

INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY

Θεός—God

Λόγος—Science, Word, Discourse, Talk, Study

Hence, **Θεολόγια** *theologia* = theology, means simply God talk, study of God, science of understanding God.

Augustine: Theology is “rational discussion respecting the deity”

Theology is an attempt of understanding God as He is revealed.

In **Patristic Greek** sources, *theologia* could refer the inspired knowledge of, and teaching about, the essential nature of God.

In **Scholastic Latin** sources, the term denotes rational study of the doctrines of the Christian religion.

Thomas Aquinas, theology is constituted by a triple aspect: what is taught by God, what teaches of God and what leads to God (**Latin**: *Theologia a Deo docetur, Deum docet, et ad Deum ducit*).

Christian theology is simply an attempt to understand God as He is revealed in the Bible. Theology is the art and science of knowing what we can know and understand about God in an organized and understandable manner.

Theology in its profound meaning not consisted of any kind of human analysis or intellectual exercises about Divinity, rather **it is an understanding of what God has done through His Eternal Logos to the humanity and how the Incarnated Logos entered into our profane history and made it a salvation history**. Therefore, the soul of theology is God who has revealed and offered himself to the mankind.

In short, theology is a divinely inspired human attempt to understand God who has revealed himself in space and time. It is the systematic, orderly and rational reproduction of what one has already experienced and accepted through faith.

Theology, therefore is a science which **should be studied on knees**.

Characteristics of Theology

An authentic theology should be:

- 1, Biblical:** Theology should be fashioned out of Scripture and should go in accordance with Scripture. **Theology is born from the Bible, lives with the Bible and finds its end in the Bible.**
- 2, Trinitarian:** Authentic theology should focus always on the mystery of most holy Trinity. **Giving glory to the triune God is the purpose of theologizing.**
- 3, Ecclesial:** Any kind of theologizing should aim at edifying of the Ecclesia.
- 4, Liturgical:** Worshiping community as the basic unit of Church. Scripture, and theology was born in the heart of the worshiping community. Fashion a true worshiping community is the distinguishing mark of true theology.
- 5, Based on the Patristic pedagogy:** Fathers of the Church are the champions of faith, they paved the way for theology and laid foundation of the faith.
- 6, Ecumenical:** aim of theology is to realize Jesus' desire "one flock and one shepherd".

Theology vs. Heresy

It is important here to establish the difference between theology in its pure form and heresy, which is its corruption. **A heresy is a corruption of dogma** and departure from biblical faith through invalid argumentations on scripture. The Apostles warned against heretics who usually corrupt truth because of sensual mindedness and illogical twisting of scriptures (□2Peter 3:16□). Again, **"But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual Persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit"**(Jude 17-19□).

For instance, in the third century, when a priest called Arius began to teach that Jesus was not God but was a created being. A proper and systematic study of the Bible helped the Church Fathers to oppose his teaching and to give formulated expression to the doctrine of Trinity. There were heretical teachings all time in the

Church. During the apostolic period there were people who adamantly argued for circumcision, adherence to Judaic customs etc. Later, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Docetism, Christian Gnosticism, Monophysitism, Nestorianism and so on... Our modern period is not devoid of heresy - think of the endless Pentecostal groups, new age churches, end day groups- Emmanuel emperor, Spirit in Jesus, Adventists etc.

A scientific study of theology and Scripture would help one to defend his faith from upcoming heresies.

Sources of Theology

1, **Scripture:** Scripture or the Scriptures refers to the Bible, including the Old and New Testaments. The primary source of all that is related to God and Christian religion.

2, **Tradition:** Tradition can be defined as the living faith of the dead, transmitted through generations. It is against traditionalism- dead faith of the living. **It is the Apostles' preaching, example, and instructions passed down through their successor bishops and expressed in the life of the Church. Tradition is the errorless life of the Church which is guided by the Holy Spirit.** It contains the salvific message transmitted and sustained through the Apostles, Church Fathers and life of the early Church. Many times tradition is misunderstood as a bundle of customs, practices etc. But tradition does not mean so in the Catholic Church.

