

A CATHOLIC OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE PREFACE

When I was first asked to teach a scripture study in our parish church, I realized I'd been unconsciously preparing to do it for many years, though *never* with the Catholic Church in mind. My grandfather had been a Baptist preacher, and I was reared in a Bible-centered Baptist church. I studied the Bible, Old and New Testaments, in the Baptist college I attended; and I married a man who went on to study to become a Baptist, later a Presbyterian, minister; our lives for several years were centered in an eastern Protestant seminary. Aside from this exterior and important framework to my life, interiorly I loved the Bible and found it to hold the secrets to a happy Christian life. It has always surprised me to find that most are ignorant of its precepts; or if not ignorant, they find them irrelevant, worthy only of a passing nod, and long surpassed by the insights of philosophy and psychology.

When social structures established in the Judeo-Christian tradition that have served civilization for thousands of years deteriorate with much hand-wringing, when social problems loom that seem to have no solution, when aberrant ideas press for reforms that speak of more chaos for humankind, it seems to me transparently clear that the Bible offers the answer that is immediate, reasonable, and life-giving. For this kind of a view, I am sometimes accused of "fundamentalism." There are many who seem addicted to the maxim "Questions lead only to another question." It is true, open-ended, the Bible is not. However, there is not a fundamentalist bone in my body or I would not be a convert to Catholicism (along with my husband and our ten living children). I do not believe that the Bible alone is all we need for true faith. If that were so, there would not be thousands of sects based on the Bible, not one that agrees with another. Rather, the Bible offers up its most sublime meaning in conjunction with the sacred tradition and apostolic authority of the Roman Church. That is how the Bible was brought into being and that is how it releases its full meaning. The reasons for this will become clear during the study.

Much has changed in the Church since I began this study. At the time, in researching materials for a parish study of the Bible, I could find nothing that presented what was to me most important about a scripture study. Many studies were available that took one book of the Bible at a time in no particular order, often to personalize or subjectivize the message. These were often good in themselves. The

need I felt was to understand each book of the Bible in context of Salvation History consecutively, answering the question "What is God doing to further my salvation through the events and teaching of this book?" How does this build on God's last revelation, and how does it fit into the overall view of the Bible?" Therefore: "What is the story from beginning to end that the Bible tells, and how does each book further that salvation story in its own time and place?" That overall viewpoint of the Bible is, I believe, only consistently and clearly discernible within the Catholic Church. When it is absorbed, cults, sects and Protestant interpretations that may be dangerous to souls will be recognized, and personalistic interpretations of certain passages, often meaningful to the seeker, can be straightened against the overall truth that the Bible reiterates. Keenly feeling the need of such a study but unable at that time to find it, I began to develop this one, keeping only a jump ahead of the first group of people who studied with me. Today very good, solid Catholic studies are readily available from internet sources: Scott Hahn and Jeff Cavins are highly recommended.

I have mentioned my early Bible background; added to that are years as a Sunday school teacher, years of personal study, and instruction with my husband's diaconate classes. But none of these stand up to the need for credentials. Of those essential to modern scholarship, I have none. I can only lean on those who have, and suggest that maybe, now and then, the lay person reacts more directly to where people are and what they are eager to know. C.S. Lewis wrote, "I write for the unlearned about things in which I am unlearned myself. . . .It often happens that two schoolboys can solve difficulties in their work for one another better than the master can." I make no comparison to Lewis, except that as a non-scholar perhaps I can respond to the novice's question more on his level than the expert who is far beyond beginning interest. Yet, by this I do not demote the importance of true scholarship, and suggest that such resources be added whenever possible with a small warning about the deconstructionist, unbelieving studies that continue to masquerade as scholarship.

Whenever the Bible is studied, it is inevitable that the acute questions of the times will press themselves upon both student and

teacher, and the study becomes, at least partly, a quest for insight on that question. The feminist demand for meaning of male and female, though often destructive, has nevertheless had the good effect of bringing men and women to clarify the purpose of God in their sexuality. This particular study, which was in development through the years of feminist questioning of the traditional views of the sexes, does pay particular attention to the meaning of male and female. It suggests that rather than being peripheral to the understanding of Salvation History, God's initial purpose in creating Man, male and female, is integral to understanding the whole course of that history. For this reason, and for ease of handling our English language as it has wisely formed over the ages, I have not used so-called inclusive language. Standard usage is actually the more inclusive and unifying, and the fad of tampering with the language of sexuality will pass, at least in the Church where the true meaning of male and female and the meaning of their unity is accepted in Tradition. "Man" is used generically referring to both sexes including them in one word, and drawing the singular masculine pronoun. Such usage gives woman her honorable, worthy place as well as man his honorable, worthy place, and retains the inherent meaning given them in creation.

