

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

40 years ago, writes **Bishop Robert Barron**, the dominant approach to the Bible was the historical-critical method. (*Introduction: The Great Story of Israel*). The purpose of this technique was to uncover as fully as possible the intention of the human authors of the biblical books.

The historical-critical method focuses on the following aspects of study

1. determining authorship of a given writing
2. dating the specific text
3. examining the text in its original language
4. comparing the text to other ancient near eastern writings
5. searching for any archaeological evidence linking to the text
6. considering cultural practices in place when text was written
7. keeping the text in its historical context when interpreting (*"Genesis 1 and the Limits of Historical Criticism"* Carol S. Wimmer)

One virtue to this method: it takes with utter seriousness the groundedness of biblical religion in history. The Bible is primarily the account of how God acted in history, precisely through the people of Israel. The climax of the biblical narrative is a very particular Jew, Jesus from Nazareth, who fulfilled God's promises to Israel through his dying and rising from the dead.

Another virtue is that it effectively blocks wildly imaginative or irresponsibly speculative interpretations of biblical texts. (The spiritual sense of a text must always be based upon the literal meaning of that text.)

By stressing the role of the human author, it emphasizes that God did not work through automatons; his proximity enhancing rather than diminishing the activity of the writers.

THE PRIME AUTHOR OF THE SCRIPTURES IS THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKING NON-COMPETITIVELY THROUGH INSTRUMENTAL CAUSES AND WITH HIS OWN "AGENDA" AND PURPOSE. THERE IS A DEEP COHERENCE BETWEEN THE VARIOUS BIBLICAL TEXTS. IT RECOGNIZES PATTERNS, THEMES, TRAJECTORIES, RHYMES, AND RHYTHMS THAT OBTAIN THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRETY OF THE BIBLE, AND THEREFORE IT DOES NOT HESITATE TO READ THE PARTS IN LIGHT OF THE WHOLE, AND EACH OF THE PARTS IN RELATION TO ONE ANOTHER.

FURTHERMORE, IT RESPECTS THE SPIRITUAL AND THEOLOGICAL TRADITION, FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD UNTIL THE PRESENT DAY, AS THE ORGANIC DEVELOPMENT OF MOTIFS AND PATTERNS IMPLICIT IN THE SCRIPTURES.

IT ENDEAVORS **TO READ THE OLD TESTAMENT CONSISTENTLY IN LIGHT OF CHRIST**, WHO IS THE NEW ADAM, THE NEW MOSES, THE DEFINITIVE SON OF DAVID, THE YES TO ALL THE PROMISES MADE OF ISRAEL. (2 COR 1:20) IT STANDS IN THE AUGUSTINIAN TRADITION "THE NEW TESTAMENT LIES HIDDEN IN THE OLD AND THE OLD TESTAMENT IS UNVEILED IN THE NEW."

When we read Scripture, we should ask the question, "What is God saying?"