



How Catholics Read the Bible

ILM New Testament Course

Key Church Documents

Pope Pius XII, *Divino afflante spiritu* (1943)

Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* (1962–1965)

Seven Principles

1. First of all, we should read and study it! *Divino afflante spiritu* 51
Dei Verbum 22-23
2. We give preference to the original languages and the earliest form of the text for study, not the Latin¹ *Divino afflante spiritu* 14-22
Dei Verbum 22
3. We read it as both God's self-revelation and the human response, "the word of God in human language" *Divino afflante spiritu* 37-39
Dei Verbum 6, 11-13
4. We recognize that we have to learn about the humans who wrote it to understand it (the "literal sense") *Divino afflante spiritu* 23, 33-41
Dei Verbum 11-13
5. We read it in light of tradition, and as a product of tradition *Divino afflante spiritu* 24
Dei Verbum 8-10, 12
6. We recognize that our interpretations may differ and we may not be able to resolve all problems in the text; this does not compromise scripture's truth *Divino afflante spiritu* 44-48
[*Dei Verbum* 13]
7. We believe that the Bible is inerrant in what is necessary for salvation, but not in every detail *Divino afflante spiritu* 47
Dei Verbum 11-12

Let all the other sons of the Church bear in mind that the efforts of these resolute laborers in the vineyard of the Lord should be judged not only with equity and justice, but also with the greatest charity; all moreover should abhor that intemperate zeal which imagines that whatever is new should for that very reason be opposed or suspected. Let them bear in mind above all that in the rules and laws promulgated by the Church there is question of doctrine regarding faith and morals; and that in the immense matter contained in the Sacred Books - legislative, historical, sapiential and prophetic - **there are but few texts whose sense has been defined by the authority of the Church, nor are those more numerous about which the teaching of the Holy Fathers is unanimous.** There remain therefore many things, and of the greatest importance, in the discussion and exposition of which the skill and genius of Catholic commentators may and ought to be freely exercised, so that each may contribute his part to the advantage of all, to the continued progress of the sacred doctrine and to the defense and honor of the Church. (*Divino afflante spiritu* 47)

The Bible teaches firmly, faithfully, and without error **that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation.** (*Dei Verbum* 11)

¹ The Latin Vulgate remains the basis for dogmatic teaching and liturgy.



Resources

Anthologies of Church Teachings on the Bible

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Discussions of Church Teaching on the Bible

Donahue, John R., S. J. "Between Jerusalem and Athens: The Changing Shape of Catholic Biblical Scholarship." In *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (ed. Eleanor Stump and Thomas P. Flint; Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 285-313.

-----, "The Bible in Roman Catholicism since *Divino Afflante Spiritu*." *Word & World* 13:4 (1993) 404-413.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. "Scripture in the Catholic Tradition." In *Living Traditions of the Bible: Scripture in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Practice* (ed. James E. Bowley; St. Louis: Chalice, 1999) 145-61.

Harrington, Daniel J., S.J. *How Do Catholics Read the Bible?* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

Schneiders, Sandra M. "Biblical Interpretation: The Soul of Theology." *Australian Biblical Review* 58 (2010) 72-82.

Senior, Donald. "The State of the Bible in North America and Its Significance for Communities of Faith." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 35:1 (2008) 32-44.

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