THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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Introduction

Since the first Catholic School opened, the teaching of religious instruction has been central to its mission as an evangelising agent of the Church. In the years since then, advancements in both theology and education have brought about changes in the manner in which religious instruction is undertaken. Particularly significant among these is the understanding articulated by the second Vatican Council in Dei Verbum.\(^1\) The Constitution begins by reaffirming that it is God’s will to be known by all people. God, ‘the first principle and the last end of all things’, can be known and wants to be known.\(^2\) In creation, God is revealed as the one who desires to be known to the first humans, as the God who cares for all humanity; in the history of Israel God is revealed as the only God and as the father and judge of all people; and in the life of Jesus, the Word made flesh, God is revealed as the one who wishes humanity ‘to become sharers in the divine


\(^2\) DV, 9.
nature.’ All these events of salvation history are recorded in Sacred Scripture, the speech of God as it is put down under the breath of the Holy Spirit. In Scripture ‘the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his[sic] children’, to meet with them and to be known by them. While God’s revelation in history and in the person of Jesus did not constitute a new understanding for the Church, on its promulgation in 1965, *Dei Verbum* broke new ground in its claim that God is revealed not only in the events of history but in a personal way in the present. God is found and may be experienced in the everyday events of ordinary people. In this claim, *DV* paved the way for a new direction in religious instruction.

Given the importance of the understanding *DV* contains, this review of Church documents begins with documents that emanated from and after the second Vatican Council. It begins with *Gravissimum Educationis* before moving to *The Renewal of the Education of Faith* and the *General Catechetical Directory*. *The Catholic School* is the first of those documents reviewed which has Catholic education as its focus. Review of this document is followed by examination of *Catechesis Tradendae* and *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*. Inclusion of *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the next work reviewed, represents a deviation from documents specifically concerned with catechesis. However, as *The Catechism* is explicitly intended for use by those writing religious instruction materials, what it contains must be considered as

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3 *DV*, 9.
4 *DV*, 21.
5 *DV*, 6.
6 *Dei Verbum* claimed that revelation was not a static event; it could and did occur in the lived reality of the present. What this meant for Catholic Schools will be taken up in chapter five in discussion on the approaches to religious instruction taken in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.
informing what is to be produced. Analysis of *The General Directory for Catechesis* concludes the review of Church documents.

The aim of this review is to establish a clear understanding of the place of Scripture in catechesis from which a set of principles for the presentation of Scripture might be drawn. As a result, each document is reviewed to ascertain how it addresses three specific concerns. First, reference to the revelation of God and to the place of Scripture within catechesis is sought. Second, how Scripture is to be used in catechesis, in particular whether any specific principles for use are given to those involved is found. Finally, as the documents come to differentiate catechesis in the parish from that which occurs in Catholic Schools, this review notes how religious instruction is to be undertaken generally.

1.1 *Gravissimum Educationis*

*Gravissimum Educationis* is a document of Vatican II. In spite of its focus on education, the document makes no reference to the specific place of Scripture in Catholic Schools nor does it direct how Scripture is to be used. In fact it contains no instructions regarding the manner in which religious instruction is to be undertaken at all. The Declaration was only ever intended to elucidate some already widely accepted beliefs. Its significance is

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8 Among the twelve principles affirmed are, that while every person has the right to education, the baptized have a right to a Christian education ‘illuminated by faith.’ *GE*, 8. Although parents, the ‘primary and principal educators’ of their children, have ultimate responsibility for their children, the duty of education also belongs to the Church. *GE*, 3. Consequently, the provision of Catholic primary, secondary and tertiary education is applauded. Catholic schools are to offer a message animated by the Gospel values of freedom and charity; children and young people have a right to know and love God more perfectly. Chief among the means designed to ensure this is catechetical instruction. Teachers in Catholic Schools should be ‘carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualification and
two fold. First, in affirming that every baptized person has the right to a Christian education ‘illuminated by faith’, it grounds the educational endeavours of the Church firmly in Vatican II (GE 8). Second, the Declaration directs that the principles it contains be developed more fully in a postconciliar document, a direction that was fulfilled in 1971 with the publication of the General Catechetical Directory. As such, it provides the impetus for a later, more detailed examination of catechesis.

1.2 The Renewal of the Education of Faith

The Renewal of the Education of Faith is, in effect, an English translation of an Italian Episcopal document.9 The Australian edition, promulgated in 1970 by the Australian Episcopal Conference, includes an additional chapter which acknowledges the specific role of Catholic Schools in Australia.10 REF is directed to those engaged in catechetical activity: teachers, educators and especially those who prepare new catechetical material.11

In contrast to Gravissimum Educationis, REF is explicit about both the importance of Scripture in Catholic Schools and about the manner in which it is to be used. Scripture is described as the first and ‘most important’ of all the sources of revelation (REF 105).12 Valid for all time, it is the inspired Word of God which contains the revelation of Christ and the whole mystery of God.13 As a result, ‘Scripture has always had the first place in various methods of spreading the Gospel and indeed in every

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10 The Italian document was promulgated on February 2 1970, the Australian one on August 21 1970.
11 REF, xvi.
12 The others mentioned are Tradition, the Liturgy and Creation.
13 REF, 105.
pastoral activity. To be ignorant about Scripture is to be ignorant about Christ’ (REF 105).

Although REF provides no specific directions regarding methods to be employed, it notes that the preferred starting point for religious instruction will be the study of Scripture prior to movement to a teaching of the Magisterium, a point of Doctrine or a current issue. Moreover, it makes three important points regarding the use of Scripture in catechesis.

First, it insists that in order that Scripture might be truly revelatory, those using it must keep in mind that it is God’s word in human language. Knowledge of the figures and symbols contained in Scripture and of the different literary forms it contains is necessary (REF 108). Interpretation must keep in mind the unity of all Scripture, and must be done ‘in the light of accepted exegesis of the Church’, the faith and mind of the Church and the Holy Spirit who inspired the writers (REF 108). In order to enable this, REF encourages the continued work of the theological sciences which ‘strive to reflect on the Word of God’. As such, theological research is an indispensable source of catechesis (REF 111).

Second, REF emphasises that all people, from infants to adults, are entitled to ‘the whole of the revealed message, in a form and in terms that they [those being taught] can understand’ (REF 134). Material should be presented honestly and accurately; teaching which is erroneous or false has serious implications for later education and for personal faith development. Third, regardless of what method is chosen, the fundamental principle of all catechetical method is fidelity to the Word of God and the concrete needs of the

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14 REF, 136. REF goes on to stress the importance of speaking about God in concrete ways to children who are incapable of thinking in abstract ways.
faithful." This is the ultimate criterion by which catechists must appraise their work as educators’ (REF 160).

The Bishops acknowledge that REF is ‘the preparatory phase’ in the much larger task of renewal within the life of the Church. It anticipates the production of local catechisms and Teachers Manuals ‘worked out along the lines sketched in this document’ (REF 200).

1.3 General Catechetical Directory

Gravissimum Educationis called for a directory for catechetical instruction to be prepared, an instruction fulfilled in April 1971 with the promulgation by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy of The General Catechetical Directory. It is the first international directory on catechesis and represents an attempt by the Church to provide Bishops and, in general, all under their leadership and direction with basic principles to guide the production of local catechetical directories and catechisms (GCD Foreward).

GDC uses Dei Verbum to emphasise the place of Scripture in catechesis. In addition, it gives general principles on the way in which Scripture is to be presented, including providing specific directions on how it is to be adapted.

The Directory reiterates that catechesis is a Ministry of the Word. As such, it takes its beginning from, and finds its nourishment within, Sacred Scripture. ‘God chose to reveal himself so that he[sic] might invite and take men[sic] into fellowship with himself.’ GDC emphasizes that the whole economy of salvation, including the

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15 REF, 160.
16 REF, 200.
17 The direction to produce a catechetical directory is found in Gravissimum Educationis in the Preface. The General Catechetical Directory (hereafter GCD) was promulgated on April 11 1971. http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/gencatdi.htm Accessed November 30 2004.
18 GCD, 10.
incarnation, is offered in the hope that all people will be led to God. Catechesis ‘must help build an ever-deeper understanding of this plan of love of the heavenly Father, must take care to show that the supreme meaning of human life is this: to acknowledge God and to glorify him by doing his will, as Christ taught us by his words and the example of his life, and thus to come to eternal life.’

It ought to take its beginning from this great gift of God, revealed in Scripture.

As an international directory GCD contains only general principles about the use of Scripture in catechesis. Local programmes, to suit both the needs of the catechised and the circumstances of catechesis, are necessary and should be developed. They should outline the specific goals to be attained and the methodology to be used. Irrespective of whatever method is decided upon, GCD states those using Scripture must be mindful of the fact that it is expressed in language which belongs to a particular culture, setting and time (GCD 32). Catechesis should begin with a simple presentation of the Christian message and lead to a more developed and detailed study of Scripture so that ‘the Christian community may arrive at an always more profound and vital acceptance of the Christian message’ (GCD 38).

