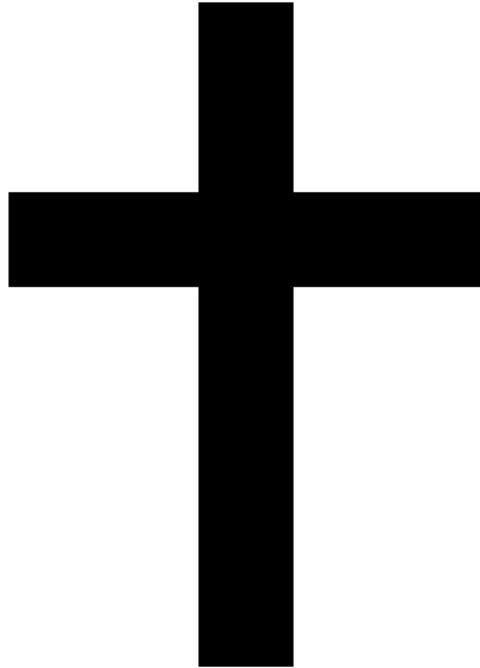


## LESSON THREE



# Coming to a Cross Roads

You have come to an intersection along the way, and you have decided to continue along that road that leads you closer towards becoming fully integrated into the Catholic Church. You have read through the bishops' COMPENDIUM of *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, you have read at least one history of the Church, and you have had time to explore online the various recommended websites as another source to answer your questions. You are going to mass at least once a week, and you are endeavoring to get into the rhythm of

Catholic worship. Now we should spend a little time with apologetics.

Apologetics is different from catechesis. Catechesis is a way of teaching that presumes the student is open to the knowledge you are hoping to hand on. Apologetics is slightly more argumentative. Apologetics is a way of teaching that seeks *to convince* and that presumes that the listener or reader is somewhat resisting what you are trying to pass on. Catechesis presumes one has a more docile listener, whereas apologetics presumes the listener is less receptive, or even somewhat hostile. Nevertheless, for most of us who are seeking to learn, we are both. In some ways we are receptive, but on other topics, we become more resistant, and so a little bit of apologetics is good for all of us.

## Consider the Sources

The Catholic Church greatly values education and literacy, and wherever we go these complimentary components of the Gospel have come with us. We also highly value reason, which is why we are not afraid to use philosophical terms to communicate the faith through those terms. Because we believe that God has created the world with reason, we are also inclined to look for patterns in our physical world, which is what has given rise to what we call physics (or science) today. Still, the ultimate discipline for the Catholic is theology, which is the study of our Lord and God. Theology has

many subcategories, but taken as a whole it is the prayerful and in depth study of God and of his grace.

Because the New Testament grew out of the Catholic Church, and because the Catholic Church was founded before the writings of the New Testament, we cannot be called a biblically based church (even though the Bible grew out of this Church). And so yes, we admire tradition, in part because Tradition predates Scripture, and in part because Scripture evolves out of the Tradition. The word Tradition is a word that means that which we pass on or hand on to the next generation, and Catholics are keen on Tradition. This is how we learn, and this is how we have maintained our integrity throughout the centuries. Passing down or handing down knowledge of Christ and of his Church is key.

And so, when Catholics consider authoritative teaching, we consider three sources: 1) the Tradition, 2) the Scriptures and 3) the Magisterium. The Magisterium is the living and authoritative teaching body of the Church, which is to say our bishops, who are ordained to teach and to sanctify the Church, and who possess (as a body) a power or authority to teach us within the Tradition. When the apostles died, they left us the bishops, and the bishops have kept alive the Church through teaching and through the sacraments. The Scriptures are the writings of the Apostles & Evangelists that were preserved and proclaimed by the Magisterium throughout the ages. The Magisterium (guided by the Holy Spirit) ultimately decided which books and letters would be in the Christian New Testament, and by their authority the New Testament was recognized as

authoritative. The Tradition is primarily (though not exclusively) the way we worship. Our worship informs us as Catholics, and our worship was the means through which the Scriptures were formed, and yet the Bishops could discern suitable from unsuitable texts for the New Testament by way of understanding the Tradition. Thus we see how intertwined these three sources really are, though they are essentially all a single source: the Lord.

Back to the beginning, recall the three sources of Divine Revelation: "Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium are so closely united with each other that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way, under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls" (*Compendium* no. 17; *Catechism* no. 95, quoting the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* no. 10 [Vatican II 1965]).

## Catholic & Christian

When someone comes into the Church from another faith, there is usually some need to also give some apologetics, because usually there are parts of us that remain unconvinced about some things. In part this is because we are typically coming into the Church by way of overcoming prejudices that we may have picked up along the way. Still, even cradle Catholics can benefit from a dose or two of apologetics, because we enjoy seeing the argued reasoning behind

our beliefs. You may not personally think you need apologetics, but some apologetics is good to have whenever *you* will have to defend the Church. Saint Peter tells us that we should always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope and faith we have in Christ, but to do this with gentleness and respect (I Peter 3:15), and this means we all need to have *some* apologetics to help us give a good defense of the faith.

