

Unless Someone Guides Me

Scripture, Tradition, and the Authority of the Church

An inductive Bible study in six sessions,
with three standalone modules

Catholic Armory

Start with no background. Go as deep as you want.

Using This Guide

This is a study for Catholics who want to know Scripture well enough to stop being afraid of it. It assumes no background whatsoever and it does not run out of depth. A person can walk into Session One having never opened a Bible and leave able to explain where the Bible came from.

The three tiers

Every session runs on three levels, marked in the text, so that the newest person in the room and the one who has read Denzinger both leave fed.

THE FLOOR One verse and one sentence anyone can say out loud that night. If a participant remembers nothing else, this is what they keep.

THE GROUND The inductive body of the session, where the group finds the passages and builds the case themselves. Most of your time goes here.

THE DEPTH The full-strength steelman and the leader-only Objection Bench. Deploy as much as the room can carry. Running a session on the Floor and the Ground alone is a legitimate way to run it.

What is in each session

- A Leader Preparation Guide: background, Old Testament roots, three Voices of the Church, Catechism references, session goals, a timed plan with pre-chosen cuts, and the Objection Bench.
- A Discussion Guide: prayers, opening questions, numbered inductive questions each followed by a shaded ANSWER box, live discovery moments where the group searches for itself, a steelman, Dig Deeper boxes, sending questions, and a memory verse.
- A Leader Reference Card listing every passage used, in order.

The ANSWER boxes

These are for you, not for the group, and they are labeled to share after the discussion. Reading one aloud before the group has worked is the single easiest way to ruin a session. The discovery is the teaching; the answer only confirms it.

The Take-Home sheets

There is no participant journal. Instead each session has a two-page Take-Home, distributed after the session, never before. It carries a recap of what the group found, that session's three Voices of the Church, a Ready Response panel that puts what the group found into the participant's own words for the conversations they will actually have, the week's practices, the memory verse, the reading for next time, and Catechism references.

Take-Home One carries a sealed question. Participants write an answer, fold it, and bring it unopened to Session Five. Do not let anyone open it early, and do not acknowledge the answer when the study passes near it in Session Two. The tension is doing work.

No Take-Home contains ANSWER content, steelman material, or anything from the Thread Watch, and no Ready Response panel is the Objection Bench in shorter form. The Bench stays with the leader; the panel carries only what the group itself found, said back in the participant's own words. Hand the sheets out afterward and the spoiler discipline takes care of itself.

The modules

Three standalone sessions extend the course and can be run in any order, or years later, or on their own. Peter and the Keys goes deeper than Session Four on the papacy, including the hard history. The Seven Books takes up the deuterocanon. The One-Liners is a drill on the short objections that arrive without warning.

Running it

- Plan for 75 to 90 minutes. Every session has a timed plan with cuts already chosen so you are not deciding under pressure.
- The course is built to be run by an ordinary parishioner, not a theologian. Everything you need is on the page.
- Six sessions is roughly a September to mid-October run, or a Lent.
- If you do not know an answer, say so. Session Six explains why that sentence is more persuasive than anything else you could say.

On sources

Citations in this guide are held to a deliberate standard. A quotation appears only where the wording and attribution are both secure. Where the theology genuinely belongs to a Father or a saint but the exact wording or locus cannot be vouched for, the box says summary and gives the work rather than inventing a chapter number. Where neither could be verified, the material was cut. Catechism references point to the paragraph that actually contains the claim.

Scripture is quoted from the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition.

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The nine Take-Home sheets are supplied as separate files so they can be printed and handed out on their own. They are deliberately not bound into this guide, since they are participant-facing and this guide is not.

Session One

Who Handed You This Book?

Unless Someone Guides Me

Scripture, Tradition, and the Authority of the Church

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers, from the New Testament itself, that Scripture arrives in a person's hands through a living community with the authority to teach, and that no book of the Bible contains a list of the books of the Bible.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church did not make these books inspired. She recognized, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the books that already were. That act of recognition is not a threat to Scripture's authority; it is the reason you have a Scripture to hold.

This is the opening session of a study on defending the faith, so a word about strategy. We do not begin with Mary, or the papacy, or the Eucharist, because every one of those arguments is downstream of a prior question that almost nobody stops to ask: how does anyone know which books belong in the Bible in the first place? Start there and the rest of the study has ground to stand on. Start anywhere else and you are trading verses across a chasm.

How the Three Tiers Work

Every session in this study runs on three levels so that the newest person in the room and the one who has read Denzinger both leave fed.

THE FLOOR One verse and one sentence anyone can say out loud tonight. If a participant remembers nothing else, this is what they keep. It is printed on the Take-Home.

THE GROUND The inductive body of the session. The group finds the passages and builds the case themselves. This is where most of your ninety minutes goes.

THE DEPTH The full-strength steelman and the Objection Bench. Deploy as much as the room can carry. It is entirely acceptable to run a session using only the Floor and the Ground.

What You Need to Know

The most common way a Catholic loses a Scripture argument is by agreeing, without noticing, to a rule that was never in Scripture. The rule is this: whatever is not found in the Bible may be discarded, and the Bible interprets itself plainly to any sincere reader. Once a Catholic accepts that rule, the game is over before it starts, because that rule is precisely what is in dispute, and it cannot be established from the Bible without arguing in a circle.

So this session goes underneath the arguments to the table they are all sitting on. It asks a question that is not rhetorical and not a trick: where did the table of contents come from?

The historical shape of it

The New Testament was not delivered as a bound volume. Its books were written across roughly the second half of the first century, circulated separately, and copied unevenly. For generations, Christians in different regions held collections that did not perfectly match. Several books we now take for granted were genuinely disputed: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Eusebius, writing in the early fourth century, catalogues this dispute, though his categories are finer than a single list. In Ecclesiastical History III.25 he places James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John among the books spoken against. Revelation he handles differently again, listing it among the recognized books with an open hedge and noting that others rejected it entirely. Hebrews he treats separately and earlier in Book III, where the question is not whether it is Scripture but whether Paul wrote it and how the church at Rome received it. Meanwhile several books that are not in anyone's Bible today, such as the Shepherd of Hermas and the Letter of Barnabas, were read with affection in some churches.

The list you now hold did not fall from the sky and it did not assemble itself. St. Athanasius, in his Festal Letter of 367, gives a list of twenty-seven New Testament books identical to ours. Regional councils at Hippo in 393 and Carthage in 397 and 419 issued canon lists that match the Catholic canon as we have it. A Roman synod under Pope St. Damasus I in 382 is traditionally associated with an early list as well, though scholars dispute the date and integrity of the surviving document, so we should not lean on it. The dogmatic definition came much later, at the Council of Trent in 1546, in response to the Reformers.

Be honest about that last point when it comes up, because it will. Trent is late. A Catholic who pretends the canon was formally defined in the fourth century is doing the same thing we are asking our interlocutor not to do. What the fourth century gives us is not a dogmatic definition but something in some ways more interesting: a settled, widely shared consensus arrived at through the discernment of the Church, in communion, over time.

St. Jerome, and why we tell his story straight

Someone in your group has heard that St. Jerome rejected the deuterocanonical books, and that a Doctor of the Church therefore agrees with the Protestant Old Testament. Resist two temptations here. Do not deny it, and do not tidy him up.

Jerome did have real doubts about the books outside the Hebrew canon and said so plainly. He also translated Tobit and Judith into Latin himself, and he rendered the Greek additions to Daniel, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, and the Prayer of Azariah with the Song of the Three Young Men, along with the Greek additions to Esther, in each case flagging that they stood outside the Hebrew; the books that came into the Vulgate through the Old Latin rather than his own hand were Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees. He cited these books, and he deferred to the judgment and usage of the Church. He is neither a proto-Protestant nor a Tridentine Catholic. He is a brilliant, cranky scholar who held a minority scholarly opinion and did not make it a hill to die on. Telling the group that, exactly that, teaches them something more valuable than a debating point: our tradition is large enough to contain its own arguments, and we do not need to sand our saints down.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The pattern in this session is old. Israel never had a text without a teacher.

“And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.” **Nehemiah 8:8**

The people have the text. They hear it read in their own assembly. And still the Levites must give the sense. The word for what is missing is not access. It is interpretation.

When a case is too hard, “you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God will choose, and coming to the Levitical priests, and to the judge who is in office in those days, you shall consult them, and they shall declare to you the decision. Then you shall do according to what they declare to you ... and you shall be careful to do according to all that they direct you.”

Deuteronomy 17:8-10

God’s own provision for disputed cases in the Law is not a better-annotated scroll. It is a living authority whose decision binds. Verses 10 through 12 are the ones that make it binding: the decision must be obeyed, and refusing it is treated as a grave offense. Malachi says the same thing about the priest, that men should seek instruction from his mouth (Malachi 2:7).

The fulfillment is Philip running alongside a chariot in Acts 8, and the apostles gathered in council in Acts 15 saying that it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. The shape does not change across the covenants. It is deepened.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

Against the Letter of Mani Called “The Foundation,” ch. 5

Arguing with a group that claimed a secret authority, Augustine says that he would not believe the Gospel itself unless the authority of the Catholic Church moved him to it.

Note carefully what he is not saying. He is not saying the Church is above the Gospel, and he is not saying his faith rests on men rather than God. He is making a point about how anyone comes to hold this book as the Gospel at all. The Church is the reason the book is in his hands and is known to be what it claims.

Quotation securely attested with a standard locus.

Voice of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against Heresies, Book III (summary)

Irenaeus faces opponents who claim a private key to the Scriptures. His answer is to make the apostolic teaching public and checkable: go to the churches the apostles actually founded, trace the succession of those who taught there, and see whether what you are being sold matches what has been handed on in the open.

He also observes that whole peoples hold the faith without paper and ink, which does not diminish Scripture but does locate it: the faith was being lived and handed on before it was fully written, and the writing was received inside that handing on.

Presented as a summary of his genuine argument in Book III rather than as a quotation, since we are not printing a chapter number we cannot vouch for.

Voice of the Church

St. Vincent of Lérins

Commonitorium, ch. 2 (c. 434)

Vincent gives the famous test for authentic Christian teaching: what has been believed everywhere, always, and by everyone.

What is often missed is why he thought the test was needed. He grants that Scripture is deep and sufficient, and then observes the obvious problem: precisely because it is deep, people read it in contradictory ways, and nearly every party claims the text. So the reading must be guided by the sense

of the Church. He is not solving a shortage of Bible. He is solving a surplus of interpretations.

The threefold canon is a securely attested quotation; the surrounding argument is given as summary.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 120 gives the full canon and states that it was by apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings belong in the list of sacred books. Note the verb: discerned, not created.
- CCC 80 and 82 set out how Scripture and Tradition flow from the same divine source, and state that the Church does not draw her certainty about everything revealed from Scripture alone. CCC 81 is the paragraph that distinguishes them: Scripture is the speech of God put into writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit, while Tradition hands on the whole Word of God entrusted to the apostles.
- CCC 85 entrusts the authentic interpretation of the Word of God, written or handed on, to the living teaching office of the Church.
- CCC 107 is the paragraph to cite for inerrancy, teaching that the Scriptures teach without error the truth God willed put into them for our salvation (with Dei Verbum 11 behind it). Do not cite 112 to 114 for this; those paragraphs concern how to read Scripture in the Spirit.
- CCC 108 is worth reading aloud if you have time: Christianity is not a religion of the book but of the living Word.

Thread Watch

Leader only. Do not read this aloud and do not let it reach a Take-Home.

- THREAD A, the Unnoticed Premise. Planted tonight. The premise is that the text alone, read privately, is self-sufficient and self-interpreting. Tonight you only expose that it is a premise, not a conclusion. Do not resolve it. Session 2 presses it and Session 5 lands it.
- THREAD B, the Sealed Guess. Take-Home 1 asks each participant to write the single verse they think most clearly teaches that Scripture alone is the final and only infallible rule of faith, the one authority no church, council or tradition may overrule, then seal it. Most will write 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Session 2 examines that verse without opening the envelopes, which is intentional. They open at Session 5.
- THREAD C, the Ethiopian's Question. Acts 8:31 recurs in every session as a diagnostic. Whenever the group hits an interpretive fork, ask it again: how can I, unless someone guides me?

Session Goals

1. Every participant can state where the table of contents of the Bible came from.
2. Every participant can name at least two books that were genuinely disputed in the early Church.
3. The group discovers, from Acts 8 and Nehemiah 8, that Scripture assumes an authoritative interpreter rather than excluding one.
4. Participants can distinguish two claims that are constantly confused: that the Church made the books inspired (false, and no Catholic holds it) and that the Church recognized which books were inspired (true, and unavoidable).
5. Nobody leaves armed for a fight. Everybody leaves able to ask one good question.

Timed Plan

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 15 minutes.
- Build, questions 1 through 4 (the Acts 8 discovery): 25 minutes.
- Build, questions 5 through 7 (the canon and the steelman): 30 minutes.

- Send, Live It, closing prayer: 15 minutes.

If you are running short: cut question 6 and the Dig Deeper on the Septuagint. Do not cut question 7 or the steelman; the session does not land without them. If you are running very short, cut the second Win question, which is the cheapest thing on the page.

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.

"Hippo and Carthage were local councils. They prove nothing."

Concede it cleanly, because it is true. They were regional synods, not ecumenical councils, and they did not dogmatically define the canon for the universal Church.

Then redirect to what they actually show: by the end of the fourth century the churches of the West, in communion with one another, had converged on the list we now hold, and the same list was carrying the day more broadly, with real variation persisting in places for some time yet. The Syriac churches, for instance, long used a New Testament without several of the shorter catholic epistles and without Revelation. That is the honest picture, and it is the one that helps us, because the Catholic claim is not that a regional synod created the canon. It is that the canon was discerned by the Church over time under the Spirit, gradually and in communion, which is exactly what the historical record looks like. Once settled, that list held for eleven centuries before anyone proposed subtracting from it.

"The Catholic Church added seven books at Trent."

Historically backwards, and this one is worth correcting gently but firmly. Those books stood in the Greek Septuagint that the early Church used, in the Latin Vulgate for over a millennium, and in the Hippo and Carthage lists. Trent defined the canon in 1546 in response to their removal, not by way of addition.

Module 6 (The Seven Books) handles this at depth. Tonight, one sentence and move on.

"Jesus and the apostles used the Hebrew canon, so we should too."

Hedge honestly here, because the scholarship is genuinely contested and overclaiming will cost you the room later. What can be said confidently: the New Testament quotes the Greek Old Testament heavily, and the Hebrew canon was not formally closed in a way that settles this question in Jesus's lifetime (the old theory of a decisive rabbinic council at Jamnia is now largely abandoned).

You can also note that Jude 14-15 draws on 1 Enoch, which no one holds as canonical, so a New Testament author citing a book does not by itself settle canonicity in either direction. That cuts both ways and you should say so.

"The books are self-authenticating. Believers recognize God's voice in them."

This is the strongest form of the objection and it is handled in the steelman chain at question 7. Do not answer it here in passing; it deserves the full treatment.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you opened the Scriptures to two discouraged disciples on a road and their hearts burned within them. Open them to us tonight. Give us the humility to be taught, the honesty to admit what we do not know, and the charity to think well of everyone we disagree with. We ask this in your name. Amen.

Win

1. Who first put a Bible in your hands, or first taught you anything about it? What do you remember about them?
2. Have you ever been in a conversation about faith where you knew you were right but had no idea what to say? You do not have to name names. What did that feel like?

Leader note. *Do not rush question 2 toward resolution. The frustration it surfaces is the engine of the whole study. Let it sit.*

Build

THE GROUND The next four questions are a live discovery. Do not preview where they lead.

Read aloud together: Acts 8:26-35.

