

INITIATION TO THE HOLY BIBLE

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PREFACE

This booklet intends to give the basic and elementary concepts which are needed in order to be able to approach the book of the Bible with profit.

The suggested method is to follow the initial explanation of the concepts by immediately reading the passages of the Bible which are the foundation of the same concepts.

For this reason more than 150 bible passages are given in the text of this booklet. There is no better method of approaching the Sacred Scriptures than to open the book and read. Every explanation comes later and in consequence.

The guided reflection and assimilation of these basic concepts about the Book of God give us a certain serene assurance in approaching the Sacred Text and free us from many prejudices which are the result of ignorance.

With my best wishes of a joyful study of God's Word,

Yours in Christ,

P. Renzo Carraro, MCCJ

INITIATION TO THE BIBLE (1):

The 3 Steps

BIBLE means “books”

The number of books in the Catholic Bible is 73: 46 for the Old Testament; 27 for the New Testament. This division in Old and New Testament is present since the beginning and typical of Christianity: it is there already in the text of the New Testament (the term “New Testament” is e. g. in *Luke* 22:20 and 1 *Corinthians* 11:25).

JESUS CHRIST is

- the HINGE that keeps together the two Testaments
- The HUB that keeps all the books of the Bible together and gives UNITY to the Bible.

“NOVUM TESTAMENTUM IN VETERE LATET, VETUS IN NOVO PATET”

(“The New Testament is hidden in the Old, the Old is revealed in the New”) this is a very famous sentence and principle stated by Saint Augustine.

The Church has inherited the Old Testament from the Jewish People. It was written before the birth of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament was written during the time of the 12 Apostles and by them. With the death of the last Apostle, John, the Bible ends, since with Jesus Christ everything has been said. He is the incarnate Word, the definitive Word. The Twelve are the direct witnesses of his life, death and resurrection.

The 3 stages in the formation of the New Testament

(The face of the Word of God is Jesus Christ)

The point of departure is the New Testament that was written by the Apostolic Church. It is in the Bible itself (New Testament) that we find the explanation of the existence of the New Testament and the stages of its formation.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT THE BIBLE?

1. It says that the first step in evangelization and the founding of the Church is the APOSTOLIC EXPERIENCE OF JESUS:

1 John 1:1-4 *“What we saw...”*

2 Peter 1:16-21 *“We were there...Scripture is a lamp...”*

The Apostolic Experience of Jesus done IN FAITH:

Luke 24: 36-43 *“Jesus said: Look, touch...”*

John 20:26-29 *“Do not be unbelieving any more , but believe...”*

2 Corinthians 5:13-21 *Beyond “human standards”*

2. The second step is the APOSTOLIC WITNESS BY PREACHING:

Luke 24:44-48 *“You are witnesses...”*

Matthew 28:16-20 *“Make disciples...”*

Mark 16:16 *“Proclaim the Gospel...”*

3. He third step is the WRITING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT:

John 20:30-31 *“So that you may believe...”*

Luke 1:1-4 *“How well founded the teaching is that you have received...”*

The Apostles and their disciples, under their supervision, put in writing their experience in faith of Jesus Christ, because they knew that VERBA VOLANT SED SCRIPTA MANENT (“Words fly away but what is written remains”).

In this way they followed the tradition that the Old Testament’s prophets started, under God’s inspiration, and has produced the Old Testament:

Exodus 24:4 “*Moses put in writing...*”

1 Maccabees 12: 6-10 *“The consolation of the Holy Books...”*

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus): Translator's Foreword: "*The Law, the Prophets and the other Writers...*"

Jesus Himself taught the Apostles to read the Scriptures (the Old Testament) because they speak of him and his mission. Jesus Christ fulfils the promises of God and the expectations of the people of the Old Testament that are contained in the writings of Old Testament itself: Luke 24:13-35; 44-48.

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INITIATION TO THE BIBLE (2) –THE REVELATION OF GOD

God is a great mystery: John 1:18/ 1 John 4:16

God speaks to humanity: Hebrews 1:1-4

This is what we call God's **REVELATION**.

God in his wisdom and goodness reveals himself. With deeds and words, he reveals himself and his plan of loving goodness which he decreed from all eternity in Christ. According to his plan, all people, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, are to share in the divine life as adopted sons and daughters in the only begotten Son Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 2:1-8

Romans 8:28-39

God reveals his “**plan of salvation**”.