Three ancient Traditions:

Greek- Alexandria, Antioch

Latin -Rome

Syriac- Edessa

3, **Liturgy- *Lex orandi lex credendi***- rule of prayer is the rule of faith. Liturgical experience for the Fathers was both the source and canon of their theological thought. St. Irenaeus suggested that **one's theological opinion should be established by the Eucharist.** Why liturgy is important for theology, because, mainly in liturgy we are encountering and experiencing the One about whom we are theologizing.

4, **Magisterium:** It is the teaching office of the Church, consisted of the bishops headed by the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. The bishops and the Pope are formally considered to be the Apostles' successors.

5, **Reason:** Role of human reason, Faith is not fully rational but fully reasonable.

6, **Sensus Fidei-**“The *sensus fidei* refers to the instinctive sensitivity and discrimination which the members of the Church possess in matters of faith.

The Branches of Theology

1. Biblical Theology: It is both exegetical and theological study of the Old Testament and the New Testament involving also a study of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. It involves exegetical studies of the biblical texts in the original languages.

Old Testament Theology. It is usually divided into six periods: Theology of the (1) Edenic Era (2) Noahic Era (3) Patriarchal Era (4) Mosaic Era (5) Monarchical Era and (6) Prophetic Era.

New Testament Theology. It is usually divided into seven thoughts: Theology of (1) the Synoptics (2) Acts (3) James (4) Paul (5) Hebrews (6) Peter and Jude (7) John.

Second Vatican Council: “the ‘study of the sacred page’ should be the very soul of theology” (DV §11), and by Pope Benedict XVI: “Dogma is by definition nothing other than an interpretation of Scripture”.

2. Historical Theology:

It is a study of Church History and the historical development of the theological concepts, teaching, and confessions. The main divisions are- (1) Ancient Theology (1st Century-A.D. 590), (2) Medieval Theology (A.D. 590-1517), (3) Reformation Theology (1517-1750), (4) Modern Theology (1750-1960) (6) study of Contemporary theologies such as Liberal Theology (which usually doesn't accept the infallibility of Scriptures, sin, atonement, and the Second Return), Neo-Orthodox Theology (which emphasizes on personal faith above propositional theology and doesn't regard historicity and infallibility of Bible as important), Radical Theology (treats Biblical accounts as mythological and assumes an atheistic texture), Liberation Theologies (Black, Feminist, Dalit, etc. that look for socio-economic emancipatory themes in Biblical Theology).

3. Systematic Theology:

It is a systematic and logical presentation of the content of Christian faith (dogmas) and the foundation of the Christian way of life (ethics). The chief disciplines within it are:

1, **Fundamental theology**-Three areas of F.T. Revelation, Faith and Theological Anthropology.

2, **Apologetics** (defense of faith which also involves studies in philosophy and religion), and **Patrology**- study of the teachings of the Fathers of the Church [From ST. Clement of Rome to St. Isidor ,636]

3, **Dogmatic Theology** (content of faith). The chief divisions are- Theology Proper (Doctrine of God- Trinity, Christology (Doctrine of Christ), Pneumatology (Doctrine of the Holy Spirit).Grace, Angelology and Demonology (Doctrine of Angels and Demons), Mariology, Ecclesiology (Doctrine of the Church), and Eschatology - Doctrine of End days).

4, Practical Theology:

It is the theological study of ministerial practice. The chief disciplines within it are -Worship (**Liturgy**), **Sacramental theology**, **Moral Theology**, Sermon (**Homiletics**), Pastoral Care (Poimenik), Community Care (Diakonie), Educational Work in School and Community (Pedagogy of Religion), and **Missiology** (A study of the nature, history, purpose, and procedure of Missions).

Development of Theology- a Historical Overview

1, Evangelists and Hagiographers—the first theologians. New Testament is not only the source of theology but also the theology itself. It witnesses how the apostles and early church understood the Mystery of Jesus. The New Testament writers are the first interpreters of divine mystery and therefore NT is called as “Normative Theology”.