GCD acknowledges that catechesis occurs in a variety of settings. Where adaptation of Scripture, to the circumstances, age levels, social conditions or culture of people is deemed necessary, it is to be undertaken faithfully. At all times catechesis ought to ‘strive to teach [the] word of God with complete fidelity’ (GCD 34). The Congregation notes that, in a rapidly developing culture, catechesis will not be able to

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19 GDC, 41.
20 GCD, 72. The Directory does not advocate the use of one method over another. Both inductive and deductive approaches are affirmed as are the use of both the life experience of the learner and set formulas.
21 GCD, 34.
advance without further study. It encourages study into the relationship between catechesis and exegesis, anthropology and the mass media. Where possible, Bishops are urged to consider international co-operation in these ventures.

1.4 The Catholic School

In the years following Vatican II the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education published three documents on the nature and purpose of Catholic Schools to follow up the initiatives of Vatican II begun in *Gravissimum Educationis*. The first of the documents, *The Catholic School*, was published in March 1977. It was intended to outline general beliefs about education which should underpin Catholic Schools rather than provide specific directions. As a result, although it continues to affirm the importance of Scripture in the life of the school *The Catholic School* does not give any directives about how Scripture is to be used in schools. However, in its differentiation of catechesis that occurs in the school from that which occurs in the parish, the document signals the beginning of an important trend within the Church.

*The Catholic School* supports the view articulated by those documents which precede it; as a vital function of the mission of the Church, Catholic Schools ‘must be fed and stimulated by its source of life, the saving word of Christ as it is expressed in sacred Scripture’ (CS 54). Without reference to Scripture, Catholic Schools are in danger of losing their purpose.

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22 The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education is a Vatican body which has responsibility for overseeing Catholic Education in its various forms: Seminaries, Universities and Catholic Schools. Its current prefect is Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski.


24 *CS*, 55.
The particular significance of *CS* is that it is the first document to articulate how catechesis which occurs in the parish is different from that which occurs in the Catholic School.\textsuperscript{25} While the family and the parish are the proper place for catechesis, the importance of, and need for, formal instruction in schools is emphasised. In keeping with other curriculum areas religious instruction is to be critical, explicit and systematic (\textit{CS} 49). Unlike other subjects though, religious instruction should aim not only for intellectual assent but for a commitment to the faith tradition of the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{26} \textit{CS} explicitly avoids making specific comment on the teaching of religion but it directs schools to be alert to developments in psychology, pedagogy and especially in catechetics, and to directives from local ecclesiastical authorities, for support in that activity.

\textbf{1.5 Catechesis Tradendae}

In October 1977 a synod of Bishops convened in Rome under the pontificate of Paul VI to prepare a statement on catechesis. After the death of Paul VI, Pope John Paul II supervised the completion of the writing and \textit{CT} was promulgated in October 1979.\textsuperscript{27} True to its title \textit{CT} is concerned with all forms of catechesis, including that which occurs in Catholic Schools. The place of Scripture in catechesis, established in previous documents, is maintained, with special emphasis being given to the Gospels. However, for the first time, Scripture is explicitly named as the source for the content of catechesis.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{CS}, 50.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{CS}, 50.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Catechesis Tradendae} was promulgated on 16 October 1979. John Paul II. \textit{Catechesis Tradendae}. (hereafter \textit{CT}) (Homebush: Saint Paul Publications, 1979).
Furthermore, clear directions on how Scripture is to be used in a catechetical setting are given. Finally, *CT* insists that catechesis in schools be systematic and goal orientated.

*CT* begins by placing catechesis within the Church’s missionary life. It stresses that at the heart of catechesis ‘we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth’; the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people in touch with Jesus, who alone ‘can lead us to love of the Father in the Spirit’ (*CT* 5). Scripture, and in particular the Gospels, is critical to the task. However, *CT* takes a further step in understanding of the role of Scripture in catechesis by explicitly naming Scripture as the source from which its content should be drawn. Scripture is not only the reason for catechesis, its nourishment and inspiration. Nor is it simply the document in which the story of God’s interaction with humanity may be found. As a Ministry of the Word, the Word of God transmitted in Tradition and Scripture constitute the actual subject matter. Scripture is the very basis of what is to be taught. In its naming of Scripture as the source of the content of catechesis, *CT* places the Bible into the forefront of religious instruction. As a result, those who are being catechised must have regular and ‘assiduous contact’ with the texts themselves (*CT* 27).

*CT* makes two important points regarding the use and interpretation of Scripture. First, it insists that the use of Scripture in catechesis be undertaken in line with the broader Church. *CT* stresses that the reading of Scripture is both richer and more effective if done ‘with the intelligence and the heart of the Church’ (*CT* 27). Those undertaking catechesis have the right to receive ‘the word of faith’ not in mutilated, falsified or diminished form but whole and entire, in all its rigour and vigour’ (*CT* 30).

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28 *CT*, 27.
29 *CT*, 27.
Second, *CT* confirms the direction of *GCD* that any adaptation of Scripture must be done thoroughly and seriously, ‘with patience and wisdom and without betrayal’ (*CT* 40). Indeed, such is the importance of fidelity to Scripture that unfaithfulness to the integrity of the message means a dangerous weakening of catechesis.\(^{30}\)

Having named Scripture as the content of catechesis, *CT* gives very specific instructions on how catechesis is to be undertaken. Catechesis is to be systematic, ‘not improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal’ (*CT* 21). While catechetical programmes will not be able to tackle everything, they are to be ‘sufficiently complete’ (*CT* 21). Programmes must teach the essentials of faith but should be designed to teach more than simply the initial proclamation of the Christian story. Finally, instruction must be an integral Christian initiation; it must be open to all facets of Christian life. *CT* avoids advocating one specific method over another, instead insisting that whatever method is chosen, it will be valid to the extent that it keeps the desired content of catechesis intact; ‘it must truly communicate the whole of the “words of eternal life” and not just a part of it’ (*CT* 31). It also insists that catechetical works must be sound. They ‘must really aim to give those who use them a better knowledge of the mysteries of Christ’ (*CT* 49). Publications which are ambiguous and harmful should be avoided. Catechetical literature should be linked with the life situation of those being catechized. It should use language that is comprehensible and it must give the whole message of Christ and the Church, without neglecting or distorting anything.\(^{31}\)

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\(^{30}\) *CT*, 30.

\(^{31}\) *CT*, 49.
CT notes, with regret, the decreasing number of countries in which it is possible to give education in faith within a Catholic school setting.\textsuperscript{32} The Catholic School provides a unique opportunity for catechesis, its role in the education of young people should not be neglected. Indeed, the special character of the Catholic School, the underlying reason why parents should prefer it, is precisely because of the quality of the religious instruction their children will receive.\textsuperscript{33} The document concludes with the request that the Holy Spirit bring ‘unprecedented enthusiasm’ to all whose work in catechesis enables the Church to carry out her universal mission to ‘make disciples of all nations’ (CT 73).

1.6 The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School.

The third document published by the Congregation for Catholic Education was intended to address directly the religious dimensions of education in Catholic Schools.\textsuperscript{34} The RDECS maintains the commitment to the place of Scripture in Catholic Schools established in earlier documents. Although it gives no specific directions on how Scripture is to be used, RDECS is particularly important as it contains the Church’s most explicit explanation of the differing roles of religious instruction in Catholic Schools and catechesis in the wider Church.

RDECS begins by reiterating that Catholic Schools find their true justification within the missionary activity of the Church; it guides men and women to human and

\begin{small}
\textsuperscript{32} CT, 69.
\textsuperscript{33} CT, 69.
\textsuperscript{34} The Congregation for Catholic Education. The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (hereafter RDECS) (Homebush: Saint Paul Publications, 1988) The second document was Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith. By 1980 the majority of teachers in Catholic Schools were lay people. Lay Catholics stresses the need for dedicated and competent teachers. In 1988 under John Paul II the Congregation dropped the word ‘sacred’ from its title.
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Christian perfection, and at the same time helps them to become mature in their faith. . . to love God and do his will.”  In religious instruction, teachers are able to introduce students to Jesus, who in his words and deeds leads to the mystery of God (RDECS 75). Fidelity to the Gospel as proclaimed by the Church is one of the criteria under which schools work.  

Part IV of the document is devoted specifically to religious instruction in the classroom. Paragraph 68 begins with discussion on the ‘distinct and complementary’ nature of religious instruction and catechesis (RDECS 68). While catechesis takes place within a community of faith over a whole lifetime, religious instruction occurs in the classroom for a specific period of time (RDECS 70). Moreover, while the school can and must play its part in the work of catechesis, the aims of catechesis and religious instruction are different. ‘The aim of catechesis . . . is maturity . . . the aim of the school however, is knowledge’ (RDECS 69). As such, the document calls for religious instruction to take its place alongside other areas of study. It should be integrated into the objectives of the school and utilise its own approved syllabus. Religious instruction classes should be timetabled alongside other subjects and should seek interdisciplinary links with other courses so there is ‘coordination between human learning and religious awareness’ (RDECS 70). Like other course work, religious instruction ‘should make use of the best of educational methods available to schools today’ (RDECS 70).

