

### *Example of First Paper*

Reflecting upon Dei Verbum, The Catechism of the Catholic Church, class notes, and other key texts discussed in class, we will discuss the meaning and interrelation of the Senses of Sacred Scripture to provide for us a foundation into how to properly interpret Sacred Scripture. In other words, we will set out to define the tools that the Church gives us to appropriately interpret Divine revelation that we might be better stewards of the sacred text.

Saint Thomas Aquinas defined the two pillar senses of Sacred Scripture in his Summa Theologica. He stated:

The first meaning, according to which the things signify things, pertains to the first sense, which is the historical or literal sense, while the other meaning, according to which the things signified by the words again signify other things, is called the spiritual sense, which is based upon the literal, and presupposes it.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, as Aquinas points out, the Bible is a book like no other book. That is to say, Only Sacred Scripture in its two senses can express two meanings at once in the very same words. For further understanding of the spiritual sense as it relates to the literal sense, the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) points out that once the biblical text is cast into the light of the paschal mystery of Christ its literal sense becomes the spiritual sense.<sup>2</sup> That being said, as where there are two separate meanings in a particular verse, the spiritual sense is dependent upon the literal sense.<sup>3</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) reminds us that the literal sense is foundational as it accounts for what the human author actually intended to write.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Part 1, quest. 1, art. 10.

<sup>2</sup> PBC, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. CCC, 116

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CCC, 116.

Now there is the question of the analogy of faith, which is “the coherence of truths of faith among themselves and within the plan of Revelation”.<sup>5</sup> This criteria for interpreting Sacred Scripture considers the deposit of revelation as a whole. Essentially, for this tool to mature properly we must have a strong understanding of not only the literal sense in all of its historical current, but also the spiritual sense in all of its grandeur.

The spiritual sense can be broken up into three subcategories: the allegorical sense; the moral sense; and the anagogical sense. First the allegorical sense. An allegory is a sustained metaphor, the description of one thing under the image of another. We speak of the allegorical sense in Scripture inasmuch as objects of faith are presented in a metaphorical use of words that literally present natural things, and this usage is recognized in a repeatable pattern. As the literal sense would be the meaning expressed immediately and directly by the words of Scripture, the allegorical sense is based only indirectly upon the words and directly upon things, events, persons used to express something else on a higher level and foreshadow some greater truth. In this way, we can better understand allegory to be typology: types of one thing to prefigure another.<sup>6</sup> One sample would be found in the Book of Hosea: “I called my son out of Egypt”.<sup>7</sup> The literal sense refers to the descendents of Jacob brought out of Egypt under Moses. The literal sense refers *typically* to the infant Jesus returning to Palestine in his own flight from Egypt.

The moral sense is the objective pattern which represents the impact of the objective truth upon the believing subject, and is construed chiefly in terms of the virtues

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<sup>5</sup> CCC, 114

<sup>6</sup> Cf. CCC, 117.

<sup>77</sup> Hos.11:1.

of the soul of the believer. The moral sense is the sense of justice, what we ought to do “for our instruction.”<sup>8</sup>

The anagogical sense is the grade of interpreting the biblical text within the scope of its “eternal significance”.<sup>9</sup> This sense of Scripture reminds us to read the Bible, in its realities and events, with the end in mind. Thus, the Church’s sacramental character is very important to better understand this eschatological sense.

Furthermore, the Church holds fast that all the senses of Sacred Scripture are intended by the Spirit, who is the principle author of Sacred Scripture. What does intended by the Spirit mean? To pray over scriptures in the Spirit with the practical tools given to us by the Church. This creates for the interpreter the dynamism of a proper hermeneutic (meaning “to interpret”). Starting with the literal sense, we then apply the spiritual sense and the hermeneutic of faith to peer into the mysteries that surround the biblical text.

By way of closing, we emphasize the need to be present to the Spirit who is always the active agent drawing us into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. We must be honest and obedient stewards to the tools that the Church has handed on from the dawn of Christianity. We must avoid any kind of fallacious reading of the text and be sure that we are using the Bible as a means to an end and not an end in itself. In the end, to interpret Sacred Scripture in the Spirit is to draw deeper into relationship with Jesus Christ. For it is St. Jerome who reminds us that “ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor.10:11. cf. CCC, 117.

<sup>9</sup> CCC, 117.