2, Apostolic Period: Apostles and their direct disciples preaching, period of oral transmission [nucleus of first century kerygma – Jesus is the foretold Messiah and Son of God, who offered himself as a sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of humanity from the reign of sin, now in his name salvation is announced to all, repent and believe in him as the sole Lord and God]. Period **near to the day of the Lord. Molding time of Scripture and theology**, period when **Scripture began to separate from Tradition.**

Creed of the Apostles

3, Patristic Period [After the period of Apostles still A.D. 636 in West (Isidore of Seville) and still 700 in the east (John Damascene. The Church Fathers are listed under three groups: Greek, Latin and Syriac.Catholic Church consider their teaching next to Bible. They are the Pillars of the Church- St. John Paul II.

During their time happened the development of major catechetical centers-Rome, Antioch, Alexandria and Edessa.Period of great Apologists. They addressed and defended questions regarding faith, Trinity- one God in three persons, Trinitarian relationship-περιχώρησις *perikhōrēsis*, "rotation"- a term referring to the relationship of the three persons of the triune God to one another,the "interpenetration" of the three persons of the Trinity. [First 7 ecumenical council addressed these issues].

Role of sacraments in Christian life, Christian morals, norms of worship etc.

Formulation of the Creed- Nicaea (325)- Constantinople (381).

Most important Church Fathers,

St. Clement of Rome, third successor of St. Peter, **St. Ignatius of Antioch**-bishop of Antioch from 70-107. St. **Justin Martyr**-the greatest apologist of all times, **St. Irenaeus of Lyons**- father of theology, **Origen of Alexandria**-a crucial figure to the whole development of Christian thought, Tertullian, **St. John Chrysostom of Constantinople** 349-407, **St. Jerome** –the Biblist 347-419, **St. Ephrem the Syrian** 306-373, and **St. Augustine- Doctor of Grace**.

Major Ecumenical Councils of Patristic Period: Nicaea-325 against Arianism affirmed the divinity of Son (homoousios-consubstantial). Constantinople I-381 against the Macedonians who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit (this was also known as Pneumatomachianism) affirmed the divinity of Holy Spirit. Headed by Emperor Theodosius and Gregory Nazianzus. Unify Christianity was another chief motive. Ephesus 431-against Nestorianism-condemned the teachings of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who held that the Virgin Mary may be called the *Christotokos*, "mother of Christ" but not the *Theotokos*, "mother of God".Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria vs Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople.Chalcedon- 451. Its principal purpose was to assert the orthodox Catholic doctrine against

the heresy of Eutyches and the Monophysites-the human nature was completely absorbed by the Divine.

These four council were the great milestones of the Catholic theological progression.

4, Scholastic Period

In its strict technical sense, scholasticism means “that which is related to the schools” and refers to the way of teaching and presenting theology which arose in the medieval university classroom. The Greek term *scholastikos* or its Latin equivalent *Scholasticus* designate a professional Theologian. Scholastic theology was an attempt to unify Greek philosophy with Christian dogmas. Scholasticism attempted to reconcile the ancient classical Greek philosophers especially Aristotle with Christian theology. Scholasticism is an attempts to reconcile Faith and Reason. They constructed theology over the Aristotelian philosophical principles. St. Anselm Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Alexander of Hales (ca. 1185-1245), Albert the Great (d. 1280), Bonaventure (1221-74), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Duns Scotus (ca. 1266-1308), William of Ockham (ca. 1287-1347) and Gabriel Biel (ca. 1420-95) are the renowned scholastic theologians.

Early Scholastics-1000-1250

High Scholastic- 1250-1350

Late Scholastic 1350-1500

St. Anselm Canterbury 1033- 1109. Father of Scholasticism.

[Neque enim quaerout credem, sed credo ut intelligam. For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand]

“For I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For I believe this: unless I believe, I will not understand.”]