3. Describe the Ethiopian official. What does he have going for him?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The group should assemble a genuinely impressive list: he is literate, wealthy enough to own a scroll (extraordinary in the first century), a court official of high rank, devout enough to have traveled to Jerusalem to worship, and sincere enough to be reading Isaiah in a moving chariot.

Press them to notice what this rules out. Whatever he lacks, it is not access to the text, sincerity, intelligence, or desire.

4. Philip asks whether he understands what he is reading. Read his answer in verse 31 exactly as it stands. What is he saying he needs?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“How can I, unless some one guides me?”

He needs a person. Not a better scroll, not more sincerity, not more time alone with the text. A guide.

Note for yourself, and only mention if the group does not reach it: Luke does not present this as a failure on the eunuch’s part. Nobody scolds him. The need for a guide is treated as the ordinary shape of things, and God’s response is to send one, by explicit instruction of the Spirit (v. 29).

5. Philip is not an apostle. He is one of the seven set aside in Acts 6. Does that weaken or strengthen the point?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Strengthens it. The point is not that only the Twelve may interpret. It is that interpretation runs through the sent, commissioned life of the Church rather than through private ingenuity. Philip was one of seven chosen by the community at the apostles' direction, then set before the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them (Acts 6:3-6); he is operating inside a structure, not freelancing.

If someone raises that Philip simply explained the obvious, hand them Isaiah 53 and ask them to identify the servant from the text alone, with no New Testament in hand. Jewish readers of goodwill have gone in more than one direction on that chapter. A major and long-standing line reads the servant corporately as Israel; other Jewish sources, including the Targum on Isaiah, read the passage of the Messiah. That the tradition itself divided over it is the point. It is not obvious. It is obvious to us because we were told.

DIG DEEPER: What did the eunuch not have?

He is reading Isaiah 53, one of the clearest messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, in a text he owns, and he cannot get to the bottom of it.

Compare Nehemiah 8:8, where the assembled people hear the Law read aloud and the Levites must still give the sense. And compare Luke 24:27, where the risen Christ himself does not hand the disciples a reading plan; he interprets. And notice that Scripture says this about itself. Peter writes that in Paul's letters there are some things hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16). The difficulty is not a modern complaint invented to make room for the Church. It is in the New Testament, stated by an apostle, along with the observation that private handling of a hard text can go badly wrong.

Live discovery. Split the group. Give one half fifteen minutes and one instruction: find the verse in the Bible that lists which books belong in the Bible. Give the other half the same time to find any verse in which Scripture claims to be the final and only infallible rule of faith, the one authority no church, council or tradition may overrule. Let them actually search. Do not shorten this.

6. What did you find?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Neither list exists. There is no inspired table of contents anywhere in Scripture.

The second group will usually arrive at 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which is the right instinct and the reason we spend all of Session 2 on it. Tonight, receive it warmly and say only this: we will give that verse a full session, at full strength, next week. Do not answer it now. The tension is doing work.

Expect discomfort here, and do not smooth it over. The discovery is supposed to be slightly disorienting. Say plainly: this is not a gotcha, and it does not mean Scripture is unreliable. It means Scripture arrived with something.

The Steelman

THE DEPTH Present the following at full strength. Read it aloud. Do not soften it, and do not let your tone signal that a rebuttal is coming.

The strongest form of the objection.

The Church did not give us the canon. God did. A book was inspired the instant it was written, and it did not need a committee's permission to be what God had already made it. The councils did not confer authority on these books; they recognized an authority the books already carried and that believers had already been submitting to for centuries. Sheep know the shepherd's voice. So the

Church is a witness to the canon, not an authority over it, and a witness who testifies to a king does not thereby outrank the king.

And notice what follows. If the Church's recognition is what makes Scripture trustworthy, then Scripture rests on the Church, and the Catholic has quietly made the word of man the foundation of the Word of God.

7. That argument contains something true. What is it? And what question does it leave standing?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

What is true, and Catholics should say so first and without hedging: the Church does not make books inspired. Inspiration is God's act, complete the moment the sacred author wrote. CCC 120 says the Church discerned which writings belong. Discerned. If anyone in your group thinks the Church manufactured the canon's authority, correct them tonight; that is not the Catholic position and defending it will lose arguments we should win.

What the argument leaves standing is not a question about God. It is a question about us. Granting that the books are self-authenticating, how does this believer, in this century, know which books those are? The answer cannot be that sincere Spirit-led readers simply recognize them, because for three hundred years sincere Spirit-led readers disputed Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation, and read Hermas and Barnabas alongside them. The recognition was real, but it was gradual, contested, and corporate. It happened in the Church, over time, through her discernment.

So the objection succeeds in showing that the Church is not the author of Scripture's authority, which no Catholic claims. It does not touch the actual claim: that God gave his Word to a people, and that the people he gave it to are how it reached you, intact and identified.

One more move, only if the room is ready. The objection assumes that resting on the Church means resting on the word of man. But 1 Timothy 3:15 calls the church of the living God the pillar and bulwark of the truth, and Luke 10:16 has Christ tell the sent ones that whoever hears them hears him. Those are the Bible's own words about the Church. To trust her is not to leave Scripture. It is to take Scripture at its word about what Christ built.

DIG DEEPER: The books they argued about

Eusebius, writing in the early fourth century, lists the books then spoken against: James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, with Hebrews and Revelation contested in various quarters (Ecclesiastical History III.25).

This is not a scandal and should not be presented as one. It is what honest, careful reception looks like. The early Christians did not accept a book because it sounded good. They asked whether it came from the apostles and whether the churches had received it. They took their time. We are the beneficiaries of their caution.

Send

8. If someone asked you tonight where your Bible came from, what would you now say? Try saying it in two sentences.

9. Is there anything about tonight that unsettled you? Say it out loud if you can. This group can hold it.

Leader note. *If nobody is unsettled, you may have oversold the answers. A little vertigo tonight is a good sign, and Session 2 catches it.*

Live It This Week

- Read Acts 8:26-40 slowly, once, without a commentary. Notice how much of it is God arranging a meeting.
- Find out who first handed you a Bible or first taught you the faith. If they are alive, thank them this week. If they are not, offer a Mass or a rosary for them.
- Look up how the readings at Sunday Mass are chosen. Ask your pastor or search for the Lectionary cycle. Notice that you are handed Scripture on a schedule you did not design.
- Pray daily, by name, for the one person you most want to have this conversation with. Ask for their good, not for your victory.

Closing Prayer

Father, you did not drop a book on the world and walk away. You gathered a people, you sent them out, and you gave us your Word inside their hands. Thank you for everyone who carried it to us. Make us worth trusting with it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

“How can I, unless some one guides me?” **Acts 8:31**

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order of appearance.

- Nehemiah 8:8, the Levites give the sense
- Deuteronomy 17:8-12, hard cases go to a living authority whose decision binds
- Malachi 2:7, men seek instruction from the priest's mouth
- Acts 8:26-35, Philip and the Ethiopian official (core text)
- Acts 8:31, memory verse
- Isaiah 53, the passage the eunuch could not unlock
- Acts 6:1-6, Philip among the seven
- Luke 24:27, Christ interprets rather than assigns reading
- 2 Peter 3:15-16, some things hard to understand, twisted by the unstable
- 1 Timothy 3:15, the church as pillar and bulwark of the truth
- Luke 10:16, he who hears you hears me
- Acts 15, the council (planted for Session 3)
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17, raised tonight, answered in Session 2
- Jude 14-15, the 1 Enoch citation (Objection Bench only)

Catechism: CCC 80, 81, 82, 85, 107, 108, 120.

Patristic: St. Augustine, Against the Letter of Mani, ch. 5. St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book III. St. Vincent of Lérins, Commonitorium, ch. 2. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History III.25.

Session Two

The Word Before the Book

Unless Someone Guides Me

Scripture, Tradition, and the Authority of the Church

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the Gospel was preached, believed, and obeyed before a word of the New Testament was written, that the New Testament itself commands holding to what was handed on by mouth, and that 2 Timothy 3:16-17 does not claim what it is usually asked to claim.

Catholic Touchstone. Scripture and Tradition are not rivals and not two separate piles of information. They flow from one source, the one Word of God entrusted to the Church. Tradition is not a set of extra facts bolted onto the Bible; it is the living handing on of the whole Gospel, inside which the Bible was written and is read.

Last week the group found that no book of the Bible contains a list of the books of the Bible. Someone almost certainly reached for 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and you deliberately did not answer it. Tonight you do, at full strength, and you will find that the verse is far more interesting than either side usually lets it be.

What You Need to Know

The Church existed for roughly twenty years before the earliest New Testament document was written, and for something like three centuries before the collection was settled. During that time people heard the Gospel, believed it, were baptized, celebrated the Eucharist, were martyred for it, and handed it on. Whatever they were handing on, it was not a book they did not yet have.

That is not a Catholic argument imposed on the text. It is what the New Testament says about itself, repeatedly and without embarrassment. St. Paul uses the vocabulary of handing on constantly: he received and he delivered (1 Corinthians 11:23 and 15:3), he tells the Thessalonians to hold what was taught by mouth or by letter, and he tells Timothy to entrust what he heard to reliable people who will teach others. St. Luke opens his Gospel by saying his account rests on what was delivered by eyewitnesses. St. Paul tells the Romans that faith comes by hearing.

The word itself

The Greek is *paradosis*, from a verb meaning to hand over or hand down. It is the same word behind our word tradition, and the New Testament uses it both approvingly and disapprovingly, which is the whole key to this session.

When Jesus attacks tradition in Mark 7, the phrase is the tradition of men, and the specific abuse is a rule that lets a man dodge his duty to his parents. When St. Paul commands tradition in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, it is what the apostles handed on. Same word, opposite verdict, and the difference is the source.

The Catechism makes exactly this distinction at CCC 83, separating the apostolic Tradition from the many ecclesial, theological, disciplinary, and devotional traditions that developed later and can be

retained, modified, or abandoned. Have that paragraph ready. It disarms the objection that Catholics call anything they like Tradition, and it does so honestly rather than defensively.

A distinction you should know and should not flatten

Catholic theologians have held two views about how the content of revelation is distributed. Some hold what is called material sufficiency: everything revealed is contained in Scripture at least implicitly, with Tradition serving as the authoritative way of reading it. Others have held that some revealed content comes to us through Tradition alone. The Second Vatican Council in *Dei Verbum* deliberately declined to settle the question, and both positions remain open to a faithful Catholic.

Why this matters tonight: if someone in your group says everything Catholics believe can be found in the Bible somewhere, you should not correct them, because that is a permitted Catholic position. And if someone says it cannot, you should not correct them either. What the Church does teach is that Scripture alone is not the sole rule of faith. CCC 82, quoting *Dei Verbum* 9, says the Church does not draw her certainty about everything revealed from Scripture alone, and that Scripture and Tradition are to be accepted and honored with equal devotion and reverence. Two further points follow from settled teaching and are worth having at your fingertips: the canon was discerned by apostolic Tradition rather than by Scripture itself (CCC 120), and authentic interpretation of the Word of God, written or handed on, is entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church (CCC 85). Theologians summarize all of this by saying Scripture is materially sufficient but not formally sufficient. That phrase is a theological shorthand, not a defined formula, so use it to organize your own thinking rather than as a quotation from the Church. Keep the argument on CCC 82, 85, and 120 and you are on solid ground.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Israel was commanded to hand the faith on by mouth long before most of it was written, and the command is domestic rather than academic.

These words “shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” **Deuteronomy 6:6-7**

At Passover the command is sharper still. The child asks what the rite means, and the parent answers with a story (Exodus 12:26-27, 13:8). The liturgy itself is the vehicle of transmission. Israel remembered by doing something and explaining it, year after year, to people who had not been there.

“Things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord.” **Psalms 78:3-4**

The fulfillment is 1 Corinthians 11:23, where St. Paul introduces the words of institution with the technical language of handing on: he received from the Lord, and he delivered to them. The Eucharist reaches Corinth by tradition before it reaches anyone by text.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Basil the Great

On the Holy Spirit, ch. 27 (summary)

Basil argues that the Church holds some things from written teaching and others from the apostolic tradition handed on privately, and that both carry the same force for godliness.

His examples are deliberately ordinary rather than exotic: the sign of the cross, turning east to pray, and

the words used at the blessing of the eucharistic elements. His point is that no one can produce chapter and verse for these, and no one seriously proposes discarding them. The practice of the Church is older than the objection to it.

Given as a summary of his argument in ch. 27 rather than as a quotation.

Voice of the Church

St. John Chrysostom

Homilies on 2 Thessalonians (summary)

Preaching on 2 Thessalonians 2:15, Chrysostom takes the verse at face value. If St. Paul distinguishes what was taught by word from what was taught by letter, then the apostles plainly did not deliver everything in writing, and what was delivered by mouth deserves the same credence.

It is worth noticing that this is not a Catholic reading invented later to win an argument. It is a fourth-century bishop reading the sentence in front of him and drawing the obvious conclusion.

Summary of his exposition in the homily series on 2 Thessalonians; no chapter number printed, since we are not vouching for a critical-edition locus.

Voice of the Church

Papias of Hierapolis

Preserved in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History III.39

Papias, writing in the first half of the second century, explains that when he could find someone who had known the apostles, he questioned them, because he did not think what came out of books would help him as much as what came from a living and abiding voice.

Represent him honestly if the group asks. Eusebius, who preserves the passage, also thought Papias was a man of limited understanding and disliked his millenarian views. Papias is a witness to an instinct in the early Church, not an authority on doctrine, and saying so protects your credibility more than tidying him up would.

The substance is securely preserved in Eusebius at the standard locus; given as summary rather than quotation.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 75-79 set out the apostolic Tradition: Christ commanded the Gospel be preached, the apostles handed it on by their preaching and by writing, and the succession continues that transmission.
- CCC 80 and 81 state that Scripture and Tradition are bound closely together and flow from the same divine wellspring, moving toward the same goal.
- CCC 82 states that the Church does not draw her certainty about everything revealed from Scripture alone, and that both are to be accepted with equal devotion and reverence (quoting Dei Verbum 9).
- CCC 83 is your most useful paragraph tonight: it distinguishes the apostolic Tradition from later ecclesial, theological, disciplinary, liturgical, and devotional traditions, which may be retained, modified, or abandoned. Use it before someone accuses you of calling the rosary apostolic.

Thread Watch

Leader only. Do not read aloud, and do not let it reach a Take-Home.

- THREAD A, the Unnoticed Premise. Tonight you press it hard but you still do not resolve it. The group will see that 2 Timothy 3:16-17 does not say what it is asked to say. What they will not yet see is the positive claim about who does have authority to read. That is Sessions 3 and 4, and the resolution lands in 5.

- THREAD B, the Sealed Guess. Envelopes stay sealed. Tonight you will examine the very verse most of them wrote down, and you must not acknowledge that. If someone says out loud that this was their sealed answer, smile and say we will find out in a few weeks. Do not confirm.
- THREAD C, the Ethiopian's Question. Ask it again at the steelman: whatever the verse means, how would a person alone with the text settle a dispute about what it means?

Session Goals

- 1. Every participant can say that the Gospel was preached before it was written, and can name at least two New Testament passages that say so.
- 2. Every participant can distinguish the tradition of men that Jesus condemns from the apostolic tradition that Paul commands, and can explain why the same word gets opposite verdicts.
- 3. The group discovers, from 2 Timothy itself, that Paul draws on material outside the Old Testament eight verses before he says all Scripture is inspired.
- 4. Participants can state what 2 Timothy 3:16-17 does affirm, positively and generously, without conceding what it does not say.
- 5. Nobody leaves thinking Catholics have a secret list of oral traditions, because they do not, and we will say so.