God's plan is our destiny and it was decided from all eternity, even before we were created, it is call “**PREDESTINATION**”. This is the content of the Gospel, the Good News: “God desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”. Jesus Christ is the Truth. He must be preached to all and believed by all. This revelation is transmitted by the **APOSTOLIC TRADITION**.

The **transmission** of God's Revelation

The Apostolic **TRADITION** is the **Living and Believing Community** of the Church (the preaching, the witnessing, the leadership, the worship, the life) that started at the time of the Apostles and continued throughout the times up to now.

To this tradition the Bible belongs. It is this tradition that makes known to the Community of the Church **the Canon** (official list) of the Sacred **SCRIPTURES** (the Holy Bible) and teaches how to read and interpret them, making them effective for the life and holiness of the community.

A special place is that of the **MAGISTERIUM**, i.e. The Bishops with the Pope (Hierarchy or Sacred Leadership): they have the task of supervising and protecting the Christian Heritage (*Depositum Fidei*) that belongs to all the faithful. Tradition, Scriptures and Magisterium are all necessary and need each other. None of them can stand by itself.

They are aspects of the Living and Believing Community of the Church.

The Scriptures (The Bible) are like a **mirror** in which the living and believing community looks continually to see if it is faithful to the teaching and example of Jesus. This is why it is called: **Rule of Faith** (*Regula Fidei*) and **Rule of Life** (*Regula Vitae*).

The Bible is the **written witness of the dialogue between God and Humanity**. To God's revelation corresponds humanity's reception. Jesus is the highest point of God's revelation and, at the same time, of humanity's reception: John 4:31-34.

The Bible is **Guide to Discipleship** (to a valid Christian experience).

The Bible is **strength** in time of difficulties.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Romans 15:1-6

The Risen Jesus taught the Apostles to read the Scriptures (the Old Testament) because they speak of him and his mission. In the Scriptures, they will find a help in order to understand the meaning of the Paschal Mystery i.e. his death and resurrection. Jesus Christ fulfils the promises of God and the expectations of the people of the Old Testament that are contained in the writings of Old Testament itself:

Luke 24:13-35; 44-48

This is already present during his life and ministry: Jesus appeals to the Scriptures:

Luke 4:14-21

And Jesus fulfils the prophecies of the Old Testament:

INITIATION TO THE BIBLE (3): *Terms of reference*

(The House of the Word of God is the Church)

1.-CANON: Is the official list of the books of the Bible. In the canon there are 27 books in the New Testament who are accepted by all Christian denominations.

For the Old Testament, the Catholic Church accepts 46 books as it was in the *Alexandria Collection*, at the time of the **first translation of the Old Testament** from Hebrew to Greek, the SEPTUAGINTA (seventy), which was done around the year 200 before Christ. At the time of the Apostles, that was the Old Testament in Greek that was used. The criteria of choosing the books for the canon are: divine inspiration and absence of error. The books in the official list of the Bible are called CANONICAL.

The Living and believing community of the Church made the Canon. The first document that goes back to the end of the II century is the *Muratoria List*. The Catholic tradition finalized the Canon about the 4th Century. It was defined during the Council of Trent.

Seven of these books are written originally in Greek and didn't need translation. They are: *Tobit*, *Judith*, *1-2 Maccabees*, *Baruch*, *Sirach*, *Wisdom*. They are called DEUTEROCANONICAL because they were added later to the official list. The Deuterocanonical books are important because they witness to some truths that are present only in them like life after death (*Wisdom*) and prayer for the dead (*Maccabees*).

The Jewish people do not accept them in their Canon since they follow the *Jerusalem Collection* of only 39 books, all in Hebrew. The Protestants follow the Jewish canon, but recently they add the Deuterocanonical books to their Bibles.

APOCRIPH are books about Jesus that are often contemporary of the canonical, but don't show inspiration or are full of errors. They lack credibility and were excluded from the Canon.

2.-CLASSIFICATION: The O.T. books are divided into:

The Pentateuch or Torah (the Law): the first 5 books

The Historical Books 16

The Wisdom Books 7

The Prophetic Books	18	ALL TOGETHER	46
The N. T. books can also be divided into:			
The Historical Books: the 4 Gospels and the Acts			5
The Wisdom Books: the letters: 14 of Saint Paul			
And 7 so called Catholic	21		
The Prophetic Book of Revelation	1	ALL TOGETHER	27

3.-THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE

The original language of the O.T. is HEBREW; The Deuterocanonical books are in GREEK as well as the N.T.

