

Use of the Bible Today

Creationism and Its Faith Implications

**A Statement of the
Louisiana Catholic Conference
January 27, 1983**

Summary

The Bishops of Louisiana share the concern of so many people in the State that Judeo-Christian values are eroding and that the gap between religion and culture is widening. They praise and encourage the efforts being made to integrate better religious tradition and scientific discoveries. This integration must begin early in life and is a responsibility of parents and educators.

In the education of the Christian as a whole person the Bible plays an eminent role and the Bishops appreciate the fact that many people today seek guidance from the Bible. Sacred Scripture together with Sacred Tradition is the supreme rule of faith for the individual as well as for the Church.

The Bishops, however, caution that the truth which God communicates through the Bible may not always be self-evident to individuals. They therefore recall three principles of scriptural interpretation which must be observed according to the Second Vatican Council:

The first principle states that the primary meaning of the Bible is the meaning intended by the human authors; therefore their language, culture, habit of thought and communication must be taken into consideration.

The second principle requires that any one text of Sacred Scripture must be read and understood in the context of the whole Bible.

The third principle demands that, since the Bible originated in the community of the believers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the interpreter must examine the understanding and use of a biblical passage in the earlier life of the Church. God's Spirit who is the final Author of the Bible also guides and inspires its authentic interpretation in the community throughout history to the present day.

The truth which God communicates through Sacred Scripture without error is the truth which the human family needs to know for salvation. One may find evidence in the Bible of the human

authors' limitations in regard to their knowledge of history or science, but even with these limitations the message of salvation remains intact and free from error, because the Bible is not a textbook of science or history.

Following these basic principles the Bishops state clearly that the Catholic Church rejects any teaching of atheistic evolution or any system of science which attempts to disprove the existence of God. Sacred Scripture teaches that God is the Creator of all things, but He left it to the human mind to discover the laws and wonders of nature.

In view of this the Bishops insist that the teaching of the Catholic Church does not require that one accept the creation stories as scientific or historical accounts; therefore, one cannot draw any scientific conclusions from the Bible. The Bible is God's plan for salvation and not an encyclopedia of the physical world.

The creation stories in the Bible set the stage for the formation of God's people and establish the spiritual truth that the human person is created by God. This truth is clothed in human language and must be understood in light of the principles mentioned earlier.

Referring to Pope Pius XII the Bishops endorse the efforts of present day biblical scholarship in helping the Church to find the genuine meaning and the saving power of the Scriptures. They are aware that the Church can always deepen its understanding of God's word and that science can discover evermore the marvels of God's creation. Both God's word in Sacred Scripture and the wonders and law of nature reveal the same God and His purposes for the world and humanity.

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Introduction

Reading the signs of the times and being able to interpret the state of the world fosters the health of both the Church and civic community. Realizing this, we, the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church of Louisiana, acknowledge the growing awareness and concern of so many people in our State in regard to the steady erosion of Judeo-Christian values and the widening gap between religion and culture both in the lives of individuals and of society. We praise and encourage their sincere efforts to bring together from both the religious traditions of the past and the scientific discoveries of the present all that advances a proper understanding of human existence. The integration of tradition and new discoveries must begin early in life and is the responsibility of Christian parents and educators.

In this endeavor to educate the Christian as a whole person, Sacred Scripture plays an eminent role. It is not surprising that today so many people, especially educators and parents, turn to the Bible for guidance and direction. God's Word written down in Sacred Scripture and brought to life in the proclamation of the Church, guides the Christian on the way to the Creator and is the final authority to which the Christian must listen. The Second Vatican Council expresses this in the following words: "The Church has always regarded and continues to regard the Scriptures, taken together with sacred Tradition, as the supreme rule of her faith. For since they are inspired by God and committed to writing for all time, they present God's own Word in an unalterable form and they make the voice of the Holy Spirit sound again and again in the words of the prophets and apostles. It follows that

all the preaching of the Church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture." (DV #21; Flannery transl.; page 762)

Teaching and Tradition of the Catholic Church Regarding the Bible

The truths which God communicates through the Bible may not always be self-evident to the individual believer. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council lists three principles for the interpretation of Sacred Scripture. (DV #12; Flannery transl.; pp. 757-758)

The **first** principle asserts that the primary meaning of the Bible consists in the meaning intended by the human authors. This is true of any book. It means that the language, culture, habits of thought and communication of the authors must be taken seriously and carefully studied.

The **second** principle requires an examination of the whole Bible when **any one text** is to be understood. Every single text finds its meaning only in the context of the whole Bible. This is true because the Holy Spirit is the ultimate Author of the whole Bible.

Throughout its history, the Church has read the Bible in the Community gathered for worship and instruction. The **third** principle demands that the interpreter investigate the understanding and use of a biblical passage in the earlier life of the Church. The Bible originated in the community of believers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit has always guided and still inspires the authentic interpretation of the Bible within the Body of Christ.

The truth that the Bible teaches for the sake of salvation is what God wanted to communicate without error through Scripture. The truth that is guaranteed, then, is what will lead the Church to God. There may be grammatical, historical or scientific expressions in the Bible that reflect the limitations of the author's own time, learning or perceptions.

These do not detract from the central message of salvation because the Bible is not a textbook of grammar or science or history but God's plan for the salvation of all.

Conclusion

Applying these principles, the Church rejects any teaching of atheistic evolution, or any laws of science that try to disprove the existence of the Giver of all laws of science. The Bible teaches certainly that God is Creator of all things, and this truth is helpful for salvation. Whatever complex processes may be involved in nature have been left by God for the discovery and wonder of the human mind.

Catholic biblical principles of the teachings of the Church do not require that we take the stories of creation as historical and scientific accounts, therefore we cannot draw from the Bible any scientific conclusions. As noted above the Bible is God's Word of salvation, not an encyclopedia of the physical word. As Pope John Paul II repeated recently, speaking to a group of scientists, ". . . the Bible . . . does not wish to teach how heaven was made but how one goes to heaven." *Origins*, Vol. II; #18; p. 279)

Through reading Sacred Scripture we know that God's love entered human history. The stories of creation (Genesis, chs. 1-3) which set the stage for God's work in the formation of his people clearly establish the **spiritual truth** of man's creation by God. Like so many other truths in the Bible, however, this divine truth articulated in human language must be understood according to the interpretative principles spoken of earlier. To neglect these principles is to fall prey to serious errors regarding the meaning of the Sacred Text. Several years ago Pope Pius XII, the great champion of biblical scholarship, pointed out the need for "discovering and expounding the genuine meaning of the Sacred Books" with the aid of ancient languages and biblical criticism. (*Divino Afflante Spiritu*, par. 23; C. Carlen, transl.)

At that time Pope Pius XII applied this concern for the genuine meaning of Sacred Scripture to the creation stories in particular. Appealing for greater use of contemporary biblical scholarship in the interpretation of these texts he states: "For not a few things, especially in matters pertaining to history, were scarcely at all or not fully explained by the commentators of past ages, since they lacked almost all the information which was needed for their clearer exposition." (*Divino Afflante Spiritu*, par. 31; C. Carlen, transl.) In our present day when so much scientific and biblical scholarship abounds, Christians should not reduce biblical truths which are so rich and profoundly spiritual to the level of uncritical or simplistic literalism. This would rob the Scriptures of their genuine meaning and salvific power.

The Church can always deepen its understanding of divine revelation by studying this written record of God's words and actions, a document unique in human history and literature. At the same time the Church encourages the corresponding research in the physical sciences to help in understanding better the marvels of God's creation; for God's revelation through the Bible and through His creation leads to the same truth about God Himself and His purposes for the world and humanity.

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