Timed Plan

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 minutes.
- Build, questions 1 through 4 (the handing-on vocabulary): 20 minutes.
- Build, questions 5 through 6 (the Jannes and Jambres discovery): 15 minutes.
- The steelman and question 7: 28 minutes. Protect this.
- Send, Live It, closing prayer: 15 minutes.

If you are running short: cut question 4 and the Dig Deeper on Acts 20:35. Never cut the steelman or question 7. If the room is struggling, drop the material-sufficiency material entirely; it is leader background and no participant needs it tonight.

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.

"Jesus condemned tradition. Read Mark 7."

Read it with them, all of it. Jesus condemns "the tradition of men" that voids the commandment of God, and his example is the Corban rule that let a man withhold support from his parents. He is not condemning the act of handing on; he is condemning a human rule that overturned a divine one.

Then set Mark 7:8 beside 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Same Greek word, opposite verdict. The New Testament itself requires the distinction, and CCC 83 makes it. If a Catholic tradition ever nullified a commandment of God, Jesus's words would apply to it, and we should say that plainly rather than flinch.

"Those oral traditions were just the Gospel, which later got written down."

This is the strongest version of the objection and it deserves respect. It is possible in principle, and no one can prove from 2 Thessalonians 2:15 alone what specific content the oral mode carried.

Two responses. First, Paul contrasts word of mouth and letter as two present modes of one handing-on, and nowhere suggests the oral mode has an expiration date. Second, ask what the objection costs: if the oral tradition was entirely absorbed into the written text, then somebody had to be able to certify that absorption was complete, and that is an act of authority outside the text.

"So where is the list of oral traditions? Produce it."

Concede immediately and without squirming. There is no list, the Church has never published one, and any Catholic who implies there is a sealed scroll somewhere is inventing.

Then explain why the demand misunderstands the claim. Tradition is not a set of extra propositions kept alongside the Bible. It is the living transmission of the whole faith, which includes how the Scriptures are read, how the sacraments are celebrated, and how the Church is ordered. Ask the person what they would accept as a list of the English language. The question assumes the wrong kind of thing.

"The rosary is not in the Bible. Neither is the Assumption."

CCC 83. Devotional and theological traditions are not the apostolic Tradition and nobody claims they are. The rosary developed and could in principle have developed differently.

The Assumption is a different case and you should not lump them together. Do not attempt it tonight; it belongs to the Mary module in Book Two. If pressed, say honestly that it is a defined dogma held to be contained in the deposit of faith, that its scriptural grounding is typological rather than a proof text, and that it deserves a proper hearing rather than five rushed minutes.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, before anyone wrote a word about you, people who had seen you told others what they had seen, and the world was changed by it. Thank you for every voice that carried the faith to us. Give us ears tonight, and patience with each other, and the honesty to follow the text where it goes. Amen.

Win

1. Think of something you know how to do that you did not learn from a book. Who taught you, and how?
2. Last week we found there is no table of contents in the Bible. Has that been sitting with you at all this week?

Build

THE GROUND Questions 3 through 6 are the discovery. Keep the pace brisk; the weight of the session is the steelman.

Read aloud, in this order: Luke 1:1-4, then Romans 10:17, then 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

3. Luke says his account rests on what was delivered by eyewitnesses. Delivered how? What existed before Luke wrote?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A body of testimony, held and passed on by people who had been there. Luke is not the origin of the material; he is a careful compiler of something already circulating and already authoritative.

Note the direction of dependence. The written Gospel depends on the prior handing on, not the other way around.

4. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul names two ways the Thessalonians received what they are to hold. What are they, and does he rank them?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

By word of mouth or by letter. He does not rank them. He puts them side by side as two modes of one handing-on and tells them to hold both.

If the group is quick, have someone read Mark 7:8 immediately after. Same Greek word for tradition, opposite verdict. Ask what makes the difference. The answer is the source: the tradition of men against what the apostles handed on.

Live discovery. Read 2 Timothy 3:8 aloud, where Paul names Jannes and Jambres as the men who opposed Moses. Then send the group to Exodus chapters 7 and 8 with one instruction: find those two names in the Old Testament. Give them a full ten minutes and let them search properly.

5. Did you find them?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

No. The magicians of Pharaoh are never named anywhere in the Old Testament. Jannes and Jambres

come to Paul from Jewish tradition outside the canonical text.

Let this land before you say anything else. Paul, writing under inspiration, uses material handed down outside Scripture, and treats it as reliable enough to build an argument on.

Be precise and do not overreach: this does not make that tradition inspired, and it does not prove any particular Catholic doctrine. What it shows is that the author of the verse most often used to exclude tradition was himself comfortable drawing on it, in the same chapter.

6. Now read 2 Timothy 2:2, in the same letter. What is Paul arranging?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A chain of transmission. What Timothy heard from Paul before many witnesses, he is to entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others in turn. That is four links: Paul, Timothy, faithful teachers, and those they teach.

Paul's plan for preserving the faith after his death is not primarily to write more letters. It is to hand it to people who will hand it on. Do not push this into a full argument for apostolic succession tonight; that is Session 4. Just let them see it.

DIG DEEPER: A saying of Jesus that is in no Gospel

In Acts 20:35 Paul quotes the Lord Jesus saying that it is more blessed to give than to receive. No Gospel records that sentence.

So a saying of Christ reached Paul, and reaches us, only because it was handed on. John says as much at the end of his Gospel: the world could not contain the books if everything were written (John 21:25).

The Steelman

THE DEPTH Read the following aloud in full. Do not soften it and do not telegraph a rebuttal. If it does not make the room slightly uncomfortable, you have not read it properly.

The strongest form of the objection.

Read the verse and take it seriously.

"All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The Greek word behind inspired by God is theopneustos, literally God-breathed. Some translations render it that way. Say so if it helps; the claim is the same and it is a very high one.

Notice the destination of that sentence. Not adequate. Not helpful. Complete, and equipped for every good work. If a second source of authority were necessary to make a Christian complete, then Scripture by itself would leave him incomplete, and Paul would have written something weaker. The word every leaves no remainder. Whatever good work you can name, Scripture equips for it.

And do not think the previous verse blunts this. Paul is not saying that only the writings Timothy knew as a boy are God-breathed. He is stating a quality that belongs to every God-breathed writing, so that as the apostolic writings are given and recognized, the same sentence covers them too. The Scriptures Timothy learned from childhood were the beginning of that collection, not its boundary.

And this is not an isolated proof text. It is the settled instinct of Scripture about itself: the word is a

lamp to the feet, it does not return empty, it judges the thoughts of the heart. Adding a second stream of authority that cannot be checked against the first is precisely how the commandment of God gets replaced by the tradition of men, which is the abuse our Lord condemned by name.

7. Now read verse 15, the sentence immediately before. Which writings is Paul talking about, and when did Timothy learn them?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

From childhood, Timothy has known the sacred writings that instruct for salvation. For a boy raised by a Jewish mother and grandmother, that means the Old Testament. Much of the New Testament did not exist yet, and 2 Timothy itself is being written as Paul says this.

This is the hinge, and it must be handled fairly rather than triumphantly. If the passage establishes that Scripture alone is a Christian's sufficient authority, then the Scripture in view establishes it for the Old Testament alone, which no one holds. So the verse cannot be doing the work it is asked to do, not because Catholics need it not to, but because of the sentence directly above it.

Say the counter out loud before anyone else does, because it is a good one. A thoughtful reader will answer that verse 16 is not naming a list; it is naming a quality of whatever is God-breathed, and that quality attaches to the New Testament writings as they are given. Grant that reading. It is fair, and Catholics have no reason to resist it. Then notice what it costs: the argument now depends on the completed canon rather than on this sentence, and this sentence does not tell you which books are in that canon. That is the fourth point below, and it is where the weight of tonight actually falls.

Second point, from the vocabulary. Paul chose a word meaning profitable, useful, beneficial. That is a warm and generous claim and Catholics should make it loudly: Scripture is profitable for all four of those things. But profitable is not the same as sufficient, and Paul had words available for sufficiency.

Third, on completeness. Compare James 1:4, where steadfastness is to have its full effect so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Nobody concludes from that verse that steadfastness alone is enough for the Christian life. Language of completeness in Scripture describes what a thing does when it does its work, not the absence of everything else.

Fourth, and this is the one to end on. Whatever the verse means, it does not tell you which books it is talking about, and it does not settle a dispute between two people who both accept it and read it differently. That is not a weakness in Scripture. It is the reason Christ left more than a library.

Leader note. *Do not let the room turn gloating. The correct posture at the end of this is respect: this verse is a genuine and beautiful statement about Scripture, and the person quoting it loves the Bible. We are not taking it from them. We are reading the sentence above it.*

Send

- 8.** Say something true and generous about Scripture that you actually believe. Not a defense, just a statement.
- 9.** Who handed the faith on to you by mouth rather than by text? What did they say?

Live It This Week

- Read 2 Timothy 3 in one sitting, the whole chapter, and watch verse 8 go past on the way to verse 16.
- Tell one person one thing about the faith out loud this week, without sending them a link.
- At Mass, notice how much of the liturgy you know by heart and never learned from a page.

- Keep praying by name for the person you named last week.

Closing Prayer

Father, you spoke before anyone wrote, and your Word became flesh before it became a book. Thank you for the Scriptures and for the living Church that carried them to us. Keep us from using either one as a weapon against the other. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” **2 Thessalonians 2:15**

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order of appearance.

- Deuteronomy 6:6-7, teach them diligently to your children
- Exodus 12:26-27 and 13:8, the Passover explanation to the child
- Psalm 78:3-4, what our fathers have told us
- 1 Corinthians 11:23 and 15:3, received and delivered
- Luke 1:1-4, delivered by eyewitnesses (core text)
- Romans 10:17, faith comes by hearing
- 2 Thessalonians 2:15, by word of mouth or by letter (memory verse)
- Mark 7:8, the tradition of men
- Colossians 2:8, according to human tradition
- 2 Timothy 3:8, Jannes and Jambres (live discovery)
- Exodus 7-8, where the group searches and finds no names
- 2 Timothy 2:2, entrust to faithful people who will teach others
- Acts 20:35, a saying of Jesus found in no Gospel
- John 21:25, the world could not contain the books
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the steelman
- 2 Timothy 3:15, the sentence above it
- James 1:4, perfect and complete, lacking in nothing

Catechism: CCC 75-79, 80, 81, 82, 83.

Patristic: St. Basil, On the Holy Spirit, ch. 27. St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Thessalonians. Papias, in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History III.39.

Session Three

The Church He Actually Built

Unless Someone Guides Me

Scripture, Tradition, and the Authority of the Church

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the Church in the New Testament is visible, identifiable, and structured: a body you can be put out of and brought back into, one you can bring a dispute to and receive a decision from.

Catholic Touchstone. Christ did not found a movement, a feeling, or a scattered set of the sincere. He founded a body with a visible shape, and he prayed that its visible unity would be the evidence to the world that the Father sent him.

Sessions 1 and 2 were about where Scripture came from and what came before it. Both pointed past themselves to a community. Tonight that community steps into the light, and the group meets the third pillar: the claim that the real Church is invisible, known to God alone, and that no institution can be identified with it.

What You Need to Know

The invisible church idea has a serious motivation and you should honor it. It arises from an obvious and painful fact: visible churches contain hypocrites, scandal, and outright wickedness. If the Church is the spotless Bride of Christ, and the visible body plainly is not spotless, something has to give. The invisible church solves that by locating the real Church among the elect, known to God alone, scattered across every denomination.

Notice that Catholics agree with the premise. The visible Church is a mixed body and always has been. One of the Twelve betrayed him. Our Lord's own parables say the field holds wheat and weeds until harvest and the net brings up fish of every kind. The Catholic answer is not to deny the mess. It is to deny that the mess requires a second, invisible Church, and to notice that the parables locate the mixture inside one field rather than sorting it into two.

The load-bearing verse

Matthew 18:17 is the sentence the whole session turns on. Jesus gives a procedure for a dispute between believers: speak privately, then take witnesses, then tell it to the church. That third step is an instruction, and it is only obeyable if there is a church to tell, with a recognizable membership and some way of rendering a decision. You cannot report a matter to an invisible body, and an invisible body cannot put anyone out.

Where the Church requires honesty from us

Do not let this session become a claim that everyone outside the visible Catholic Church is lost. That is not what the Church teaches and stating it would be both false and cruel. The Second Vatican Council

taught that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, and also that many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside her visible boundaries. Baptized Christians who are not in full communion are rightly called brothers and sisters in the Lord. Say all of that out loud tonight, before anyone asks, because it is true and because a group that hears it will trust everything else you say.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Israel was never an invisible fellowship of the sincere. It was a people with a census, a priesthood, borders, feasts, courts, and a procedure for putting someone outside the camp and bringing them back.

Of the man with the disease: “he shall dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp.” **Leviticus 13:46**

There is a camp. You can be inside it or outside it, and someone with authority makes that determination. The priest does not discern an invisible condition of the heart; he examines and declares.

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” **Psalms 133:1**

The fulfillment is Matthew 18, where the same power to declare someone inside or outside is handed to the Church, and John 17, where our Lord asks that his people be one so that the world may believe that the Father sent him. The word visible is not in the text. What the text does is make the unity of his people the evidence offered to the world, and Catholics draw the conclusion that evidence the world is meant to read has to be evidence the world can see. State that step out loud rather than assuming it, because a thoughtful Protestant will hear the difference.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch

Letter to the Smyrnaeans, ch. 8

Writing around 107 on his way to martyrdom, Ignatius tells the Smyrnaeans that where the bishop appears, there the people should be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.

This is the earliest surviving use of the phrase catholic Church, and note what it is doing: it locates the Church visibly, around a particular man in a particular place. Whatever else the early Christians thought the Church was, they thought you could point at it.

Famous and securely attested at the standard locus; substance given as summary.

Voice of the Church

St. Cyprian of Carthage

On the Unity of the Catholic Church, chs. 6-7

Cyprian writes that a person cannot have God for a Father who does not have the Church for a mother, and compares the Church to the seamless garment of Christ, which the soldiers would not tear.

He is writing during an actual schism, not composing theory. His concern is pastoral and urgent: a torn Church is a torn Christ, and the tearing is the thing he cannot accept.

Well attested; the Father and mother line and the seamless garment argument stand in consecutive chapters rather than in one, so the locus is given as chs. 6-7. Given as summary rather than quotation.

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

City of God, Book XVIII, ch. 49 (summary)

Against the Donatists, who held that the true Church consists only of the pure, Augustine argues from the parables that the Church in this world is a mixed body, containing both wheat and weeds until the harvest, and that the servants are told not to attempt the separation themselves.

This matters for tonight in both directions. It concedes everything true in the invisible church instinct, and it denies the conclusion: the mixture is inside the one field, not evidence of a second and truer field elsewhere.

Given as a summary of his anti-Donatist argument rather than as a quotation.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 771 teaches that the Church is at once visible and spiritual, a society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ, one complex reality rather than two things.
- CCC 811-816 give the four marks and state that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church.
- CCC 819 states that many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church. Read this one aloud tonight.
- CCC 817-822 treat wounds to unity and the work of restoring it, and are worth having open if the room includes anyone with Protestant family.

Thread Watch

Leader only. Do not read aloud.

- THREAD A, the Unnoticed Premise. Tonight the premise takes its first positive hit. Sessions 1 and 2 showed what the text does not establish; tonight the group finds that the text positively describes a visible body with a decision procedure. Still do not name the thread.
- THREAD B, the Sealed Guess. Envelopes stay sealed. Two sessions to go.
- THREAD C, the Ethiopian's Question. Ask it at Matthew 18:17: if two sincere readers disagree about what this passage requires, what does the passage itself tell them to do?

