

Module Three

The One-Liners

Unless Someone Guides Me

A standalone session. Run it any time.

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group learns to handle the short, sharp objections that arrive without warning, and discovers that nearly all of them are answered by a second passage the objector has not considered.

Catholic Touchstone. These objections are not stupid and the people making them are not fools. Most of them arise from reading one verse without reading the rest of the book, which is a mistake anyone can make and most of us have.

This module is different in shape from the others. It moves fast, covers six or seven objections rather than one, and is built to be run as a drill. Its purpose is not depth but reflex: when the line arrives at a wedding reception, your people should not freeze.

What You Need to Know

Call no man father

Matthew 23:9 says call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. The same passage also forbids being called rabbi and master. So the reading that takes it as a flat ban on a word has a problem: nobody applies it to teachers, and nobody applies it to biological fathers, though the sentence does not distinguish.

The strongest form of the objection does not deny biological fatherhood at all. It concedes that, and says our Lord is barring a religious honorific: a title that confers spiritual standing on one man over another. Meet that form, not the weak one. The rest of the New Testament settles it. St. Paul tells the Corinthians that though they have countless guides in Christ, they do not have many fathers, and that he became their father through the gospel (1 Corinthians 4:15). St. Stephen opens his defense with brethren and fathers (Acts 7:2). Abraham is called the father of us all (Romans 4:16-17). Paul calls himself a teacher (1 Timothy 2:7), and rabbi, which our Lord forbids in the same breath, simply means teacher; John 1:38 glosses it that way. The flat reading would have to ban that word too, and nobody does. Our Lord is condemning the seeking of honorific titles by men who love the best seats, and asserting that all fatherhood is derivative, held on loan from the Father. That is the point of Ephesians 3:14-15, where Paul bows his knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. The word rendered family there is patria, built on the word for father, which is why older translations render it paternity. Give it as the sense of the verse, not as a quotation, and if someone checks the RSV2CE wording you will be on solid ground.

Vain repetitions

Matthew 6:7 warns against heaping up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, who think they will be heard for their many words. The weak form of the objection reads this as a prohibition on repeated prayer,

and that form collapses quickly. The strong form does not. It grants that repetition is biblical and says the rosary is different in kind: fifty counted Hail Marys, a fixed formula, a tally that seems to do the work. Answer the strong form. Three passages make that reading impossible. In Revelation 4:8 the living creatures never cease day or night to sing Holy, holy, holy. Psalm 136 repeats the same refrain twenty-six times in twenty-six verses. And in Gethsemane our Lord prays a third time, and Matthew notes specifically that he said the same words again (Matthew 26:44).

What is condemned is emptiness, not repetition. And say what the rosary actually is. The vocal decade is not the prayer's content; it is the setting. The content is the mystery, which is an episode in the life of Christ. The repetition holds the mouth steady so the mind can look at the Annunciation, the Agony, the Resurrection. That is why the Church calls it a Christ-centred prayer, and it is why a rosary with no mysteries in mind has lost the thing that makes it a rosary. A rosary prayed absently falls under the warning, and Catholics should concede that cheerfully rather than pretend otherwise.

Graven images

Exodus 20:4-5 forbids making a graven image and bowing down to it. Twenty-five chapters later, God commands Moses to make two cherubim of hammered gold for the mercy seat (Exodus 25:18-20). In Numbers 21:8-9 God commands a bronze serpent to be made and lifted up, and the people who looked at it lived. Solomon's temple, built to divine specification, is full of carved figures (1 Kings 6:23-29).

So the commandment cannot mean that images as such are forbidden, unless God contradicted himself within one book. What is forbidden is giving an image the worship that belongs to God alone: making it an object of adoration and service, a rival to God rather than a pointer to him. Notice that Exodus 20:5 attaches the prohibition to bowing down and serving, not to carving as such. And Scripture shows the line being crossed: in 2 Kings 18:4 Hezekiah destroys the bronze serpent, the very object God commanded, because the people had begun burning incense to it. Tell that story. It concedes the danger honestly and shows the distinction is scriptural rather than invented.

The rest, in brief

On honouring Mary and the saints: the Church distinguishes the worship due to God alone from the honour given to those he has glorified. That distinction is not a Catholic evasion; it is the same distinction anyone makes between reverencing a photograph of their mother and worshipping it. CCC 2132 makes the point directly, citing St. Basil, that the honour paid to an image passes to the one it represents.

On confession: John 20:21-23 has the risen Christ breathe on the apostles and say that whoever's sins they forgive are forgiven and whoever's they retain are retained. Retaining requires knowing: you cannot judge between forgiving and retaining a sin you know nothing about. And in the ordinary course there is only one way a confessor comes to know it, which is that the penitent tells him. That is not a trick of logic, it is why the Church has understood and practised this commission as it has from the beginning (CCC 1461-1467). James 5:16 tells them to confess their sins to one another.

