

Historical Overview

1. Early Middle Ages (500-1000)

Jerome

The *Vulgate*, Jerome's translation of the Bible, became the established biblical text for much of the medieval West.

Augustine

In his book *De doctrina Christiana* ("On Christian Teaching"), he advanced his theory of signification and puts forward the seven "mystical rules" for discerning the "hidden" meaning in Scripture.

On Christian Teaching set in place the well-known medieval commitments to the division of Scripture into "the letter and the Spirit" and the multiple senses of Scriptural meaning.

John Cassian

The *Quadrigena*, the fourfold method of literal (historical), allegorical (spiritual, theological), tropological (moral), and anagogical (eschatological, hoped for) senses.

Bede

He wrote commentaries on books of the Bible without patristic precedent by continuing the fourfold method while also seeking to guide the laymen into a clear understanding and application of the biblical text.

2. High Middle Ages (1000-1300)

Lefranc of Pavia

He employed a form of "rhetorical" analysis on the apostles' letters to discern their "argument."

Bruno of Cologne

He applied the tools of the liberal arts for close grammatical, literary, and rhetorical interpretation of the Scriptures.

Rupert of Duetz

He sought to understand God's nature as triune through examination of his creative and redemptive acts in Scripture, with special focus on God the Son and "the mystery of Christ" in the Old Testament.

Hugh of St. Victor

He based his work, *Didascalicon*, on Augustine's "signification theory" allowing for multiple senses in Scripture; however, he gave priority to the literal, historical meaning as the ground for and from which all other senses were understood.

Andrew of St. Victor

Andrew continued to privilege the Bible's literal sense in his exegetical work, drawing from Jewish sources for his approach to the Old Testament.

Richard of St. Victor

Richard practiced a more experiential reading of Scripture with preference for the allegorical and tropological senses.

Anselm of Laon

Anselm is attributed as the source and director of the Glossa.

Peter Comestor

He wrote *Historia scholastica*, which was a running commentary on the chronological, historical sequence of Scripture, with the aim of explaining the Bible according to its literal sense.

Thomas Aquinas

In his *Quodlibetal Questions*, all spiritual senses, allegorical or otherwise, should be authorized by the biblical text's literal sense so as to safeguard the univocal meaning of Scripture's unified message.

3. Late Middle Ages (1300-1500)**Nicholas of Lyra**

His commentary on the entire Bible, *Postilla Litteralis*, drew heavily from rabbinic exegesis to better discern the literal sense of the text.

John Wyclif

In his work, *On the Truth of Holy Scripture*, He advocated for allowing Scripture to interpret itself on obscure or uncertain issues over appealing to the early Church Fathers or other extrabiblical texts.

Jean Gerson

Gerson recognized that interpretations of the literal meaning of a biblical text in theological argumentation needed some of kind of authoritative means for determination of the truth.

This methodological move served to raise "tradition" as a source inspired and preserved by the Holy Spirit at an authoritative level with Holy Scripture.

Case Studies

1. The Literal Sense of Scripture, Authorial Intention, and Authority

With the emergence of the monastic and cathedral schools and the universities during the twelfth century, free contemplative meditation on Scripture lacked adequate authoritative determination to address the multiplicity of interpretations. The answer was a revived understanding of the literal sense of Scripture.

The Victorines

One result of their labors was an extended conception of the literal sense of Scripture that tied it from being too historically particularized, thus allowing for a "parabolic" or "prophetic" dimension.

Thomas Aquinas

The faith to be believed and matters of theological argument ought to rest on the revealed truth of God, and Aquinas considered the Scriptures *verba* ("words") themselves as that revelation, not the *res* ("things") they might signify; therefore, the Christian faith stands on the sufficiency and authority of Holy Scriptures according to their literal sense.

2. The Literal Sense and Papal Infallibility

"Tradition" changed into the establishment of authoritative, doctrinal positions and ecclesial practices. It no longer represented a person's disposition toward the patristic legacy, but, instead, tradition became what one accepts in submission to religious authority.

For the Church

1. The Middle Ages can teach us how to appreciate and read the Bible as a book.
2. Current trends among evangelicals show renewed interest in the history of interpretation, theological interpretation of Scripture, and the use of tradition for theological retrieval.
3. The medieval period saw the coexistence of the ecclesial, monastic, and university communities.
4. The Middle Ages issue a warning to the contemporary church that should not go unheard.