Session Goals

1. Every participant can explain why Matthew 18:17 requires a visible Church.
2. Every participant can state the invisible church position fairly enough that someone holding it would recognize it.
3. The group discovers that the parables of the mixed body concede the problem and locate the mixture in one field.
4. Every participant can say what the Church actually teaches about Christians outside her visible boundaries, accurately, without either triumphalism or vagueness.
5. Nobody leaves believing that the Catholic claim is that non-Catholics are damned, because that is not the claim.

Timed Plan

- Opening prayer and Win: 12 minutes.
- Build, questions 3 through 5 (Matthew 18 and Ephesians 4): 25 minutes.
- The steelman and question 6: 30 minutes.
- Question 7 and the honest teaching on those outside: 13 minutes. Do not cut this.
- Send, Live It, closing prayer: 12 minutes.

If you are running short: cut question 4 and the Dig Deeper on Acts 2. Never cut question 7; a session that presses the visible Church without stating what the Church teaches about those outside it will do harm.

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.

"The Church is the body of Christ, and a body is spiritual, not institutional."

Ask which body. St. Paul's body language in 1 Corinthians 12 is relentlessly physical and organizational: some are apostles, some prophets, some teachers, and he ranks them (12:28). A purely spiritual body does not have an ordered list of offices.

"Denominations are just branches. Unity is in Christ, not in structure."

Hold Ephesians 4:5 up to it: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Ask, gently and without scoring: if two communities teach contradictory things about baptism, is that one faith? The branch metaphor is warm but the text says one, not several.

Then concede the real force: the divisions are a scandal, Catholics bear a share of the blame historically, and the Council said so. Do not defend the divisions; defend the claim that they are wounds rather than the design.

"So you are saying my Baptist grandmother is going to hell."

No, and answer it immediately and warmly rather than with qualifications first. The Church does not teach that. Baptism truly incorporates a person into Christ, and someone raised outside full communion through no fault of their own is not held culpable for that.

CCC 818 and 819 are the paragraphs. If it is your own group member's grandmother, put the theology down for a moment and say something kind first.

"The visible Church was corrupt for centuries. That proves it is not the true one."

Concede the history without flinching. There were corrupt popes, simony, and periods of genuine scandal, and pretending otherwise destroys your credibility.

Then ask what the objection proves. Judas was chosen personally by Christ and the promise did not fail. The Catholic claim has never been that the Church's members are good; it is that Christ keeps his promise to preserve her teaching, which is a narrower and more defensible claim than the one being attacked.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, on the night before you died you prayed that we would be one, so that the world would believe. We have not kept that unity well. Have mercy on us, and let us look at your Church tonight the way you see her. Amen.

Win

1. Have you ever belonged to something where the membership was genuinely unclear? How did that go?
2. When someone asks what church you go to, what do you actually say?

Build

THE GROUND Questions 3 through 5 are the discovery.

Read aloud: Matthew 18:15-18.

3. Walk through the three steps Jesus gives. What is the third one, and what would you have to do to actually obey it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Tell it to the church. To obey, you would need to know which church, be able to reach it, and be able to receive an answer from it.

Press gently: could you tell it to an invisible church? Could an invisible church answer? Could it treat someone as an outsider, which is what verse 17 goes on to say?

The command presupposes a body with a membership and a decision procedure. That is not a Catholic gloss; it is what obeying the sentence would require.

Be precise about how far this gets us, because a well read Protestant will be. It establishes that Christ expected an identifiable church with a membership and a way of rendering a decision. It does not by itself tell us which body that is, and someone who holds the universal Church to be invisible can answer that the local congregation is what you tell it to. That is a fair answer and we will meet it head on in the steelman. Tonight's claim is the one the text will bear: the Church of the New Testament is visible, identifiable and structured.

4. Verse 18 gives binding and loosing. Who is holding that authority here?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Look at who is being spoken to. The you in verse 18 is plural, and it lands immediately after "tell it to the church," so the binding and loosing is given to the disciples together, in the setting of the church acting on a case, not to an individual settling a private grievance. Catholics understand that authority as exercised in and through the Church. Note this carefully for Session 4: at Matthew 16 the same words are given to Peter alone along with the keys; here they are given in the plural. Both are true and we will sort out the relationship next week.

Do not run ahead into the papacy tonight. If someone raises it, say we are doing exactly that next session.

Live discovery. Give the group Ephesians 4:1-6 and ask them to count the ones. Then ask which of those seven things could be true of a set of communities that teach contradictory doctrines.

5. What did you count, and what did you conclude?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. Seven.

The pressure point is one faith and one baptism. Communities that contradict each other about what baptism does are not holding one faith about baptism, whatever else unites them.

Keep the tone even. Many in the room have Protestant family and the point is not that those people are frauds. The point is that Paul's unity is doctrinal and visible, not merely sentimental.

DIG DEEPER: What the first Christians looked like

Acts 2:42-47 describes a body with teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers, shared goods, daily meeting, and a countable membership that grows by a recorded number.

Whatever else this is, it is not anonymous. Somebody was counting.

The Steelman

THE DEPTH Read in full and do not soften it.

The strongest form of the objection.

Scripture says the Lord knows those who are his. That is the Church: the elect, known to God, hidden from us. And it must be so, because every visible church on earth is full of people who are not his. Some are hypocrites, some are frauds, and some sit in high office. Our Lord himself said the field would hold weeds among the wheat and the net would bring up fish of every kind, so we already know that any visible body will be mixed.

Which means identifying the true Church with a visible institution is a category error. It confuses the roster with the reality. The real Church is the company of the redeemed in every age and every denomination, and its unity is a unity in Christ that no organization chart can produce and no schism can destroy.

And do not hear this as a claim that congregations do not matter. The position holds both things at once. The universal Church is invisible because no one but God can read a heart and no roster can be trusted to match the book of life; meanwhile visible congregations genuinely preach, baptize, admit members and put members out. Matthew 18 is obeyed at that level, in the local body, by men who may be wrong. What is denied is only this: that any visible institution may identify itself with the whole Church of Christ, or claim that its verdict is anything more than the fallible judgment of Christians doing their best.

And the alternative is worse. If the true Church is a visible institution, then that institution can point at itself and say: we are the Church, and to question us is to question Christ. That is precisely the move that produced the abuses the Reformation answered.

6. That argument contains something true. What is it? And where does it go wrong?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

What is true: the visible Church is a mixed body. Catholics do not merely concede this, we teach it. Judas was among the Twelve. The parables of the weeds and the dragnet are our texts too, and the Church has always rejected the view that only the visibly pure belong to her.

Where it goes wrong is in what the parables actually say. The weeds grow in the field, and the servants are forbidden to pull them, and the sorting happens at the harvest. That is one field with a mixture in it, not a hidden true field somewhere else. The parable answers the problem of impurity without producing a second Church.

Second, Matthew 18:17 presses hard on the position, but notice exactly where. If the objection lets a visible congregation hear the case, it has already granted that Christ founded something you can point at, be a member of, and be put out of. What it still denies is that any such body is the Church rather than a fallible piece of it. That is the real question between us: whether Christ left his Church an authority that can actually settle a matter, or only congregations that can each settle it differently and none of which can be wrong in a way that matters.

Third, take the last part of the objection seriously rather than brushing it off. The worry about an institution claiming immunity from question is a real worry, and history gives it teeth. The Catholic answer is not that the Church is above criticism. It is that the promise of preservation attaches to her teaching, not to the holiness of her officeholders, which is why the Church can and does confess her members' sins without the promise failing.

7. So what does the Church actually teach about Christians who are not Catholic?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Read CCC 818 and 819 aloud. The Church teaches that those born into communities separated from full communion cannot be charged with the sin of separation, that they are accepted as brothers and sisters in the Lord, and that many elements of sanctification and truth exist outside her visible boundaries.

Say plainly: the Catholic claim is about where the fullness of the means of salvation is found, not a verdict on any individual soul. God is not bound by his sacraments even though we are.

If someone in the room has a Protestant spouse, parent, or grandparent, this is the most important five minutes of the session. Do not rush it and do not hedge it into mush.

Send

8. Where have you seen the Church's visible unity actually work? Where have you seen it fail?
9. Is there someone you love on the other side of this divide? What would you want them to hear from you this week?

Live It This Week

- Read Acts 2:42-47 and notice how ordinary and how organized it is.
- Pray once this week for Christian unity, specifically, by name, for someone not in full communion with the Church.
- Find out who your bishop is, if you do not know, and pray for him.
- If you have said something dismissive about another Christian community, go repair it.

Closing Prayer

Father, your Son asked that we be one so the world would believe. Forgive us for the ways we have made that harder. Keep us in the unity you gave, and make us the kind of people others would want to be one with. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

▮ *“One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Ephesians 4:5*

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

- Leviticus 13:46, outside the camp
- Psalm 133:1, brothers dwelling in unity
- Matthew 18:15-18, tell it to the church (core text)
- Matthew 13:24-30 and 47-50, the weeds and the dragnet
- Ephesians 4:1-6, the seven ones (live discovery, memory verse at v. 5)
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-28, the body and its ordered offices
- Acts 2:42-47, the shape of the first community
- John 17:20-23, that they may be one so the world may believe
- 2 Timothy 2:19, the Lord knows those who are his (steelman)
- 1 Timothy 3:15, pillar and bulwark (carried from Session 1)

Catechism: CCC 771, 811-816, 817-822, with 818 and 819 read aloud.

Patristic: St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaeans ch. 8. St. Cyprian, On the Unity of the Catholic Church chs. 6-7. St. Augustine, anti-Donatist argument on the mixed body.

Session Four

Bind and Loose

Unless Someone Guides Me

Scripture, Tradition, and the Authority of the Church

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Matthew 16 is built on an Old Testament royal office, that the authority Christ gives is exercised in an actual council in Acts 15, and that the apostles themselves replaced one of their number, treating their office as something transmissible.

Catholic Touchstone. Christ did not leave a book and hope for the best. He gave men authority to teach, to decide, and to bind, and he attached his own name to their decisions. The Church's authority is not a rival to Scripture; it is the thing Scripture describes him establishing.

What You Need to Know

Tonight has the strongest single piece of textual evidence in Book One, and it is the kind the master rule of this study prefers: a verifiable echo that anyone can check with two passages open. Matthew 16:19 is not a free-floating metaphor about keys. It is a deliberate echo of a royal appointment scene in Isaiah 22. Be precise about what kind of echo. Matthew does not quote Isaiah word for word and does not name him: Isaiah has the key and the power to open and shut, Matthew has keys and the power to bind and loose. The correspondence is of imagery and office, not of wording, and that is still a great deal. If someone presses you on the verbal link, the closest verbatim New Testament use of Isaiah 22:22 is Revelation 3:7, which shows the verse was live in the apostolic Church.

In Isaiah 22, Shebna is removed from an office in the household of King Hezekiah and Eliakim is installed in his place. The office is described with four elements: the king's robe and sash, the key of the house of David laid on his shoulder, the power to open so that none shall shut and to shut so that none shall open, and the promise that he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This is the office of royal steward, the man who runs the house while the king reigns. It is an office, not a personal favor, and it passes from one holder to another, which is the entire point of the passage: Shebna is out, Eliakim is in.

When Jesus, the Son of David, hands one man the keys of the kingdom and the power to bind and loose, he is not reaching for a pleasant image. He is speaking in the vocabulary of a royal installation, and any hearer who knew Isaiah 22 had everything needed to recognize it. Do not claim more than that. We cannot document what the men standing there registered in the moment, and we do not need to. The echo is in the text, and the text is what anyone can check.

What to claim and what not to claim

Here is where this study will differ from a lot of Catholic apologetics, and where it will be more persuasive for it. Matthew 16 does not, by itself, establish the papacy as defined at the First Vatican Council. It establishes a unique commission to one man, using the vocabulary of a transmissible office.

The development from that commission to the papal office as Catholics now hold it is a matter of Tradition and history, argued from the practice of the early Church.

Say that plainly to your group. If you claim one verse proves everything, a reasonably informed interlocutor will show your people that it does not, and they will conclude the whole case was oversold. If you claim what the verse actually gives you, which is a great deal, your people can defend it all the way down.

The two hardest facts, which we state ourselves

Four verses after the promise, at Matthew 16:23, our Lord calls Peter Satan and a hindrance. Later, Peter denies him three times. Later still, St. Paul opposes Peter to his face at Antioch because he stood condemned. Do not let your group hear these from someone else first. State them yourself, tonight, and then make the point they actually support: the office was never a claim about the personal excellence of the man holding it. If it had been, it would have failed in the first generation, in front of witnesses, and the New Testament records the failure without withdrawing the commission.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Of Eliakim: “he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.” **Isaiah 22:21-22**

Note that the office carries a paternal title. Note also that the authority is described as a power to open and shut that no one can reverse. Then set it beside Matthew 16:19, where one man receives keys and a power to bind and loose that heaven itself ratifies.

The fulfillment runs further than Peter. In Acts 1 the apostles conclude from Psalm 109:8 that Judas’s office is to be taken by another, and they fill it. The Greek word for that office is *episkope*, the root of our word bishop. The apostles treated their number as a body of offices rather than a fixed list of names: when one fell vacant, they filled it.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Letter to the Corinthians, chs. 42-44

Writing from Rome to Corinth around the year 96, Clement addresses a congregation that has deposed its leaders. He argues that the apostles appointed their first converts as overseers, and made provision that when those men died, other approved men should succeed to their ministry.

Two things are worth pointing out to your group. First, this is an argument about succession made while the New Testament was still being assembled. Second, notice who is writing to whom: the church at Rome is intervening in the affairs of a church in Greece, and expects to be heard.

Well attested; substance given as summary at chapter level.

Voice of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against Heresies, Book III (summary)

Irenaeus answers people claiming secret apostolic teaching by pointing to something public: the churches the apostles founded can name the men who have held the teaching office in unbroken order since. He then sets out such a list for the church at Rome.

His argument only works if succession was an ordinary, well-known, checkable fact in the second century, not a later invention. He expects his opponents to be able to verify the list.

Summary of his argument in Book III; no chapter number printed.

Voice of the Church

St. Leo the Great

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

Leo, bishop of Rome in the middle of the fifth century, teaches in substance that the care Christ entrusted to Peter does not lapse with Peter's death, but continues in those who hold his chair, so that what Peter received is exercised by his successors.

Represent this as what it is: a fifth-century bishop of Rome articulating the claim, not a first-century proof text. It is genuine and early evidence of how the office was understood, and that is what we are claiming for it.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 552-553 treat Peter's confession, the keys, and the power to bind and loose, and connect the keys to the authority to govern the house of God.
- CCC 880-882 set out the college of the apostles with Peter at its head, and the bishops with the Bishop of Rome at theirs.
- CCC 857 gives apostolicity: the Church is built on the apostles and continues to be taught by their successors.
- CCC 891 states the conditions under which the Roman Pontiff teaches infallibly. Read the conditions carefully; they are narrower than most people assume, and knowing them precisely is worth more than any argument you can make tonight.

Thread Watch

Leader only.

- THREAD A, the Unnoticed Premise. Tonight it takes its heaviest positive hit: not only does the text fail to teach the text-alone rule, it describes Christ installing an authority. Still do not name the thread. Next week.
- THREAD B, the Sealed Guess. One session to go. If anyone reaches for their envelope tonight, stop them.
- THREAD C, the Ethiopian's Question. Ask it at Acts 15: the council faced a genuine dispute where both sides had Scripture. How did they settle it?