TRANSLATIONS: the translations of the O.T. into ARAMAIC (Jesus' language) are called TARGUMIN.

The most famous translation into Greek is THE SEPTUAGINTA; the most famous translation into LATIN was made by Saint Jerome (V century) and it is called VULGATA. It was used in the Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council.

The first English translation of the Bible was made in 1449. It is only in the last century that the Bible was translated in more than 2000 languages. For many local languages, the Bible is the first book printed in those languages.

4.- THE WRITING OF THE BIBLE: Some necessary terms:

PAPYRUS: tall, reed-like water-plant with thick fibrous stems used by the Ancient Egyptians to make paper. PAPYRI: manuscripts written on this paper.

PARCHMENT: heavy paper-like material made from the skin of sheep or goats used for writing on. Piece of this material which has been written on.

SCROLL: roll of parchment for writing on. Ancient book written on such a roll.

BOOK: number of written or printed sheets of paper bound together in a cover.

CODEX (CODICES): handwritten ancient text both in the form of book of scroll.

The holy writers wrote by hand on papyrus or parchment. Each copy was a unique work. The codices of the Bible were kept in churches and monasteries for the liturgical usage. Very few were owned by individual persons. During many centuries the work of copying the bible was done by monks. This continued until the invention of the printing press by JOHANNES GUTENBERG, a German, who printed the 42-lines bible, called *The Gutenberg Bible*, in 1455. Since then it became possible to make the bible available for the individual Christian, but it is only in the XIX, XX centuries that the people in their totality had access to literacy by means of universal education. We are lucky because we know how to read and we have our own bible.

To establish the ORIGINAL CRITICAL TEXT of the bible, scholars had to collate the different manuscripts or codices and choose among the thousands of variants.

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Traditional reading of the Scriptures or Bible is done in the light of faith and for prayer.

The first most important usage of the Scriptures or Bible in the community of the Church is the **Proclamation** of the word of God in the Liturgy. This is the “**Public Use**”. The “Liturgy of the Word” in the Mass is also called “the table of the Word”, before passing to the “table of the sacrament”.

The “**Private Use**” is the reading of the Scriptures by individuals and groups outside the liturgy. A traditional method of reading the Scriptures that we inherited from the monastic tradition is the **Lectio Divina** that is developed in 5 steps:

1. **Reading** (*Lectio*): slow, repeated reading of the passage in question;
2. **Meditation** (*Meditatio*): reflection on the reading of the passage with this main question : How does this word of God affect my life?
3. **Prayer** (*Oratio*): personal, spontaneous conversation with God about the result of the meditation
4. **Contemplation**: dwelling affectionately and at length in a detail of the Word of God.
5. **Sharing** (*Collatio*): if the exercise is done in a group we may be inclined to share some of our reflections with our companions.

The Senses in Scripture:

1. **Literal**: what the text says by itself. This is the first sense to be always understood and which to pay attention to, before considering the other senses.
2. **Allegoric or Symbolic**: the literal sense becomes the first step in order to point to a symbolic meaning which usually refers to Christ. Allegory: a symbol which is developed in all its details.
3. **Moral**: it directs our behavior according to God’s guidelines or commandments.

4. Spiritual (and Eschatological): it points to the soul's struggle for holiness in order to reach the final destination, Heaven.

There is also, very important, the FULL SENSE ("Sensus Plenum"): it is what we read in a given text from the perspective of the Risen Christ. It illustrates the principle that only with the knowledge of the Risen Christ we can understand fully the Scriptures.

