A theological and pastoral guide to avoid shipwreck in the reading of the Word of God

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Introduction: Errors in the Bible?

In an age of immediacy, it’s easy to come across bold statements like *“the Bible is full of errors.”* Social media, certain academic circles, and even voices within the Christian world have promoted this claim without stopping to examine what it really means. Are we talking about contradictions? Scientific errors? Historical issues? Or simply misinterpretations?

This article was born with the purpose of shedding light, from the traditional Catholic faith, on how Scripture should be read and interpreted. Our goal is not to ignore apparent difficulties but to offer the necessary tools to face them with faith, intelligence, and fidelity to the Magisterium.

I. What is the Bible? God’s Word in Human Language

Before talking about “errors,” we must ask ourselves: What really is the Bible?

The **Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council** offers us an essential key:

> *“Those truths which are necessary for our salvation are conveyed in the Sacred Scriptures through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, one must admit that the books of Scripture teach firmly, faithfully, and without error the truth that God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see consigned to the Sacred Letters” (Dei Verbum, 11).*

This means that **the Bible is not a secular history book, nor a manual of natural science**, and much less a novel. It is the Word of God revealed in history, for our **salvation**. It is not a cold chronology or a technical encyclopedia. It is a profoundly human book because

it was written by men, with their cultural contexts, literary styles, and limited knowledge; and profoundly divine because **it was inspired by the Holy Spirit**.

Thus, to truly understand Scripture, we need more than a literal reading: we must interpret it as the Church has always done.

II. Three Keys to Correctly Interpreting Scripture

1. Recognizing the Biblical Literary Genres

One of the greatest causes of error in reading the Bible is **taking everything literally**. But the Bible was not written all at once or in a single way. It **contains multiple literary genres**, among them:

- **Historical** (e.g., the Books of Kings)
- **Poetic** (like the Psalms)
- **Wisdom literature** (such as Proverbs or Ecclesiastes)
- **Prophetic** (Isaiah, Jeremiah…)
- **Apocalyptic** (like the Book of Revelation or parts of Daniel)
- **Parabolic narratives** (in many of Jesus’ discourses)
- **Genealogical** (such as in Matthew 1)
- **Midrash or theological commentary** (like parts of Exodus or Paul’s letters)

 Practical application: Before reading a passage, ask yourself: *What kind of text is this?* A parable is not read the same way as a historical event. For example, the creation account in Genesis is **not a scientific chronicle**, but a **profound theological reflection on the origin of the world and the human being as a creature of God**.

2. Interpreting with the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church

The Bible is **not for private interpretation**. St. Peter warns us clearly:

> *“First of all, you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men moved by the Holy*

> *Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20–21).*

For centuries, the Church has safeguarded, interpreted, and taught the Word of God. **Catholic hermeneutics**—the science of interpreting sacred texts—**is based on three pillars**:

1. **Scripture itself**: The Bible is interpreted in the light of the Bible.
2. **The living Tradition** of the Church: The teaching handed down from the Apostles.
3. **The Magisterium**: The authoritative teaching office of the Pope and bishops in communion with him.

 Practical application: Accompany your Bible reading with reliable Catholic commentaries (for example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or the *Catholic Bible Commentary* by Scott Hahn), and follow the liturgical reading cycle. Let the Church be your mother and teacher in interpretation.

3. Distinguishing between Essential Doctrines and Accidental Details

Not all elements in Scripture carry the same doctrinal weight. **A number in a genealogy is not the same as the Resurrection of Christ**. The Church teaches that the Bible is inerrant *in matters pertaining to our salvation*. That is, **what is directly related to our faith and eternal life is free from error**, even though there may be secondary elements that reflect the limited human understanding of the authors.

 Practical application: Don’t be scandalized if a passage seems to contain a historical error. Instead, ask: *What is the salvific message here?* For instance, the different Resurrection accounts don’t match in every detail, but **all proclaim the same truth: Christ is risen!**

III. What About the Alleged Errors?

Some commonly cited examples of “errors” in the Bible include:

- Discrepancies in the Gospel accounts
- The number of people in a census or battle

- Ancient cosmological language (such as “the sun stood still” in Joshua 10:13)

From the Catholic point of view, these are not “flaws” in the text but the result of **a fundamentalist and ahistorical reading**. The Church has always defended that **theological and spiritual truth is compatible with the human form of language**.

> *“In Sacred Scripture, God speaks through men in human fashion. The interpreter must search out what the sacred authors really intended to say, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words” (Dei Verbum, 12).*

IV. A Practical Guide to Catholic Reading and Interpretation of the Bible

Here is a brief pastoral guide for incorporating Sacred Scripture into your daily life without falling into errors or unnecessary scandal:

1. **Pray Before Reading**

Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind and heart. Reading the Bible is not just an academic exercise—it’s a **personal encounter with the living Christ**.

2. **Read with Ecclesial Understanding**

Use a Catholic Bible (such as the Jerusalem Bible or the Latin American Bible) and follow the notes and references provided.

3. **Use Reliable Aids**

Include the Catechism, writings of the Church Fathers, approved Catholic commentaries, etc.

4. **Don’t Rush**

Scripture is nourishment, not fast food. Read slowly, meditate, go back. *Lectio divina* is a centuries-old practice you can adopt.

5. **Consult When in Doubt**

If a passage disturbs or confuses you, ask a priest, catechist, or faithful scholar. Avoid jumping to isolated conclusions.

❤ 6. **Live What You Read**

It’s not enough to know the Word—you must **live it**. Ask yourself: *What is this passage saying to me today? To what is God calling me?*

Conclusion: A Bible Without Errors… of Faith

Saying that “the Bible is full of errors” is the result of a rushed, literalist, or disconnected reading from Tradition. The Catholic faith teaches that **Sacred Scripture is infallible in what pertains to our salvation**, and that it must be read in communion with the Church, with intelligence, humility, and love.

Do not be afraid of difficult texts. Don’t avoid them. Rather, dare to enter them with the guidance of the saints, the councils, and the Magisterium. Remember the words of St. Jerome:

> *“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”*

And the very words of Jesus:

> *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).*

What Now?

- Choose a Gospel to begin your guided reading.
- Use a spiritual journal to write down your reflections.
- Join parish Bible reading groups.
- Listen to homilies and lectures that help you go deeper.
- And always remember: **the Bible is not a museum piece—it is a home for your soul.**