Session Goals

- 1. Every participant can describe the Isaiah 22 office and point to the elements it shares with Matthew 16 and name the ones it does not.
- 2. Every participant can state honestly what Matthew 16 does and does not establish on its own.
- 3. The group discovers, in Acts 15, a council settling a doctrinal dispute by decision rather than by each party citing texts.
- 4. Every participant knows about the rebuke at Caesarea Philippi, the denials, and Antioch, and can explain why none of them undoes the commission.
- 5. Nobody leaves thinking the case rests on a pun about a rock.

Timed Plan

- Opening prayer and Win: 10 minutes.
- The Isaiah 22 live discovery and questions 3 and 4: 25 minutes. This is the heart of the session.
- Acts 15, questions 5 and 6: 20 minutes.
- The steelman and question 7: 25 minutes.
- Send, Live It, closing prayer: 12 minutes.

If you are running short: compress Acts 15 to question 5 only. Do not cut the Isaiah discovery and do not cut the steelman.

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.

"The rock is Peter's confession, not Peter. Petros is a small stone, petra is a boulder."

Handle the Greek honestly rather than aggressively. In Aramaic, which is what our Lord was speaking, the word is Kepha with no gender distinction at all, and John 1:42 preserves that name. Greek needs a masculine form for a man's name, which is why a masculine ending appears.

Then make the simpler point. Every other element of the sentence is addressed to the person: you are, I will give you, whatever you bind. It would be very strange for the one clause in the middle to switch to addressing an abstraction.

Finally, concede something real: the confession genuinely matters, and Peter's authority is not independent of the faith he just professed. That concession costs nothing and is true.

"Jesus calls Peter Satan three verses later."

Agree, and get there first. Also raise the denials and Galatians 2:11 yourself.

Then ask what the objection would prove. If the commission depended on Peter's reliability, it collapsed within a chapter, and the evangelist who recorded the collapse also recorded the promise, in the same Gospel, without apparent embarrassment.

"James presided at the Council of Jerusalem, not Peter."

Read Acts 15 carefully with them rather than asserting. Peter speaks and the assembly falls silent (15:7-12). James then speaks, appeals to the prophets by citing Amos 9:11-12, says my judgment is (15:19), and proposes the terms. The letter then goes out from the apostles and the elders with the whole church (15:22-23). Give James his full weight; the objector will have read the passage.

Do not overclaim here. The passage does not read like a papal decree and pretending it does will cost you. What it does show, decisively, is a council of the Church settling a doctrinal question with binding authority and writing that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. That is the point tonight, and it is enough.

"Binding and loosing is given to everyone in Matthew 18."

Correct, and we taught that ourselves last week. Concede it immediately.

The distinction is the keys. In Matthew 16:19 the noun is plural, keys, but the recipient is one man, and behind them stands the Isaiah 22 office. Do not build anything on the grammatical number of the noun; build it on who is handed them. Binding and loosing is shared; the stewardship is not. Hold both rather than collapsing one into the other.

"There were wicked popes."

Yes, and name one or two if you know the history. Do not minimize.

The promise is about the preservation of teaching, not the sanctity of the man. CCC 891 states the conditions for infallible teaching and they are narrow. A pope's private opinions, personal conduct, and political

decisions are not covered, and Catholics should say so loudly, because most objections here are aimed at a claim the Church never made.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you did not leave your people without shepherds. Thank you for the men you have sent, the good ones and even the poor ones, and for keeping your promise through both. Teach us tonight to want the truth more than we want to be right. Amen.

Win

1. Who has ever handed you keys? What did it mean that they trusted you with them?
2. When two people you respect disagree about something serious, how do you decide?

Build

THE GROUND The Isaiah discovery is the centerpiece. Give it room.

Live discovery. Split the group in two. Give one half Isaiah 22:19-22 and the other half Matthew 16:17-19, without telling either half what the other has. Ask each group to list everything their passage says about the person receiving the office. Then bring the lists together on paper where everyone can see both.

3. What do the two lists have in common?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A single man singled out and renamed or newly designated. A key or keys given to him. Authority to open and shut, or bind and loose, that no one reverses. And in Isaiah, explicitly, a position that one man vacates and another fills. Then name what is NOT shared, before anyone else does. The robe and sash and the paternal title belong to Isaiah alone; Matthew 16 does not call Peter a father. The parallel is strong without them, and a leader who claims them will be corrected by anyone holding the Matthew text.

Let them find it themselves. This is the strongest evidence in Book One precisely because no one has to take our word for it.

If they miss the transmissibility, point at Shebna. The whole passage is about a change of officeholder. An office that can change hands is by definition not a personal gift that dies with the man.

4. What does that mean Matthew 16 is doing? And what does it not yet establish?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It is an installation scene. Jesus, addressed two verses earlier as the Christ, the Son of the living God, installs a steward over the household of the kingdom in the vocabulary of the Davidic court.

What it does not establish on its own: the full doctrine of the papacy as later defined, including universal jurisdiction and the conditions of infallible teaching. Say this plainly. Those are argued from the continuous practice of the Church, not from one verse.

Being honest here is not a retreat. It is what makes the rest of the case survive contact with someone who knows the objections.

Read aloud: Acts 15:1-2, 6-29.

5. A genuine doctrinal dispute breaks out. How is it settled?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Not by each party producing a proof text and leaving it there. By the apostles and elders assembling, debating, hearing Peter's testimony, hearing James cite Amos 9:11-12 and give his judgment, and then issuing a decision in a letter that binds the churches. Scripture is used inside the deliberation; what settles the question is the decision the assembly reaches with it. Say that carefully, because it is the honest form of the point and the stronger one.

The dispute was serious and the Scriptures of the time did not obviously settle it: circumcision is commanded in Genesis 17 in perpetual terms. Both sides could quote.

6. Look at the wording in verse 28. What do they claim for their decision?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

That it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. They attach the Spirit's authority to a decision reached by an assembly of men, and then impose it.

This is what Session 1 was pointing at from the beginning. This is the pattern Acts 15 puts on display: when the New Testament shows us a doctrinal dispute actually being settled, it is settled by the decision of an authorized body, not by each side's private reading. One narrative does not by itself make a universal rule, and do not claim that it does. What it does give you is the clearest case in the New Testament of that machinery in operation, and the letter it produced binds churches that were never in the room.

DIG DEEPER: The office that outlived its holder

In Acts 1:20-26 the apostles apply Psalm 109:8 to Judas and conclude that his office should be taken by another, then fill it by lot after prayer.

The Greek word rendered office there is *episkope*, from which we get bishop. Take the narrow claim, which is the durable one. The apostles treated the commission as an office, something that can fall vacant and has to be filled, not a personal gift that dies with the man. Note the limit too, and state it yourself: Acts 1:21-22 requires the replacement to have accompanied them from the baptism of John to the ascension, and no later generation can meet that. So Acts 1 does not by itself prove succession down the centuries. It proves the apostolic commission was understood as an office from the first weeks. That the office kept being filled after the eyewitnesses died is shown from the practice of the Church, which is what Clement and Irenaeus give us tonight.

The Steelman

THE DEPTH Read in full. This one is strong and the group should feel it.

The strongest form of the objection.

Look at what the man actually did. Four verses after the promise, at Matthew 16:23, Christ turns and calls him Satan and a hindrance. On the night it mattered, he swore he had never met him, three times, the first of them to a servant girl and the rest to bystanders around a fire. Years later, with the Gospel itself at stake at Antioch, he behaved so badly that Paul opposed him to his face and wrote that he stood condemned, and it is Paul's account that ended up in Scripture.

And when the Church faced her first great doctrinal crisis, the decision at Jerusalem is announced

by James, not Peter. The letter goes out from the apostles and elders together. There is no throne in the text, no jurisdiction, no appeal to Rome, because there is no Rome in the story at all.

What there is, is a rock, and the rock is what Peter had just said. Flesh and blood did not reveal that confession to him, and it is the confession that the Church is built on. Read the whole passage and the natural sense is that Christ builds his Church on the faith that has just been professed, not on the man who a moment later would try to talk him out of the cross.

7. Take the objection one part at a time. What is true in it? What does the text still say?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

True, and we should say it before they do: the rebuke, the denials, and Antioch all happened, and Scripture preserves all three. Concede also that Acts 15 is not a papal decree and that reading one into it is a stretch.

On the rock: the Aramaic Kepha carries no gender distinction, John 1:42 preserves the name, and every surrounding clause is addressed to the person rather than to an idea. Concede that the confession matters and that Peter's role is not detachable from the faith he professed. Then note that the passage does not merely say rock; it hands over keys, and keys belong to a man, not to a proposition.

On the failures: the objection assumes the promise was a compliment. It was not. Every element of the Isaiah 22 office is about function, not virtue. Christ chose a man he knew would deny him, said so in advance, and gave him the commission anyway, which tells you what kind of promise it is.

On Acts 15: agree that it shows a college acting together, and take the win that is actually there. A council of the Church settled a disputed doctrine with binding authority and claimed the Holy Spirit for the decision. Whatever else you conclude about Peter, the text has just shown you the Church exercising exactly the authority the last three sessions have been describing.

Where to land: Matthew 16 gives a unique commission in the language of a transmissible office. Acts 1 shows the apostles treating their commission as transmissible. Acts 15 shows the authority in operation. Clement, Irenaeus, and Leo show it understood that way early. That is a cumulative historical case, and it is the honest one.

Send

8. Does it change anything for you that Christ built on a man who failed publicly and was forgiven publicly?
9. Where in your own life do you resist being told something rather than deciding it yourself?

Live It This Week

- Read John 21:15-19, where the man who denied three times is asked three times and given a charge.
- Pray for the Pope by name once this week, whatever you think of him.
- Look up the actual conditions in CCC 891 and learn them well enough to state them from memory.
- Bring your sealed envelope next week. Do not open it.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, you gave keys to a man who would fail you, and you kept your promise anyway. Thank you for an authority that does not depend on our worthiness. Give our shepherds courage, and give us the humility to be led. Amen.

Memory Verse

“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.” **Acts 15:28**

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

- Isaiah 22:19-22, the royal steward (live discovery)
- Matthew 16:13-19, the confession, the rock, and the keys (core text)
- Matthew 16:21-23, the rebuke
- John 1:42, you shall be called Cephas
- Matthew 18:18, binding and loosing given to the Church (carried from Session 3)
- Acts 1:20-26, the office of Judas taken by another
- Psalm 109:8, quoted by the apostles
- Acts 15:1-2, 6-29, the council (memory verse at v. 28)
- Genesis 17, the perpetual covenant of circumcision (why the dispute was hard)
- Galatians 2:11, Paul opposes Peter at Antioch (steelman)
- John 21:15-19, the threefold charge

Catechism: CCC 552-553, 857, 880-882, 891.

Patristic: St. Clement of Rome, Letter to the Corinthians chs. 42-44. St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies Book III. St. Leo the Great, on the see of Peter.

Session Five

Reading Like the Apostles

Unless Someone Guides Me

Scripture, Tradition, and the Authority of the Church

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the New Testament authors read the Old Testament in a way no one would arrive at by private study of the Old Testament alone, and that this reading was handed to them rather than deduced by them.

Catholic Touchstone. Catholics do not read the Bible typologically because we need extra room for our doctrines. We read it that way because the apostles did, and because the risen Christ taught them to on the road.

This is the payoff session. For four weeks the group has been using a method without being told they were using it. Tonight it gets named, the sealed envelopes are opened, and the thread that has been running since Session 1 is finally spoken out loud.

What You Need to Know

On the day of the Resurrection two disciples walk to Emmaus, and Christ does not hand them a reading plan. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interprets to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Later, to the Eleven, he opens their minds to understand the Scriptures. Both scenes describe an act performed on them from outside. Understanding is given, not achieved.

Watch what the apostles do with that afterward. St. Paul says the rock in the wilderness was Christ, which the Book of Exodus does not say. He calls Adam a type of the one who was to come. St. Peter says baptism corresponds to the flood. The letter to the Hebrews calls the whole Law a shadow of the good things to come. St. Matthew takes a line from Hosea that plainly refers to Israel coming out of Egypt in the past tense, and applies it to a child returning from Egypt centuries later. None of these readings could be derived by a careful reader working alone with the Old Testament. Every one of them requires the key, and the key was handed over.

Naming it

The word is typology, from the Greek *typos*, meaning a pattern or a stamp. St. Paul uses the word himself of Adam.

The idea is that God writes history the way an author writes a novel, with earlier events genuinely happening in their own right while also being shaped to foreshadow what comes later. The Exodus really happened; it is also the pattern of the Passion. Isaac really was carried up a mountain by his father with the wood on his back.

The discipline, which matters more than the method

The obvious danger is that typology becomes a license to make any text mean anything, and you must not pretend that danger is imaginary. The Church supplies the rule, and it is worth knowing exactly. CCC 116 states that the literal sense is the foundation, and that all other senses of Scripture are based upon it. CCC 112 through 114 give three criteria for interpreting in the Spirit: attention to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, reading within the living Tradition of the Church, and attention to the analogy of faith, the coherence of the truths of faith with one another.

So a typological reading is disciplined when it rests on what the text actually says, coheres with the whole canon, and does not contradict the faith. And note what supplies that discipline. These criteria are handed to every reader and every reader is meant to use them. But they are not self-applying, and when readings collide someone must have the standing to settle the question. Giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God belongs to the living teaching office of the Church (CCC 85-87). Which is the point of the whole book.

One honest note for the leader. The Church has definitively fixed the meaning of remarkably few passages. The great majority of typological readings, including many beautiful ones, are permitted rather than required. Do not present a Father's reading as though the Church has settled it.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” **Hosea 11:1**

Read the verse in its own context and it is not a prediction at all. It is God remembering the Exodus, in the past tense, and the son is Israel. Then Matthew 2:15 applies it to the child Jesus returning from Egypt, and says this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

If Matthew were doing what we usually mean by prophecy and fulfillment, this would be a misuse of the verse. He is doing something else: reading Christ as the true Israel, recapitulating his people's history in himself. That reading is either apostolic or arbitrary, and there is no third option.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

Questions on the Heptateuch (summary)

Augustine gives the principle in a single compact line that has shaped Western reading ever since: in the Old Testament the New lies hidden, and in the New the Old lies open.

Notice the symmetry. It is not that the Old Testament is a husk to be discarded once the kernel arrives. Each Testament is doing something to the other, permanently.

Widely attested formula given as summary with the work named; no section number printed.

Voice of the Church

St. Melito of Sardis

On Pascha (summary)

Melito, writing in the second century, preaches the Passover as pattern: the lamb, the blood on the doorpost, and the deliverance are read throughout as the shape of what Christ has done.

The value of Melito for your group is the date. This way of reading is not a medieval overgrowth on a simpler early faith. It is what Christian preaching looked like by the second century, within roughly a century and a half of the Resurrection.

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

Voice of the Church

St. Gregory the Great

Moralia on Job, Letter to Leander (summary)

Gregory teaches, in substance, that Scripture grows with those who read it: the same text yields more as the reader is more capable of receiving it, and he compares Scripture to a river at once shallow and deep, in which a lamb may walk and an elephant may swim.

The lamb and the elephant are his image and it is worth repeating. But note what it implies and what it does not. It implies inexhaustible depth. It does not imply that every reader's depth is equally reliable, which is precisely why the Church supplies a rule.

Given as summary of his genuine teaching; the wading and drowning image is traditionally associated with him and is presented here as tradition rather than as a verified quotation.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 115-119 set out the senses of Scripture, literal and spiritual, with the spiritual divided into allegorical, moral, and anagogical.
- CCC 116 is the paragraph that keeps this honest: the literal sense is the foundation, and all other senses are based upon it.
- CCC 112-114 give the three criteria for reading in the Spirit: the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church, and the analogy of faith.
- CCC 128-130 treat typology directly and the unity of God's plan across the Testaments. Present the Church's approach from these paragraphs; do not claim the Catechism lays down a numbered rulebook for typology, because it does not.