10 GUIDELINES FOR A PROFITABLE READING OF THE BIBLE:

1. Don't think that you are the first to read the Bible. Many people in all generations have read, meditated and put it into practice. The best interpreters of the Scriptures are the Saints.
2. The Bible is the book of the Christian Community. Our reading can never be solitary, but must be in the tradition of the Church and under the light of the Holy Spirit.
3. The Bible is "Somebody/Christ". The best reading is done in the Proclamation of the Word during the liturgy.
4. The center of the Bible is Jesus Christ. Everything therefore must be read in the light of Christ. He is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Christ is the key for the interpretation of the Bible.
5. The Bible is made of facts/happenings and words. God's revelation is manifested both by facts and words. The words throw light on the facts. The facts fulfill the words.
6. A good and practical way of reading the whole Bible is to start with the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, then the Letters, alternating with books of the Old Testament... Some books must be read little by little like Leviticus or the Psalms. The Prophets are the soul of the Old Testament. They deserve a special attention and dedication...
7. The Bible must be conquered like the city of Jericho: surrounding it. Thus, try to see the parallel passages and the references. It takes time and effort, but it is of great profit. St. Augustine used to say: "The New Testament is hidden in the Old. The Old is revealed in the new".
8. The Bible must be read and meditated with the same spirit by which it was written. The Holy Spirit is the main author and interpreter. We must always pray before starting our reading of the scriptures and, at the end, we must give thanks to God.
9. Let us not use the Bible in order to criticize or condemn other people.

10. Every passage of the Bible is set in an historical context and literary form. If we ignore these characteristics we may manipulate the Bible to make it say what it doesn't want to say. It is like taking God's name in vain.

Some Famous Allegories:

- The meeting of the trees: Judges 9:1-21
- Marriage between Yahweh and the Chosen People (the great/sublime allegory):
- Isaiah 54:5-10; Hosea 1-3 (2:16-22)
- The Word of God: The Seed and the Sower, Matthew 13:1-23
- The allegory of the Body, 1 Corinthians 12:1-31
- FULL SENSE: Isaiah 52:13-15; 53:1-7

INITIATION TO THE BIBLE (5) PLACES	SIGNPOSTS OF TIMES AND
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HISTORICAL SIGNPOSTS IN THE BIBLE

OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis 1-11 Pre-History

Genesis 12..... **History** begins with the story of Abraham

1850 before Christ (BC): Abraham

1250 **Exodus**

1000 King David- Solomon and the 1st temple

721 Fall of Samaria by the Assyrians (Kingdom of Israel)

587 Fall of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Kingdom of Judah)

Exile

538 Return from exile (Cyrus, king of Persia) -2nd temple

323 Death of Alexander the Great

167-168 Persecution of king Antiochus Epiphanes and rebellion of the Maccabees

164 Purification of the temple.

63 The Romans conquer Palestine. King Herod, vassal of the Romans, Reconstructs the temple -3rd temple

NEW TESTAMENT

Birth of Jesus (6 BC)

27 AD (Anno Domini) CE (Christian Era/Current Era) John the Baptist

30 Jesus' Death/The Risen Lord

48 Council of Jerusalem

50 1-2 Letters to the Thessalonians (First NT writings)

64/67 Martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome

- 70 Fall of Jerusalem/destruction of the city and the temple
- 95-100 Book of Revelation and death of John, the last of the Apostles.
End of The Bible. End of the Apostolic Era.

GEOGRAPHICAL SIGNPOSTS OF THE BIBLE

The land of Canaan or **Palestine** (from the ancient people *The Philistines*) is in Asia, in the Near East, it borders with Egypt (West) Lebanon (East) the Mediterranean Sea (North) and the Arabian desert (South). Egypt belongs to Africa.

The North of Palestine is **Galilee**, with the Lake of Genneseret (Sea of Tiberias), including the towns of Cana, Nain, Capernaum, Nazareth, Caesarea Philippi, Bethsaida and Mount Tabor.

Samaria is the area in the middle of Palestine, including the towns of Samaria, Sychar and Mount Gerizim.

Judaea is in the South and includes the city of **Jerusalem** on mount Zion, Bethlehem, Bethany, Jericho, Hebron, Emmaus. In the extreme South there is the Sinai desert with mount Sinai (Horeb), the gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea.

Along the length of Palestine runs the river Jordan which comes out of the Lake of Genneseret and ends into the Dead Sea, the place of the two ancient towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Eastern side of the river Jordan is the area called Transjordan, at present the state of Jordan; the Western side is Cisjordan or West Bank.

The great political powers during the biblical time were, in the West: Egypt ruled by the Pharaohs; in the East: The Assyrians (Assyria with capital Nineveh); The Babylonians (capital Babylon); the Persians (Persepolis); the Greek and the Romans.

The land between the two great rivers Tigris and Euphrates, called Mesopotamia (present day Iraq) is the place from which Abraham came to go to the land of Canaan as a nomad. The place in Mesopotamia where Abraham came from is called Ur.

