

PRESENTER'S GUIDE

Understanding the Scriptures



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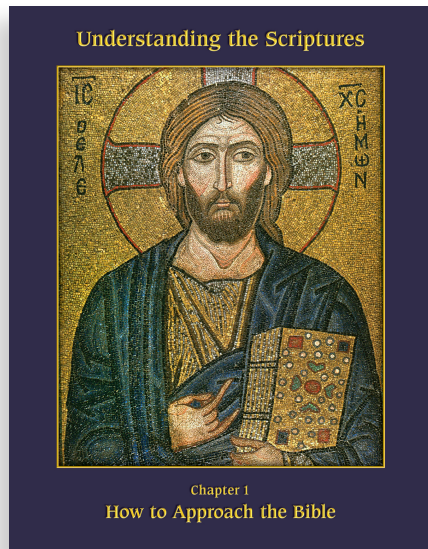
MIDWEST THEOLOGICAL FORUM

Downers Grove, Illinois

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Chapter 1: HOW TO APPROACH THE BIBLE

Key Ideas

These are reprinted from the textbook for your reference:

- The Bible is that part of Divine Revelation that has been put down in writing.
- The Bible is inspired by God, inerrant in teaching the truth, and is infallibly interpreted by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.
- The Bible must be interpreted as ancient, religious literature according to the intention of the human and divine authors.
- Besides the literal sense in which every passage must be read, a passage of Scripture may also be interpreted in one of three spiritual senses: allegorical, moral, or anagogical.
- The Bible is best interpreted in light of the totality of the Faith.

Vocabulary List

These are reprinted from the textbook for your reference:

- **Magisterium**—The teaching authority of the Church which, guided by the Holy Spirit, interprets Scripture and Tradition. (p. 4)
- **Inerrant**—Making no mistakes or errors. Scripture is inerrant; that is, it always teaches truth, never falsehood. (p. 4)

- **Infallible**—Incapable of misleading or deceiving. The Bible and the teaching of the Church—when teaching on matters of faith or morals—are infallible due to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (p. 4)
- **Inspired**—Guided by God. From a word meaning “breathed in.” The human writers of Scripture wrote in their own language, but through God’s inspiration they wrote what God intended them to write and nothing more. (p. 4)
- **Literal sense**—The meaning of Scripture based on the meaning of words in the linguistic and historical context, also referred to as the plain meaning. (p. 7)
- **Spiritual sense**—The interpretation of Scripture that considers not only the words of the text but also the people, things, and events they describe as signs. The spiritual sense flows out of the literal meaning of the words. The three kinds of spiritual senses in Scripture are the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. (p. 7)
- **Allegorical sense**—The spiritual interpretation of Scripture that shows how people and events in salvation history point forward to other times. Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is an allegory of God’s sacrifice of his own Son, Jesus Christ. (p. 8)
- **Anagogical sense**—The spiritual interpretation of Scripture that shows how events in Scripture point to what will be in Heaven. (p. 8)
- **Moral sense**—The spiritual interpretation of Scripture that draws moral lessons from the behavior, good or evil, of people in the Bible. (p. 8)
- **Covenant**—An agreement that establishes a sacred family bond between persons. A covenant is more than a contract; a contract establishes a temporary relationship beneficial to both parties, whereas a covenant is intended to bind both persons in kinship forever. (p. 9)
- **Salvation history**—The story of God’s plan to save humanity from the consequences of sin. This plan begins with Creation, is unfolding now, and will continue until the end of time. (p. 9)

NOTES

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SESSION

Opening Prayer

Begin the session with an opening prayer such as the following or incorporate the Scripture passage that is referenced in the Opening Activity (cf. Lk 1:1-4; see below):

*O my God, I firmly believe
that you are one God in three divine Persons,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
I believe that your divine Son became man
and died for our sins,
and that he shall come to judge the living
and the dead.
I believe these and all the truths
that the holy Catholic Church teaches,
because you have revealed them,
who can neither deceive nor be deceived.
Amen.*

(Act of Faith)

Overview of the Chapter

If you did not have the registrar distribute the summary to the participants, read the summary (p. 64 in this guide) to them.