Thread Watch

Leader only, and read this carefully before the session. Tonight three things resolve at once and the order matters.

- THREAD B first. Open the envelopes early in the Build, not at the end. The reveal is the setup for everything after it.
- THREAD A second. After the envelopes, the group should be able to name the premise themselves. Let them do it. Do not announce it.
- THREAD C last, in the Send. The Ethiopian's question turns around: they are becoming the guide for someone.
- If the envelopes disappoint, which happens, have a backup. Ask instead for a show of hands: how many wrote 2 Timothy 3:16? The point survives without the paper.

Session Goals

1. Every participant can define typology and give two New Testament examples from memory.
2. Every participant can state the discipline that keeps typology honest, beginning with the primacy of the literal sense.
3. The group discovers, from Hosea and Matthew, that the apostolic reading of the Old Testament cannot be derived from the Old Testament alone.
4. The group names, in their own words, the premise the study has been circling since Session 1.
5. Nobody leaves thinking typology is a trick for finding Catholic doctrines in odd places.

Timed Plan

- Opening prayer and Win: 10 minutes.
- The envelopes and question 3: 15 minutes.
- The Hosea discovery, questions 4 and 5: 25 minutes.
- Questions 6 and 7, the method and its discipline: 20 minutes.
- The steelman and question 8: 20 minutes.
- Send and closing: 12 minutes.

If you are running short: compress the steelman to a reading and a single response. Never cut the envelopes or the Hosea discovery.

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.

"Typology lets you find anything anywhere. It is unfalsifiable."

Take this seriously, because uncontrolled typology genuinely has produced nonsense, including among Catholics. Do not defend the excesses.

The reply is that the discipline exists and is public: the literal sense governs, the whole canon constrains, and the analogy of faith rules out readings that contradict the faith. And the deeper reply is that the objection lands on anyone who accepts the New Testament, because Matthew, Paul, Peter, and Hebrews all do it. The question is not whether to read typologically but under whose rule.

"Matthew is just misusing Hosea."

This is the honest version of the objection and it deserves a real answer rather than a dodge. Concede the observation: Hosea 11:1 in its own setting refers to Israel and is not predictive.

Then say what Matthew is claiming. He is claiming that Jesus is Israel reduced to one, living the nation's history over again and getting it right. Once you see that, the citation is not sloppy but dense. Whether you accept it depends on whether you accept the apostolic key, which is exactly the point of the session.

"The Fathers found Mary in every woman in the Old Testament."

Some readings are stronger than others and you should say so rather than defending all of them equally. The Ark parallels in Luke 1 are textually dense; some other patristic readings are devotional flourishes.

Point to CCC 116: the spiritual senses must rest on the literal sense, which is the foundation of all the others. That is the test of whether a reading is disciplined. Whether a reading binds is a different question, and it turns on whether the Church has actually proposed it, not on how beautiful or how ancient it is. Most patristic Marian typologies have never been proposed as binding, so a Catholic may find a given one unpersuasive without dissenting from anything the Church teaches.

"This is all just reading your conclusions back into the text."

Concede the risk plainly; everyone does this and Catholics are not exempt.

Then hand them the strongest evidence, which is not ours. In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul says the rock was Christ. Exodus does not say that. Either an apostle had a key that the text alone does not supply, or he invented it. That choice is not one Catholics constructed.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, on the road to Emmaus you opened the Scriptures to two discouraged disciples and their hearts burned within them. Do that here. Open our minds tonight, because we cannot open them ourselves. Amen.

Win

1. Has anyone ever explained something to you that you had been looking straight at for years without seeing?
2. Bring out your envelope but do not open it yet. What do you remember writing?

Build

Open the envelopes. Have each person read aloud only the verse they wrote, not their reasoning. Write every answer where the group can see it.

3. What do you notice about the list?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Almost everyone will have written 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and the rest will have written a small handful of others.

Now ask the question the whole study has been building toward. Every person in this room accepts the same Bible. In Session 2 we read that verse together and reached a reading that millions of sincere Christians reject. So: the disagreement is not about whether Scripture is true. It is about who says what it means.

Do not answer this yourself. Ask it and wait. Someone in the room will name it.

4. For five weeks we have been assuming something without saying it. What has this study been doing to the Bible that we never named?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Reading it inside a community that hands over a key. Every session has done it: Nehemiah 8 behind Acts 8, Passover behind the handing on, the camp behind Matthew 18, Isaiah 22 behind Matthew 16.

The premise being tested all along was that the text alone, read privately, is self-sufficient and self-interpreting. The group has now watched the New Testament authors themselves fail to operate that way.

Let them say it. If they get most of the way there, finish the sentence with them rather than for them.

Live discovery. Give everyone Hosea 11:1 with the surrounding verses. Ask one question and let them work: who is the son, and is this a prediction? Only after they have answered, give them Matthew 2:15.

5. Who did Hosea mean? And what has Matthew done with it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Hosea means Israel, and he is remembering the Exodus in the past tense. It is not a prediction and

nobody reading Hosea alone would take it as one.

Matthew applies it to the child Jesus and says it was fulfilled. He is not being careless. He is claiming that Jesus is Israel gathered into one person, living the nation's story again.

Ask directly: could you have gotten there from Hosea by yourself? Nobody will say yes. That is the finding.

6. Find two more. What do these say that their sources do not?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Have them look at 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 (the rock was Christ), Romans 5:14 (Adam a type of the one to come), 1 Peter 3:20-21 (baptism corresponds to the flood), John 3:14 (the bronze serpent), and Hebrews 10:1 (the law a shadow of the good things to come).

In each case the Old Testament passage says nothing of the kind on its own. The apostolic writers are reading with something they were given.

7. If that is how Scripture is read, what stops a person from making it mean anything?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The rule, and it is public. The literal sense is the foundation and every other sense rests on it (CCC 116). The whole canon constrains. The analogy of faith rules out readings that contradict the faith. And the living Tradition of the Church applies all three.

Note what kind of thing that answer is. Every reader is meant to use those criteria; they are given to the whole Church, not withheld from the pew. What no private reader has is the standing to settle a disputed reading for everyone else. That belongs to the Church's teaching office (CCC 85-87).

DIG DEEPER: Where the method came from

Luke 24:27 says that beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Christ interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Verse 45 says he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Both are things done to the disciples. The apostolic way of reading is not a discovery they made. It is a gift they received and then handed on, which is the subject of Session 2.

The Steelman

THE DEPTH Read in full.

The strongest form of the objection.

Grant that the apostles read this way. They were apostles. They wrote under inspiration and their readings became Scripture. That is precisely why nobody else may do it. An inspired author identifying the rock as Christ is revelation; a bishop in the fourth century identifying a Marian type in a minor prophet is invention wearing the same costume.

And look at what the method licenses in practice. Once any text can carry a hidden second meaning, no doctrine can ever be refuted from Scripture, because any passage that tells against you can be spiritualized and any passage that does not mention your doctrine can be made to. A method that cannot fail is not a method. It is a way of always being right.

8. What is right about that? And what does it cost the person making it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

What is right: the objection is correct that undisciplined typology is unfalsifiable, and correct that some patristic and medieval readings are devotional rather than demonstrative. Concede both. A Catholic is free to find a given typological reading unpersuasive.

What it costs: the objection draws a line between inspired reading and later reading, and then has to explain who is authorized to police that line. Give the best answers their due first. A serious Protestant reader does not say each man for himself; he points to the canon itself, to grammatical-historical controls on the text, to historic confessions, and to real discipline inside an accountable church body. Those are genuine safeguards and you should say so. The Catholic question is what happens when those authorities divide, as they have, since each confession and each church body is finally received or rejected by the reader's own judgment, and none of them claims to be protected from error in settling the question. At that point the line is being policed by each individual reader after all, and the objection has reinvented the problem it accuses us of.

The Catholic answer is not that anyone may read typologically without restraint. It is that the same community that received the key also received the authority to say when it is being turned correctly, and that this authority is public, accountable, and has in fact rejected readings.

Land here, gently: we are not claiming the method is infallible in every hand. We are claiming it was handed on with a rule, and that the alternative on offer is not a method without risk but a method without a referee.

Send

9. You have been the Ethiopian in this study for five weeks. Who is currently reading something in the chariot next to you?
10. What is one place you still need a guide, and are you willing to go ask?

Live It This Week

- Read Luke 24:13-35 slowly and notice how much of it Christ does to them rather than for them.
- Pick one Old Testament story you know well and ask what it is a pattern of. Do not force it.
- At Sunday Mass, notice the relationship between the first reading and the Gospel. On Sundays and feasts the Old Testament reading is normally chosen to answer the Gospel, and often the link is typological. On weekdays the first reading usually runs its own continuous course, so do not force a connection that is not there.
- Say thank you to whoever has been your guide.

Closing Prayer

Father, you wrote one story across many centuries and many hands, and you gave your Church the key to read it. Keep us humble with that key. Let us never use it to win, and never bury it out of fear. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

“Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.” **Luke 24:45**

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

- Hosea 11:1, out of Egypt I called my son (live discovery)
- Matthew 2:15, the fulfillment citation
- Luke 24:13-35, the road to Emmaus
- Luke 24:27 and 44-45, he interpreted, and he opened their minds (memory verse at v. 45)
- 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, the rock was Christ
- Romans 5:14, Adam a type of the one to come
- 1 Peter 3:20-21, baptism corresponds to the flood
- John 3:14, the bronze serpent lifted up
- Hebrews 10:1, a shadow of the good things to come
- Galatians 4:24, Paul reading an episode as allegory
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17, revisited from the envelopes

Catechism: CCC 112-114, 115-119 with 116 central, 128-130.

Patristic: St. Augustine, Questions on the Heptateuch (summary). St. Melito of Sardis, On Pascha (summary). St. Gregory the Great, Moralia on Job, Letter to Leander (summary).

Session Six

With Gentleness and Reverence

Unless Someone Guides Me

Scripture, Tradition, and the Authority of the Church

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the New Testament's central command to be ready to give a defense, an *apologia*, for the hope that is in you arrives with conditions attached, and that those conditions are not decoration but method.

Catholic Touchstone. A person is almost never argued into the Church. They are loved into a place where the arguments can finally be heard. The arguments still matter, which is why we spent five weeks on them. They are just not the thing that opens the door.

This is the capstone, and it is the session most likely to be treated as a soft landing after the real work. Resist that. It is the session that decides whether the previous five made your people useful or insufferable.

What You Need to Know

1 Peter 3:15-16 is where the word apologetics comes from: be ready to make a defense, an *apologia*, to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.

Every Catholic apologist quotes the first half. Read the whole sentence and notice how much of it is about the manner rather than the matter. Reverence Christ as Lord in your hearts. Do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear. And then the purpose clause: so that those who revile your good behavior may be put to shame.

Read that last part carefully, because it is the sentence that should govern this session. Peter does not say they will be put to shame by the quality of your argument. He says they will be put to shame when they revile your behavior and the behavior turns out to be good. The defense is verbal; the thing that lands is a life.

The same instinct runs through the rest of the New Testament. The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, correcting opponents with gentleness (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, and let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:5-6). Avoid stupid controversies (Titus 3:9). Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). And most bluntly of all, if I understand all mysteries and all knowledge but have not love, I am nothing.

What we are actually asking of them

Your people now know more about the canon, Tradition, the Church, and typology than most of the people they will talk to. That is a genuine gift and also a genuine hazard. A newly equipped Catholic is dangerous in two directions: he can help someone home, and he can hand someone a permanent reason never to look at the Church again.

The practical skills worth naming tonight, since none of them are obvious: ask more than you assert; concede everything true as early as possible; never correct someone in front of an audience they care about; find out what the person actually believes rather than what their denomination officially teaches; and know when to stop, which is usually about ten minutes before you want to.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” **Proverbs 15:1**

Israel’s wisdom literature is unusually blunt about arguing, and unusually funny about it. Proverbs 26:4-5 gives two flatly contradictory instructions in consecutive verses: do not answer a fool according to his folly, and answer a fool according to his folly. The contradiction is the teaching. There is no rule that mechanically settles when to engage and when to walk away, which is why Scripture files this under wisdom rather than under law.

The fulfillment is Christ himself, who answers some questioners at length, answers others with a question, and answers Herod with nothing at all.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Justin Martyr

Dialogue with Trypho (summary)

Justin, writing in the second century, presents an extended conversation with a Jewish interlocutor named Trypho in which the other man is given real arguments, real objections, and genuine courtesy throughout.

Whatever one concludes about the arguments, the form is worth noticing. One of the earliest works of Christian apologetics is shaped as a conversation with a named person who is treated as worth persuading rather than as a target.

Summary of the work’s character and method; no section number printed.

Voice of the Church

St. Francis de Sales

Given as a summary of his method; no locus printed

Sent to a region that had largely left the Catholic faith, and finding that almost no one would come hear him preach, Francis wrote out his case in short pieces and passed them under doors, then waited. He worked that way for years.

His reputation for gentleness is not a legend invented later, and the method is at least consistent with it. Reading the leaflets as an assumption that people need time and privacy is an interpretation rather than something Francis states, but it is a defensible one: a page pushed under a door can be considered alone and at leisure, which a public confrontation does not allow.

The surviving leaflets were collected and published as the Controversies. The motive attributed to the method is an interpretation, not a quotation. The familiar saying about honey and vinegar is popularly attributed to him but not securely sourced, so it is not printed here.

Voice of the Church

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Quoted in the Catechism at CCC 2478

The Catechism cites his rule that every good Christian ought to be more ready to put a good

interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it, and that where the meaning is unclear one should ask how the other understands it, and correct him with love if he is in error.

This is the whole of tonight's method in one sentence, and it is in the Catechism, which means it is not merely good advice but part of how the Church teaches us to treat the eighth commandment.

Securely located: the Catechism quotes it at 2478, from the presupposition of his Spiritual Exercises.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 2471-2474 treat bearing witness to the truth, up to and including martyrdom, which is where this obligation ultimately points.
- CCC 2478 gives the duty to interpret a neighbor's statements favorably and to ask before condemning. This is the most practically useful paragraph in the entire book.
- CCC 856 describes the Church's missionary work as a dialogue that respects the other and looks for the seeds of the Word already present.
- CCC 821 lists what genuine ecumenism requires, beginning with renewal of the Church and conversion of heart. Note the order: it starts with us.

Thread Watch

Leader only. All threads close tonight.

- THREAD C resolves in the Send. The Ethiopian asked how he could understand unless someone guided him. Your people have been the Ethiopian for six weeks. Tonight they become Philip, and the honest half of that is that they will remain the Ethiopian too, permanently.
- If you are continuing to Book Two, say so tonight but do not lean on it. This course is designed to end here and to be complete.
- Watch for the participant who has become combative over six weeks. This session is aimed at that person and they will not know it. Do not single them out; let the text do it.

Session Goals

- 1. Every participant can quote 1 Peter 3:15-16 in full, including the conditions.
- 2. Every participant can name at least three practical habits of a good conversation about faith.
- 3. The group discovers, in Acts 17, that Paul begins with what his hearers already hold rather than with what they lack.
- 4. Every participant has considered, seriously, the case that apologetics does harm.
- 5. Nobody leaves this course looking for a fight.

Timed Plan

- Opening prayer and Win: 12 minutes.
- 1 Peter 3:15-16, questions 3 and 4: 20 minutes.
- The Acts 17 live discovery, questions 5 and 6: 22 minutes.
- The steelman and question 7: 22 minutes.
- Send, the closing practice, and the blessing: 20 minutes. Protect this; the course ends here.

If you are running short: compress Acts 17. Do not compress the Send, and do not skip the closing practice.

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.

"Being nice is how the truth gets lost. Someone has to say the hard thing."

