

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

IN | CLUSION

Explaining the Biblical Foundations
of the Catholic Church

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Introduction.

This discussion guide is written for simplicity and to facilitate discussion. Some of the questions will reinforce the teaching and drive home the main points of the presentation. Other questions are meant to apply what was taught. If helpful, give each member the questions to read through beforehand.

The group leader's **FIRST TASK** is to make sure everyone gets to know one another. Spend a few moments learning names and getting acquainted with one another's lives (family, etc.) before diving into the teaching and discussion.

The group leader's **SECOND TASK** is to make sure everyone respects the group dynamic. Some people think through talking and others need a few moments to process. The talkers must not shut out the thinkers.

It is **EVERYONE'S** responsibility, not just the group leader, to make sure that each person who *wants* to contribute their thoughts are able to do so and that no one is attacked for doing so. Nothing shuts down a good discussion than a disrespectful comment or launching into a debate.

REMEMBER! This is our faith, our most sacred and central beliefs, and some of those beliefs are being challenged in the presentations, in the discussions, and in the readings. That is great, as long as it remains respectful.

INCLUSION PRINCIPLES

1. Unity is only real when it is based on the truth. Therefore, do not hide your real beliefs, opinions, and views for the sake of some sort of consensus, nor trample on other's beliefs, opinions, and views.
2. Humans tend to arrive at truth through dialogue, which means all parties giving and receiving, listening as well as speaking.

SESSION ONE

The Catholic Church is Biblical

“He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.”

Ephesians 1:22-23

Do you think Catholics have a “high view” or a “low view” of Scripture?

Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants- we all are at our best when immersed in the inspired, inerrant Word of God in our study and our prayer. *Discuss.*

Why must faithful Christians read the Bible through the fulfillment of the Old Testament by the New, not its rejection or negation?

In the Road to Emmaus story in Luke’s gospel, what books was Jesus teaching the disciples about the type of death the Messiah must suffer?

What is typology? What are examples of typology that the Gospels use of Jesus?

What are some examples of typology that St. Paul uses, especially in Romans 5 and 6?

St. Peter sees the _____ “through which eight in all were saved” as a foreshadowing of what New Testament sacrament? What does St. Peter say that sacrament does for Christians?

SESSION TWO

Scripture and Tradition

“to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,”

Ephesians 3:9-11

What are the three legs of the New Testament Church?

Books were expensive and literacy was extremely low. How did the Church communicate the gospel when few could read and fewer could afford books.

How does the Catholic Church understand the concept of Sola Scriptura, and what are the key points of disagreement with this doctrine?

Can you explain why the Catholic Church believes in the importance of Sacred Tradition alongside Sacred Scripture?

What biblical evidence supports the Catholic teaching on the role of tradition in understanding Christian doctrine?

Tradition is delivered, handed-on, and one receives it. The same words are used to describe not just tradition, but the gospel, the Word of God, faith, and the commandment. Do you think this changes the small view that “tradition” is condemned in the New Testament?

The oral preaching of the Apostles is the foundation of the Church and the spreading of the Gospel. So the New Testament sees _____ traditions as central to the New Testament Church, but _____ traditions are to be condemned.

SESSION THREE

Scripture and Church Authority

“He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

Luke 10:16

How do we know what we believe is what Christ and the Apostles taught?

Does the Catholic Church’s authority that it claims for the *Magisterium* (Teaching Office) mean it can create new teachings, doctrines, and dogmas?

If the Bible is our sole rule of faith, then it must be self-interpreting. But does the Bible assert that about itself? Are the authors that admit parts of the Bible are not perspicuous (clear)?

If the Bible needs to be interpreted, then how do we know which teachers to trust? How do we discern between entire denominations or schools of theology which contradict one another?

St. Paul puts the Corinthian Church to the question: “Is Christ divided?” If there is not one, visible, united Church, then looking around at Christianity today we must say, “Yes. Christ is regrettably divided.” Discuss.

In the US Military they say, “Salute the office/rank, not the man.” The Apostles had an “Office”. Whenever there is an office, a ministry, it is bigger than the individual man. What is the office of the apostle if it endures beyond the Twelve?

“Scripture needs an authoritative teacher.” Do you believe this? Does a Magisterium destroy the inspired authority of Scripture or in service to it?

SESSION FOUR

The Office of St. Peter

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 16:18-19

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SESSION FIVE

The Communion of Saints

“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Hebrews 6:11-12

“Respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.” Does God honor His saints in the Bible? Should we imitate God and honor them as well?

Marine Corps. Monument honors the men who laid down their lives in WW2. These are honorable *deeds* we want celebrated and honorable *lives* we want imitated. List a few examples of honorable deeds or people that should be imitated to make this world a better place.

Does God use secondary causes- angels, saints, disciples- to bring about the conversion of others? Does involving saints and angels make the glory of the Lord more or less present to us?