Passages the show the importance of the historical and geographical signposts:

- Genesis 13: *Abraham and Lot go in different directions*
- Deuter., 34:1-12 *Moses sees the promised land from Mount Nebo*
- 1 Maccabees 1:1-10 *Alexander the Great*
- Matthew 4:12-25 *The Galilean ministry*
- Luke 2:1-6 *The census and the birth of Jesus*
- Luke 3:1-6 *The preaching of John the Baptist*
- Luke 9:51-52 *Jesus turns towards Jerusalem to fulfill his mission*
- Acts 11:19-26 *Jesus' disciples are called "Christians" at Antioch*

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INITIATION TO THE BIBLE (6) OLD & NEW TESTAMENT: DIFFERENCES

1. **The concept of God**: The contribution of the O.T. to our concept of God is immense. In this sense we belong to the Jewish religious tradition. The first idea is that God is one: **monotheism**. The second is that God is good. We see this through the goodness of his Creatures. We see this through God's law: **morality**. Then the God of the Bible is a personal God who wants to communicate with his creatures, with humanity and cares for us. God's personality and concern for us is witnessed throughout the whole Bible. He is a God who wants to have a covenant with his chosen people, gives them his Law (the content of the covenant) and the heart of God's covenant is love.
 - Deuteronomy 6:4-9
 - Exodus 3:1-15
 - Genesis 12:1-5
 - Psalm 23
 - Psalm 103.

All the same, **God is a great mystery**: we cannot see God's face, only his back: Exodus 33:18-33

In the N.T., Jesus reveals the mystery of God: God is "a family of love", the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- John 1:18
- 1 John 4:12

GOD "*ad intra*": 1 John 4:16-17

GOD "*ad extra*": John 3:16

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the revelation and the sacrament of God's love for us:

John 1:1-18

John 14:1-11

John 15:1-11

- The Trinitarian **commission**: Matthew 28:18-20
- The Trinitarian **prayer**: The sign of the cross
- The Trinitarian **greeting**: 2 Corinthians 13:13

Baptism attaches, links a person to Jesus, the Savior. All his work of salvation proceeds from the Father's love and reaches its completion in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

- Romans 6:3-11
- Romans 8:12-17

2. **The images of God:** In the O.T. images of God are forbidden for fear of idolatry: to worship the creatures instead of the Creator. In the prophets we find a strong polemic against idols. The prohibition of making images is strong even nowadays in Judaism and Islam. It is a safeguard for monotheism.

- Deuteronomy 5:7-10 (Exodus 20:3-6)
- Deuteronomy 4:15-20
- Isaiah 44:9-20
- Jeremiah 10:1-10
- Psalm 115
- Wisdom 13:10-19

In the N.T., we have the fact of the Incarnation. “O Logos Sarx Egeneto” (the Word became flesh”: John 1:14). The fundamental experience of the Apostles is the experience of Jesus (1John1:1-4), an experience of Jesus that is based on the senses but is completed in faith. Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). This is the reason of the images of Jesus Christ and consequently Mama Mary and the Saints in the Catholic Church. In the VIII century there was a struggle about the problem of the images. The movement that intended to forbid images and was called **Iconoclasm** was condemn by the pope and the images remained in the Catholic tradition and gave origin to the masterpieces of art throughout the centuries. Strictly speaking there is no image of God, but only of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints.

The opposition to the images, if pushed to the extreme, results in the denial of the Incarnation as it is in Judaism, Islam and also in some sects like Iglesia ni Kristu.

3. **Rules about Eating (Dietary Rules).** In the O.T., there are rules about food: Leviticus 11:1-8 regards the type of animals that cannot be eaten because considered unclean. Exodus 23:19 “You will not boil the kid in its mother's milk” regards the way of cooking according to the rule not to mix meat with dairy products like milk, cheese, butter. The Jewish cuisine is called KOSHER (fit, appropriate). The Islamic

is called HALAL and refers, among other things, to the way the animal are slaughtered. The Hindu cuisine is strictly vegetarian. These dietary rules are very much in practice even nowadays.

In the N.T., Jesus declares all foods clean: Matthew 15:10-20; Mark 7: 14-23: “Can you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot make him unclean, because it doesn’t go into his heart but through his stomach and passes out into the sewer? **Thus he pronounced all food clean.** For it is from within, from men’s hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a man unclean”.

The first generation of Christians took time in understanding this: see the example of Peter: Acts 10:9-16.