Opening Activity

Have the participants complete the Opening Activity (p. 2).

Key Ideas

Have a participant read aloud the Key Ideas (p. 3).

NOTES

INTRODUCTION; WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE

(pp. 2-4)

Vocabulary

Have a participant read aloud the definitions of the vocabulary words on page 4.

Review

Allow some time for the participants to read or review this section.

Focus Questions

Ask the participants to reply to these Focus Questions:

- 1. Who is the fullness of Divine Revelation?** Jesus Christ is the fullness of Divine Revelation.
- 2. What are the two main sources of our knowledge of Jesus Christ?** The main sources of our knowledge of Jesus Christ are Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.
- 3. What does the claim “ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ” mean?** “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ” means that we must know the Scriptures if we wish to know Christ. Sacred Scripture is a great way to learn more about Jesus Christ.
- 4. What does the inspiration of the books of the Bible mean?** Inspiration means that the Holy Spirit inspired the sacred writers to write what God wanted and nothing more.
- 5. Did God dictate Scripture to its writers word for word?** God did not dictate the Scriptures. Instead, the human writers acted as free, subordinate, and intelligent instruments of the Holy Spirit who communicated God’s inspired truth in their own words using a variety of literary styles.
- 6. What is the inerrancy of the Bible?** The inerrancy of the Bible states that since God the Holy Spirit is the primary author of every book of the Bible, the Bible cannot be in error.
- 7. What is infallibility in reference to the Bible?** Infallibility means that the Church has the authority, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret the Bible without error.

Additional Activities

If there is time, have the participants complete the Guided Exercises (pp. 3-4).

THE BIBLE IS SACRED LITERATURE

(pp. 5-6)

Review

Allow some time for the participants to read or review this section.

Focus Questions

Ask the participants to reply to these Focus Questions:

8. Can individual Christians be in error in understanding the Bible? Yes. The Sacred Authors used different literary forms and techniques which unless we understand how those forms and techniques work, we cannot understand the meaning that these inspired authors wanted to convey.

9. What are some of the genres in which the authors of the Bible wrote? The authors wrote stories, poems, dialogues, and histories.

10. What are some literary techniques the Sacred Authors employed? The authors employed metaphors, similes, parallelism, symbolism, and personifications.

Additional Activities

If there is time, have the participants complete the Guided Exercise (p. 5).

THE BIBLE IS RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

(pp. 6-7)

Review

Allow some time for the participants to read or review this section.

Focus Questions

Ask the participants to reply to these Focus Questions:

11. What is the purpose of the Bible as religious literature? The Bible's purpose is to help people find fulfillment in God.

12. Why is the Bible objectively the most unbiased book in history? The Bible expresses history from God's point of view, and God sees everything exactly the way it is.

LITERAL AND SPIRITUAL SENSES

(pp. 7-8)

Vocabulary

Have a participant read aloud the definitions of the vocabulary words on pages 7-8.

Review

Allow some time for the participants to read or review this section.

Focus Questions

Ask the participants to reply to these Focus Questions:

13. What is the literal sense of Scripture? The literal sense is that which the author directly intended to express.

14. What is the spiritual sense of Scripture? The spiritual sense is the meaning expressed by the biblical text when read under the influence of the Holy Spirit in light of the mystery of Christ.

15. What is the literal sense of the passage of Psalm 22:16-18? David was in deep trouble, surrounded by deadly enemies, and was crying to God for help.

16. What is the spiritual sense of this same passage? This passage also describes the Passion of Christ.

17. What is the allegorical sense of Scripture? The allegorical sense is how people and events in salvation history point to future people and events.

18. What is the moral sense of Scripture? The moral sense is how we can learn moral lessons from how people behave in the Bible.

19. What is the anagogical sense of Scripture? The anagogical sense shows how the events we see in Scripture point upward to what we will know in Heaven. Through the things that are seen we come to understand the things we cannot yet see.

