



# SCRIPTURAL CATECHESIS

The presentation of doctrine must be biblical and liturgical.

In the fourth article in this series we wrote about how to ensure that the presentation of doctrine be liturgical. This fifth article forms a diptych with the fourth (a second half hinged to the first), that is, the presentation of doctrine must also be scriptural. Scripture and Tradition - of which liturgy forms a major part - are the two panels of the diptych that are distinct but should not be separated.

## Maintain the Unity of Scripture and Tradition to Teach Christ

The primary task of catechesis is to transmit the Word of God, sometimes phrased as 'the gospel of Christ'. The 'Word of God' is often taken to mean only the Scriptures while in fact the Church means, much more fully, the whole person of Christ who is the Word of the Father. It is *he* who is the gospel, the good news. It is so important to maintain the unity of Scripture and Tradition that whenever one is teaching from Scripture it is also good to consider the Catechism, and conversely whenever one is teaching from the Catechism one should also get into the habit of turning to Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Concretely, then, one needs to beware of following an approach which uses either the *Catechism* alone or Scripture alone. If in your session you want to refer to a Scripture passage in your teaching, make sure that you link this to a point of the Church's doctrine. If in your session you want to refer to a passage from the Catechism, make sure that you link this to a Scripture passage.

## Use the Index of Citations

Scripture is the driving force for every doctrine of the Church and so the fullest catechesis will always hold these together. In this respect, an invaluable tool for catechists is the index of citations that can be found at the back of the Catechism. Here the catechist can find a verse from Sacred Scripture and see which doctrines the Church draws from it and thus participants will be enriched even further by scriptural texts.

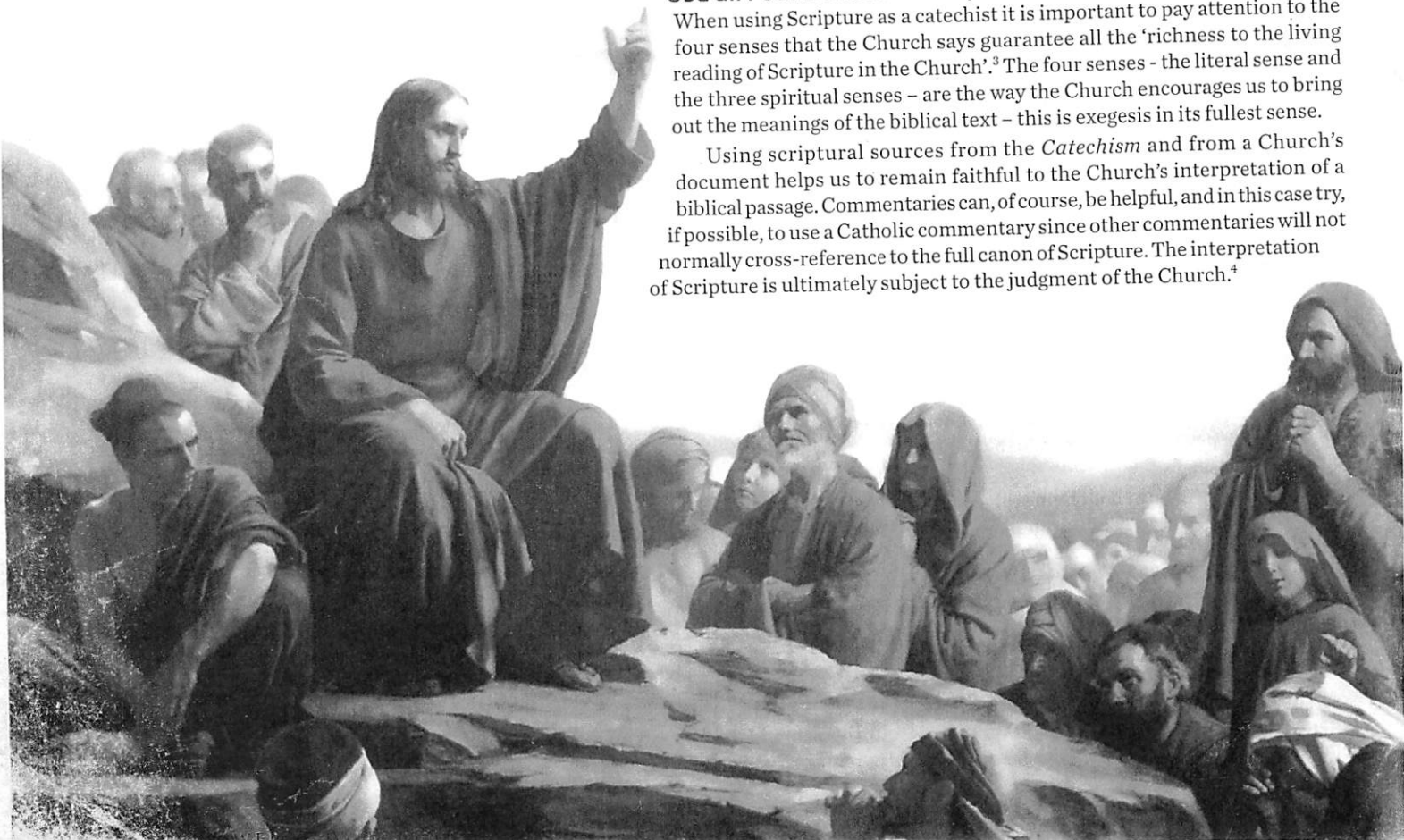
Similarly, you can go to any article in the Catechism and find which passages from Sacred Scripture 'drive' the doctrine. Catechesis is about the transmission of doctrine and it is important to root doctrine always in Scripture. Doctrine flows from Scripture, it hangs from it, depends on it.