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35 RDECS, 34, 49.
36 RDECS, 101. This view is stated again in paragraph 31 where the school is described as a pastoral instrument whose service is to mediate between faith and culture; ‘being faithful to the newness of the Gospel while at the same time respecting the autonomy and the methods proper to human knowledge.’ RDECS, 31.
37 RDECS, 73. Renewal anticipates the writing and publication of a new catechism to assist the writing of syllabus material.
The Congregation concludes by requesting that all Bishops bring their reflections to the attention of teachers. Further study, research and experimentation into areas that affect the religious dimension of education in Catholic Schools is to be encouraged.

1.7 Catechism of the Catholic Church

In 1985 John Paul II called a synod to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Vatican II. At this gathering the Bishops expressed the need for a new catechism, a request fulfilled in October 1992 with the promulgation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.\(^{38}\) The Catechism is a different type of document: while the other documents in this review were intended to address issues of method and rationale, the Catechism of the Catholic Church was designed to outline the teaching of the Church on matters of faith. As a result, although it does not comment on how catechesis in schools should be undertaken it does both affirm the place of Scripture in the Church and provide clear direction on how it is to be used. Inclusion of the CCC in this review is deliberate and important. As a compendium of faith, the Catechism is intended as a ‘point of reference’ for the composition of local catechisms (CCC 11). The view of Scripture it contains and the principles it articulates are important: those preparing catechetical material are arguably more likely to encounter a summary of the teaching of the Church here than they are anywhere else.

The Catechism is arranged according to the Creed. It begins by recalling God’s desire to be known by people and matches it with the human need to know God; created

\(^{38}\) The Catechism was promulgated on 11 October 1992, the thirtieth anniversary of the second Vatican Council.
by God, people are called to know and love God far beyond their natural capacity.\textsuperscript{39} However, \textit{CCC} notes that knowledge of God will always be limited. God transcends all and we must be vigilant not to confuse our language ‘imagebound or imperfect’ with the mystery of God (\textit{CCC} 42). In particular, we must be conscious that no matter what we compare God to, there will always be greater dissimilitude than similitude.\textsuperscript{40} Christians can never grasp what God really is, only ‘what he[sic] is not, and how other beings stand in relation to him[sic]’ (\textit{CCC} 43)\textsuperscript{41}

Although the \textit{Catechism} cites Scripture often, the section devoted to comment on it is comparatively small.\textsuperscript{42} In general, it recalls the points made in \textit{DV}.\textsuperscript{43} Scripture provides the story of salvation, from creation through the covenants with Noah and Abraham to the prophets and finally to Jesus, the fullness of revelation. Scripture is thus the source and strength of the faithful; access to it should be wide. Christian instruction, including catechetics ‘is healthily nourished and thrives in holiness through the Word of Scripture’ (\textit{CCC} 132).\textsuperscript{44}

For its instruction on how to use Scripture, \textit{CCC} again cites \textit{DV}. Scripture is God’s word in human language. Interpreters are to ‘be attentive to what the human authors wanted to affirm and what God wanted to reveal to us by their words’ (\textit{CCC} 102).\textsuperscript{45} Citing Thomas Aquinas, \textit{CCC} reminds exegetes to observe the literal sense, the sense conveyed by the actual words used, by following established rules of sound interpretation.\textsuperscript{46} Exegetes are to take into consideration the culture, models of writing and

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{CCC}, 52.\textsuperscript{40} \textit{CCC}, 43.\textsuperscript{41} Discussion on Scripture is contained in Article 3, Part One, The Profession of Faith.\textsuperscript{42} Of the fifty citations footnoted, twenty eight come from \textit{DV}.\textsuperscript{43} \textit{CCC}, 132 citing \textit{DV}, 24.\textsuperscript{44} \textit{CCC}, 102 citing \textit{DV}, 12.\textsuperscript{45} \textit{CCC}, 116.
literary genres used at the time. ‘For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in various types of historical writing’ (CCC 110).\textsuperscript{46} The \textit{Catechism} reminds exegetes that it is their responsibility to work toward ‘a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture’ so that the Church might gain a greater sense of what Scripture means (CCC 119). Ultimately, the Church, under the guidance of the Magisterium, has the role of watching over and interpreting the Word of God.\textsuperscript{47}

\subsection*{1.8 General Directory for Catechesis}

Publication of the \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church} necessitated a revision of the \textit{General Catechetical Directory}. Like its forerunner the \textit{General Directory for Catechesis}, published in August 1997, is addressed principally to Bishops, Episcopal Conferences and to those who have responsibility for catechesis.\textsuperscript{48} The document defines its own role as offering principles to guide and encourage each diocese as it develops its own guidelines for religious instruction according to its particular circumstance.

Although the document contains the most recent set of directives with regard to catechesis, in real terms it says nothing new. Rather, it affirms what has already been said. It recalls \textit{CT}’s claim that while all Scripture is important, the Gospels have a particular place in catechesis. It also insists that the message of Scripture must not be corrupted by poor adaptation. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of distinguishing

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\bibitem{46} CCC, 110 citing \textit{DV}, 12.
\bibitem{47} It is of note that in spite of containing much of worth about the indescribable nature of God and the limitations of human language, the use of exclusive language both for humans and God throughout the text places \textit{CCC} alarmingly outside its own teachings. Further, the extensive use of single verses to support doctrinal principles also brings into question the extent to which \textit{CCC} itself fulfils the requirements it espouses.
\end{thebibliography}
religious instruction from other forms of catechesis and the need for religious instruction in schools to be in keeping with other academic subjects.

Like many of the documents which precede it, GDC places catechesis within the evangelising mission of the Church. As a Ministry of the Word, catechesis must give prominence to the economy of revelation; the revelation of God, of God’s ‘innermost truth’, is the true vocation of the human person (GDC 41). It reaches its culmination in Jesus Christ, ‘the son of God [who] enters human history, assumes human life and death, and brings about the new and definitive covenant between God and man[sic]’ (GDC 41). It is the task of catechesis to introduce Jesus to those being catechised and to present Christian faith as adherence to his life and ministry.\(^49\) Catechetical activity will, therefore, always have as its content the Scriptures and, in particular, the Gospels (GDC 94).\(^50\)

In its directions on the use of Scripture the General Directory takes up and strengthens the call in CT that adaptation must never corrupt the message. The need to inculturate the message of Scripture into the particular social and cultural world of the learner is acknowledged. However, the ‘translation’ of Scripture is not without difficulty (GDC 94). Scripture is expressed in human words which ‘although close to us . . . still remains veiled’ (GDC 94).\(^51\) Inculturation should never be done at the expense of the integrity and purity of the message. ‘It [the Gospel message] may lose its very nature and savour if on the pretext of transposing its content into another language that content is rendered meaningless or is corrupted’ (GDC 112).\(^52\) A fundamental principle of catechesis is that of ‘safeguarding the integrity of the message and avoiding any partial

\(^{49}\) GDC, 41.
\(^{50}\) GDC, 94 citing CT, 27.
\(^{51}\) As a result, the Magisterium of the Church has the duty of ‘giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God.’ GCD, 96 citing DV, 10b.
\(^{52}\) GDC, 111 citing CT, 31.
or distorted presentation’ (GDC 111). This principle should be accomplished by presenting the message gradually, ‘more amply and with greater explicitness’ in accordance with the abilities of those being taught (GDC 112).

Although The General Directory does not advocate any particular method or approach, it emphasizes the ‘absolute necessity’ of distinguishing religious instruction in schools from other forms of catechesis (GDC 73). Religious instruction, although an original Ministry of the Word, is intended for a formal educational setting. It must appear ‘as a scholastic discipline’ which is comparable to other areas of learning (GDC 73, 74).

Religious instruction must present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same systematic demands, rigour and seriousness as other disciplines (GDC 73).

Religious instruction should never appear as an accessory to the curriculum, rather it should be integral to it, so that every aspect of the students’ personality is touched by it.

1.9 Summary
In this review, relevant Church documents promulgated during and since Vatican II have been examined in order to establish the desires of the Church with regard to the use of Scripture in catechesis, including religious instruction that occurs in Catholic Schools. Six clear principles for those responsible for catechetical programmes are evident.

1. Scripture is the inspiration for catechesis and the source of the content to be taught.
The Church is unequivocal in the view that Scripture is critical to catechesis. As a Ministry of the Word, catechesis finds its inspiration and nourishment in Scripture.

Scripture contains the revelation of a God who desires to be known and loved. In the

53 Religious instruction in schools is to be complemented by liturgical celebration and homilies. However, religious instruction is to be understood as indispensable to the pedagogical function of these other forms of catechesis.
person of Christ, God’s revelation reaches its summit. Scripture thus contains the whole mystery of God; it is valid for all time. Within the context of catechesis, the Gospels, those books which contain the words and actions of Jesus of Nazareth, are particularly important.

Furthermore, an extended understanding of the role of Scripture is expressed in both CT and the General Directory. In their naming of Scripture as the source of the content of catechesis, they signal an important understanding. God’s word, expressed in and through Scripture not only provides the impetus for catechesis, it is the very subject matter. This direction significantly increases the status of Scripture in religious instruction. Scripture is the very substance of the learning; it is the basis of what is to be learned. The need for use of Scripture that is of the highest standard is, therefore, crucial.