20. What sense of Scripture is always primary? The literal sense is primary.

21. What is the difference between literal and literalistic? Literal means what the author intended to say. Literalistic means the most concrete meaning of the words. For example, when Genesis says God created the universe in six days, a literalistic reading is that it took God exactly six twenty-four-hour days, which was probably not what the author intended.

22. Which spiritual sense does Psalm 22:16-18 embody? Explain. The spiritual sense embodies the allegorical, or typical, sense. David's suffering is a type, or allegory, of Christ's suffering on the Cross, for example, of Christ's hands and feet being pierced by nails.

ANALOGY OF FAITH

(pp. 8-9)

Review

Allow some time for the participants to read or review this section.

Focus Questions

Ask the participants to reply to these Focus Questions:

23. What is the "analogy of faith"? The analogy of faith means one must interpret the Bible in light of everything known about the Catholic Faith.

24. Give an example of using the analogy of faith in reading Scripture. If we read that some Old Testament patriarchs had many wives, we should not jump to the conclusion that it would be similarly permissible for a Christian today to have multiple spouses. We have to consider what natural law and the entire Old and New Testaments teach about marriage, what the practice of Christians has been from the beginning, and what the Church teaches about marriage.

Additional Activities

If there is time, have the participants complete the Guided Exercise (p. 9).

WHAT IS SALVATION HISTORY?

(p. 9)

Vocabulary

Have a participant read aloud the definitions of the vocabulary words on page 9.

Review

Allow some time for the participants to read or review this section.

Focus Questions

Ask the participants to reply to these Focus Questions:

25. What is salvation history? Salvation history is God's plan for the salvation of all people that plays out over time.

26. What is a biblical covenant? A covenant is an agreement between God and human beings, creating a sacred family kinship.

27. With whom did God make covenants and promises in Sacred Scripture? God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and all people through Jesus Christ; he made promises to Adam and David.

CHRISTIANITY IS THE RELIGION OF THE WORD OF GOD; CONCLUSION

(pp. 10-12)

Review

Allow some time for the participants to read or review this section.

Focus Questions

Ask the participants to reply to these Focus Questions:

28. What is the most sensible thing to do if you don't understand something in Sacred Scripture? The sensible thing would be to learn what the Church teaches about it.

29. Why is Bl. John Henry Newman famous in the English-speaking religious world? Bl. John Henry is the most famous Anglican convert to the Catholic Faith. Before converting, many in England considered him the most brilliant religious scholar and writer of his day.

30. What led Bl. John Henry to become Catholic? Bl. John Henry's reading of the early Church Fathers convinced him that the fullness of Christianity was found in the Catholic Church rather than the Anglican Communion.

31. What is Bl. John Henry's most famous book? Bl. John Henry wrote the autobiographical *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, which follows the course of his religious thought from his youth through his entrance into the Catholic Church.

CLOSING ACTIVITIES

Closing Activities

Have the participants complete the Closure or Alternative Assessment (p. 12).

Ask the participants to answer the Discussion Questions (p. 12; answers below). These can be given as a quiz or used to lead a class discussion.

Discussion Questions (p. 12)

1. **What does the inspiration of the books of the Bible mean?** Inspiration means that the Holy Spirit inspired the Sacred Authors to write what God wanted and nothing more.
2. **What is the inerrancy of the Bible?** The inerrancy of the Bible states that since God the Holy Spirit is the primary author of every book of the bible, the Bible cannot be in error.
3. **What is infallibility in reference to the Bible?** Infallibility means that the Church has the power, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret the Bible without error.
4. **What is the purpose of the Bible as religious literature?** The Bible's purpose is to help people find fulfillment in God.
5. **What is the literal sense of Scripture?** The literal sense is that which the author directly intended to express.
6. **What is the allegorical spiritual sense of Scripture?** The allegorical sense is how people and events in salvation history point to future people and events.
7. **What is the moral spiritual sense of Scripture?** The moral sense is how we can learn moral lessons from how people behave in the Bible.
8. **What is the anagogical spiritual sense of Scripture?** The anagogical sense shows how the events we see in Scripture point upward to what we will know in Heaven. Through the things that are seen we come to understand the things we cannot yet see.
9. **What is the analogy of faith in regard to Sacred Scripture?** Sacred Scripture is best interpreted in light of the totality of the Faith.
10. **What is salvation history?** Salvation history is God's plan for the salvation of all people that plays out over time.