The index of citations can also be used for finding other sources in Tradition (such as, creeds, councils, encyclicals, liturgical texts, ecclesiastical writers and saints) so that one's catechesis is 'renewed at the living sources of the faith'.<sup>2</sup>

## Use all Four Senses of Scripture

When using Scripture as a catechist it is important to pay attention to the four senses that the Church says guarantee all the 'richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church'.<sup>3</sup> The four senses - the literal sense and the three spiritual senses - are the way the Church encourages us to bring out the meanings of the biblical text - this is exegesis in its fullest sense.

Using scriptural sources from the *Catechism* and from a Church's document helps us to remain faithful to the Church's interpretation of a biblical passage. Commentaries can, of course, be helpful, and in this case try, if possible, to use a Catholic commentary since other commentaries will not normally cross-reference to the full canon of Scripture. The interpretation of Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church.<sup>4</sup>



## Use Typology

This refers to the practice that we find in Tradition to illuminate 'the unity of the divine plan in the two Testaments.'<sup>5</sup> So in our catechesis we explain the actions, events and other realities in the Old Testament that prefigure, and are fulfilled, in the person of Christ.<sup>6</sup> We do not skim over difficult but rich texts from the Old Testament, but rather try to assist those whom we are teaching to find valuable insights into God's saving plan: the whole of the story of salvation, culminating in Christ, is central to our catechesis. The three spiritual senses of Scripture are all Christo-centric – all Scripture is about Christ.<sup>7</sup>

## Do Not Use Eisegesis!

The error of eisegesis is the reading of a biblical text with a purely human interpretation. Eisegesis means reading meaning *into* the text rather than drawing meaning *from* the text. In eisegesis, Scripture is used simply as a resource to back up our teaching rather than as a living source of God speaking to his people. Lectionary-based catechesis can sometime fall into this mistake of fitting a pre-chosen theme to a Sunday reading – a theme that does not come from the main point of the biblical passage but is added to it in some way. For example, one might try to use the account of the feeding of the five thousand to illustrate the Church's teaching on fair trading. This would be eisegesis!

## Follow the Church's Three Criteria for Interpreting Scripture.

In order to avoid the danger of a narrow or idiosyncratic personal interpretation *Dei Verbum* taught<sup>8</sup> that there are three criteria we can follow for interpreting Scripture.

1. *Be especially attentive to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture.* The unity of God's plan is reflected in Scripture and therefore reflected in the Word.<sup>9</sup> In catechesis we pass on this living Word rather than our own personal images and concepts of God and Revelation.
2. *Read the Scripture within the living Tradition of the whole Church.* The *Catechism* teaches us that 'the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God's word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture.'<sup>10</sup> As catechists we base our scriptural teaching on the Church's living Tradition in order to give our students its authentic content in a climate when relativism prevails.
3. *'Be attentive to the analogy of faith.'*<sup>11</sup> The *Catechism* explains this term as 'the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation.'<sup>12</sup> Isolating scriptural texts for our own ends or convenience is not helpful to those whom we are catechizing.

