

A Catholic novelist reads the Bible

Heidi Schlumpf | Nov. 4, 2009 NCR Today

If early reviews (including one in [NCR](#) [1]) and the questions at last night's public lecture by Catholic novelist Mary Gordon are any indication, Catholics still prefer to leave biblical interpretation to the experts.

Gordon read from her new nonfiction book, "[Reading Jesus: A Writer's Encounter with the Gospels](#) [2]," at Loyola University's 34th Annual Edward Surtz Lecture. The book contains Gordon's reflections after reading all four gospels--from a literary perspective.

"Most people have their family Bible from the attic. They don't have [scripture scholar] Raymond Brown," Gordon said. "They base decisions not on context, but on text. People don't live their lives based on scholarship. They live their lives based on words. So I asked, 'What do these words say to a common reader?'"

But after reading her reflection, "The Problem of Asceticism: Do We Want to Live Like This?" many in the audience challenged her interpretations. Doesn't Jesus' bodily Resurrection override any anti-body dualism? Although Jesus didn't talk about happiness, didn't he talk about joy? What about the passage that says he was a drunkard and a glutton?

"To what extent," one person asked, "did you consider the time frame of the gospels?"

Without downplaying the importance of scholarship, Gordon defended her right to reflect on the gospels. "At the end of the day, we are by ourselves with the book."

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[1] <http://ncronline.org/node/15537>

[2] http://www.amazon.com/Reading-Jesus-Writers-Encounter-Gospels/dp/0375424571/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&camp=s=books&qid=1257361549&sr=8-1