On purgatory and on the brethren of the Lord, do not attempt full answers in this module. Give the one-line version and say honestly that each deserves a proper session. Both are treated at length in Book Two.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Basil the Great

Cited in the Catechism at CCC 2132

The Catechism quotes his principle that the honour rendered to an image passes to the one whom the image represents.

The Catechism then draws the conclusion itself: whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it. This is the cleanest single answer to the charge of idolatry, and it is not a modern rationalisation.

Securely located: quoted in the Catechism at the paragraph cited.

Voice of the Church

St. John Damascene

On the Divine Images (summary)

Writing during the iconoclast controversy, he argues that the Incarnation changes what may be depicted. The invisible God could not be imaged; God who has taken flesh can be. To refuse the image, he argues, is to be uneasy about the flesh.

This is the deepest available answer and worth giving to a group that can take it. The argument about statues is finally an argument about whether matter can carry grace.

Summary of the work's central argument; no section number printed.

Voice of the Church

The Second Council of Nicaea

787

The seventh ecumenical council settled the matter for the whole Church, distinguishing the veneration given to images from the adoration due to God alone, and affirming that the honour given to an image passes to its prototype.

Useful to know because it shows the Church addressing this objection directly, in council, over a thousand years before it was raised again in the sixteenth century.

Historical; the council and its subject matter are securely attested.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 2129-2132 on images, the Incarnation, and the distinction between veneration and adoration.
- CCC 971 on devotion to Mary as essentially different from the adoration given to God.
- CCC 1461-1467 on the priest's role in confession and the seal.
- CCC 2700-2704 on vocal prayer, which is the range to reach for when the objection is really about vocal prayer as such.
- CCC 2559-2565 on what prayer is: gift, covenant, communion, useful when the objection is about prayer in general.

Session Goals

- 1. Every participant can answer four of these objections without notes.
- 2. Every participant can name the second passage that reframes each one.
- 3. Every participant learns to concede the true part of an objection first.
- 4. Nobody leaves treating these as trick questions to be beaten.

THE OBJECTION BENCH

Leader only. Deploy what the room needs, skip the rest. Do not hand this page out. The matching Take-Home carries a

shorter version in the participant's own words.

"This all sounds like a system with an answer for everything."

This is the real objection underneath the others and it is handled in the steelman. Do not brush it off if it comes early; tell them you are getting there.

"Fine, but why does the Church need traditions at all if Scripture is enough?"

That is Sessions 1 and 2 of the core course. If this module is being run standalone, give the short version: the Bible contains no list of its own books, so something outside it identified them.

"You have an answer for the bronze serpent, but people really do treat statues superstitiously."

Agree without qualification. Superstition is real, it happens in Catholic parishes, and the Church condemns it plainly: CCC 2111 treats superstition, including the case where a magical importance is attached to a practice that is otherwise lawful. The same Catechism that permits veneration at CCC 2132 condemns its superstitious abuse a few pages earlier. It is one book, and it says both.

Hezekiah is your friend here. Scripture itself records an object God commanded being destroyed once it was abused. The Catholic position is not that images cannot be abused; it is that abuse does not make the thing itself forbidden.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord, keep us from cleverness tonight. Give us short answers, warm tone, and enough humility to say we do not know. Amen.

Win

1. Which of these lines have you actually had thrown at you? Which one made you go quiet?
2. Has anyone ever asked you something about the faith that you later realised was a fair question?

Build: The Drill

THE GROUND Run each round the same way: read the objection, let the group attempt an answer cold, then hand them the second passage. Do not give the answer first.

3. Round one. "Jesus said call no man father, and you call your priest Father."

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Second passages: 1 Corinthians 4:15, where Paul says he became their father through the gospel; Acts 7:2, where Stephen says brethren and fathers; Romans 4:16-17, Abraham the father of us all.

Then the clincher: the same passage forbids rabbi and master as well, and rabbi means teacher, yet Paul calls himself a teacher in 1 Timothy 2:7 and God gives teachers to the Church in 1 Corinthians 12:28.

Nobody reads that as a ban on a word. What is barred is the title worn for status, which is why our Lord attaches it to the best seats and the places of honour.

Concede the true part: our Lord is condemning men who love titles and the best seats, and that warning lands on clergy in every century, ours included.

4. Round two. "The rosary is exactly the vain repetition Jesus condemned."

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Second passages: Revelation 4:8, where the living creatures never cease day and night; Psalm 136, twenty-six verses with one refrain; Matthew 26:44, where our Lord prays a third time saying the same words.

The Greek warns against heaping up empty phrases in the belief that volume compels God. Emptiness is the target. Then give the positive answer: the beads count, the mind meditates on a mystery of Christ, and the counting exists to free the mind, not to accumulate credit.