St. Thomas Aquinas[1225-1274]

St. Thomas Aquinas due to his endowers to synthesize philosophy and theology, known as the **Aristotle of Christianity.**

“It is necessary to posit something which is necessary of itself, and has no cause of its necessity outside of itself but is the cause of necessity in other things. And all people call this thing God.”

By the emergence of reformation theology which upheld that reason cannot help to know God, scholasticism declined. Moreover, scholasticism failed to place Scripture and Tradition at a place actually they deserved. Over emphasis of reason and efforts to philosophize truths of faith were another draw backs of scholasticism.

Reformation movements can be positively evaluated as an effort to free theology from scholasticism. Luther tried to bring back Christian theology to its Biblical sources, he aspired for a Scripture based theology- *Sola Scriptura*.

But their creative proposals did not have acceptance. Church again tried to follow the scholastic pattern to explain faith. Catholic theologians could not read the signs of time, they failed to develop a theology which has smell of life.

Council of Trent- 1545-1563: Against Protestant revolution. The Council issued condemnations of what it defined to be **heresies** committed by proponents of **Protestantism**, and also issued key statements and clarifications of the Church's doctrine and teachings, including **scripture**, the **Biblical canon**, **sacred tradition**, **original sin**, **justification**, **salvation**, the **sacraments**, the **Mass**, and the **veneration of saints**.

5, Theology in the Modern period

20th century is known as the century of the Church. Theology, from its scholastic hangings freed itself. Richness of Scripture, Liturgy and Tradition regained. New concept of ecclesiology- Church as people of God developed. Scripture, got predominance in the theological process. Emergence of contextual theologies is something very special to the 20th century.

Theology in the modern period has suffered great attacks from philosophical trends and isms such as Rationalism, Idealism, Empiricism, Existentialism, Marxism, Humanism, Pragmatism, Liberalism, Personalism, and Feminism etc. Risk of a 20th century theologian is to address these isms and maintain the Catholic faith amidst their invasion alive.

Second Vatican Council 1962-65- an epoch making event in the modern history of theology. 21st **ecumenical council** of the **Roman Catholic Church**, announced by Pope **John XXIII**, as a means of spiritual renewal for the church and as an occasion for Christians separated from **Rome** to join in a search for Christian unity. It sought, in the words of Pope **John XXIII**, *aggiornaménto*, “to bring the church up to date,” and many of the council’s decrees did bring the church into the modern world.

Biblical studies got predominance in the Catholic theological circles. (*Dei Verbum, Divinoafflante Spiritu*(1943), *Verbum Domini*, Interpretation of the Bible in the Church).

Ten modern day theologians whom one should know:

- Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*
- Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*
- Karl Rahner, Dogmatics
- Jean Daniélou, *God and the Ways of Knowing*
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*
- Edward Schillebeeckx
- Walter Kasper, dogmatic theologian
- Joseph Ratzinger
- Hans Urs von Balthasar
- Avery Dulles, *Theology of Revelation*

A General Introduction to Bible

Bible- *Biblos* (a port situated 40 km away from Beirut, Lebanon papyrus sheets exported from here, that which is from biblos- biblia), *Biblia*, Bible – The Book.

How many Bibles

Catholic 73 books – 46+27 (7 books known as Deutro- canonical)

Protestant 66 Books -39+27

Deutro Canonical Books:

- The [*Book of Tobit*](#)
- The [*Book of Judith*](#)
- The [*First Book of Maccabees*](#), also called *1 Maccabees*
- The [*Second Book of Maccabees*](#), also called *2 Maccabees*
- The *Wisdom of Solomon*, also called *The Book of Wisdom*
- The *Book of Sirach*, also called *Ecclesiasticus*
- The [*Book of Baruch*](#), with the [*Letter of Jeremiah*](#) as its last chapter

Parts of the [Book of Daniel](#) and the [Book of Esther](#)

Early Christians read the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. It included the seven deuterocanonical books. There is only one Bible which from the apostolic period is preserved by the Catholic Church. Protestant Bible is a 16th century aberration of Scripture. If Catholics added the deuterocanonical books in 1546, then Martin Luther beat us to the punch: He included them in his first German translation, published the Council of Trent. They can also be found in the first King James Version (1611) and in the first Bible ever printed, the Gutenberg Bible (a century before Trent). In fact, these books were included in almost every Bible until the Edinburgh Committee of the British Foreign Bible Society excised them in 1825. Until then, they had been included at least in an appendix of Protestant Bibles. It is historically demonstrable that Catholics did not add the books, Protestants took them out.

