the context of the pastoral ministry in the liturgy. This ministry belongs to bishops, priests, and deacons alone. Most people cannot preach at Mass, whether they are women or men. But that does not mean that they are not “prophets, priests, and kings,” understood properly. All Christians are. Again, all Christians are members of the universal priesthood of the faithful by virtue of their baptisms. And thus all Christians are called to “teach” in the sense of performing the spiritual work of mercy: “to teach the ignorant.” But only the few, the called, are members of the ordained clergy, who are called to teach formally by way of the homily at Mass.

—Tim Staples

At Mass every Sunday in my parish, able-bodied lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs) do not kneel at the consecration. Is this allowed? And one priest keeps saying, at the consecration, “which will be poured out for you and FOR ALL.” Is this permitted as well?

Let’s consider your second question first because, while both are errors, the second is the more serious matter. No priest or even a bishop can change the translation of the holy sacrifice of the Mass from “for many” to “for all.” Only the Apostolic See, with the confirmation of the pope, can do that. Canon 846 of the *Code of Canon Law* states, “The liturgical books approved by the competent authority are to be faithfully observed in the celebration of the sacraments; therefore no one on personal authority may add, remove or change anything in them.”

It is true that “for all” was once permitted in the vernacular Mass translations of the Latin rite of the Catholic Church, but this was officially changed as a part of the process of the Church’s offering a more faithful translation of the liturgy—more faithful, that is, to the official Latin text of the *Missale Romanum* promulgated by Pope St. Paul VI and later revised by Popes St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

In answer to your first question, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) 43 clearly provides, “In the dioceses of the United States of America, they [the faithful] should kneel beginning after the singing or recitation of the *Sanctus* [Holy, Holy, Holy] until after the Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer, except when prevented on occasion by reasons of health, lack of space, the large number of people present, or some other good reason. Those who do not kneel ought to make a profound bow when the priest genuflects after the consecration.”

Notice that, in normal circumstances, the priest alone is presumed to be standing (he has to be in order to genuflect). Of course he is, because everyone else was standing for the

prayers of the faithful until the end of the *Sanctus*. The priest (or priests) alone are to be standing at this point; all other members of the faithful are to be kneeling. There are no exceptions for lectors and EMHCs unless, as noted, there is some extraordinary circumstance(s). Even deacons are to kneel (GIRM 179).

—Tim Staples

Is there any truth to the “Jesuit roots of dispensationalism” claim?

This is basically a theological debate between two branches of Protestantism: those who oppose dispensationalism and argue that its roots are founded on the doctrine of a Jesuit theologian of the latter seventeenth century, while others (the dispensationalists) maintain that although the priest may have gotten some things right, he was dead wrong in *not* recognizing the Catholic Church as the biblical Whore of Babylon of Revelation 13, and that, in any event, *authentic* dispensationalism is biblical.

Those who argue for Jesuit roots base their theory on the writings of *only* one Jesuit, the Spaniard Fr. Manuel Lacunza, who expressed his eschatological views in his multi-volume work *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*.

In contrast to authentic Catholic teaching, and similar to the doctrine of later Protestant dispensationalists, Fr. Lacunza espoused a literal, one-thousand-year reign of Jesus prior to the end of the world.

However, Fr. Lacunza’s work didn’t receive support from the Spanish government authorities, and it was later banned by the Spanish Inquisition and put on the Index of Forbidden Books by Pope Leo XII in 1824.

For a faithfully Catholic perspective on premillennialism, dispensationalism, and the related doctrine of the Rapture, see our related tract and articles on catholic.com.

In addition, in a tract on our website, we respond to nine charges of how the Catholic Church is allegedly the Whore of Babylon noted in Revelation 13 (“The Whore of Babylon,” www.catholic.com). In reading this resource, you will see well that the ancient pagan Roman Empire—not Christ’s Catholic Church headquartered in Rome—is the great persecutor of Christians.

We also have a tract on the biblical number 666, a.k.a. “the mark of the beast.”

—Tom Nash



Duc in Altum

Christopher Check

“Which Bible translation should I get?” is a question the Catholic Answers apologists hear not infrequently. They have a ready answer that is not bad, if a little glib: “The one you are going to read.”

To call the founder of Catholic Answers, Karl Keating, “quite an admirer of Ronald Knox” would be understatement. I think Karl owns a copy of everything Msgr. Knox published, and his translation of the Bible is Karl’s favorite. Mine, too—I have one at home and one on my desk at the office. (Baronius Press has a handsome edition that I like to give as a wedding present.)

Knox’s New Testament came out in 1945. The Old Testament followed in 1950. Seven years later, cancer claimed this brilliant theologian at age sixty-nine, so he did not witness the brief period, from 1965 to 1970, when the Knox Bible enjoyed episcopal approval for liturgical use. Alas, that ship has now sailed, but if there are any priests who offer the traditional Latin Mass and like to give the readings in English before the sermon, may I recommend Knox instead of the Douay? Knox is much more readable—and, more important from the pulpit, much more audible.

