

Second, it is important to recognize that the Scriptures were written in a culture quite different than ours. You have to understand, at least a bit, the culture the Scriptures came out of. Two examples that often cause us moderns to flinch when we read the Bible. First is the issue of violence in the Bible. It is called “under the ban.” And it means that you get rid of practically every thing and everyone, burn, kill obliterate. If you think we live in a violent world now, boy howdy, you should have seen things back in the day. Believe it or not, human nature, helped in large part by the influence of Christian values (a historical fact not Fr. Kevin’s opinion) has grown away from violence. But back in the day, that was how things were. So when you hear about God wanting the Israelites putting conquered nations under the ban you have to remember that this was a part of their culture. They were also destroying things that were an abomination in the sight of God, like human sacrifices and the like. The second deals with women in the Bible. Women tend to flinch when they read that wives should be submissive to their husbands in the letter of Paul to the Ephesians. But Paul was merely reflecting how things were back in the first century when women were second class citizens. If anything, Paul gives them a new dignity in Christ that was previously unheard of. You need to read the Scriptures in the context of the times. What is amazing about the Bible is that despite this, it can still speak and speak profoundly to the issues of humans in the 21st century.

Third, there is a hierarchy of truths in Sacred Scriptures. Not every line, not every verse has the same oomph. That doesn’t mean that there are parts of Scripture that we can ignore or disregard. It simply means that some passages have more meaning, more depth, more say so over our lives than others. I would say, for instance, that the Sermon on the Mount carries more weight than the finer point of the Mosaic Law found in the book of Leviticus. The story of Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection are more important than the story of Balaam’s ass or Ruth. The call to love our enemies is more vital than the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. It seems obvious to me, but many Christians forget that.

The Church is quick to point out in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, called Dei Verbum (the Word of God) that the Church is NOT a religion of the book. We instead are a religion of the Word of God, a Word that is incarnate and living, not just written and mute. In other words, The Bible and our understanding of it and the insights that we get about Jesus from it, continue to blossom. We are not locked it.

In other words, God said it, I believe it, and far from being settled, it continues to challenge us, to confront us, to test us and deepen us in love of God.