11. **With whom did God make covenants and promises in Sacred Scripture (as presented in this chapter)?** God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and all people through Jesus Christ; he made promises to Adam and David.

12. **What are the two main sources of our knowledge of Jesus Christ?** The main sources of our knowledge of Jesus Christ are Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

Overview of the Next Chapter

Read this summary to the participants:

Chapter 2 presents the structure of the Bible. This chapter examines the Law, historical, wisdom, and prophetic literature of the Old Testament and their New Testament corollaries in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation.

Key Idea of the Next Chapter

Have a participant read aloud the Key Idea (p. 15). This is reprinted from the textbook for your reference:

- Both Testaments of the Bible are organized according to books of law, history, wisdom, and prophecy.

AT THE END OF THE SESSION

Read the Next Chapter

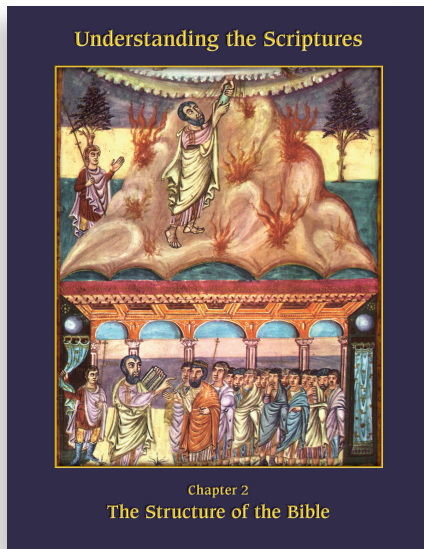
Have the participants read Chapter 2 before the next session.

Closing Prayer

End the session with a closing prayer.

Examples include the *Lord's Prayer*, the *Hail Mary*, or the *Glory Be*.

NOTES



Chapter 2: THE STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE

Vocabulary List

These are reprinted from the textbook for your reference:

- **Law**—A rule of conduct enforced in a society. Also the traditional name (in Hebrew, “Torah”) of the first five books of the Old Testament, also known as the Pentateuch or the Books of Moses. These five books are called the Law because they contain many rules and regulations, including the Ten Commandments. (p. 15)
- **Old Testament**—The forty-six books of Scripture written by Jews before the coming of Jesus Christ. (p. 15)
- **Pentateuch**—The first five books of the Old Testament. From the Greek word for “five.” (p. 15)
- **Wisdom literature**—A style of Hebrew literature that meditates on important truths. Wisdom literature uses poems, teachings, and other literary means of communicating these truths. (p. 17)
- **Prophet**—One who speaks the message of God to the people. Some prophets foretold future events, while others preached against the unholiness of their own time. (p. 18)
- **Gospel**—From the Old English *godspel*, which means “Good News.” A Gospel is a book that tells the Good News of Jesus Christ. The four Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. (p. 21)

- **Synoptic Gospels**—Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “synoptic” (Greek for “seeing together”) because they have a similar point of view when contrasted with the Gospel of John. (p. 21)
- **Catholic**—Universal. Catholic can describe the Church or one of her members. A catholic epistle is written to all Christians, i.e., the Church as a whole. (p. 22)
- **Epistle**—Letter. Much of the New Testament consists of epistles written to individuals, to whole congregations, or to the Church as a whole. (p. 22)

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SESSION

Opening Prayer

Begin the session with an opening prayer such as the following or incorporate the Scripture passage that is referenced in the Opening Activity (Ps 22; see below):

*Lord, our God,
Savior of the human family,
you brought salvation and joy to the house
of Elizabeth
through the visit of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
the Ark of the new Covenant.*

*We ask that, in obedience
to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,
we too may bring Christ to others
and magnify your name by the praise of our lips
and the holiness of our lives.*

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*(Novena to the Immaculate Conception, Fourth Day,
Introductory Prayer)*

Opening Activity

Have the participants complete the Opening Activity (p. 14).

NOTES