Why?

Msgr. Knox’s scholarship with ancient languages was matched by his skill with the English language. If you’d like a sample of the prose of a man who wrote everything from profound theological reflections to detective fiction, pick up a copy of the anthology Catholic Answers published when Karl was president, called *The Lost Works of Ronald Knox*.

It’s not, however, only his great prose style that makes Knox’s translation so accessible. When he set about the task of “Englishing the Bible” as he described the process in a pamphlet so titled, he followed “the great principle” his friend Hilaire Belloc said should guide every translator: “Not to ask, ‘How shall I make this foreigner talk English?’, but ‘What would an Englishman have said to express this?’”

We’d be mistaken to interpret Belloc’s counsel as encouragement to render the text in the colloquialisms of the day. There are such Bible translations. Avoid them as you would similar efforts to make Shakespeare intelligible to today’s high school sophomores. (Heavens! It’s not Shakespeare’s fault!) Accessible need not mean banal or irreverent. Indeed, an effective translation will invite the

reader with both heart and mind to engage what is being revealed with reverence. To slow down. To reflect on the mystery. And Knox excels in reverence and mystery, because he understood the medium of reverence and mystery: poetry.

Even when Knox isn’t translating the poetry of the Old Testament, his poetic agility informs his prose. When young people ask me about professional success, I tell them to learn to speak and write well. Then I tell them that if they want to be very good at writing prose, they need to spend a lot of time reading poetry.

To be sure, a life immersed in poetry will show forth in a lyrical prose style. Think of Anthony Esolen. His prose is positively musical because of all that time spent translating Tasso and Dante, all that time poring over Beowulf.

Poetry also, because it is constrained by rules (well, real poetry, at least), demands care in word choice. A songwriter whose craft I admire offers in one of his songs: “It’s likely one of us”—either the husband or the wife, on the death of the other—“will have to spend some days alone.” He might have used the word “time” instead of “days” without doing any violence to the meter, but “days” conveys so much more than “time” when we imagine loneliness: getting up in the morning and drinking coffee alone, emptying the dishwasher alone, running errands alone, climbing into bed alone. All those quotidian actions common to a marriage that make up a day are contained in that word *day*.

As much as a third of the Old Testament is poetry. Adam’s words on first beholding Eve are clearly a poem, and a love poem at that. If you are in the habit of praying the Divine Office, you know that King David begs and praises, gives thanks and asks forgiveness, all in poetry. Thomas Aquinas understood. The great philosopher and theologian said that we use poetry when the thing we are contemplating defies expression in prose or rhetoric. He turned to poetry to contemplate the Blessed Sacrament. We pray that poem every Corpus Christi.

What are these things that defy expression in prose or rhetoric? Mysteries. St. Thomas knew that we engage mysteries through the action of the heart, and that this action is love.

“Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair,” wrote G.K. Chesterton in his biography of St. Francis of Assisi. Which Bible translation should you get? The one that draws your heart deeper into love of God.

Joe Heschmeyer

Apologist & Speaker



Sits in the hot seat for his “last things”

THE LAST BOOK I READ

I’m actually in the middle of it still, but so far, I’ve really enjoyed Brant Pitre’s *Introduction to the Spiritual Life: Walking the Path of Prayer with Jesus*. If you’ve read any of Pitre’s other books, like *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, then you already know how skilled he is at presenting academic scholarship in ways that ordinary people can appreciate. He brings these skills to his treatment of spiritual theology as well. For instance, he shows how the three temptations of Jesus in the desert (Luke 4:1-9) correspond to the “triple lust” of 1 John 2:16-17 (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life), and how they’re combatted by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It’s one of those books that expands your head and your heart simultaneously. Good stuff.

THE LAST TIME I BELLY LAUGHED

Probably something one of my kids did. My four-year-old daughter and two-year-old son recently decided that they wanted to record their own podcast. Bafflingly, they named it *The Suttons Podcast*, after some friends of the family. It’s dedicated to “princesses and construction workers,” and relies (I might argue *excessively*) upon toilet humor. Somehow, it hasn’t made it past the first episode.

LAST TIME I FELT NOSTALGIC

I was walking past a physical therapist’s office near where I grew up, when I was struck by the realization that it was standing where there had once been a terrific video rental store. For twenty-six years (coincidentally, the first twenty-six years of my life), the place was a locally-owned business called SRO Video that had a great selection of artsy and just generally off-the-wall movies. I don’t think I ever walked into SRO to get a specific movie, the way I might with Blockbuster.

Instead, my friends and I would go in with no idea what we were going to watch that night and come out with some bizarre movie we’d never heard of, like *Six-Stringed Samurai*, a strange film about a sword-fighting rockabilly singer trying to make his way to the city of “Lost Vegas” in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. I don’t think you can replicate that experience with an online streaming service, and with the closing of brick-and-mortar stores like SRO, the moment is gone forever. “Tempus fugit, memento mori,” as our forefathers would say . . .



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