Apologetics can be divided into at least two types. The first might be called *Christian apologetics* (which is an apologetics that is general to the Christian tradition, and which was used by the apostles to convert non-Christians to the faith). The second can be called *Catholic apologetics* (which has been used throughout the centuries to pull non-Catholics who profess Christ into the Catholic fold). Years ago in America, the Catholic Church was a minority within a Protestant nation, but more and more today the Catholic Church finds herself in a world which has lost its faith in God altogether, so a little bit of both Christian and Catholic apologetics are needed.

This is not to say that Catholics are not Christian. Catholics were the first to be called Christians, and we most certainly are Christian, but in the past those Christians who emerge out of the Catholic Church have not always been ready to acknowledged us as Christians, and very early on the term Catholic emerges to identify a kind of Christian. From the beginning there have been divisions within believing Christians, which even the Lord warned against when he prayed that we may be ONE. And so to call oneself Catholic is to

place oneself within a historical continuum of the very One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church Christ founded.

## Defending the Faith

A good place to find apologetics is online, but one *has* to be careful, because there are some that *claim* to be Catholic that are not really Catholic at all. The website [www.scripturecatholic.com](http://www.scripturecatholic.com) might be a good start for you if you like to use the web. This website is mostly used to find scriptural proof texts for Catholic teaching. If someone has a deep respect for the authority of the Bible, and is seeking evidence that Catholic practices are in sync with the Bible, this may be the best place to begin.

Another source for apologetics would be certain books, and it is important for us that you own and have read at least one book of Catholic apologetics. And so we would like to offer the following considerations for your exploration:

- One book option might be [CATHOLIC FOR A REASON: Scripture and the Mystery of the Family of God](#), which has just over 300 pages and costs ~\$15.
- Another book option might be [CATHOLIC DOCTRINE IN SCRIPTURE](#): by Gregory Oatis, which has just over 144 pages, and costs ~\$10.

- Similarly, *BASIC APOLOGETICS: How to Defend the Catholic Faith*, which has around 40 pages, and which costs less than ten dollars. You can order this online at [www.catholiccompany.com](http://www.catholiccompany.com) or by calling The Catholic Company toll free at 866-522-8465.

## Homework Follows

Remember that before 419 AD there was no Bible! Rather, St. Jerome compiled the Latin Vulgate Bible after translating it from Hebrew and Greek from 72 separate "vellums" or animal skins on which became eventually the various "books" of the Bible, times a significant number of copies of each that he was able to collect in Jerusalem. See, *Compendium* no. 20 and *Catechism* no. 120.

Recall also that the Magisterium (or teaching authority of the Catholic Church) was vested in St. Peter and the Apostles (Mt. 16: 13-19 and Mt. 28: 20; see also, *Compendium* no. 16; *Catechism* nos. 85-90).

The *Catechism* (but not the *Compendium*) includes an awesome apologetics tool which will enable you to respond, with definitive Catholic teaching, to any Scripture "proof text" proposed to you on substantially any subject a Protestant brother or sister might ask. See, the *Catechism's Sacred Scripture Index* at pages 689-720. This index follows the order of *Bible* books, front to back, Genesis to

Revelation, chapter one to the last chapter of each book, and virtually all important verses, from one until the end, of each book. Opposite these left hand columns appear in a right hand column the paragraph number(s) which include Catholic teaching drawn from the particular Scripture chapter and verse. It is amazing! (Also, never engage a Protestant in Scripture study without your *Catechism* alongside your RSV-CE *Bible*!)

In addition, Fr. Robert Barron (formerly a seminary rector for the Archdiocese of Chicago and now an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles), has written ***Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith*** (Image Books 2011), which includes a magnificent companion DVD series of the same title. Nothing produced by the Church anywhere in the world demonstrates the "universality" of Catholicism as does this DVD series: it is simply stunning! *A copy of the DVD series can be borrowed from the parish library: see the Coordinator about obtaining one. It is a "must watch."*

Complete the *Fourth Questionnaire* and discuss it with the Coordinator.

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# Fourth Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions, and return this information to us.

1. Have you completed reading at least one of the apologetics books recommended above, and if so, which one?
2. Do you have any questions regarding what you have read? If so, turn this page over and put write down those questions so you can discuss them at our next meeting.
3. Are you still attending weekly Sunday Mass at the parish?
4. If not, why not?
5. Do you continue to explore the on-line sites we have recommended, and if so, what are your impressions?

6. How is your discernment going? Are you still personally interested in becoming more fully integrated into the Catholic Church?
  
7. Are you ready to learn more about this faith you seek to embrace?