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INITIATION TO THE BIBLE (7) OLD & NEW TESTAMENT: DIFFERENCES

4. The law/The New Law

In the O. T., in a very special moment of Salvation History, when God had already proved his love for the chosen people and his faithfulness to the covenant by making his chosen people come out of the slavery of Egypt, he gives Moses the Ten Commandments, the Law.

- Exodus 20
- Deuteronomy 5
- Deuteronomy 4:1-9

The Law is the content of the covenant for the chosen people: if they want to be God's friends, they must keep God's commandments. There is an essential link between Monotheism and Morality. We cannot please God or worship him if we are bad/crooks. It goes against God's holiness/goodness.

The Prophets, fighting for God against the unfaithfulness of the people, already point out that the heart of the covenant is love, in this way anticipating and preparing the N. T. In this they continue the very important passage of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ("*Shema, Israel*") that is like the Jewish confession of faith.

In the N.T., Jesus completes and perfects the Law, making it new and showing all the implications:

- Luke 10:25-37
- Matthew 5:17-19
- Matthew 5:20-48
- Matthew 25:31-46

The **novelty** introduced by Jesus is the joining of the two commandments ("Love your neighbor as you love yourself" is from Leviticus 19:18) and saying that the second is equal to the first, but especially when he puts himself as an example of brotherly love: "Love your neighbor as I have loved you" and, above all, as the object of our love for the brethren: "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers it is to me that you do it".

5. THE WORSHIP OF THE O.T./THE WORSHIP OF THE N.T.

The worship of the O.T. consisted in sacrifices of animals, performed in an official place, the temple of Jerusalem, by a specialized priestly group, the tribe of Levi. Examples of sacrifices of animals in very important moments of the history of the covenant:

- Genesis 15:1-21
- Exodus 24:1-8

The first temple was built by Solomon and inaugurated with solemn prayer and abundant sacrifices:

- 1 Kings 6:1-14
- 1 Kings 8:1-66

Already in the Prophets, there is a **polemic against the temple and the sacrifices** that finds echo in the Psalms. All this is a prophecy and a preparation of the N.T.:

- Isaiah 1:11-17
- Jeremiah 7:1-15
- Amos 5:21-25
- Psalm 40:7-9
- Psalm 50:9-15
- Psalm 51:16-17

In the N. T.: Jesus follows the line of the prophets with the cleansing of the temple and, at the same time, he hints that the true temple is his body. Talking with the Samaritan woman, he announces the end of the temple and speaks of a worship in Spirit and in truth. **The passion and resurrection of Jesus is the true sacrifice of the N. T.** The sacrifices of animals are declared obsolete i.e. finished and **Jesus appears as the High Priest of the N.T., making the offering of his body once and for all.** Jesus, facing death as an act of supreme obedience and filial love, becomes the true temple that is destroyed by men's evil power but raised to a new life by the Father. Jesus' priesthood is not ritual but personal. **Jesus is the mediator of the N. T., bridging the infinite gap between God and humanity with his obedience and sacrificial love.** According to Jesus' example and command, all Christians are constituted priests because of their baptism, continuing in the world Jesus' mission through their mediation of love. **The Eucharist, which is the memorial of Jesus' Paschal Sacrifice, is the**

worship of the New Testament (1 Corinthians 11:23-30; Luke 22:14-20; John 6:51-58)

- John 2:13-22
John 4:20-24
- Hebrews 10:4-10
- 1 Peter 2:4-10
- Romans 12:1-2

<i>INITIATION TO THE BIBLE (8) OLD & NEW TESTAMENT: DIFFERENCES</i>
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6. LIFE AFTER DEATH

1. In the O. T., the idea of a life after death, where goodness is rewarded by God and wickedness is punished, appears only gradually together with the resurrection of the body. In the beginning, **the reward of faithfulness to God and his commandments is expected in this life.** When the experience of life shows that many times the opposite is happening, i. e. the wicked are successful and prosperous and the good are troubled by misfortune and sickness, the fact is perceived as a great problem and becomes the object of meditation and prayer... Often the solution is still placed in this lifetime and in this world, or the problem remains unanswered and becomes a drama. Then, little by little, the conscience of a life after death emerges as we can see from some relevant passages and it prepares the full blossoming of this doctrine and conviction in the N. T.

