



Senses of Scripture

“For whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. -Romans 15:4

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. (CCC #115)

Literal Sense

The literal sense refers to “that which has been expressed directly by the inspired human authors”. It is what the text is obviously communicating after careful and attentive reading, employing when necessary the tools that help determine its historical and literary context (cf. CCC 110). In short the literary sense is the meaning that the human and divine author wished to convey through the text.

CCC #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."

CCC #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

“Let interpreters bear in mind that their foremost and greatest endeavor should be to discern and define clearly that sense of the biblical words which is call literal” Pope Pius XII *Divino Afflante Spiritu* #23

Spiritual Sense

Allegorical

The allegorical sense refers to the hidden meaning, or the meaning underneath the text that connects the Old Testament to the New Testament. This includes “typology”, that is the events of the Old Testament foreshadowing the events of the New Testament.

CCC #117: 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 (cf 1 Cor 10:2).

Moral

The moral sense refers to what moral lessons can be learned from the text.

CCC #117 The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written "for our instruction". (cf 1 Cor 10:11, Heb 3-4:11).

Anagogical

The anagogical sense refers to the future fulfillment that the texts refers to.

CCC #117 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. (cf. Rev 21:1-22:5)

