

On "stomaching" the Bible

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There are a handful of topics and themes that I can fairly reliably count on to cause questions or concerns in the life of the church. Near the top of the list would be questions about the Bible. What about all of the problem texts of violence and misogyny? What about the history of canonization—which books got in, which were left out, and why? Which parts are “historical” and which are “symbolic” or “metaphorical?” What about all of those long, boring, irrelevant lists of sacrificial rituals and antiquated, bewildering legal codes? Why, in short, do we have such a messy, complicated, difficult book to deal with instead of a book that conforms to our expectations of what an “inspired” text ought to look like?

There are many approaches to take to questions like these, but one of the most important places to start, in my view, is to examine our assumptions about the nature of Scripture—about what we expect from the Bible and why. Very often our assumptions about what the Bible *ought* to be and do fit awkwardly with our professed convictions about the God to whom it points, and this God’s way of being in the world.

This morning, I came across a quote from C.S. Lewis (via [Brick by Brick](#)) that expresses this well:

The same divine humility which decreed that God should become a baby at a peasant-woman’s breast, and later an arrested field-preacher in the hands of the Roman police, decreed also that He should be preached in a vulgar, prosaic and unliterary language. If you can stomach the one, you can stomach the other. The Incarnation is in that sense an irreverent doctrine: Christianity, in that sense, an incurably irreverent religion. When we expect that it should have come before the World in all the beauty that we now feel in the Authorised Version we are as wide of the mark as the Jews were in expecting that the Messiah would come as a great earthly King. The real sanctity, the real beauty and sublimity of the New

Testament (as of Christ's life) are of a different sort: miles deeper or further in.

An interesting approach—begin with Christology rather than an *a priori* conception of what a “holy book” should look like. For those prepared to accept God entering into the mess of human existence in the person of Jesus, it shouldn't be too much of a stretch to accept God choosing to reveal himself in and through the mess of human language, culture, and modes of transmission.

If we can stomach one, we can stomach the other.

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