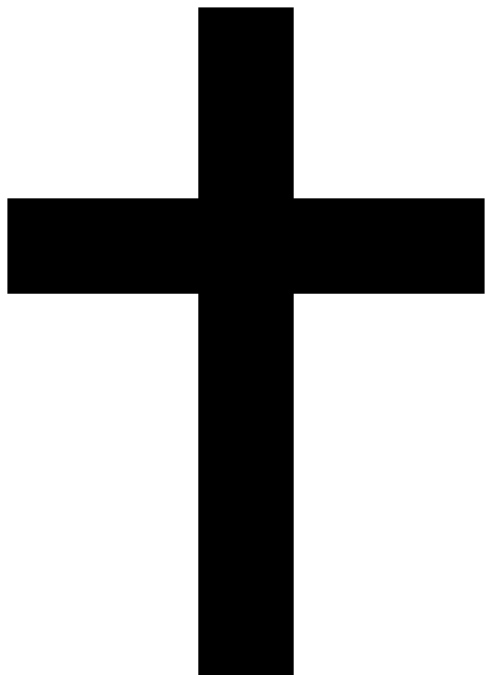


LESSON THREE



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 some what 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.

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 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 which may cost around \$15, and which can be ordered online. You can order this online at www.catholiccompany.com or by calling The Catholic Company toll free at 866-522-8465.
- Another book option might be CATHOLIC DOCTRINE IN SCRIPTURE: by Gregory Oatis, which has just over 144 pages, and which should cost less than ten dollars, and which can be ordered online. You can order this online at www.catholiccompany.com or by calling The Catholic Company toll free at 866-522-8465.
- Another book option might be 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 or by calling The Catholic Company toll free at 866-522-8465.

Homework Follows

- Purchase and read at least one of the above mentioned books on the Catholic apologetics (or another book on Catholic Apologetics that the priest or catechist approves), and then once you have read it, call and schedule another meeting with the priest or the catechist. Write down any questions you might want to ask when you arrive, but also expect to be asked some questions yourself.
- If you desire to, you *could* make a retreat over a weekend at one of any number of retreat houses available for Catholics here in the South. While this is not mandatory, it might be helpful in your walk towards greater participation in the Catholic Church, and aid in your preparation for your baptism and/or confirmation. If that sounds interesting to you, consider the following options:
 - The Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers will offer retreats throughout the year. Visit their website, or call them at 770-483-8705.
 - The Sister Servants of the Eternal Word run a beautiful retreat house (Casa Maria) in Alabama, and they offers retreats throughout the year. You can visit them online at www.sisterservants.org, or call them at 205-956-6760.
- If you can't make a retreat, you *might* consider making a pilgrimage as a part of your preparation for becoming Catholic. Some interesting places close by might be the following options:
 - The Mission of *Nombre de Dios* and the Shrine of *Our Lady of La Leche* in Saint Augustine, Florida. Learn more at www.missionandshrine.org.
 - The Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Hanceville, Alabama. You could check them out online at www.olamshrine.com.
- Fill out the following questionnaire, and bring it in with you when you come.

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?