Examples of God's blessings for the good and punishment for the wicked:

Psalm 1

Psalm 128

Problem of the fate of just and wicked: Psalm 73

2. Problem of life after death : **SHEOL: a word of unknown origin, meaning the "underworld"** to which the dead "go down" to and where the virtuous and the wicked lead a colorless existence. God is not praised there but the dead are not outside God's power.

Canticle of Hezekiah: Isaiah 38:9-20

Psalms 6:4-5

Psalms 88, the whole text, especially vv. 10-12

Ezekiel 32:17-32

But let us keep in mind **Jesus' exegesis** as in Matthew 22:31-33: the faith in the ancestors was already faith on the life after death.

3. The doctrine of reward and punishment beyond the grave and of bodily resurrection is anticipated somehow by **some passages** of the psalms and other O. T. books, but doesn't make a definite appearance until the O.T. is drawing to a close.

Anticipations in the psalms and other O. T. books:

Psalms 16:8-11 *"I keep the Lord before me always, for with him at my right hand nothing can shake me. So my heart exults, my very soul rejoices, my body, too, will rest securely, for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor allow the one you love to see the Pit; you will reveal the path of life to me, give me unbounded joy in your presence, and at your right hand everlasting pleasure"*.

Psalms 49:15 *"But God will redeem my life from the grasp of Sheol, and will receive me"*.

Job 19:25-27 *"This I know: that my Avenger lives, and he, the Last, will take his stand on earth. After my awakening, he will set me close to him, and from my flesh I shall look on God"*.

Clear affirmations of the immortality of the soul and of the resurrection:

Daniel 12:2-3 *"Of those who lie sleeping in the dust of the earth many will awake, some to everlasting life, some to everlasting disgrace. The learned will shine as brightly as the vault of heaven, and those who have instructed many in virtue, will be as bright as stars for all eternity"*.

2 Maccabees 7:9 *"With his last breath he exclaimed, 'Inhuman fiend, you may discharge us from this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up, since it is for his laws that we die, to live again forever'"*.

2 Maccabees 12:38-45

Wisdom 3-5 *“But the souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God, no torment shall ever touch them. In the eyes of the unwise, they did appear to die, their going looked like a disaster, their leaving us, like annihilation; but they are in peace. As they experienced punishment as men see it, their hope was rich with immortality; slight was their affliction, great will their blessings be”*(3:1-4).

4. In the N. T., the fact of **the Incarnation brings a new perspective**: The Son of God comes into the world to share our life so that we may be able to enter God’s life, the Trinitarian family, life after death. The Resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of our faith in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. We have very many places in the N. T. where this truth is attested, but we quote only few essential ones:

John 14:1-3

Matthew 25:31-46

John 6:40.47-58/John 11:17-26

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

So strong is the faith in the life to come, that the first Christians felt that they did not belong to the world: Philippians 3:20-21 *“For us, **our homeland (citizenship) is in Heaven**, and from heaven comes the savior we are waiting for, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his glorious body. He will do that by the same power with which he can subdue the whole universe”*.

A very beautiful document of the **position of the Christians in the world** is the LETTER TO DIOGNETUS, a text of the second generation of Christians, very relevant even today:

“The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live apart in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, nor practice any eccentric way of life...They pass their lives in whatever township-Greek or foreign- each man’s lot has determined; and conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet, and other habits. Nevertheless, the organization of their community does exhibit some features that are remarkable, and even surprising. For instance, though

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EVIL IN THE BIBLE

The problem arises when evil is ordered by God.

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from more primitive and barbarous times. **These mass murders of hostile people cannot be justified morally** in any way by the fact that the Hebrews believed that the action was pleasing to God, even ordered by God.

Joshua 6:17-21

1 Samuel 15

The conception of Yahweh as a warrior was an imperfect apprehension of his reality and activity. There is a however a development and a growth in the moral and religious mentality in the O.T.: this is shown by the fact that the practice of the ban doesn't appear any more after the war of Saul against the Amalechites.

2. The Bible itself presents elements which permit man to **emancipate from the idea of war** which is "primitive" in ancient as well as in modern times. Several passages of the prophets declare the **futility of the war** as a means of assuring peace and security: it is not the means of salvation for Israel: their survival is assured by faith. Especially **the messianic dream** of the prophets is **a world without war**, bound by universal peace and tolerance.

