

'7 ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES FOR CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE STUDY'

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PRINCIPLE #1 — GOD'S WORD: DIVINE WORDS IN HUMAN LANGUAGE

Catholic Scripture study is governed by the firm belief that the Bible is the *inspired word of God, expressed in human language*. Thus, Scripture can be fully relied upon to teach us the truth about God and humanity in everything it says. Sacred Scripture was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and, at the same time, was composed by *true* authors, with all of their human capacities and limitations. The thoughts and the words of Scripture belong both to God and to human beings in such a way that the whole Bible comes *simultaneously* from God – and from the inspired human authors.

PRINCIPLE #2 — GOD'S WORD IS REVEALED IN HISTORY

Catholic Scripture study rests upon '*the principle of enfleshment.*' Just as God's Living Word entered human history in the flesh (*John 1:14*), so too God's written Word entered history through its enfleshment in true human authors. In accordance with this, Catholic exegetes seek to discover the original meaning expressed by the biblical author in his ancient context. By the same token, the Bible can never be reduced to a merely historical word; God's supernatural involvement in human history is always affirmed in Catholic Scripture study.

PRINCIPLE #3 — GOD'S WORD: SACRED TRADITION AND SACRED SCRIPTURE

Catholic Scripture study is grounded in the firm belief that there is one source of Divine revelation: Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which '*flow from the same one divine wellspring*' and '*form one sacred deposit of the Word of God*' (*Dei Verbum*, 10). It was by the apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings were to be included in the biblical canon - and it is above all *Sacred Tradition* that guides us to truly and properly understand the Word of God. In the end, it is the Church's Magisterium, the '*servant of the Word*', which provides the sure and authoritative interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

PRINCIPLE #4 — GOD'S WORD: REVEALED IN THE UNITY OF THE OT AND NT

Catholic Scripture study insists upon the *unity and coherence* of the whole canon of Scripture, both the Old and New Testament. This unifying dimension of God's Word is evident in many ways; a Catholic approach should be aware of three in particular: (1) *The Theme of Covenant*; (2) *Biblical Prophecy and Typology*; and (3) *Recapitulation in Christ*. In these and other ways, we affirm Augustine's conclusion: '*The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.*'

PRINCIPLE #5 — GOD'S WORD HAS MEANINGS

Catholic Scripture study affirms that God's Word is truly rich in meaning. Thus, a multiplicity of approaches can assist our search for the meaning of biblical texts. No one method of approach or particular sense of Scripture is adequate in itself to plumb the depths of Sacred Scripture. Diligent study and comparison of various interpretations – from ancient and medieval to modern and contemporary approaches can cast valuable light and yield fresh insights on biblical texts, provided one evaluates them within the Church's tradition and according to a hermeneutic of faith, and not suspicion.

PRINCIPLE #6 — GOD'S WORD REQUIRES SOUND & BALANCED ANALYSIS

Catholic Scripture study requires *sound and balanced analysis*. God's Word merits vigorous study – which is marked not only by a curious intellect, but also by a robust Christian faith and genuine pastoral concern for the needs of God's people. Three essential criteria for ensuring a sound and balanced approach to the study of biblical texts are: (1) *Attention to the content and unity of the entire Bible*; (2) *Reading Scripture within the living Tradition of the Church*; and (3) *Adherence to the 'rule of faith'*.

PRINCIPLE #7 — GOD'S WORD IS LIFE-GIVING AND ACTIVE!

Catholic Scripture study does not end when we finally arrive at the meaning of a text. Now we must let the Scripture interpret us. All of our struggle and effort with the written Word leads back to its very source – to '*the God who speaks to us*' and who invites us to speak with Him (*Verbum Domini* 24). The Word of the Lord must be actualized in our lives, for it is powerfully capable of '*opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end*' (*Porta Fidei*, 15).