Martin Luther makes a pertinent observation in the sixteenth chapter of his *Commentary on St. John* “We are obliged to yield many things to the papists [Catholics]—that they possess the Word of God which we received from them, otherwise we should have known nothing at all about it.”

Formation of the Canon of Bible:

The Catholic canon was set at the [Council of Rome](#) (382), the same Council commissioned [Jerome](#) to compile and translate those canonical texts into Latin (Vulgate), under Pope St. Damasus, St. Jerome and St. Ambrose, the council gave a complete list of the canonical books of both the Old Testament and the New Testament (it is also known as the [Decretum Gelasianum](#) - 'Gelasian Decree' because it was reproduced by Gelasius in 495), which is identical with the list given by Trent council. In the wake of the Protestant Reformation, the [Council of Trent](#) (1546) affirmed the Vulgate as the official Catholic Bible. Early Church followed the Canon of LXX for Old Testament Books, not the anti-Christian Jamnian Canon as Protestant churches did. Regarding the NT canon they accept Council of Rome but for OT canon they follow a Jewish Council –Council of Jamnia, (90-130). At the Council of Rome in 382, the Church decided upon a canon of 46 Old Testament books and 27 in the New Testament. This decision was ratified by the councils at Hippo (393), Carthage (397, 419), II Nicea (787), Florence (1442), and Trent (1546).

Jewish council of Jamnia: They shaped the Canon of Jewish Scripture (**TaNaK**) and the possibility of new Jewish faith and life without sacrifices, priesthood and the centrality of the Jerusalem Temple. Its aim was to confront two historical dilemmas: Emergence and growth of Christianity within Judaism, Destruction of Temple.

Translations of the Bible

LXX – Septuagint: Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture (OT) around 280 B.C. The large majority of Old Testament references in the New Testament are taken from the Greek **Septuagint**—which includes the deuterocanonical books, as well as apocrypha—both of which are called collectively *anagignoskomena*. Several appear to have been written originally in Hebrew, but the original text has long been lost. Archaeological finds in the last century, however, have provided a text of almost two-thirds of the book of **Sirach**, and fragments of other books have been found as well. The Septuagint was widely accepted and used by Jews in the first century, even in the region of Roman Judea Province, and therefore naturally became the text most widely used by early Christians.

Vulgate – Latin Translation of Bible by St Jerome 5th Century A.D.

Pshitha – Syriac Translation of Bible, 6th Century A.D.

Most trustworthy copy of OT- which is according to the Biblical scholarship nearest to the Original: **Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia** or **Biblia Hebraica Quinta**.

NT – NA 28th edition or **Nuovum Testamentum Graece**.

First English version **King James Version** (protestant)

Malayalam – *Sathyavedapusthakam* 1910 (CMS Missionaries Protestant).

Bible has been fully or partially translated into 2993 languages.

Inspiration

Theopneustos- "God-breathed"- word used in 2 Timothy 3:16 to denote that Bible is divinely inspired. **“Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness.”** The Greek word *theopneustos* is actually a compound term. Its two parts (**theos** and **pneustos**) literally mean “God-breathed.” The Bible, including both the Old and New Testaments, is a divine revelation, the original autographs of which were verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Author: Divine and Human

Holy Spirit is the author but at the same time it does mean that,

It is not dictation, not subsequent approbation. This implies that God is the source or origin of what is recorded in Scripture. God, through the Holy Spirit, used human authors to write what

He revealed in the Bible. They were not mere copyists or transcribers. The Holy Spirit guided and controlled the writers of Scripture, who used their own vocabularies and styles but wrote only what the Holy Spirit intended.⁶ This is true only of the original manuscripts, not the copies or translations. Coherence and fidelity to the original text is the criterion that makes a translation sacred Scripture.