Catholics invoke the saints and ask for their prayers just as we do fellow Christians who are still living. Is there something biblically wrong with this?

Is there a separate Body of Christ for those in Heaven than for those still living on the Earth, or are we all still supernaturally united together?

Does the distinction between *Latria* and *Dulia* help you in understanding the difference between worshipping the Creator and honoring His holy creatures?

SESSION SIX

The Role of Mary

“Then the dragon was angry with the Woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.”

Revelation 12:17

She was the first human to say “Yes” to Jesus. She was the first disciple and was the best disciple of Jesus Christ. How does this change the way you and I should honor her?

Mary’s role in the Church is contained within the last words she was recorded as saying: “Do whatever He tells you.” Why is this significant?

What do Catholics NOT mean when we call Mary “the Mother of God”?

Do you think that Mary’s perpetual virginity safeguards the uniqueness of Christ’s conception? Do you find convincing the explanation that the “brothers of the Lord” are blood relations, but not full brothers and sisters of Jesus and sons and daughters of Mary?

The Immaculate Conception means Mary was conceived without sin, a special grace for her role as the New Eve and mother of the Redeemer. How was Jesus still her savior?

What is the difference between the Assumption of Mary body and soul into Heaven and the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus into Heaven? Why is this difference so important?

Have you made Mary your mother? Have you taken her into your house? Do you honor her as Christ does? Do you call her blessed as Scripture prophesies? Why or why not?

SESSION SEVEN

Sacraments of New Life

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

1 Corinthians 4:1

What is a sacrament according to Catholic teaching, and why are sacraments considered essential to the life of the Church?

How do sacraments convey the presence and action of Christ in the life of the Church and the individual believer?

How do sacraments connect us to the Paschal Mystery of Christ—His Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension?

Where do we find evidence of sacramental practices in Scripture?

Reflect on the sacraments as visible signs of the invisible reality of God’s free gift of grace. How do sacraments communicate the Incarnation of Christ through His Church?

In what ways do sacraments contribute to our ongoing conversion and sanctification, shaping our Christian identity and mission in the world?

Are the sacraments “works” by men and women trying to earn their way into Heaven? The word liturgy means a “work done for the people”. How does this explain the Catholic view of the sacraments?

SESSION EIGHT

The Priesthood and the New Covenant Sacrifice

For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinthians 5:7-8

How does the priesthood of Christ relate to the Old Testament priesthood?

How does the Catholic Church view the ministerial priesthood versus the priesthood of all believers in the context of Christ's role as High Priest?

How is the Eucharist considered the New Passover meal in Catholic theology, and what are the key connections between the Passover and the Eucharist?

Can you explain how Jesus fulfills the Passover through the institution of the Eucharist?

Explore the idea of sacrificial language in the context of the Eucharist. How does the Catholic Church understand the Eucharist as a true sacrifice?

Reflect on the idea of memorial and presence in the Eucharist. How does the Catholic Church understand the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist as it relates to the Passover meal?

How does participating in the Eucharist unite believers with the saving events of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection, echoing the deliverance of the Israelites in the Exodus?

SESSION NINE

Faith Working in Love

“For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.”

Galatians 5:5-6

What does the Catholic Church teach about the relationship between faith and works in salvation, particularly in light of St. Paul's writings on faith working through love (Galatians 5:6)?

If a person confesses Jesus is Lord and believes, is he/she “once saved, always saved”? Can a person's sins jeopardize their salvation? Why or why not?

How does James 2 emphasize works in salvation?

How does grace play a role in both faith and works, and how does it relate to our salvation?

How does ongoing growth in holiness (sanctification) relate to the initial act of justification?

How does the Catholic Church understand the role of repentance and conversion in the life of a believer? How do these elements connect with faith, works, and salvation?

Discuss the concept of cooperation with God's grace in Catholic theology. What is our role in responding to God's grace through our faith and good works?

SESSION TEN

Gospel, Sanctity, and Eternity

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature."

2 Peter 1:3-4

What does the Catholic Church teach about the concept of divinization (theosis) and its connection to personal sanctity? How does this concept relate to our understanding of salvation?

How does the doctrine of divinization align with the Scriptural teaching that we are called to be partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4)? What implications does this have for our spiritual life?

Can you explain the role of grace in the process of divinization according to Catholic theology? How does grace transform us and elevate us toward union with God?

Discuss the significance of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and baptism, in the journey toward divinization. How do these sacraments impart divine life and grace to believers?

How does the Catholic Church view the relationship between human effort (cooperation with grace) and divine action in the process of divinization? How do we participate in our own transformation?

Discuss the idea of spiritual growth and maturity in the journey toward divinization. How does ongoing conversion and purification play a role in our transformation?

How can the concept of divinization inspire and shape our prayer life, moral conduct, and relationship with God and others?