

"The Bible: What it is and What it is not"

4 Minute Special - February 17, 2002

by Father Brian Joyce

The topic of today's four minutes is "The Bible: What it is and What it is not." Two things I'd like you to remember from these four minutes. Number 1 is we do not believe the Bible was dictated by God. The Church of the Latter Day Saints believes that the Book of Mormon was dictated by God through the Angel Moroni. And the Muslims believe that the Koran was dictated by God directly to Mohammed, so much so that they do not accept the Koran in translation. We do not believe the Bible is God's dictation, but rather literature, shaped by its human authors and the literary tools of their time and culture, but inspired by God to record the experience of God's people as they encountered God, as they reflected on that encounter and as they expressed it as best they could. We believe the Bible is not dictated, but inspired, by God and is foundational, nourishing and normative for the people who encounter God in the Person of Jesus Christ. That's number 1.

Number 2: the Bible is not a book. It is, rather, Sacred Scriptures, which means it's an entire library. So it's always important to know which section of the library you are in and which section of the library you are reading from. There are books of poetry and song. There are books within books. There are books of fiction, satire, and epic legend. There are books of customs and laws, of letters and sermons, and books close to what today we would call "Philosophy" and "History."

Fundamentalism mistakenly treats the Bible like a single book, dictated directly by God. Fundamentalists not only take each passage of Scripture literally, even when it is not so intended, they do so erroneously because if you don't check which section of the library you are in, you end up doing things like treating the Creation account in Genesis like a science textbook, when it is closer to the Philosophy section, or treating the Book of Jonah like a fishing report or a travel journal, when it is really from the fiction section of the library, or treating the Book of Revelation like a secret code from God when it is actually a persecuted people's statement of Christian hope. We believe the Bible is the inspired word that allows us to hear God's message today and to experience, today, God's loving Presence. That's an awesome statement and an awesome belief.

But we are also able to say "ALL of it is true, and SOME of it actually happened." How can we say that? Well, for example, the story of Jonah and the whale conveys an inspired message that rang true for the Hebrew people five hundred years before Jesus and is still true and needed by us today. Simply put, the message is "Even if you are called to be God's 'Chosen People' don't become racially prejudiced, know-it-all, religious bigots." That's the inspired message, not a report on a three-day cruise with an

inside cabin.

When we hear and read the Bible, it is not God's dictated book, but God's living word that brings us God's message and loving presence in a rich variety of ways and forms. It is God's living word, always poised to confront us and to form us into community. So we take the Bible literally only where it is clearly appropriate to do so. But we always and everywhere take the Bible seriously.