## Include Celebrations of the Word

Catechesis for RCIA is the paradigm for all catechesis<sup>13</sup> and so what the Church recommends for RCIA will be relevant to other forms of catechesis and adult formation. Catechesis for RCIA is to be 'solidly supported by celebrations of the Word' and so a catechist may often choose to open a session with a liturgy of the Word related to the theme of the session, linked to the particular liturgical season of the time.

Such a celebration of the Word tends to have a short Reading from the Old or New Testament together with the use of an appropriate psalm. This might be recited antiphonally by dividing the group into two sides: one group is *proclaiming* and the other is *listening to* God's word. A reading from one of the four gospels is also recommended.

This celebration of the Word is generally used within the context of *prayer* rather than as a text for teaching. Although the liturgy of the Word will reflect the teaching component, it is used rather to introduce the theme of the session biblically and prayerfully. It is mainly a prayer of listening because, 'in the Sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children and talks with them'.<sup>14</sup> 'Prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture so that a dialogue takes place between God and man for we speak to him when we pray we listen to him when we read.'<sup>15</sup> Catechesis can then embody a life of prayer

which 'is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice holy God and being in communion with him'.<sup>16</sup> All our catechesis is ultimately directed towards this.

The RCIA allows for two other forms of celebration of the Word but neither of these recommend the sole use of the Sunday lectionary as the source for a systematic, comprehensive catechesis (For a full explanation of this see an earlier article in *The Sower* by Bill Keimig).<sup>17</sup>

## Pray with Scripture

Just as prayer helps us read the Sacred Scriptures, so the Sacred Scriptures can help us to pray. You cannot have one without the other.

The catechesis of young people and adults 'aims at teaching them to meditate on the word of God in personal prayer, practicing it in liturgical prayer and internalising it at all times in order to bear fruit in a new life'.<sup>18</sup> We pray to live and live to pray.

Concretely, one can do this with young people or adults, in a short period of *lectio divina*. This particular way of reading and meditating is an ancient tradition and one needs to learn how to follow the method for the most beneficial effect. For example, it helps to familiarize oneself with exegetical knowledge of the literal sense of the chosen passage before beginning so that one can focus on the spiritual meanings and not get distracted by questions about the literal meaning.

We can teach the value of Scripture to help people pray no matter what their particular feelings or situations are by using the canon of the psalms which meets every kind of emotion that humanity undergoes and which can be used for personal individual prayer or for prayers for mankind in general.

## Reverence the Bible

Catechetical teaching of Scripture uses the Bible itself rather than individual sheets of paper with the text. The catechist places the Bible reverently (the use of a bow is appropriate) on a lectern, if possible, and encourages participants to turn towards the lectern and therefore the Bible, thereby making an appropriate liturgical response to the Word of God being proclaimed. Just as the liturgical icon is honoured as representing *Christ*,<sup>19</sup> Scripture is *God in Christ* speaking to us and so the use of tasteful cloths, candles and a definite area for the placing of the Holy Scriptures is essential in our catechetical environment.

For children's catechesis a good translation of the Bible is important. We try to avoid translations that leave words out or add words to the text, no matter how much simpler it seems the text would be. Here, Notre Dame de Vie's catechetical experience is interesting, since their catechists have found that using an adult translation of the Bible is just as effective in catechizing children as using 'simpler' versions. ☩

## Notes

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| 1. GDC 94; CT 27.                              | 7. CCC 134.       | 14. DV11.  |
| 2. Pope John Paul II, <i>Fidei Depositum</i> . | 8. Cf. DV 12.4.   | 15. CCC 2653.  |
| 3. CCC 115.                                    | 9. Cf. CCC 112.   | 16. CCC 2565.  |
| 4. DV 12.                                      | 10. CCC 113.      | 17. For a full explanation of this see <i>The Sower</i> July/September 2006, pp.5-7. |
| 5. CCC 128.                                    | 11. Cf. Rom 12:6. | 18. CCC 2688.  |
| 6. Cf. <i>Ibid</i> .                           | 12. CCC 114.      |  |
|  | 13. GDC 90.       |  |

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