

Why I am Catholic

God interprets the Bible for us and our role is to seek His interpretation. Not to insert any personal things into how we read and interpret.

In 1969, Hal Lindsey wrote "The Late, Great Planet Earth," a book that sold millions of copies and was his personal interpretation and application of the Bible. Lindsey started with his own bias and his own agenda and found select passages to support his argument. He played "Bible Hopscotch" or what is officially called "prooftexting"—using and manipulating the Bible to prove a personal theory.

New denominations have been started based on one isolated Scriptural quote, taken out of context, and not even based on a central theme of Scripture. To understand the Bible we must understand the Bible, and how it was written and developed.

"To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 109) From the Second Vatican Council, the bishops remind us that "'Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written.'" (111)

Three criteria must be used: 1) "Be especially attentive 'to the content and unity of the whole Scripture'. . . 2) Read the Scripture within 'the living Tradition of the whole Church'. . . 3) Be attentive to the analogy of faith. . . the coherence of the truths of faith." (112-114)

This first of all means that a line-by-line interpretation will be wrong if it is not seen against the background of the whole of Scripture. It also means that a literal interpretation will most likely be wrong as well. "In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader 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) We must not only understand God's intent, but the human author's intent as well. They did not set out to record a literal historical account but to tell a love story.

It is for example why some of the Gospel stories have slightly different details in each Gospel. Only Luke's Gospel mentions Jesus' visit to King Herod on Good Friday. Four children have different memories of their parents. Each remembers different things based on different life experiences and events and yet each is an authentic memory. God works through the memories of faith communities and each author's personal style and personal memories to pass on His story. Remember the first of the four gospels was not formally written down until more than 25 years after Christ's Resurrection.

Another reason a literal interpretation is problematic is that the compilers of the Old Testament (and God Himself) were comfortable with including myths, legends, and stories. Genesis 6:1-4 relates a story about the Origin of the Nephilim that discusses "the sons of heaven" having children with "the daughters of man." We cannot apply our standards to previous times. We must receive what they gave us and trust God had a reason to include it. We should not force the Bible to be literal—that is not God's intent.

God's intent is to pass on the story of His relationship with us and the story of salvation. He works through the Catholic Church to reveal the story, to interpret it properly, and to shine the light of Scripture on modern concerns.

St. Bernard writes that the Word of God "is 'not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living.'" (108) Put another way, "All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ." (134)

We interpret the Bible God's way when we ask Him to give us the same Holy Spirit so we may read and understand with God's eyes and His understanding.