

some tips /  
principles



①  
Trust God.

②  
The human authors  
were a) truly  
inspired,  
but b)  
still human.

③  
The Holy Spirit  
is focused on  
our salvation.

④ Pray!

the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them."<sup>68</sup>

## II. INSPIRATION AND TRUTH OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

105 *God is the author of Sacred Scripture.* "The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."<sup>69</sup>

"For Holy Mother Church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself."<sup>70</sup>

106 God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. "To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more."<sup>71</sup>

107 The inspired books teach the truth. "Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth 702 which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures."<sup>72</sup>

108 Still, the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book." Christianity is the religion of the "Word" of God, a word which is "not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living."<sup>73</sup> If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, "open [our] minds to understand the Scriptures."<sup>74</sup>

<sup>68</sup> DV 21.

<sup>69</sup> DV 11.

<sup>70</sup> DV 11; cf. Jn 20:31; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19-21; 3:15-16.

<sup>71</sup> DV 11.

<sup>72</sup> DV 11.

<sup>73</sup> St. Bernard, *S. missus est hom.* 4, 11: PL 183, 86.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Lk 24:45.

### III. THE HOLY SPIRIT, INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE

109 In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to man in a human way. To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words.<sup>75</sup>

110 In order to discover *the sacred authors' intention*, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating then current. "For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression."<sup>76</sup>

111 But since Sacred Scripture is inspired, there is another and no less important principle of correct interpretation, without which Scripture would remain a dead letter. "Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written."<sup>77</sup>

The Second Vatican Council indicates three criteria for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Spirit who inspired it.<sup>78</sup>

112 1. *Be especially attentive "to the content and unity of the whole Scripture."* Different as the books which comprise it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God's plan, of which Christ  
128 Jesus is the center and heart, open since his Passover.<sup>79</sup>  
368

The phrase "heart of Christ" can refer to Sacred Scripture, which makes known his heart, closed before the Passion, as the Scripture was obscure. But the Scripture has been opened since the Passion; since those who from then on have understood it, consider and discern in what way the prophecies must be interpreted.<sup>80</sup>

113 2. *Read the Scripture within "the living Tradition of the whole Church."* According to a saying of the Fathers, Sacred Scripture is  
81 written principally in the Church's heart rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God's Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her

75 Cf. DV 12 § 1.

76 DV 12 § 2.

77 DV 12 § 3.

78 Cf. DV 12 § 4.

79 Cf. Lk 24:25-27, 44-46.

80 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Expos. in Ps 21,11*; cf. *Ps 22:15*.

⑤  
Be mindful of  
genre and  
context.

⑥  
Believe in the  
whole Bible.

⑦  
Read the Bible  
with the Church...

the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture ("according to the spiritual meaning which the Spirit grants to the Church"<sup>81</sup>).

... and in faith.

114 3. *Be attentive to the analogy of faith.*<sup>82</sup> By "analogy of faith" 90 we mean the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation.

### The senses of Scripture

115 According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two *senses* of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church.

116 The *literal sense* is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: "All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal."<sup>83</sup> 110-114

117 The *spiritual sense*. Thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks 1101 can be signs.

1. The *allegorical sense*. We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ's victory and also of Christian Baptism.<sup>84</sup>

2. The *moral sense*. The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written "for our instruction."<sup>85</sup>

3. The *anagogical sense* (Greek: *anagoge*, "leading"). We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>86</sup>

118 A medieval couplet summarizes the significance of the four senses:

The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith;  
The Moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny.<sup>87</sup>

119 "It is the task of exegetes to work, according to these rules, toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church 94

81 Origen, *Hom. in Lev.* 5, 5: PG 12, 454D.

82 Cf. *Rom* 12:6.

83 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I, 1, 10, ad 1.

84 Cf. *1 Cor* 10:2.

85 *1 Cor* 10:11; cf. *Heb* 3-4:11.

86 Cf. *Rev* 21:1-22:5.

87 *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.* Augustine of Dacia, *Rotulus pugillaris*, I: ed. A. Walz: Angelicum 6 (1929) 256.

to form a firmer judgment. For, of course, all that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God."<sup>88</sup>

- 113 But I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me.<sup>89</sup>

#### IV. THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

- 120 It was by the apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned  
1117 which writings are to be included in the list of the sacred books.<sup>90</sup>  
This complete list is called the canon of Scripture. It includes 46 books for the Old Testament (45 if we count Jeremiah and Lamentations as one) and 27 for the New.<sup>91</sup>

*The Old Testament:* Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

*The New Testament: the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters of St. Paul to the Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, the Letter to the Hebrews, the Letters of James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude, and Revelation (the Apocalypse).*

#### The Old Testament

- 121 The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred  
1093 Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value,<sup>92</sup> for the Old Covenant has never been revoked.  
122 Indeed, "the economy of the Old Testament was deliberately so oriented that it should prepare for and declare in prophecy  
702, 763 the coming of Christ, redeemer of all men."<sup>93</sup> "Even though they contain matters imperfect and provisional,"<sup>94</sup> the books of the Old  
708 Testament bear witness to the whole divine pedagogy of God's

88 DV 12 § 3.

89 St. Augustine, *Contra epistolam Manichaei*, 5, 6: PL 42, 176.

90 Cf. DV 8 § 3.

91 Cf. Council of Trent: DS 179; 1334-1336; 1501-1504.

92 Cf. DV 14.

93 DV 15.

94 DV 15.