Concede generously: a rosary prayed while thinking about lunch is prayer that has become mouth without mind, and it is drifting straight toward what the verse warns about. Strictly, the verse names something narrower, prayer offered in the belief that sheer quantity will move God, but a distracted rosary is well on the road there and no Catholic should pretend otherwise. Saying so out loud will do more for your credibility than any argument.

Live discovery. Give the group Exodus 20:4-5 and ask them to hold it in mind. Then hand out Exodus 25:18-20, Numbers 21:8-9, and 1 Kings 6:23-29 and ask what has just happened.

5. Round three. What did you find?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

God commands the making of images: two golden cherubim over the mercy seat, a bronze serpent to be looked at for healing, and a temple full of carved figures built to his own specification.

So the commandment cannot forbid images as such. It forbids treating an image as an object of worship, giving it the adoration owed to God alone. That is why Hezekiah acted: nobody thought the bronze was a god, but they were burning incense to it, and incense is worship.

Then hand them 2 Kings 18:4 and let it land. Hezekiah destroys the bronze serpent, the object God had commanded, because people were burning incense to it. The line is real and Scripture shows it being crossed.

6. Round four, rapid fire. Take these in turn and give one sentence each.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

On honouring Mary and the saints: we do not give her what belongs to God, and CCC 2132 puts it simply, the honour paid to an image passes to the person represented.

On confession: John 20:21-23 gives the apostles authority to forgive and to retain. Retaining requires knowing, and ordinarily the only way the confessor knows is that the penitent tells him. James 5:16 has them confessing their sins to one another, and James 5:14-16 puts that alongside the presbyters of the church.

On purgatory: 1 Corinthians 3:15 describes a man saved but only as through fire. Give that and stop; Book Two treats it properly.

On the brethren of the Lord: the word covers a wider range of kinship in Semitic usage, Mark 15:40 names another Mary as the mother of two of them, and John 19:26-27 has Christ entrust his mother to a disciple, which is strange if she had other sons. Give that and stop.

Model the stopping. Knowing when an answer is long enough is the actual skill this module teaches.

The Steelman

THE DEPTH Read in full. This is the objection underneath all the others.

The strongest form of the objection.

Notice the pattern. Every single time, there is a second verse. Every single time, the plain sense of the first verse turns out not to be the plain sense. A system that can absorb any objection this smoothly is not being tested by Scripture; it is using Scripture decoratively, and it would produce the same confident answers no matter what the text said.

And the answers arrive too fast. Nobody in this room worked any of this out. You were handed a set of counter-verses to deploy, which is exactly what you would accuse a cult of doing.

7. Is that fair? How would you tell the difference?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Concede the second half completely and immediately. It is true. Your people were handed these tonight and did not derive them. So was everyone who holds any position on anything, which is worth saying

gently rather than defensively.

On the first half, offer the test rather than a denial. An unfalsifiable system is one where no possible evidence could count against it. So ask: what would count? For most of tonight's objections, the answer is concrete. If God had never commanded an image, the Catholic position on images would be in serious trouble. If no New Testament writer had ever called himself a father, the case on Matthew 23 would be far weaker. The positions are resting on things that could have turned out otherwise.

Then concede the real risk honestly: it is entirely possible to hold true positions for bad reasons, and a person who has memorised counter-verses without understanding them is doing exactly what the objection describes. The remedy is not a better list. It is knowing why, which is what the core course was for.

Land here: the goal is not to have an answer for everything. It is to be the kind of person who says I do not know when he does not know, which is why that phrase is on your Take-Home.

Send

8. Which of tonight's answers do you actually understand, as opposed to merely remember?
9. What will you say the next time you do not know?

Live It This Week

- Pick the one objection you fumbled tonight and learn its second passage properly.
- Practise saying, out loud, I do not know, let me find out and come back to you.
- Read Exodus 25 and 2 Kings 18:4 together.

Closing Prayer

Father, keep us from loving the sound of our own answers. Make us quick to concede, slow to correct, and honest when we are out of our depth. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

"Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence." **1 Peter 3:15**

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

- Matthew 23:1-12, call no man father
- 1 Corinthians 4:15; Acts 7:2; Romans 4:16-17; 1 Timothy 2:7; Ephesians 3:14-15
- Matthew 6:7, empty phrases
- Revelation 4:8; Psalm 136; Matthew 26:44
- Exodus 20:4-5, the commandment
- Exodus 25:18-20; Numbers 21:8-9; 1 Kings 6:23-29 (live discovery)
- 2 Kings 18:4, Hezekiah destroys the bronze serpent
- John 3:14, the serpent lifted up
- John 20:21-23; James 5:16, confession
- 1 Corinthians 3:15, saved as through fire
- Mark 15:40; John 19:26-27, the brethren of the Lord

Catechism: CCC 971, 1461-1467, 2129-2132, 2559-2565, 2700-2704.

Patristic and conciliar: St. Basil, quoted at CCC 2132. St. John Damascene, On the Divine Images. Second Council of Nicaea, 787.