

## **Catechism of the Catholic Church on Sacred Scripture**

### **I. Christ - The Unique Word of Sacred Scripture**

101 In order to reveal himself to men, in the condescension of his goodness God speaks to them in human words: "Indeed the words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men."

102 Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely:

You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since he who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables; for he is not subject to time.

103 For this reason, the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body.

104 In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, "but as what it really is, the word of God". "In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them."

### **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."

"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."

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."

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 which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures."

108 Still, the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book". Christianity is the religion of the "Word" of God, "not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living". 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."

### **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.

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."

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."

The Second Vatican Council indicates three criteria for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Spirit who inspired it.

112 Be especially attentive "to the content and unity of the whole Scripture". Different as the books which compose it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God's plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart, open since his Passover.

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.

113 2. Read the Scripture within "the living Tradition of the whole Church". According to a saying of the Fathers, Sacred Scripture is 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 the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture (" . . . according to the spiritual meaning which the Spirit grants to the Church").

114 3. Be attentive to the analogy of faith. By "analogy of faith" 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."

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 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.

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".

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.

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.

119 "It is the task of exegetes to work, according to these rules, towards a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church to form a firmer judgement. For, of course, all that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgement of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God."

But I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me.