2. Those being taught must have regular and assiduous contact with the actual text. The Church insists that Scripture is both the inspiration for catechesis and its content material. As a result, those being catechised must be provided with regular access to Scripture itself. Catechesis which removes students from the actual text of Scripture denies them contact with the very material which is the basis of their study. Moreover, in calling for assiduous contact with Scripture, the notion that the use of Scripture is to be attentive to its historical and literary facets is implied, if not explicitly stated.

3. Scripture must be read with the intelligence and heart of the Church.
Scripture is the source for the content of catechesis. It follows then that it should be read and interpreted in a manner that enables what it says to be transmitted faithfully.

Three documents, REF, CT and CCC, explicitly call for interpretation to be done in the light of accepted exegesis of the Church. Others assume the use of exegetical method in the many references to advancements brought about by critical scholarship. Scripture is written in human language; it is the product of a particular time and place. Knowledge of the culture, historical setting and of the literary forms used is necessary for a valid interpretation. It is evident then, that while no specific method or approach to biblical interpretation is named, the use of interpretation in keeping with the Church’s current directions is anticipated.

4. Any adaptation of Scripture, necessary to meet the educational and cultural needs of students, should be undertaken with patience, wisdom and without betrayal of the message.

In calling for the adaptation of Scripture to be undertaken with wisdom and patient, the Church highlights that adapting Scripture is a difficult and complicated task. Any adaptation considered necessary should be undertaken by those whose own knowledge and understanding of the processes of interpreting Scripture is extensive. What the author intended to convey must remain intact; the adaptation of Scripture should never corrupt or distort the message. Those being catechized have a right to experience Scripture whole and entire, without mutilation or falsification. Indeed, material taught erroneously at one
stage of learning has serious consequences for any subsequent learning. At every point in its use fidelity to Scripture and the needs of the faithful is critical; together these comprise ‘the ultimate criterion by which catechists’, and by extension religious instruction teachers, ‘must appraise their work as educators.’\textsuperscript{54} Any unfaithfulness to the integrity of the message contained in Scripture, either deliberately or unintentionally, means a dangerous weakening of catechesis.\textsuperscript{55}

5. Scripture should be introduced systematically to meet the developmental needs and capacities of students.

The Church avoids mandating any particular programme or approach. However, it is adamant that Scripture should be introduced with increasing complexity according to the abilities of students. Scripture use should begin with a simple presentation of the Christian story and then develop into a more detailed and explicit study. Religious instruction should avoid reducing the contents of Scripture to a superficial presentation of people and events; rather it should aim for genuine understanding of texts.

6. Sound educational processes are to be applied to religious instruction; it must appear as an academic study similar to any other subject in the curriculum.

Although the Church still insists that religious instruction is a Ministry of the Word, in Catholic Schools it has a function different from other forms of catechesis: its aim is the acquisition of knowledge. Lessons should be taught with rigour and seriousness and in accord with the stated goals of the programme. The principle that religious instruction

\textsuperscript{54}REF, 160.
\textsuperscript{55}REF, 30.
function as an academic study adds significantly to the Church’s expectations with regard to Scripture. In insisting that religious instruction is a serious scholastic activity, the Church places the authentic, academically sound use of Scripture at the forefront of all religious instruction. Any use of Scripture which does not accord it the same seriousness and care as the content of other subjects is totally unacceptable.

Conclusion

The principles of the Church regarding the use of Scripture in religious instruction are encouraging. They stress the seriousness with which the Church takes the use of Scripture in religious instruction. Of the six principles drawn from this review, five provide clear and specific guidelines for the teaching of religious instruction. However, one, the direction that Scripture should be used within the accepted exegesis of the Church, while clear in principle, does not give precise directions regarding method. Perhaps understandably, no document provides a clear description of what accepted exegesis of the Church might entail.56 Before finally determining a set of principles which should underpin the presentation of Scripture in Religious Education, clarification of what is understood as accepted exegesis of the Church must be sought. This review, therefore, moves to documents which direct the use of Scripture in all Church activity, to ascertain more clearly the heart and mind of the Church.

THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE CHURCH

56 The documents reviewed pertain to catechesis, including that which occurs in Catholic schools. In that sense their focus is on the establishment of general principles rather than specific details. However, in its insistence that catechesis is a Ministry of the Word, the Church places a governing set of rules over catechesis; its use of Scripture is to adhere to the same rules which apply to all those who use God’s Word in Church endeavours.
This review now moves to the use of Scripture in the Church, and specifically to what can be considered legitimate or authentic exegesis. It does so by reviewing key Church documents which have directed the use of Scripture over the past 150 years. Each document is examined with the single purpose of gaining an understanding of what it has contributed to the field of biblical study by way of the principles it articulates for the use and interpretation of Scripture. The review begins with Providentissimus Deus, the first encyclical specifically concerning the use of Scripture issued after Vatican I, before moving to examination of Spiritus Paraclitus and Divino Afflante Spiritu. The Biblical Commission instruction on the historical truth of the Gospels, Instructio de historica evangeliorum veritate is the fourth document reviewed. Dei Verbum and The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, the most recent set of Church guidelines on the use of Scripture, conclude this review.

2.1 Providentissimus Deus

Providentissimus Deus was published more than in 150 years ago in November 1893, primarily in response to the emergence of biblical criticism that had been prompted by recent archaeological discoveries. Although the encyclical is clearly a document of its time, one which expresses a strong need to protect Scripture, it is the first explicit statement made by the Church on the interpretation of the Bible. Three points are relevant to note for this study. First, PD actively affirms and encourages the need for Scripture study, particularly the study of its original languages. Second, it attempts to clarify the

purpose of Scripture. Third, it hints at the need for study outside Scripture to determine its historical setting.

Pope Leo XIII begins by placing the encyclical within the context of his own writing and the work of his predecessors. Having already encouraged ‘others branches of study’ Leo XIII now desires to give impetus to the study of Scripture (PD 2). Indeed, the protection of Scripture, against those who are perceived to be attacking it, appears as the primary concern of the document.58

Leo XIII’s primary line of defense is to direct Seminaries and Academic Institutions to investigate Scripture. Study should be orderly and thorough and follow ‘a definite and ascertained method of interpretation’ (PD 13). It should begin by training students to ‘investigate and ascertain the true sense of Scripture and how to meet and refute objections’, but it should also pay attention to the interpretation of Scripture (PD 13). While the Vulgate is to be the ordinary text, ‘the meaning of words, the connection of ideas, the parallelism of passages and the like’ should be explored through the use of other ancient manuscripts (PD 13).59 Study of ‘the tongues in which the sacred Books were originally written’ is encouraged (PD 17). Leo XIII notes that while ancient texts may be difficult to understand, the language of the Bible constitutes a particular problem as it is ‘employed to express . . . many things which are beyond the power and scope of men[sic]’ (PD 14). Scholars are to work with the ‘literal and obvious sense’ but they should not neglect those passages which the Fathers have understood as allegorical or

58 PD, 10. Among those singled out for rebuke are theologians and Christians who are using a form of rational criticism to question the authority of the Bible. Leo XIII denounces claims that the Scripture narratives are ‘stupid fables and lying stories’, that the prophecies are made up after the event and that the miracles are tricks or myths. PD, 10 ‘Should not these things . . . stir up and set on fire the heart of every Pastor so that . . . Holy Scripture may find the champions that are needed in so momentous a battle.’ PD, 10.
59 The use of other manuscripts is never to be at the expense of the canonical texts which should hold primary place.
figurative, more especially when such interpretation is justified by a literal interpretation \((PD\ 15)\).

\(PD\) makes two further contributions to the study of Scripture. While Leo XIII argues strongly from the position of the inerrancy of Scripture the encyclical signals the acceptance of two important principles. One concerns the purpose of Scripture. Those who ‘minutely scrutinize’ Scripture in order to detect scientific errors are foolish \((PD\ 18)\). No discrepancy between theologian and scientist is possible ‘as long as each confines himself[ sic] within his own lines’ \((PD\ 18)\). Scripture was not intended to teach the nature of the universe, ‘in no way profitable to salvation’ \((PD\ 18)\).\(^{60}\) It should not be used against those who seek to understand the scientific nature of things. The other contribution concerns a form of ‘higher criticism’ which judges the origins, integrity and authority of each book by using internal indications alone \((PD\ 17)\). In the observation that internal evidence alone is seldom of great value in answering historical questions, Leo XIII alerts to the need to go beyond the actual texts to ‘historical evidence’ concerning the origin and handing down of works \((PD\ 17)\).

In spite of making significant moves towards a more contextual understanding of Scripture \(PD\) maintains a conservative approach to Scripture. Ultimately, with God as its author the Bible is free from error \((PD\ 15)\). Interpretation which makes the sacred writers disagree with one another or which opposes the doctrine of the Church is either foolish or false.\(^ {61}\) In matters of Christian Doctrine, the Church is to judge the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures. Leo XIII concludes by summoning all scholars to adhere to the principles outlined and to exert themselves ‘with willing alacrity’ so that the study

\(^{60}\) Leo XIII observes that greater attention to literary form and the presence of figurative language in Scripture might be a possible avenue of reconciliation in disputes between Scripture and science.

\(^{61}\) \(PD,\ 14.\)
of Scripture might flourish and in due course, ‘be extended and widened as the interests and glory of truth may require’ (PD 25).

