

# The Interpretation of the Bible

*Fr. Thomas Hopko*

The Bible is the book of sacred writings for God's People, the Church. It was produced in the Church, by and for the Church, under divine inspiration as an essential part of the total reality of God's covenant relationship with His People. It is the authentic Word of God for those who belong to God's chosen assembly of believers, to the Israel of old and to the Church of Christ today and forever.

The Bible lives in the Church. It comes alive in the Church and has the most profound divine meaning for those who are members of the community which God has established, in which He dwells, and to which, through His Word and His Spirit, He has given Himself for participation, communion and life everlasting. Outside of the total life and experience of the community of faith, which is the Church of Christ, "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15) no one can truly understand and correctly interpret the Bible.

First of all you must understand that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Pet 1:20).

Scholars of the Bible can help men to understand its divine contents and meaning. Through their archeological, historical, and literary studies they can offer much light to the words of the scriptures. But by themselves and by their academic work alone, no men can produce the proper interpretation of the Bible. Only Christ, the living and personal Word of God, Who comes from the Father and lives in His Church through the Holy Spirit, can make God known and can give the right understanding of the scriptural Word of God.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. ... For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known (Jn 1:1-18).*

Jesus Christ, the Word of God in human flesh, alone makes God known. And Jesus, besides being Himself the living incarnation of God, the living fulfillment of the law and the prophets (Mt 5:17), is also the One by whom the Bible is rightly interpreted.

*And [being risen from the dead] he said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"*

*And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Lk 24:25-27).*

*And he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. ... (Lk 24:44-45; also Jn 5:45-47).*

Jesus Christ remains forever in His Church by the Holy Spirit to open men's minds to understand the Bible (Jn 14:26, 16:13). Only within Christ's Church, in the community of faith, of grace, and of truth, can men filled with the Holy Spirit understand the meaning and purpose of the Bible's holy words. Thus,

speaking about those who do not believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the apostle Paul contends that when they read the Bible a "veil" hides its true meaning from them "because only through Christ is it taken away" (2 Cor 3:14).

*Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all [i.e. believers in Christ] with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. Therefore, ... we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God (2 Cor 3:15-4:4).*

In the New Testament, Christ not only provides the correct interpretation of the Bible, He also allows the believers themselves to be directly enlightened by the Holy Spirit and to be themselves "the letter from Christ. ... written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:3). Thus is fulfilled the prediction of the old covenant that in the time of the Messiah "they all shall be taught of God" by direct divine inspiration and instruction (Jn 6:45, Isa 54:13, Ezek 36:26, Jer 31:31, Joel 2:28, Micah 4:2, et. al.). It is only within the living Tradition of the Church under the direct inspiration of Christ's Spirit that the proper interpretation of the Bible can be made.