

Take-Home: Deep-Dive, Can I Trust the Bible and the Church?

WHAT WE FOUND

We tested three charges: telephone-game copying, winners' history, and the circle of Bible-vouches-Church-vouches-Bible. The documents themselves claim the genre of testimony: Luke opens like a historian; Peter insists, we did not follow cleverly devised myths, we were eyewitnesses. The earliest layer of the message, the creed Paul hands on in 1 Corinthians 15, is dated very early by many scholars, often within a few years of the events, and appeals to five hundred witnesses, most still alive: an audit invitation in print. The New Testament writings enjoy exceptionally abundant and early manuscript evidence relative to other ancient works, their variants openly cataloged, a few significant, none touching doctrine. And the circle dissolves into a sequence: first Christ, then the community he founded, then that community's writings, then the community's recognition of its own book, ratified in regional synods of the late fourth century and definitively defined at Trent. The Bible itself names the load-bearer: the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15, RSV2CE).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

Writing around the year 107 in his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, St. Ignatius gives the earliest surviving use of the phrase the Catholic Church: a visible, ordered community one lifetime from the Crucifixion.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS

In *Against Heresies* (Book III), his answer to the secret-gospel sects was transparency: the apostolic tradition is preserved in churches the apostles founded, through successions anyone could check. The true tradition is the one with the public paper trail.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

From *Against the Fundamental Letter of Mani*: I should not believe the Gospel, except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church. Not demeaning Scripture: naming the historical order of knowing. He names the Catholic Church's authority as the motive that moved him to believe the Gospel.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Actually run one check: look up how scholars date the creed in 1 Corinthians 15, from any serious source you choose, skeptical ones included.
- Read Luke 1:1-4 once more, slowly, and then read anything else in Luke this week as what it claims to be: an investigated account addressed to a person who wanted the truth.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths... but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” 2 Peter 1:16
(RSV2CE)

GOING FURTHER

Read Acts 1 to 2 in one sitting this month.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

CCC 105 to 107; 120; 126; 80 to 82; 95.