2.2 Spiritus Paraclitus

Twenty seven years later, in September 1920, the encyclical Spiritus Paraclitus was promulgated by Benedict XV. Its purpose was three-fold: to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Jerome, to encourage the work begun by Benedict’s predecessors; and, to direct study ‘more precisely to the present needs of the Church’ (SP 1). The encyclical develops Leo XIII’s understanding of inerrancy and explains more comprehensively the definition of the literal sense of Scripture. It takes a significantly more conservative approach to the purpose of Scripture than expressed in PD though, in that it explicitly warns against study which questions the authorship of the Gospels.

Benedict XV begins by affirming Jerome’s adherence to the absolute truth of Scripture. However, his recognition that Scripture is the product of a partnership between God and the author initiates a more sophisticated understanding of inspiration and inerrancy. Even though each author wrote under the Spirit of God, they did so according to their own gifts and powers, evident by their particular manner of composition, language, style and mode of expression (SP 9). Any discrepancies and errors found in

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63 Much of the document is devoted to reflection on the life and work of Jerome which becomes the framework on which Benedict XV structures his directions for the study and use of Scripture.

64 SP, 18.
texts therefore do not belong to God, the ultimate author of Scripture, but rather to its human authors, who ‘being mere men[sic], sometimes err’ (SP 14, 17).65

In directing areas for attention, SP reiterates much of what had been called for by Leo XIII. Study of Scripture should begin by determining what is called its literal sense: that is, what is actually written. Careful study of the actual words is necessary ‘so that we might be perfectly certain what the writer really does say’ (SP 50). Those examining Scripture ‘should study the beginning, middle and end and so form a connected idea of the whole of what he[sic] finds written’ (SP 51). All interpretation of Scripture rests foremost on ascertaining its literal sense.66

Although SP continues Leo XIII’s call for the study of Scripture, Benedict XV takes a more cautious approach than his predecessor regarding its purpose. In particular, he warns against ‘rash and false’ interpretations of Leo XIII’s claim that Scripture is not concerned with historical or scientific realities (SP 20). ‘If Leo does say that “we can apply to history and cognate sciences the same principle which holds good for science” this is not a universal law’ (SP 23). Benedict XV also cautions against those who question the authorship and writing of the Gospels. Those who deny ‘the things Christ said or did have come to us unchanged and entire through witnesses who carefully committed to writing what they themselves had seen or heard’ threaten and weaken the authority of Scripture (SP 27). While the profane authors of Scripture might have erred, the Apostles did not.67

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65 New critical methods to ‘discover new ways of explaining the difficulties in Holy Scripture’ are to be encouraged. SP, 18.
66 SP, 50.
67 SP, 14.
Benedict XV concludes by hoping that Jerome’s example will ‘fire both clergy and laity with enthusiasm for the study of the Bible’ (SP 58). Bishops are urged to ‘hold fast’ to the principles laid down in PD and this encyclical so that all people ‘being saturated with the Bible may arrive at the all surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (SP 69).

2.3 *Divino Afflante Spiritu*

In 1943 Pius XII celebrated the 50th anniversary of *Providentissimus Deus* by publishing the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.  The encyclical was intended to offer support for the critical study of Scripture against those who wanted to move from a scientific approach toward one which was more meditative or spiritual. Widely recognised as heralding a new era in biblical scholarship, *DAS* is the first document to confidently authorise the set of procedures which would eventually become known as the Historical-Critical method. The contribution of *DAS* comes in two important assertions. First, *DAS* declares that the authors of Scripture were a product of their time. Interpretation of Scripture is, therefore, dependent not only on a clear understanding of what the authors wrote but when, how and why they wrote. Second, *DAS* insists that correct identification of literary form is integral to a valid interpretation of Scripture. In addition, *DAS* provides

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68 Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (hereafter *DAS*) *Encyclical of Pope Pius XII on promoting Biblical studies, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Providentissimus Deus*


70 Fitzmyer notes that although it was almost ten years before the effect of *DAS* was felt due to its promulgation during World War II. He calls it a liberating document, one which renewed the Catholic Biblical movement dramatically. Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission’s Document*, 20.
a definitive answer to the question of purpose which had plagued Leo XIII and Benedict XV.

*DAS* begins by reaffirming Scripture as the most precious source of faith, and by praising the significant developments in biblical studies and archaeology in the previous fifty years.  

In particular, it urges that the study of biblical and other oriental languages should be continued. As much remains to be done, work should now proceed without interruption.

More than any of his predecessors before him Pius XII offers clear and specific directions on the manner in which the study of Scripture is to be undertaken. Exegetes are to begin by applying the rules of textual criticism to ensure the biblical text is as near to the original as is possible. Passages are to be freed from corruptions, omissions and the interchange or repetition of words ‘which are wont to make their way gradually into writings handed down through many centuries.’ (*DAS* 17).

Having determined the most accurate text, exegetes are then to turn to the greatest task of all, that of ‘discovering and expounding the genuine meaning of the Sacred Books’ (*DAS* 23). *DAS* repeats the call in *PD* and *SP* that interpretation should always begin by defining clearly the literal sense of the words. Scholars are to use every method and aid available to help them; the context of the passage, other similar passages and their own knowledge of languages, all are to be utilized. However, it is Pius XII’s specific call to exegetes to take account of ‘the peculiar character and circumstances of the sacred writer, the age in which he lived, the sources, written and oral to which he had recourse and the forms of expression he employed’ which marks this document as especially

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71 *DAS*, 2.
72 Pius XII observes that this form of criticism has ‘become a most valuable aid to the purer and more accurate editing of the sacred text.’ *DAS*, 18.
significant (*DAS* 33). *SP* had previously accepted that each author wrote according to their own style. *DAS* now insists that knowledge not only of the particular setting within which they wrote but their use of oral and written sources must be ascertained.

Interpreters must not limit their study of Scripture to the text they see before them. Rather, they must ‘go back wholly in spirit to those remote centuries of the East and with the aid of history, archaeology, ethnology and other sciences, accurately determine what models of writing, so to speak, the authors of the ancient period would be likely to use and did in fact use’ (*DAS* 35). In doing so, they will find a variety of literary forms and devices: poetic and figurative language, legal language, approximations, hyperbole or paradox; no mode of expression is excluded from the sacred books (*DAS* 37).

Once the manner of expression or literary form is identified, commentators should then determine how this form is to be interpreted.73 *DAS* stresses that the identification of literary form is not an isolated academic exercise in itself. Correct identification of literary form is critical in that it informs and enables a valid interpretation of what is being said. The commentator should ‘be convinced that this part of his[sic] office cannot be neglected without serious detriment to Catholic exegesis’ (*DAS* 38).

Finally, *DAS* takes up and settles the differing views on the purpose of Scripture, expressed by Leo XIII and Benedict XV.74 Leo XIII was correct to claim that the purpose of Scripture was not to teach ‘things of the universe’; rather the Bible’s authors were interested in matters ‘profitable to salvation’ (*DAS* 3). They are, therefore, not to be ‘taxed with error’ if they spoke of things of the physical order either in figurative

73 *DAS*, 38.
74 *DAS* recalls Leo’s claim that the use of figurative language may be used in defense of Scripture against attack by those in the field of science. This principle is now extended to include those in ‘cognate sciences and history’ who similarly attack the Bible. *DAS*, 3.
language or in terms commonly used at the time (DAS 3).\(^{75}\) ‘This teaching which our predecessor Leo XIII set forth with such solemnity, We also proclaim with Our authority and We urge all to adhere to it religiously’ (DAS 4).

Pius XII concludes by commending the use of all human knowledge in the search for greater understanding of Scripture.\(^{76}\) Biblical scholars should work with zeal, vigor and care so that, ‘through their assiduous labours, the faithful may comprehend all the splendor, stimulating language and joy contained in the Holy Scriptures’ (DAS 61).

**2.4 Instructio de historica evangeliorum veritate**

*Instructio de historica evangeliorum veritate*, the Instruction concerning the Historical Truth of the Gospels was issued in April 1964, while the second Vatican Council was in session.\(^{77}\) It is important to note that Paul VI directed production of this instruction during significant debate on the contents of *Dei Verbum*. The direction that the *PBC* should prepare a statement on the Gospels during this discussion can, therefore, be seen as an attempt to settle some of the questions being raised at the Council.\(^{78}\) It is also important to note that this document is an instruction; it represents an official explanation

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\(^{75}\) Discussion about the debate on whether the Bible can be said to comment on matters of science or history are concluded with this statement.

\(^{76}\) *DAS*, 41.


\(^{78}\) *HTG*, III. The Pontifical Biblical Commission (hereafter *PBC*) is a group of Catholic Cardinals and biblical scholars who are responsible for matters which pertain to the Bible and to biblical interpretation. The Commission is charged with the protection and defense of Catholic Faith in biblical matters; the progression of the exposition of Scripture, taking account of all recent discoveries; determining matters of question; providing answers to specific consultations; ensuring that the Vatican Library is maintained and the publishing of studies on Scripture as occasion may demand. Although the Commission is not an official agent of the Magisterium it enjoys the support and confidence of the Magisterium.
concerning the implementation of an existing Church law.\textsuperscript{79} Given by the authority which oversees matters concerning the law in question, as an instruction the \textit{HTG} can neither add to nor delete anything; its purpose is explanatory only.