Agree, and agree quickly, because it is true and the person saying it is usually reacting to real cowardice they have seen.

The distinction is between gentleness and vagueness. Gentleness is about manner; it says the hard thing and says it kindly. Vagueness refuses to say it at all. 2 Timothy 2:25 asks for correction, actual correction, delivered with gentleness. Both halves of that sentence are commands.

"What about when Jesus called them whitewashed tombs?"

A fair question and worth answering seriously. Notice the target: our Lord speaks that way to religious authorities within his own tradition who are laying burdens on others, not to seekers, not to the Samaritan woman, not to Nicodemus, not to Pilate.

The pastoral rule that follows is uncomfortable and worth saying out loud: the harshest words in the Gospels are aimed at insiders with power. If we are going to imitate them, the target is us.

"I tried this and they just kept attacking. Am I supposed to take it forever?"

No. Titus 3:9 says avoid stupid controversies, and Proverbs gives permission to disengage.

Help them name what winning looks like: not agreement, but a conversation the other person would be willing to have again. If a conversation has become one neither person would repeat, ending it is the faithful move rather than the cowardly one.

"Should I use what I learned on my family at Christmas?"

Almost certainly not the way they are imagining. Family arguments about religion are rarely about religion, and a table with an audience is the worst possible venue.

Redirect: ask them what would happen if they spent a year being noticeably easier to live with, and said nothing at all until someone asked. That is the actual strategy, and it is slower and harder than the one they wanted.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you were patient with people who were slow, and gentle with people who were wrong, and you saved your hardest words for those who should have known better. Give us your manner as well as your truth. Keep us from becoming people who are right and unbearable. Amen.

Win

1. Think of a time someone changed your mind about something that mattered. What did they actually do?
2. Now think of a time someone tried and failed, and made you dig in. What went wrong?

Build

Read aloud: 1 Peter 3:15-16, the whole of both verses.

3. Divide the sentence. Which parts are about what you say, and which are about how you are?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

What you say is a small fraction of it: be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks a reason for your hope.

Everything else is manner and condition: reverence Christ as Lord in your hearts, do it with gentleness and reverence, keep a clear conscience.

Note also what triggers the defense. Someone asks. Peter does not say what prompts the asking, and in this letter it is often not friendly curiosity: the very next verse has people reviling your good behavior. What he does tie the defense to is a clear conscience and a life that holds up under hostile inspection. The pastoral pattern that follows, and it is a pattern rather than a rule the verse states, is that ordinarily the life comes first, the question second, and the answer third.

4. Read the end of verse 16 again. What is it that actually puts the critics to shame?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Their good behavior in Christ. Peter does not say the opponents will be shamed by superior arguments. He says they will be shamed when they revile a life and the life turns out to be good.

This is the load-bearing line of the whole session, and of the course. We have spent five weeks on arguments precisely so that they can be held lightly and offered when asked, rather than deployed.

Live discovery. Give the group Acts 17:22-31 with one instruction: Paul is at the Areopagus in Athens, addressing Athenians who brought him there after Epicurean and Stoic philosophers argued with him in the marketplace. Make a list of what he does NOT do.

5. What is missing from his approach?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He does not quote Scripture at them, though he knows it better than anyone present. He does not open by telling them they are wrong. He does not mock the idols, though the text says he was provoked by

them.

What he does instead: he compliments their religiousness, starts from an altar they already built, and quotes their own poets back to them. He builds the case on ground they already occupy.

Then note the ending honestly, because it matters. Some mocked, some deferred, and some believed. Even done perfectly, this is the normal distribution of results, and your people need to expect it.

6. What would the equivalent be for you, with the specific person you have been praying for since Session 1?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Let them answer concretely rather than in principle. Push for the actual altar: what does this person already love, already believe, already long for?

If someone cannot answer, that is the finding. It means they know their friend's position but not their friend.

DIG DEEPER: The two verses that contradict each other

Proverbs 26:4 says do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him. Proverbs 26:5 says answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

They sit side by side deliberately. Scripture declines to give a mechanical rule for when to engage, which means discernment is required and cannot be outsourced.

The Steelman

THE DEPTH This one is aimed at us. Read it in full and let it sit before anyone answers.

The strongest form of the objection.

This course has been a mistake. You have taken a room of ordinary Catholics and handed each of them enough material to embarrass their Protestant friends, and that is what most of them will do with it, whatever tonight's session says. People do not convert because they lost an argument. They convert because someone loved them and they saw something they wanted.

And there is worse. A person who has been publicly bested does not reconsider; he hardens, and he now associates the Catholic Church with the experience of being humiliated by someone he used to like. Six weeks of study have made your people more capable of doing permanent damage than they were before, and they will do it with a clear conscience because they will be right.

If the aim was souls, the honest course would have been six weeks on prayer, and on becoming the kind of person whose life raises a question.

7. How much of that is true? And is there an answer?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Concede a great deal, and concede it first. Winning arguments rarely converts. Public humiliation hardens. A newly equipped Catholic is genuinely more dangerous than an unequipped one. Anyone who has done parish work has watched this happen.

The answer is not that the objection is wrong but that it presents a false choice. 1 Peter 3:15 does not say

be good instead of being ready; it says be ready, with gentleness, out of a good life. Peter assumes all three, and the verse would not need to command readiness if a good life alone always sufficed.

The second answer is about who this is for. Most of your people will never debate anyone. What they will do is stop being afraid, stop avoiding their own family at Christmas, and stop quietly suspecting that the Church cannot answer the questions. A Catholic who is not afraid of Scripture is a different person, and that is worth six weeks even if they never win an argument in their life.

Third, and say this plainly: the objection is right that this material can be used badly, which is why the course ends here rather than at Session 5. Anyone who takes what they learned and uses it to win has misunderstood the assignment, and you should say that to their face tonight.

Send

8. Six weeks ago the Ethiopian asked how he could understand unless someone guided him. Who are you now the guide for? And where do you still need one?
9. What is one thing you will not do with what you have learned here?

The Closing Practice

Go around the room. Each person names aloud the person they have been praying for since Session 1, and one concrete thing they will do for that person in the next month that is not an argument. Write them down. Ask someone to check in with the group in a month.

Live It This Week

- Memorize 1 Peter 3:15-16, both verses, including the conditions.
- Do the thing you named in the closing practice.
- Go to confession before you go looking for a conversation.
- Keep praying for your person by name. You have done it for six weeks; do not stop now.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank you for six weeks in your Word and for everyone in this room. You have given us more than we knew there was to have. Keep us from using it badly. Make us patient with people who are where we used to be, and honest about how much we still do not know. Send us to the ones you have already been working on, and let us be gentle enough not to get in your way. 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

- Proverbs 15:1, a soft answer
- Proverbs 26:4-5, the two contradictory instructions
- 1 Peter 3:15-16, the core text and memory verse
- 2 Timothy 2:24-26, not quarrelsome, correcting with gentleness
- Colossians 4:5-6, speech seasoned with salt
- Titus 3:9, avoid stupid controversies
- Ephesians 4:15, truth in love
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-2, all knowledge without love
- Acts 17:22-31, Paul at Athens (live discovery)
- Acts 17:32-34, the three responses
- Acts 8:31, the Ethiopian's question, carried from Session 1

Catechism: CCC 821, 856, 2471-2474, 2478.

Patristic and later: St. Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho. St. Francis de Sales, the Chablais mission. St. Ignatius of Loyola, quoted at CCC 2478.

Module One

Peter and the Keys

Unless Someone Guides Me

A standalone session. Run it any time after Session Four.

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Peter's singular role is not built on one verse but on a pattern running through all four Gospels and Acts, and learns exactly what the Church claims for the papal office and exactly what she does not.

Catholic Touchstone. The office is a promise about the preservation of the Church's teaching, not a claim about the holiness or cleverness of the man holding it. Catholics who understand that distinction can face the whole history of the papacy without flinching.

Session Four established the Isaiah 22 background and the council at Jerusalem. This module goes further: the pattern across the New Testament, what Vatican I actually defined, and the hard history. It assumes Session Four but can be run on its own with fifteen minutes of setup.

What You Need to Know

The pattern, not the proof text

Peter is named first in every formal list of the apostles, at Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16 and Acts 1:13, and Matthew 10:2 goes out of its way to call him first, which is odd in a list where nobody else is numbered. John gives no formal list of the Twelve, but he gives Peter the same prominence by other means: the naming at John 1:42, the confession on behalf of the Twelve at John 6:68-69, and the threefold commission at John 21:15-17. He is named far more often than any other apostle. He speaks for the group repeatedly, walks on the water, is the one Christ teaches from in the boat, is the first to preach at Pentecost, works the first healing, receives the vision that opens the Church to the Gentiles, and is the one whose shadow the crowds seek. A person who has never heard of the papacy, reading Acts straight through, will notice a man out in front.

Three scenes are singular. At Caesarea Philippi he alone is solemnly identified as the rock, under the new name Christ had already promised him at John 1:42, and he alone is given the keys. He is the only apostle Christ renames, and the name is an office, not a nickname. At the Last Supper Christ tells him that Satan has demanded to sift the apostles like wheat, and then says that he has prayed for Peter in particular, that his faith may not fail, and that when he has turned again he must strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:31-32). Note the grammar carefully: the sifting is plural, the prayer is singular, and the commission is to strengthen the others. After the Resurrection, the man who denied three times is asked three times whether he loves Christ and told three times to feed the flock (John 21:15-17).

What Vatican I actually defined

This is the most useful five minutes you will spend, because most objections are aimed at a claim the Church has never made. The First Vatican Council in 1870 defined that the Roman Pontiff teaches

infallibly when four conditions hold together: he speaks (ex cathedra), that is, in the exercise of his office as pastor and teacher of all Christians; he acts by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority; he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals; and he does so as to be held by the whole Church.

What follows from those four conditions is a long list of things not covered: a pope's private theological opinions, his interviews, his personal conduct, his political judgments, his disciplinary decisions, his prudential calls about war or economics, and his choice of appointments. The charism is a negative protection, preserving the Church from being taught error under those specific conditions. It is not inspiration, it does not produce new revelation, and it does not make the man wise.

The history we tell ourselves

Do not let your group meet these facts from a hostile source first. Pope Honorius I was condemned by name by the Third Council of Constantinople in 681 for his handling of the monothelite controversy, and later popes ratified that condemnation. There were popes of scandalous personal life, Alexander VI being the usual example. There was a period when rival claimants each commanded the allegiance of whole nations, and saints were found on opposing sides. Some other cases often cited, such as the pressure placed on Pope Liberius in the fourth century, are genuinely disputed by historians and you should not present them with more confidence than the sources allow.

The honest Catholic response is not to explain these away. It is to notice that none of them involves a pope defining a doctrine of faith under the four conditions, and to say that the claim has always been narrower than its critics assume and narrower than some enthusiastic Catholics have implied.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

“And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.” **Isaiah 22:22**

The steward's office in the Davidic court is the pattern: a single man, an installed office, a transmissible authority, a paternal title. Consider also the pattern of renaming in Genesis, where Abram becomes Abraham and Jacob becomes Israel. In Scripture a new name from God signals a new role in his plan, and it is not given casually.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Jerome

Letter 15, to Pope Damasus, around 376 (summary)

Writing to Rome from the East during a contested succession in Antioch, Jerome asks Damasus to tell him with whom he should be in communion, and says he is joined in communion with the chair of Peter.

What makes this useful is who is speaking. Jerome is the great critical scholar of his age, not a man given to flattery, and he is writing from a distance about a practical problem: which of several claimants is the real bishop? His instinct is to write to Rome and abide by the answer.

Summary of the letter's substance; the communion sentence is in section 2. Read it there before you quote it.

Voice of the Church

The Fathers of Chalcedon

At the reading of Leo's Tome, 451

When the doctrinal letter of Pope St. Leo was read at the Council of Chalcedon, the assembled bishops

acclaimed it, and the acclamation recorded in the acts includes the cry that Peter had spoken through Leo.

Represent this carefully and it is powerful; overstate it and you will be caught. The bishops examined the Tome against the faith rather than accepting it unread, which is exactly what the Catholic position expects. What the acclamation shows is how the see of Rome was regarded, not that the council thought examination unnecessary.

The acclamation is preserved in the conciliar acts; presented as summary.

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

Arguing against the Donatists, Augustine appeals to the unbroken order of bishops in the Roman see, running from Peter forward, as a publicly checkable fact that his opponents cannot match.

The argument's force depends entirely on the list being common knowledge and verifiable in the fourth century. He is not revealing something; he is pointing at something everyone already knew.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 552-553 on the keys and the power to bind and loose.
- CCC 880-887 on the college of bishops with the Roman Pontiff as its head.
- CCC 891 on infallibility, which summarizes the definition in its own words and speaks of the Pope proclaiming a doctrine by a definitive act as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful. The fourfold statement of the conditions is Vatican I, Pastor aeternus, chapter 4. Learn both precisely, and keep them distinct; together they settle most arguments before they start.
- CCC 892 covers the ordinary teaching of the Magisterium and the religious assent owed to it, which is a real obligation and a different one. Do not blur 891 and 892 together.

Session Goals

- 1. Every participant can name at least four ways Peter is singled out across the Gospels and Acts.
- 2. Every participant can state from memory the four conditions defined at Vatican I in Pastor aeternus, chapter 4, and can say how CCC 891 summarizes them.
- 3. Every participant can name at least two genuine failures in papal history and explain why they do not touch the defined claim.
- 4. Nobody leaves believing that Catholics think the Pope cannot sin or cannot be wrong.

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.

"Peter was never in Rome."

Handle at the level the evidence supports. 1 Peter 5:13 sends greetings from Babylon, which the early tradition read as Rome, and Revelation uses Babylon the same way. Irenaeus states it plainly, that Peter and Paul preached at Rome and founded the church there (Against Heresies 3.3.2), writing around 180. The earlier witnesses are less explicit but converge: 1 Clement, written from Rome in the 90s, holds up the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul as belonging to its own memory without naming the city, and Ignatius, writing to the Roman church around 107, appeals to Peter and Paul as men who had given that church commands. Present this as

an early and convergent tradition, not as eyewitness testimony.

The archaeological material under St. Peter's is suggestive and is treated as such by careful scholars; do not oversell it. The literary evidence is early, unanimous, and uncontested by any competing city claiming his tomb, which is the strongest form of the argument.

"Honorius was a heretic pope, so infallibility is false."

Concede the condemnation immediately; it is in the acts of an ecumenical council and Catholics gain nothing by fighting it.

Then apply the four conditions. Honorius wrote official papal letters to Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople, in reply to a formal inquiry in a live controversy. His language was careless and his counsel was to drop the competing formulas rather than settle the question, and the council condemned him for that failure. What he did not do is define a doctrine ex cathedra, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, to be held by the whole Church. Do not call the letters private; they were not, and you do not need them to be. The case is actually evidence for the Catholic position, since the Church was able to condemn a pope, which a Church that thought popes personally impeccable could not have done.

"Paul rebuked Peter, so Peter had no authority over him."

Galatians 2:11 is real and we should quote it ourselves. Note what Paul objects to: Peter's conduct, his withdrawal from table fellowship, not his teaching. Paul says he stood condemned because he was not straightforward about the truth of the Gospel in practice.

A subordinate can rebuke a superior for behaviour, and saints have done it repeatedly, St. Catherine of Siena being the famous case. The rebuke presupposes the office matters.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you chose a fisherman who failed you badly and made him the rock. Give us confidence in your promises rather than in ourselves, and charity toward the men you have placed over us. Amen.

Win

1. Have you ever been given responsibility you knew you were not equal to? What happened?
2. What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word pope? Be honest.