Isaiah 30:15-17

Isaiah 2:1-5

3. In the N.T., Jesus says that whoever lives by the sword will die by the sword (Matthew 26:52). **Jesus especially teaches not to resist evil and to love our enemies.** Jesus' total non violence is present in the Church in some categories of his followers like the religious and espoused by some (*pacifists*); but the catholic tradition has always accepted **reasonable defense** against unjust aggressor and still more opposition to evil in the world:

Matthew 5:38-48

John 18:22-23

4. A compound problem is **the conquest of Canaan**. When Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were leaders of large families and nomadic clans they used to wander through the land of Canaan, looking for pasture and water for their flocks. The land did not belong to them but to several

other peoples. Abraham only bought the property at Machpelah-Mambre (Hebron) to be his burial ground.

Genesis 23

But the Israelites multiplied and became a people during the slavery in Egypt, and when they emerged from the desert, they felt that they deserved their own land. So they attacked and conquered the inhabitants of Canaan. **The Bible presents the conquest of Canaan as the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and a gift from God.**

Genesis 12:7 15:18-21
Deuteronomy 7,8

It is true that the Canaanite population were very corrupt, promoting sacred prostitution and human sacrifices, but the fact that **the Bible present the conquest as the fulfillment of God's promise can be understood as a provisional step in the history of salvation.** In the N.T., the new Israel of God is made up of all the peoples of the earth who believe in Jesus Christ. For the Christian people the "promised land" is Heaven (*"We do not have here on earth a permanent residence; our homeland is in Heaven"*). It cannot be said nowadays that the Bible states that Palestine must belongs to the Jews.

IMMORALITY

Here, the main problem is the polygamy of the patriarchs and kings. The purpose of marriage is mentioned in the two accounts of the origin of man with some differences. In Genesis 1:27ff , the differentiation of sexes has as its purpose that man should multiply. In Genesis 2:18-25, marriage is the union in which the wife is to be the helper of the man, for it not good for a man to be alone. It is implied that the union of man and woman is monogamous. Sex and marriage are divine institutions through which man finds fulfillment. In Tobit 8:5-7 the husband doesn't take the wife in lust, but in truth.

1. **Genesis describes polygamy as part of the degeneration of mankind.** With polygamy goes concubinage and divorce.

Genesis 4:23-24 Lamech's savage song

2. In the Wisdom books, monogamy is proposed as the ideal state. There appears to have been little or no polygamy after the exile. There is no polygamy in today's Judaism. **The highest tribute which is paid to marriage in the O.T. is the adoption of the union of marriage as an image of the covenant union and love of Yahweh for the people of Israel.** It is the passages of the prophets that describe the above allegory together with the Song of Songs that show that marriage was a union of love in the O.T..

Proverbs 31:10-31

Sirach 26:1-4

- 3. In the N.T., the teaching of Jesus about marriage is limited to its indissolubility. In this way, Jesus brings back marriage to its original condition and abolishes divorce.** The exception in Matthew 5:32 should be translated: *porneya* (unlawful sexual union i.e. concubinage). The other passages in the N.T., especially Ephesians, continue the parallelism between husband and wife and God and the people, in this case: Christ and the Church. **This makes marriage one of the seven sacraments.**

Mark 10:1-12 (Matthew 5:31-32; Luke 16:18)

Ephesians 5:21-33

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Conclusions

1. The most important line in the Bible is: John 1:14 “The Word became flesh”
2. The Old Testament is the Bible of the Jewish People. It is voluminous because:
 - It covers around 1800 years of history from Abraham to Jesus Christ, and the Pre-history of mankind (Genesis 1-11). The New Testament covers the first century of the Christian Era: the story of Jesus and the Apostles as privileged witnesses of the story and the mystery of Jesus Christ.
 - It is the Encyclopedia of the Jewish People: it contains history, legislation, poetry, proverbs, traditions, etc... In the New Testament, the early Church decided not to burden the new converts with the Jewish culture but instead to allow every culture to turn towards the saving mystery of Jesus (Council of Jerusalem, year 48 A.D.).
 - Jesus Christ is our key for understanding the expectations of the people of the Old Testament for the coming of the Messiah and all God’s promises that Jesus fulfills.
 - The Old Testament is also our store of piety and wisdom and religiosity: e.g. the book of Psalms...
3. Jesus’ sayings in the New Testament are often expressed through paradoxes i.e. exaggerations. In order to understand them well we must consider the context and the parallel passages.
4. All the introductory approach of this booklet is meant to be a preparation for a prayerful and frequent usage of the Bible.

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