\textit{HTG} makes three specific contributions to the study of Scripture. Unlike the documents which precede it, \textit{HTG} does not speak of Scripture generally. Rather, it only focuses on the Gospels. While it asks for nothing more than \textit{DAS} did in terms of the study and interpretation of Scripture, \textit{HTG} provides a detailed description of three stages in the development of the Gospels. This makes a clear and significant point; the authors of the Gospels are as much subject to the condition and circumstances of their time as are the other authors of Scripture. The second contribution \textit{HTG} makes concerns the notion of truth. In its claim that the truth of the Gospels is not affected by the fact that the writers record things differently, the Commission articulates a more comprehensive and sophisticated sense of truth than previously expressed. A third contribution relates to what \textit{HTG} demonstrates. By endorsing application of the Historical-Critical method to the Gospels, the Commission encourages, by example, application of its procedures to other areas of Scripture.

It is appropriate that the Commission begins by placing \textit{HTG} directly in line with \textit{DAS}. By opening with a reminder of Pius XII’s call to exegetes to ‘adhere to the norms of rational and Catholic hermeneutics . . . above all those which the historical method, taken in its widest sense, offers to him[sic]’ the Commission make explicit the status of the document as an instruction. What the \textit{HTG} elucidates is neither new nor unreasonable (\textit{HTG IV}). On the contrary, the \textit{PBC} argues it is essential, so that the ‘abiding truth and authority of the Gospels [may be revealed] in their full light’ (\textit{HTG IV}).

Having established its purpose, the Commission turns immediately to the application of the method in their description of three stages in the development of the Gospels. Initially, Christ chose disciples who followed him, heard his words and saw his deeds. In his lifetime he spoke in the manner of his day ‘using modes of reasoning and of exposition which were in vogue at the time’ so that his listeners could understand and remember \(HTG\) VII).

The death and resurrection of Jesus marks the beginning of a second stage in the development of the Gospels. In their interactions with people, the disciples, witnesses to the life of Jesus, proclaimed what they had seen and heard. They too used modes of speaking suited to their purpose and to the circumstances of the people to whom they spoke, among them ‘catechesis, stories, testimonia, hymns, doxologies, prayers and other literary forms which were in Sacred Scripture and were accustomed to be used by men[sic] of that time’ \(HTG\) VIII). Eventually, this instruction, ‘at first passed on by word of mouth’, was committed to writing by the sacred authors \(HTG\) IX).

The actual composition of the Gospels represents the third stage in the process of their development. The Commission goes to some lengths to explain why the evangelists wrote accounts which differ from each other. From the many accounts and sayings handed down to them each evangelist selected those events and stories which suited the specific situations of the faithful for whom they wrote. They reduced, adapted, re-ordered and explained passages, all according to the needs of their audience. As a result, it is imperative that exegetes seek out what each evangelist meant in recounting events or sayings as they did. Indeed, ‘unless the exegete pays attention to all things which pertain to the origin and composition of the Gospels and makes proper use of all the laudable
achievements of recent research, he[sic] will not fulfill his[sic] task of probing into what the sacred writers intended and what they really said’ (HTG X).

Although this represents a shift in thinking, the Commission is adamant that none of this detracts from the truth and authority of the Gospels. ‘The truth of the story is not affected at all by the fact that the Evangelists relate the words and deeds of the Lord in a different order and express his sayings not literally but differently, while preserving its sense’ (HTG IX). For the Commission, truth is something much more than simple agreement between texts; truth has to do with maintaining the ‘sense’ of a passage. Difference, in the recording of the life and words of Jesus does not affect the truth of the Gospels. This insistence marks HTG as a document which takes a significant step toward a nuanced interpretation of Scripture; one which acknowledges its sources, style, purpose and culture, and away from a fundamentalist one.

The final contribution HTG makes is an unwritten one. SP had distinguished the authors of the Gospels from other Scripture authors, a separation most likely a result of the deep respect attached to the Gospels. By explicitly demonstrating how use of the Historical-Critical method has enabled better understanding of the Gospels, the PBC gives unspoken encouragement to the application of its principles to Scripture in general. If the method is suitable for the Gospels, it must be suitable for all Scripture.

The PBC concludes by encouraging all those who teach in seminaries and other similar institutions to practise ‘the art of criticism’, particularly the art of literary criticism so that all might have a clearer understanding of what God intended through the sacred writer (HTG XII). Those who publish for the faithful should proceed with prudence, exploiting ‘all the real advances of biblical science which the diligence of recent students
has produced’ (HTG XIV). If these things are observed the study of sacred Scripture will continue to be of benefit to all the faithful.

2.5 Dei Verbum

A year after publication of HTG, Vatican II finally promulgated Dei Verbum. As noted above, DV was written in difficult circumstances. Although critical scholarship of the Bible had been recognised in the Church since DAS, detractors of the practice considered it an unnecessary and invasive assault on the Sacred Text. As a result, the wording of the document was highly contentious.  

DV makes two important contributions to this aspect of study. First, it inextricably links the relationship between truth and literary form. Second, while the document claims little more than either DAS or HTG, DV is a Dogmatic Constitution. In the context of being a Church document, constitutions refer substantially to doctrinal matters. They are the most solemn and formal type of document issued by an Ecumenical Council. DV stands, therefore, as the most authoritative of all the documents reviewed.

The Church’s directions concerning the interpretation of Scripture are found in Chapter III. In contrast to HTG, DV offers broad principles only, all of which, although previously articulated, are now stated with the full authority of the entire Church.

Scripture has been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God chose writers

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80 The original schema was presented under the name The Two-fold Source of Revelation, in the first session in November 1962. It was not received well. However, on a vote it did not gain the necessary two third majority needed to send it back for further work. It was finally returned to a special commission for reworking under the direct intervention of John XXIII. After significant rewriting, including another presentation in 1964 which was again rejected, it was finally promulgated in 1965. McBrien, (Ed.) Encyclopedia of Catholicism, 425.


82 Scripture is the focus of Chapters III, IV, V and VI. Chapters IV and V however focus on the authority of the Old and New Testaments but add nothing to discussion on the interpretation or place of Scripture in the life of the church.
who made full use of their human powers and faculties to consign to writing what God wanted written ‘and no more’ (DV 11). The words of God in Scripture are, therefore, ‘expressed in the words of men[sic] . . . in every way like human language’ (DV 13). As a result, interpretation of Scripture must begin by carefully searching out the meaning ‘which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of [the sacred writers’] words’ (DV 12). DV reiterates that attention must be paid to the culture and time of writing and to the particular literary form employed, ‘both [to] the customary and characteristic patterns of perception, speech and narrative which prevailed at the age of the sacred writer’ (DV 12).

More than any previous document DV is insistent about the reason for careful study of the language of Scripture. While HTG noted that the truth of the Gospels was not affected by any difference in detail, DV goes further to finally and openly link the truth of a message to its literary form. Attention to literary form does not constitute a nicety in the study of Scripture, it is crucial to it; ‘for the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of…literary expression’ (DV 12). DV reiterates that both Scripture and the Tradition constitute a single entity and that the task of giving an authentic interpretation will always belong to the Church.

The Council conclude by reiterating the importance of Scripture in the Church: ‘The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerates the Body of the Lord…Scripture [is] the supreme rule of her faith’ (DV 21). All Christian activity, including ‘preaching, catechetics and all forms of Christian instruction’ should be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture (DV 24). Catholic exegetes are called to work

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83 This point is first made in paragraph 12 where the document states that God speaks ‘through men[sic] in human fashion.’ DV, 12.
‘zealously’, according to the rules laid out in DV towards a better understanding of Scripture so that ‘as many as possible of those who are ministers of the divine Word may be able to distribute fruitfully the nourishment of the Scriptures to the People of God’ (DV 23).84

2.6 The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church

In 1993 The Pontifical Biblical Commission released The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Divino Afflante Spiritu.85 Like most of the documents which precede it IBC was released in response to criticism, in this case that the Historical-Critical method was giving rise to a plurality of interpretations and was devoid of faith.86 The Commission replied by outlining and assessing current methods and approaches, and finally, by determining ‘more precisely the direction which best corresponds to the mission of exegesis in the Catholic Church.’87

As the most recent publication of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the IBC contains the current directives on the use and interpretation of Scripture in the life of the Church. Indeed, it contains the most thorough description of methods of biblical interpretation given by the Church. What follows, therefore, is considerably more detailed than the comments regarding the previous documents. Comment is divided into three areas, each one reflecting a particular contribution of the document. Clearly the

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84 Schneiders notes that the call to work zealously was taken up almost immediately. Summer schools, seminars, lecture circuits, retreats and in-services designed to explore the new place of Scripture quickly emerged. Catholic biblical scholars plunged into their work in earnest, quickly becoming a force to be reckoned with; previously held away from the text they became a ‘people of the book.’ Sandra Schneiders, “The Bible in Feminism” in La Cugna, C. (Ed.) Freeing Theology (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 33.
86 IBC, 31.
87 IBC, 32.
most significant contribution is that *IBC* confirms the use of the Historical-Critical method. This review begins by thoroughly examining the method considered best for determining the literal sense of Scripture. It describes the procedures the Historical-Critical method employs, limitations which surround its use and the achievements it has allowed.