Build

Live discovery. Give the group four passages and ask them to note everything said about Peter specifically: Matthew 10:1-4, Luke 22:31-32, John 21:15-17, and Acts 2:14 and 10:1-48. Fifteen minutes.

3. What did you find?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Named first in the list and explicitly called first. Prayed for by name while the sifting is aimed at all of them, then told to strengthen the others. Asked three times and given the flock. Preaching first at Pentecost. Receiving the vision that opens the door to the Gentiles.

Draw out the Luke 22 grammar if they miss it: Satan asks for all of you, I have prayed for you singular, and you must strengthen your brothers. The singling out is in the sentence structure.

4. Read CCC 891 aloud, slowly, twice, and read the four conditions from Vatican I beside it. What are the conditions, how does the Catechism put them, and what is left out?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Speaking as pastor and teacher of all Christians, by virtue of supreme apostolic authority, defining a doctrine of faith or morals, to be held by the whole Church.

Left out: opinions, interviews, conduct, politics, prudential judgments, appointments, discipline. Have them list these out loud. Most people arguing about the papacy have never heard the definition.

5. Given all that, what does it mean that Honorius was condemned by an ecumenical council?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

That the Church can and did condemn a pope, which tells you the claim was never personal impeccability. Honorius answered Patriarch Sergius in official letters and answered badly; what he never did was define anything for the whole Church.

Let the group sit with the fact that the Church preserved this in her own conciliar records rather than burying it.

DIG DEEPER: What the office is for

Luke 22:32 gives the purpose in six words: when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.

The office exists to hold the others together, and it is given to a man who is told in advance that he will fail

and return. That order matters.

The Steelman

The strongest form of the objection.

If Christ established a visible head with universal authority, the first three centuries should be full of appeals to him, and they are not. Churches settled disputes locally, councils were called by emperors, and the great doctrinal controversies were fought out among bishops across the empire. Rome is respected, certainly, as the church of the capital and of two martyred apostles, but respect is not jurisdiction.

What the record actually shows is a primacy of honour growing slowly into a claim of power, helped along by the collapse of imperial authority in the West. That is a perfectly natural historical development, and it does not require a promise from Christ to explain it.

6. What is true in that, and where does the Catholic case actually stand?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

True: the office as exercised in the second century does not look like the office as exercised in the nineteenth, and pretending otherwise is indefensible. Development is real and Catholics should own the word rather than fear it.

What the case rests on: Clement of Rome intervening in Corinth around 96 and expecting compliance. Ignatius addressing the Roman church in distinctive terms. Irenaeus pointing to Rome as the reference point for apostolic teaching. Jerome writing from the East to ask Rome whom to be in communion with. Chalcedon acclaiming Leo. Keep the data and the reading of the data apart, out loud. The data: Clement of Rome writes to Corinth around 96, unasked, and expects to be heeded, and says so at the end of the letter; Ignatius greets the Roman church around 107 in language he uses for no other church he writes to; Irenaeus around 180 points to Rome as the church with which the others must agree (Against Heresies 3.3.2), and the key phrase there is disputed among translators; Jerome writes from the East to ask Rome whom to be in communion with; Chalcedon acclaiming Leo. The Catholic reading is that this is a real primacy already being exercised. Our interlocutor reads the same texts as prestige and moral weight, not jurisdiction, and that reading has to be answered with argument rather than waved off. What cannot be maintained is that the texts are silent, or that Rome's standing was invented in 1870.

The honest formulation: the seed is in Matthew 16, the practice is visible early, and the articulation develops. That is how doctrine works generally, including doctrines our interlocutor holds, such as the Trinity, whose formal vocabulary is also later than the New Testament.

Send

7. Does the papacy make the faith easier or harder for you? Say the true answer.
8. What would change if you prayed for the Pope regularly?

Live It This Week

- Memorize the four conditions in CCC 891.
- Read Luke 22:31-34 and John 21:15-19 together, in that order.
- Pray for the Pope by name daily this week.

Closing Prayer

Father, you build on people who fail. Thank you for keeping your Church through men who were not worthy of her, and for keeping us through the same mercy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

“But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.” **Luke 22:32**

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

- Isaiah 22:22, the key on the shoulder
- Matthew 10:1-4, Peter named first
- Matthew 16:13-19, the keys
- John 1:42, you shall be called Cephas
- Luke 22:31-32, I have prayed for you (memory verse at v. 32)
- John 21:15-17, feed my sheep
- Acts 2:14, Peter preaches first
- Acts 10:1-48, the vision and the Gentiles
- 1 Peter 5:13, greetings from Babylon
- Galatians 2:11, the rebuke at Antioch

Catechism: CCC 552-553, 880-887, 891, 892.

Historical: Vatican I, 1870, the four conditions. Third Council of Constantinople, 681, on Honorius. Council of Chalcedon, 451.

Module Two

The Seven Books

Unless Someone Guides Me

A standalone session. Run it any time after Session One.

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers which books are in dispute, why they were in the Christian Bible for over a thousand years, and what actually happened in the sixteenth century.

Catholic Touchstone. The question is not whether someone added books but which collection the Church received and used. Answering it requires history, and the history is not in Catholics' disfavour.

What You Need to Know

The seven books are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees, together with additional material in Esther and Daniel. Catholics call them deuterocanonical, meaning of the second canon, a term that acknowledges they were discussed rather than pretending they never were.

The early Church read the Old Testament principally in Greek, in the Greek scriptural tradition commonly called the Septuagint, which broadly carried these books alongside the rest. Be precise here: there was no single fixed Septuagint canon. The great Greek Christian codices differ from one another in what they contain and in what order, and some carry books the Catholic canon does not. The claim that holds is transmission and use, not a closed Greek list. The New Testament authors quote the Old Testament in a Greek form very frequently, which tells you which text was in their hands. The regional councils at Hippo in 393 and Carthage in 397 and 419 list a canon matching the Catholic one. These books were then carried in the Latin Bibles of the West for over a millennium, copied, read and preached from as part of Scripture. Say it as continuity of use, not as a fixed table of contents. The Latin transmission was not perfectly uniform; manuscripts and editions differ in where some books were placed and in what else was bound with them, and as noted above several of these books reached the Vulgate through the Old Latin rather than through Jerome's own hand. What is constant, and what the argument needs, is that the West read these books as its Bible until the sixteenth century.

St. Jerome is the honest complication and you should present him fully. He had genuine doubts about books outside the Hebrew canon and said so. He also translated Tobit and Judith himself, quoted these books, and deferred to the Church's usage. The remaining deuterocanonical books entered the Vulgate through the Old Latin rather than his own hand. He is neither a proto-Protestant nor a Tridentine Catholic, and tidying him into either is a sourcing error.

In the sixteenth century Luther's German Bible grouped these books in a separate section, presented as useful and good to read but not held equal to Scripture. He also expressed reservations about several New Testament books, moving Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation to the end of his New Testament, and his description of James as an epistle of straw appears in the 1522 preface and was dropped from

later editions. He did not remove James from the Bible, and saying he did is the kind of overclaim that will cost you the argument. The Council of Trent defined the canon in 1546, in response.

Where the Books Show Up

The wicked plot against the righteous man: “let us test him with insult and torture... let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.” **Wisdom 2:12-20**

Set this beside Matthew 27:41-43, where the chief priests mock the crucified Christ with the taunt that he trusts in God and God should deliver him if he wants him. The verbal parallel is close enough that most readers notice it immediately, and it is the single most striking thing you can show a group in this module.

Hebrews 11:35 speaks of women who received their dead by resurrection and of others tortured, refusing release, that they might rise to a better life. No episode in the protocanonical Old Testament matches that description, and it is widely regarded as an allusion to the mother and her seven sons in 2 Maccabees 7. Present it as an allusion rather than a quotation, because that is what it is.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

On Christian Doctrine, Book II (summary)

Augustine sets out how to judge which books belong, advising that the reader follow the authority of the churches, preferring those held by the greater number and the more weighty. His own enumeration includes the disputed books.

Note his method as much as his list. Faced with a question the Scriptures do not answer about themselves, he consults the practice of the churches.

Summary of his argument in Book II; no section number printed.

Voice of the Church

St. Jerome

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

Jerome distinguished books of the Hebrew canon from those he described as read for edification but not for establishing doctrine, and he said so bluntly. He also translated Tobit and Judith, cited these books in his own writing, and submitted to the judgment of the Church on their use.

We print him honestly rather than conscripting him. A tradition confident enough to keep a dissenting Doctor in full view is more persuasive than one that hides him.

Voice of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Letter to the Corinthians (summary)

Writing around the year 96, Clement holds up examples of faithful women from Israel's history, and the figures he reaches for include Judith.

Whatever conclusion one draws about canonicity, the practical point stands: these narratives were part of the furniture of Christian moral instruction in the first century.

Summary; presented as evidence of early use rather than of a formal canon list.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 120 lists the canon in full, including the seven, and states that the Church discerned the list by apostolic Tradition.
- CCC 121-123 treat the enduring value of the Old Testament and warn against dismissing it.
- CCC 138 states that the Church accepts and venerates the forty-six Old Testament and twenty-seven New Testament books as inspired.

Session Goals

- 1. Every participant can name the seven books.
- 2. Every participant can explain, in one sentence, why Trent is late without conceding the argument.
- 3. Every participant can tell St. Jerome's story accurately, including the part that is inconvenient for us.
- 4. Nobody leaves saying Luther removed books from the New Testament, because he did not.

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.

"The Jews rejected these books, and it is their Old Testament."

Hedge honestly. The Hebrew canon was not formally closed in a way that settles the question during our Lord's lifetime, and the old theory of a decisive rabbinic council at Jamnia is now largely abandoned by scholars.

The Greek-speaking Jewish world used a wider collection, and that is the world the apostles preached in and quoted from. Do not claim more than that.

Do not say the Septuagint had a canon. Say these books were transmitted and read with the Greek Scriptures.

"Trent added them in 1546, which is proof enough."

Concede that Trent, in 1546, gave the first solemn definition of the canon with an anathema attached, and that this is a real fact, not one to hide. But do not concede that Trent was the first time the Church listed these books authoritatively. The ecumenical Council of Florence enumerated the same collection, including the seven, in its 1442 Decree for the Jacobites, a century before Luther. Trent defined; Florence had already listed.

Then give the sequence: Hippo and Carthage in the 390s, the Latin Bible of the West for a millennium, relegation to a separate section in the sixteenth century, and outright omission in many later Protestant editions, definition in response. Trent closed a question that had long been settled in the practice of the Latin Church, in her Bibles, her liturgy and her preaching, and closed it because someone had reopened it. Be honest about the qualifier: settled in practice is not the same as never questioned. A minority of Latin scholars, Jerome most famously, kept raising the Hebrew canon as a difficulty right up to the eve of Trent. What was constant was the use of the books; what Trent supplied was the definition.

Use relegation, not removal. The module has already taught that Luther separated these books rather than deleting them, and your own summary must match.

"2 Maccabees prays for the dead, which is why you kept it."

The order of causation is backwards and worth stating: the book was in the Christian Bible for centuries before anyone was arguing about purgatory in these terms.

Then be honest about what 2 Maccabees 12 shows: Jews in the second century before Christ prayed and made offerings for the dead, and the author commends it. Whether that establishes the later doctrine is a separate question, treated in Book Two.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you gave your Word to a people and let them carry it through centuries of argument and copying and care. Thank you for everyone who kept it. Give us patience with the history and honesty with the facts. Amen.

Win

1. Have you ever read any of the seven books? What do you actually know about them?
2. How does it feel to be told your Bible has extra books in it?

Build

Live discovery. Give half the group Wisdom 2:12-20 and the other half Matthew 27:39-43, without saying why. Ask each to summarise their passage in three sentences. Then read them side by side.

3. What do you notice?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The taunt in Matthew tracks the plot in Wisdom closely: the righteous man claims God as his father, is tested with insult, is condemned to a shameful death, and his claim to divine protection is thrown back at him.

Be careful about the claim you make. This is a striking parallel, and the strongest honest statement is that the Passion narrative appears to be shaped by language the evangelists knew from this book. Do not assert direct quotation.

4. Read Hebrews 11:35. Can you find that episode in the Old Testament you already have?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

No. The description of people tortured and refusing release in hope of a better resurrection has no match in the protocanonical books, and is widely regarded as an allusion to 2 Maccabees 7.

Again, allusion rather than quotation. The honest version is stronger than the overclaim.

5. Given Jerome's doubts, how should a Catholic tell his story?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Completely. He doubted, he said so, he translated two of them, he cited them, and he deferred to the Church. Any version that omits half of this is dishonest, including the Catholic version that omits the doubts.

This is the teaching moment of the module: our confidence does not depend on our saints agreeing with us about everything.

DIG DEEPER: What Luther actually did

He grouped the disputed Old Testament books separately as useful and good to read but not equal to Scripture, and he moved Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation to the end of his New Testament.

He did not remove any New Testament book. The epistle of straw phrase is from the 1522 preface and was dropped in later editions. Getting this right matters: the accurate account is damaging enough without embellishment.

The Steelman

The strongest form of the objection.

The Old Testament was entrusted to Israel. Paul says the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God, and the tradition that carried Israel's Scriptures forward never received a single one of these seven. Notice also what the New Testament does not do. It cites the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms constantly and by formula, and it never once cites any of the seven as Scripture. And the appeal to the Greek collections proves too little, because those collections do not agree with one another: the great codices carry different books in different orders, some of them books Rome itself does not accept. A list nobody in the first century could state is not a canon. Christians who later fixed the wider list were not receiving something from Israel; they were settling something Israel had never handed them.

And the doubts were not marginal. Jerome, the greatest scriptural scholar the ancient Church produced, the man who actually translated the Bible the West used, said plainly that these books were read for edification and not for establishing doctrine. If the Church had always been certain, her finest scholar would not have written that.

6. What is true there, and what does it leave standing?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

True: Romans 3:2 says what it says, Jerome said what he said, and the doubts were real and were held by serious people. Concede all of it. Concede the citation point too. There is no formula quotation of the seven in the New Testament, only allusion, and this module has already refused to overclaim on Wisdom 2 and Hebrews 11:35.

What it leaves standing is a question about which Israel. The Greek-speaking Jewish world used a wider collection, and it is that world the apostles came out of and preached into. Deciding between them is a judgment about which tradition of reception is authoritative, and that judgment is not itself found in any book.

On Jerome: he did not treat his opinion as decisive, and neither should we. He submitted the question to the Church, which is precisely the move this whole course has been describing.

The honest landing: this is not a question Scripture can answer about itself, which is why it is in this course at all.

Send

7. Will you read one of the seven this year? Which one?

8. What does it do to you that the Church kept a dissenting Doctor in plain view?

Live It This Week

- Read the Book of Tobit. It is short, it is a family story, and most Catholics have never read it.

- Read Wisdom 2 and then Matthew 27 in one sitting.
- Learn the seven names well enough to list them without looking.

Closing Prayer

Lord, you spoke through many hands over many centuries, and your Church carried the words to us. Give us love for all of them, and honesty in how we defend them. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

▮ *“My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation.” Sirach 2:1*

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

- Wisdom 2:12-20, the plot against the righteous man (live discovery)
- Matthew 27:39-43, the taunt at the cross
- Hebrews 11:35, tortured, refusing release
- 2 Maccabees 7, the mother and her seven sons
- 2 Maccabees 12:44-46, prayer and offering for the dead
- Romans 3:2, entrusted with the oracles of God (steelman)
- Sirach 2:1, memory verse
- Tobit, recommended reading

Catechism: CCC 120, 121-123, 138.

Historical: Hippo 393; Carthage 397 and 419; the Vulgate; Luther's 1534 Bible; Florence, Decree for the Jacobites, 1442; Trent, fourth session, 1546.

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.