

The problems of using the Bible as a source of wisdom and authority in daily life

Introduction / Key terms

Allegorical meaning	a means of interpretation of Scripture that looks for symbolic significance in parallels between the Old Testament and the New such as the exodus from Egypt as an allegory of the Cross.
Authority	the grounds for obedience to Scripture based on authorship and reliability
Hermeneutics	the study of interpretation
Inspiration	the breathing in of life to Scripture by the act of the Holy Spirit
Infallibility	a doctrine developed in the United States that says that the Bible is unambiguously trustworthy and true



The Two Horizons of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the study of biblical meaning and interpretation – from Hermes the messenger of the Greek gods. However, there are two horizons of hermeneutics, the horizon of the author’s own time some two thousand years ago and the horizon of our own time.

So much has changed between the two horizons, and so the issue becomes: how can the horizon of the bible address, encourage and advise us in our own time? How can the bible possibly be a source of moral advice, or a source of comfort? How do we escape captivity to our own cultural views and understandings?

Because of this, many see that the goal in interpreting the Bible is to fuse the two horizons whilst respecting differences in both, and being able to bring our critical and philosophical judgement to bear on each.



Problem of the Bible as source of wisdom and authority

The Pontifical Biblical Commission of the Catholic Church expresses both the problem and the goal:

A difficulty derives from Sacred Scripture itself: biblical writings were redacted at least nineteen hundred years ago and belong to distant epochs in which life conditions were very different from those of today. Many actual situations and problems were completely unknown in these writings and therefore one may think that they can offer no appropriate answers to these problems.

Consequently even if the fundamental value of the bible as an inspired text is acknowledged some people retain a strong sceptical attitude and maintain that Scripture is of no use for offering solutions to the numerous problems of our times.

Present humanity is confronted every day with delicate moral problems continually presented by the sciences and by globalization; even convinced believers have the impression that many of our past certainties have been annulled; just think about such themes as violence, terrorism, war, immigration, distribution of wealth, respect for natural resources, life, work, sexuality, genetic research, the family and community life.

Faced by such complex problems one is tempted to marginalize, totally or partially, Sacred Scripture. In this case too, though for a variety of motives, the sacred text is laid aside and solutions to the grave and urgent problems of today are sought elsewhere.

(Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2006)



Activity:

1. **Make a list of bullet points of the problems identified above of using the Bible as a source of wisdom and authority in daily life.**

2. **Can you add further bullet points of your own?**

(Some possible examples might include the emergence of the critical historical study of the Bible, the emergence of philosophical objections to the idea of God acting in history in the way that Scripture describes, and to the morality of aspects of the biblical account and developments in literary theory that have raised new ways of thinking about what it means to read and interpret texts)

3. **How far do you think the problems identified are actual problems to using the Bible as a source of wisdom and authority in daily life?**