In direct contrast, the second area of comment pertains to the only method of interpretation rejected by the Commission. A fundamentalist interpretation ignores every feature of Scripture to which the Historical-Critical method draws attention. It is, therefore, incompatible with a legitimate and valid interpretation. As such, the second contribution *IBC* makes is that it clearly explains what is to be avoided. Finally, *IBC* is the only document reviewed to offer an opinion of what the presentation of Scripture in catechesis should aim to achieve. As a result, the third area of this review focuses on how Scripture is to be used in catechesis.

Fifty years earlier *DAS* had instructed exegetes to determine the literal sense of Scripture; ‘the precise meaning of the texts as produced by their authors’. 88 To enable this, Pius XII had directed study of the languages in which Scripture was written and examination of the literary structure and form of passages. Moreover, Pius XII had insisted that account of the historical circumstances of writing be given due consideration. The Commission now reiterates this call in its insistence that ‘it is absolutely necessary to seek to define the precise meaning of texts as produced by their authors - what is called the “literal” meaning.’ 89 The Commission makes it clear that a literal sense is very different from a literalist one. Ascertaining the literal sense of a

88 *DAS*, 23.
89 *IBC*, 78.
passage is not simply a matter of conducting a word for word translation. It is about ascertaining what has been expressed by the author, through undertaking careful analysis of the passage using all the resources of historical and literary criticism available. 

One must understand the text according to the literary conventions of the time. When a text is metaphorical its literal sense is not that which flows immediately from a word to word translation, but that which corresponds to the metaphorical use of these terms. When it is a question of a story the literal sense does not necessarily imply that the facts recounted actually took place, for a story need not belong to the genre of history but be instead a work of imaginative fiction.90

Ascertaining the literal sense of a passage is enhanced by determining its genre and subsequently how what is written should be interpreted. It leads to a ‘more precise understanding of the truth of Sacred Scripture.’91 The Historical-Critical method is the means deemed the best at determining a literal sense and thus to facilitate a valid, legitimate interpretation.92

In description of the method IBC begins by noting that the name reflects the manner in which study of Scripture is undertaken. The method is historical, not just because Scripture is an ancient text, but because the method attempts to situate Scripture within the historical context in which it was composed. The method also attempts to gain a sense of the historical processes which have given rise to the text of Scripture we have today. The Historical-Critical method is called a critical method as it operates with the help of ‘scientific’ criteria that ‘seek to be as objective as possible.’93 'As an analytical

90 IBC, 79.
91 IBC, 39.
92 The IBC describes and affirms a range of approaches to Scripture interpretation including those based on the Tradition, the Human Sciences and Contextual interests. Each of these is considered to offer an added understanding of the text when used in conjunction with the Historical-Critical method. IBC, 41-68.
93 IBC, 37. Use of the phrase ‘seek to be’ is important. In stating that the Historical-Critical method attempts to be as objective as possible, the commission acknowledges that no method can claim to provide a totally objective interpretation of Scripture. Indeed, while the Historical-Critical method is considered the best at ascertaining the literal sense of a passage, other methods for studying the Bible are considered
method it studies the biblical text in the same fashion as it would study any other ancient
text and comment upon it as an expression of discourse.\textsuperscript{94}

Investigating Scripture from an historical critical perspective involves examining
it from a variety of distinct but complementary perspectives. Textual criticism compares
different manuscripts of the same work in order to determine which versions are the
oldest and, therefore, likely to be the closest to the original.\textsuperscript{95} Textual criticism also seeks
to establish if manuscripts belong to a particular tradition or group of people. It provides
interpreters with a biblical text as close to the original as possible with which to work.
Once the most original version is determined, study of the structure and grammar is
undertaken. Linguistics, sometimes called Philology, subjects a passage to intense
examination of the parts that make up its whole.\textsuperscript{96} The particular phrases and words used
in the text are identified as is the overall structure of the work. Linguistics also notes the
grammar of a passage and tries to gain a sense of its meaning within the broader context
of the paragraph and work. Literary or source criticism is then able to determine where an
individual passage begins and ends. Literary criticism pays particular attention to the
‘internal congruence’ of a work so that anything which suggests that the writing is a
composite work or has been edited or adapted might be noted.\textsuperscript{97} It also attempts to
identify any sources on which a passage might depend.

Having determined the structure and size of a passage, genre criticism then
ascertains its literary form. By identifying the specific genre of a passage, whether, for

\textsuperscript{94} IBC, 37.
\textsuperscript{95} IBC, 38.
\textsuperscript{96} IBC, 38.
\textsuperscript{97} IBC, 38.
example it is a poem, speech, saying or narrative, exegetes are then able to determine how it should be interpreted. While each of the methods is important in their own right, the significance of genre criticism in assisting an authentic interpretation of a passage is not to be overlooked. Genre criticism also seeks to ascertain the particular social context or life setting of a work. Tradition criticism focuses on the development of a particular form within the living tradition of a community. It seeks to understand how the traditions of the Bible are used by other biblical writers; how the Gospel writers for example draw on traditions in the First Testament. Finally, Redaction criticism attempts to determine if a passage has been modified or altered since its original writing. It helps to distinguish what was written by the actual author from what was added by editors, or redactors, in later editing. Redaction criticism thus assists in determining the particular circumstances surrounding the production of a work. ‘At this point the text is explained as its stands on the basis of the mutual relationships between its diverse elements and with an eye to its character as a message communicated by the author to his[sic] contemporaries.’

The Commission notes that while the Historical-Critical method represents the best possible way in which to examine Scripture, it does have limitations. When used in an appropriate manner the method provides the foundations necessary for an authentic interpretation. However, interpretation may be rendered corrupt and tendentious if use of the Historical-Critical method is ‘accompanied by a priori principles.’ Tendentious...
interpretation results when Scripture is used to promote or support a particular predefined cause or viewpoint. Instead of being respectful of Scripture in its own right, tendentious use exploits it for its own preset, narrow purposes only. It is incompatible with correct use of the Historical-Critical method and with an authentic interpretation.\textsuperscript{102}

The Commission observes that sound use of the Historical-Critical method has resulted in significant advancement in the understanding of Scripture. It has revealed that the Bible is a collection of writings and not a single unified publication. Similarly, it has shown that each of the writings found in the Bible has a long pre-history, one intimately tied to the community from which it came. It has also enabled the development of biblical theology and the publication of commentaries. The most important advancement brought about by use of the Historical-Critical method is that it has enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the literal sense of a passage. Its use has, therefore, ‘made it possible to understand far more accurately the intention of the authors and editors of the Bible, as well as the message which they addressed to their first readers.’\textsuperscript{103} The method is to be given ‘importance of the highest order.’\textsuperscript{104}

The second contribution \textit{IBC} makes is that it clearly identifies the kind of use of Scripture that is to be avoided. While many approaches are considered appropriate when accompanied by the Historical-Critical method, one approach is considered inappropriate at all levels: fundamentalist interpretation.\textsuperscript{105} Fundamentalist interpretation is defined as

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\item exegesis recognise their own predispositions in their interpretation, and, second, that they remain open to interpretations which may challenge or contradict their own mindset.
\item The document gives a number of examples of tendentious use; that used by Jehovah’s Witnesses; to justify racial segregation or sexism and that used to justify hatred of the Jews. \textit{IBC}, 117.
\item \textit{IBC}, 37.
\item \textit{IBC}, 37.
\item In total, the document reviews five other groups of approaches. Approaches that take a literary focus include Rhetorical analysis, Narrative analysis and Semiotic analysis. Rhetorical analysis attends to two aspects of a text. First, attention is paid to the manner in which persuasive language and techniques are
\end{itemize}
one that begins from the premise that Scripture is free from all error and that it should, therefore, be read and interpreted verbatim. While the Commission recognises that much fundamentalist interpretation results from an intense desire to be faithful to the text, such a ‘naively literalist interpretation’ refuses to acknowledge that the Bible has been used. Noting the rhetorical features found in Scripture is normally part of examining its philological characteristics, so this type of analysis does not constitute a new method. However, more recently a style of rhetorical analysis has developed which attempts to investigate how a passage acts upon and influences its audience. Such analysis has enriched critical study of the Bible by focusing on Scripture as an important means of communication. A second literary approach, Narrative Analysis, is also described. Narrative analysis considers Scripture from the point of view of a story or personal testimony. Attention is, therefore, paid to the plot, characters and stance of the narrator, as well as how a passage engages its audience in a ‘narrative world.’ IBC, 45. Semiotic Analysis, the third literary approach, is based on three principles. First, each text forms a unit of meaning that is complete in itself. Attention to the history of a text, for example the audience for which it was intended, is therefore, irrelevant. Second, meaning of a given passage is found through consideration of the internal relationships it contains. Analysis of elements of a passage, and in particular those elements of difference, enable interpretation. Third, the grammar of a passage, the ways in which it conforms to rules or established structures is noted. Semiotic analysis has made a positive contribution to the field of biblical study by directing attention to the fact that each biblical text is a coherent whole.