Because this study developed without any thought of publication over ten plus years, and was intended only for small groups of students, my study notes, taken from a large number of resources from our partly Catholic, mostly Protestant library (my husband's seminary books and a library bequest from a retired minister), are not traceable to their source. If I used direct quotes from books, by the time the study took form for website publication, those sources were long forgotten. There is no intent to hide my dependence on many scholars, but it may be, in rare instances, that passages are word for word from one of them. Though I am indebted to all of the following, their contribution appears digested into my own thought and words. These books are in the order of their importance to my study:

The Analytical Concordance to the Bible by Young published by Eerdmans
 Harper's Bible Commentary by William Neil
 The Jerome Biblical Commentary published by Prentice Hall
 Enthusiasm by Ronald Knox published by Oxford Press
 A Theological Word Book of the Bible by Richardson published by MacMillan
 The Illustrated Bible Dictionary published by Tyndale
 Dictionary of the Bible (1898) published by Scribners
 Dictionary of the New Testament by Dufour published by Harper and Row
 Documents of Vatican II by Gallagher published by America Press
 Smith's Bible Dictionary revised by Peloubet published by Zondervan
 Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology by Bauer published by Crossroad
 The Concise Sacramentum Mundi by Rahner published by Seabury
 Great People of the Bible and How They Lived published by Readers' Digest
 Atlas of the Bible published by Readers' Digest
 The Mediterranean World in Ancient Times by Sanford published by Ronald
 Gospel Records by Wieand published by Brethren Publishing
 A Harmony of the Gospels for Historical Study by Stevens and Burton published by Scribners
 Robinson's English Harmony of the Gospels by Riddle, Houghton Mifflin
 The Moffatt Commentary Series published by Harper
 The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible
 How to Read the Old Testament and How to Read the New Testament by Charpentier, published by Crossroad
 The Interpreter's Bible published by Abingdon Cokesbury
 New Testament commentary series by Barclay published by Westminster
 New Atlas of the Bible by Negenman published by Doubleday
 What the Bible is All About by Mears published by Regal Books
 Abingdon Bible Commentary
 New Standard Bible Dictionary published by Funk Wagnalls
 Word Studies of the New Testament by Vincent published by Scribners
 The MacMillan Bible Atlas by Aharoni and Avi Yonah
 The History of Civilization by Breasted published by Harpers
 The RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament by Marshall, Zondervan
 The Twelve Prophets, I and II by Smith published by Harper
 Isaiah, I and II by Smith published by Harper
 Personalities of the Old Testament by James published by Scribners

Each of the sixty lessons of A Catholic Overview of the Bible has four parts. These allow a student or a teacher latitude in the way they wish to approach the study. A complete lesson with a class and teacher can take an hour and a half (the briefest amount of time) as a lecture with blackboard diagram, or it may take weeks in a discussion format. An overview is served best by the first format - lecture and diagram. The first part is a written narrative that tells the story of the lesson in the continuing context. Its use is obvious, to acquaint the student with a story that develops from lesson to lesson. The second part of the lesson is a diagram aid for the teacher or the student which is narrated on the website. During a lecture the parts of the diagram can be put on a blackboard to help the student see inter relationships. Or each student may have a copy of the diagram in front of him, and the lesson can be taught from the diagram. Diagram use is more effective than mere lecture. Sometimes these diagrams appear complicated, but in connection with the other aids, the student will find that everything primary in that lesson is made visual including relationship of themes and the way they fit into the overview. Two continuing motifs appear again and again to visually aid recognition both of the development of Salvation History (the time line) and its exalted end - reunion with God (the compartmentalized square).

The third part is a synopsis of each chapter that is assigned for that lesson. It can be used many ways: as a quick review or preview, to specify the location of ideas, and to link various themes. Compact, on only a few pages, it is possible with the use of colored pencils to color-code repeating ideas, or to underscore important passages for easy finding of a point of interest. As example in the fourth lesson Abraham has a number of theophanies through which God tells His plan for Abraham and his descendants. Using a particular color, the student can mark each of these theophanies of the lesson in the synopsis having immediate access to their location, at the same time seeing the relationship between them and their progression of revelation. In the New Testament pastoral epistles, the trials of the new Church as it struggles against heresy is a repeated theme. These can be color coded linking the ideas from letter to letter.

The fourth part is a study or teacher's outline which is flexible playing different roles depending on the need. For some lessons the outline is more necessary than others. I look upon the outline as

support material beyond the continuing story line. The outline makes background material available; often it incorporates the historical data and the archaeological evidence behind the reading. Other times for complicated books it sorts out the main ideas of the text and groups them. Isaiah and Jeremiah are notorious for poor organization; they neither follow topical nor sequential order. The outline draws out and groups the major themes, and makes some historical sequence possible. The later Pastoral Epistles lean upon each other in their pursuit of heretical teaching and the outline points out the interrelationship.

There are three other parts to the study: the questions at the beginning of each lesson to be duplicated as an assignment handout for the next session. Eleven video shows accompany roughly every sixth lesson. Each student also needs Hammond's Atlas to Bible Lands (available through the internet) whose reference numbers are used in the text.

Acknowledgements & Gratitude

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Nancy Cross October 2013