Did the *Haggiographers* actually claim God guided their writings?

A) Old Testament Writers Claimed Their Message Was from God

Isaiah 1:2 - The Lord has spoken.

Jeremiah 10:1,2 - Hear the word which the Lord speaks. Thus says the Lord...

Ezekiel 1:3 - The word of the Lord came expressly.

Hosea 1:1,2 - The word of the Lord that came ... the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said...

Jonah 1:1 - The word of the Lord came to Jonah.

Micah 1:1 - The word of the Lord that came to Micah.

Zech. 1:1 - The word of the Lord came to Zechariah.

B) New Testament Writers Claimed Their Message Was from God

1 Corinthians 14:37 - The things I write are commands of Lord.

Ephesians 3:3-5 - The things Paul wrote were made known to him by revelation. Formerly these things were not known but have now been revealed by the Spirit to apostles & prophets.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 - We say by the word of the Lord.

1 Timothy 4:1 - The Spirit expressly says.

[2 Thessalonians 3:12; John 12:48-50; Acts 16:32; Romans 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:5]

C) Inspired Men Claimed that What Other Writers Wrote Was from God.

Matthew 1:22 - A quotation was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.

Matthew 2:15 - Another passage was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.

Acts 1:16 - The Spirit spoke by the mouth of David.

Acts 28:25 - The Holy Spirit spoke by Isaiah ... prophet.

Hebrews 1:1,2 - God spoke in times past to the fathers by prophets. But now He has spoken to us by His Son.

Matthew 15:4 - Jesus Himself confirmed that Scriptures were from God. He quoted the Law revealed through Moses and said it was what God commanded.

Matthew 22:29-32 - He said the Scriptures were spoken by God.

1) The Bible is truly the Word of God, having infallible authority in all that it affirms or enjoins.

(2) The Bible is truly the production of man. It is marked by all the evidence of human authorship as clearly and certainly as any other book ever written by man. Inspiration affects the will, the intelligence, and all the executive faculties of the writer.

(3) This two-fold authorship extends to every part of Scripture as well as to the general ideas expressed.

Theories of Inspiration

Intuition or illumination theory. It's not the writings that are inspired, but the writers themselves. Inspiration is merely superior insight on behalf of natural man into moral and religious truth. God inspired individuals who wrote scripture. If this were true, this type of inspiration could be claimed by Plato, Socrates and many others. Even today anybody who is similarly inspired could potentially write scripture.

Dynamic inspiration. This view believes God provided the enabling needed for the transmission of truth which the writers of scripture were commissioned to deliver. This made them infallible in matters of faith and practice but not in areas of nonreligious character.

Neo-orthodox inspiration. This view is similar to dynamic or partial inspiration. It maintains while there are supernatural elements present, the Bible contain errors and cannot be taken literally. Neo-orthodoxy maintains God speaks through scripture as a means of communicating truth to the individual. It elevates the subjective experience of the individual over scripture.

Natural inspiration. There is nothing supernatural about the Bible. The writers were just men who wrote books or letters the same way anybody would. Over time, the Bible came to hold special significance for Christians. This view holds the Bible is of an entirely human origin and no different than any other piece of literature.

Conceptual inspiration. The thoughts of scripture are inspired but the actual words used are not. Only the concepts or thoughts in the Bible were inspired. God gave ideas to the writers of scripture who did their best to convey those ideas in writing. This view weakens the concept of biblical inspiration, maintaining that God only inspired the concepts, and not the individual words written.

Dictation theory. The writers recorded God's words without any participation of their own styles or personalities. They mechanically recorded the words of scripture, much as a secretary might write down the words they were told to write.