A second group of approaches draw on the tradition of Scripture. The Canonical approach begins from the premise that the Historical-Critical method may not result in interpretation which has deeper theological meaning. The Canonical approach, therefore, interprets each individual text in the light of the single plan of God as expressed in the Bible as a whole. The Canonical approach is considered valuable in that it cautions against excessive attention to finding the most original example of a passage. This approach reminds that it is the final form of a passage, as part of a much larger whole, which constitutes Scripture. A further traditional approach draws on Jewish sources and interpretation. This approach follows the example given by Origen and Jerome who sought to acquire a better understanding of Scripture from Jewish biblical learning. A final traditional approach considers the history of a text through examining how a passage has given life to a community through its appropriation in life, art and literary works. Approaches that use the human sciences constitute a third group. Sociological approaches complement the need for information on the social circumstances that gave rise to a text, by providing a sociological explanation of what occurs and what is said. Such explanation is able to outline the implications of a given social structure on a passage and is thus considered valuable. An approach closely aligned with a sociological approach is that which considers the cultural anthropology of a passage. This approach is concerned with the ethnography of a text; of ways in which humans of a particular cultural and social world operate. This approach has enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the people identified in Scripture to be gleaned. For example, the role of women in Israelite society has been highlighted in this approach. Finally, an approach which focuses on the psychological and psychoanalytical aspects of a passage has allowed Scripture to be examined for norms of behaviour and common experiences of life. This approach has enabled a greater understanding of the value and role of symbols found in Scripture to be explored.

A final group of approaches acknowledges interpretations drawn from the particular context of its readers. Two contexts are named by IBC: The Liberationist and the Feminist. While both approaches are affirmed for drawing attention to specific issues of power and oppression, PBC advocates a more cautionary role regarding their use in the seeking of social change within and outside the Church. The fifth approach, and the only one dismissed by IBC, is the fundamentalist approach.
expressed in human language by human authors ‘possessed of limited capacities and resources.’  

A fundamentalist interpretation fails to accept that the language of the Bible has been conditioned by the society which produced it; ‘it pays no attention to literary form and to the human ways of thinking to be found in the biblical text.’ In contrast, it treats Scripture as if it has been dictated word for word by God to a human author who recorded it. As a result, it places undue emphasis on the inerrancy of details contained in the text, especially those concerning history and science. A fundamentalist approach therefore, is dangerous. Rather than leading towards the true meaning of Scripture, fundamentalism leads away from it, to a kind of ‘intellectual suicide’ which destroys authentic interpretation. Those who wish to genuinely understand the Word of God must show proper respect for Scripture by undertaking the study required for a thorough grasp of its meaning.

The third and final contribution IBC makes relates to the role of Scripture in the life of the Church. While exegetes have a particular role in the interpretation of the Bible, ‘academic analysis’ is not the sole activity of the Church. Exegesis finds its rationale in enabling a more valid understanding of Scripture to be given to the faithful. Unlike any of the documents which precede it in this review, IBC is notable in that it explicitly names catechesis and catechetical teaching as activities as those through which a

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106 IBC, 69.
107 IBC, 71.
108 Pius XII determined that matters of science and history were outside the intentions of the authors of the Bible. DAS, 3.
109 IBC, 72, 128.
110 IBC, 128.
111 IBC, 113.
112 IBC reiterates that catechesis should avoid superficial commentary on the Bible which reduces the Bible to a simple chronological presentation of events and people. Rather, it should move from the historical context of Scripture to its salvific meaning.
legitimate understanding of Scripture, brought about primarily through use of the Historical-Critical method, should be made available. Indeed, one of the goals of catechesis should be to ‘initiate a person into a correct understanding and fruitful reading of the Bible.’ ¹¹¹³ This explicit request further emphasises the importance the Church places on the sound use of Scripture. Programmes of religious instruction should not only ensure their use of Scripture reflects application of the Historical-Critical method, they should deliberately aim to bring those they educate to a correct and fruitful reading of the text.

The Commission concludes by reiterating that biblical exegesis, undertaken through use of the Historical-Critical method, fulfills an ‘indispensable’ task for the Church and the world, one that contributes to an ‘evermore authentic transmission of the content of Scripture.’ ¹¹¹⁴ To attempt to by-pass exegesis demonstrates a real lack of respect for Scripture. ‘Whatever be the context – catechetics, preaching or the biblical apostolate – the text of the Bible should always be presented with the respect it deserves.’ ¹¹¹⁵

2.7 Summary

This chapter has outlined what the Church intends in asking those involved in catechesis to use accepted exegesis. In reviewing Church documents pertaining to the study, interpretation and use of Scripture since 1893, it has established that the Church is committed to understanding, as best it might, an ancient text it calls both true and

¹¹¹³ IBC, 123.
¹¹¹⁴ IBC, 130.
¹¹¹⁵ IBC, 135.
inspired. In particular, it has described the Historical-Critical method, the method named by the Church as indispensable in the study and interpretation of Scripture.

Scripture is the most precious source of faith; it contains the revelation of God for all time. It is to be venerated as the Body of Christ is venerated. However, understanding and interpretation of Scripture is not without difficulty. In Scripture, God’s word is written in the limited realm of human language by truly human authors who wrote in the specific circumstances and conditions of their time. With the encouragement and support of successive Popes, biblical scholars have worked zealously to increase understanding of Scripture. Their study of ancient languages, of archaeology and anthropology has lead to an increased understanding of both the historical situations in which writing took place and to the literary forms used. Furthermore, it has enabled development of a method described by the church as indispensable in the study and subsequent interpretation of Scripture. In the Historical-Critical method exegetes are provided with a tool which demands recognition of both the historical setting of Scripture and its commonality with other forms of literature. Used objectively, the method has made it possible to explore the intention of the biblical authors and the message they addressed to their first audience.

All use of Scripture is to proceed from application of the Historical-Critical method.

The Historical-Critical method proceeds through a series of processes. First, it allows the most accurate version of a text to be determined. Ascertaining the literal sense

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of a passage is then enabled through the application of a series of philological techniques; identification of the grammar of a passage, of the meaning of the words it contains, individually and within the context in which they are placed. Clarification of when passages begin and end and of whether they have been added to or adapted by later authors is also undertaken. Importantly, philological criticism has allowed the genre of a passage to be identified; what its literary form is and whether it represents the metaphorical use of language. Finally, the manner in which a form developed and was used within a community or adapted by later editors is discussed.

Furthermore, description of the method considered essential in the use of Scripture is matched by identification of an approach considered totally unacceptable. Fundamentalism, in its avoidance of all that the Historical-Critical method alerts to, is named by the Church as dangerous. In its failure to consider either the historical or literary characteristics of Scripture, it leads to interpretation which is seriously flawed. As a result, fundamentalist interpretation stands outside those practices accepted by the Church.

In describing the method of exegesis considered essential, the Church makes clear why its application is vital: in its focus on explaining the literal sense of a passage, it enables a genuine understanding of Scripture to be gleaned, and thus a valid interpretation to be made available to the faithful.117 The Church maintains vigourously that the study of Scripture is never an end in itself; exegesis is always to enable the most authentic interpretation of the message Scripture contains to be made available to the

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117 Use of the term, valid, requires clarification. A valid interpretation, used in this study, is to be understood as an authentic or genuine interpretation. It is interpretation which notes all that the Historical-Critical method alerts to. An invalid interpretation might occur if the literary form of a passage were not noted, for example, if metaphors were interpreted in a literal manner.
faithful. In *IBC* this expectation is explicitly stated to include those being catechised; one of the aims of catechesis should be to initiate people in and to lead them to, a correct understanding and fruitful reading of Scripture. While only one document on Scripture speaks explicitly about its use within catechesis, it is significant that this document is the most recent. Catechesis, a recognised Ministry of the Word, should have as one of its very aims the correct introduction of Scripture to those being catechised. ‘If the “words of God…are like human language” it is so they can be understood by all people’; the faithful, including those being catechized, have this as a fundamental right.\(^\text{119}\)

**Conclusion**

This review has revealed six principles for the use of Scripture in religious instruction.

1. Scripture is the inspiration for catechesis and the source of the content to be taught.

2. Those being catechised must have regular and assiduous contact with the actual text.

3. Accepted exegesis of the Church establishes the literal sense of a passage as a core part of its interpretation. The method considered best to articulate the literal sense of Scripture is the Historical-Critical method. All use of Scripture, including that in religious instruction, is to proceed from an understanding drawn from its findings.

4. Any adaptation of Scripture is to be done carefully, with patience and wisdom.

5. Scripture should be introduced systematically to meet the developmental needs and capacities of students.

\(^{118}\) In his introduction to the *IBC*, Pope John Paul II stresses that the authentic interpretation of Scripture is of ‘capital importance’ for Christian faith and for the life of the Church. While the first task of exegetes is, therefore, to arrive at an authentic sense of Scripture, the second equally important task is to communicate this meaning to every human person. *IBC*, Introduction.

\(^{119}\) *IBC*, 19.
6. Sound educational processes are to be applied to religious instruction; it must appear as an academic study similar to any other in the curriculum.

Dr M. Carswell

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