Verbal, plenary inspiration. This view of Biblical inspiration holds that the Holy Spirit provided both verbal and plenary inspiration to the original writers. Both the words and message of scripture are inspired by God. Plenary means all the words used by the writers in their original manuscripts were equally inspired. Verbal means God directed the choice of the individual words used by the writers in their original manuscripts.

Vatican II said it best: "The books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully, and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures" (*Dei Verbum*, no. 11). We believe the Bible was written, edited, and selected under the

inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that both Testaments are so inspired, and that God is their author in an ultimate sense. It should be noted that the word “author” in Latin has wider range than in English and means “producer” more than writer. That means God worked with the Bible’s human authors, called “true authors” in *Dei Verbum*, using their skills to bring these truths to light. The human writers weren’t simply taking dictation but were genuine collaborators in the message they rendered.

Inerrancy of the Scripture. Bible is without error, no error in matters concerning faith and morals. No error in message of salvation. But there are due to the human collaboration errors typographical and of non-religious matters.

Interpretation

2 Peter, 1:20 First, you must know this: No prophecy in Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.

The Church’s most extensive and authoritative teaching on the Scriptures is found in the Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*. It often is referred to by its first words in Latin, *Dei Verbum* (The Word of God), abbreviated below as DV.

***Dei Verbum*, 12 (see also CCC, 109-114) offers principles for Catholic biblical scholarship.**

Historical Critical Exegesis-This exegesis is *historical*, because it tries to go back to the historical contexts in which the biblical texts were fashioned. This exegesis is *critical*, because it requires professional knowledge and judgment to determine, even to some extent, what the writer wanted to communicate and what sources were used.

Principles of Interpretation

1. Identify the kind of literature your text is for insight into its meaning.

Bible scholars call this the *genre* of the text. That means the general form the text takes—narrative, prophecy, poetry, history, gospel, and epistle.

2. Consider the context of the passage for a better understanding of its meaning.

This is often considered the first and most important principle for accurate interpretation. Bible scholars use the term *context* to discuss various aspects of the original writing of the text—historical, social, political, religious, and literary. It is this literary concern I have in mind as the *context* of the passage.

3. Try to discern the writer’s intentions when he wrote the text.

This principle of intentionality is critical for the expository preacher. You study the text not to find a sermon in it but to discover the writer’s intended message.

Unless you can learn the intended meaning of the text writer, you will not be able to preach the message of the text in your sermon.

Remember, “The text cannot mean what it never meant.” Discovering the writer’s original meaning is your first task as you prepare to preach to your own generation.

Dei Verbum 12: “Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same Spirit through whom it was written”.

Dei Verbum mentions three rules:

- Attention to the content and unity of the entire Bible, unified by God’s plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart.
- Attention to the living tradition of the whole Church, for Scripture is written principally in the Church’s heart which carries Tradition, the living memory of God’s Word; and
- Attention to the harmony that exists between elements of the faith.

4. Consider the Tradition of the Church

The most important norm in Catholic interpretation is the authentic tradition of the Church. The Bible was given to the believing community of Jesus’ disciples, not to individuals, and only the community, acting under the Spirit’s guidance through its appointed leaders, is empowered to define its teaching. The contemporary Church reads the Bible in the context of the tradition of interpretation through the centuries in order to locate the constants.

Methods of Biblical Criticism

Biblical criticism is the process of making informed judgments about biblical literature. The word ‘criticism’ does not imply anything negative; the word comes from the Greek word for judgment. Matters for scholarly ‘judgment’ include the dating, authorship, historical background, sources, literary forms and meaning of texts. Some methods are:

- Efforts to establish the original and most authoritative text (**textual criticism**)
- Efforts to establish the oral and written sources a biblical author used (**source criticism**)
- Efforts to study the text as a work of literature, considering its style, structure and distinctive language and literary forms (**literary criticism**)
- Efforts to study the **literary form** of a text (eg, **myth**, narrative, hymn, parable) in its oral stage and original life setting (**form criticism**)
- Efforts to study how the final author (the ‘redactor’) assembled the text in order to express its theological emphasis (**redaction criticism**).

