

PILLAR I

THE CREED

SEAN INNERST

Student Study Set



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Pillar I: The Creed—Getting Your Bearings is a component of the *Pillar I: The Creed* Study Set. Additional components include *Questions to Guide Your Reading*, *Presentation Outlines*, and *Group Discussion Questions*. These components comprise the written materials that students need to complete the study. They are designed to be used in conjunction with the *Pillar I: The Creed* DVD/CD presentations by Sean Innerst, available through Ascension Press.

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A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Congratulations! You are about to undertake the spiritual and faith-formative journey of a lifetime. Through this series, you will discover in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* not a stale book of dogmatic “facts,” but a precious map that can guide you on your personal journey toward God. You will learn how your story fits into the “big picture” of the salvation story and the journey of faith that is recounted in both Sacred Scripture and the history and life of the Church.

Pillars: A Journey Through the Catechism is the fruit of many years of teaching the content of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to young people and adults in a variety of catechetical settings. That experience has taught me that the *Catechism* can be a remarkably effective tool for introducing new Christians to the Faith of the Church and deepening the faith of those who are already members of the Catholic Church. While the *Catechism* may seem daunting to read at first, its structure and content are not beyond the grasp of the average person—especially when certain guiding principles have been explained and the course of the journey has been mapped out ahead of time.

For this “course,” that sort of journey metaphor is important. In fact, it isn’t metaphor at all; a journey is *exactly* what the *Catechism* charts out. Catholicism is not just a body of propositions, of “faith facts” to be learned; it is a journey that one undertakes in faith. There are certainly vital doctrines that we hold as Catholics, and the *Catechism* is very much taken up with disclosing those. But our Faith is directed toward a Person, Jesus Christ, whom we profess to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This *Pillars* program, based upon the content of the *Catechism*, seeks to emphasize the *truth*, the *way*, and the *life* of faith, so that we may embrace them more fully.

That the *Catechism* maps out a journey shouldn’t be surprising, if we recognize that the human story of our struggle to enter into a covenant relationship with God that we call the Bible describes just such a journey. In fact, the life of faith instituted by Christ in his Church is the sequel to that biblical story—really the continuation of that same journey.

So the goal of *Pillars* is not simply to teach the content of the Faith, as important as that is today, but also to encourage and equip people to live the Faith in a new way, to undertake a journey to a new land of freedom and truth, to make new commitments to the love of God and neighbor in answer to the call of Christ. You will be invited to read, to study, to pray, to share your journey of faith with your fellow students. These lessons will invite you to participate more fully and deeply in the sacraments, to live the moral teachings of the Church more faithfully, and to commit to an active love of God in prayer.

In short, the *Pillars* program asks you to consider going somewhere, to change, to grow, and to strive for holiness and heaven. Those who have already undertaken this journey are happy (or, more accurately, blessed) for having done so, and you can have every confidence that you will be, too.

God grant you a safe and speedy journey from Blessing to Blessing.



Sean Innerst

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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE CATECHISM

INTRODUCTION

“God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life.”

—Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1

A clear pattern to the journey of faith can be seen in the very first sentence of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. That journey has a clear starting point and destination, both of which are God, “... infinitely perfect and blessed in himself ...” (No. 1), and a path to follow, which is determined by God’s “... plan of sheer goodness ...” (No. 1) for us and the economy (or history) of salvation by which his plan is accomplished.

What that first sentence tells us, and what the whole of the *Catechism* charts out for us, is a journey “from Blessing to Blessing,” from the God who creates us and back to him again. The three essentials of the journey—our origin, our destination, and the path by which we find our way back to our “... share in his own blessed life”—will be discussed in much greater detail in the first session of *Pillars*, so that you can undertake with confidence the journey of faith that the *Catechism* charts out. Let’s take a closer look at what the first phase of this journey through the *Catechism* will entail.

ABOUT PILLAR I: THE CREED

The first part (or “pillar”) of the *Catechism* is about “The Profession of Faith,” which is the Creed. The Creed, as you will see, is the story of our journey in miniature. While laying out the basic Christian beliefs about the three divine Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the Creed also recalls the three phases of the history of salvation (or what you will come to know as the “economy”). In the Creed, we confess our belief in God the Father as Creator, God the Son as Redeemer of the human race, and God the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier of the Church or, as we say in the Creed, “the Lord, the giver of life.”

Those three acts of God—the creation and redemption of the world, and the sanctification of the world through the Church—occur at the beginning, middle, and end of the history of salvation, or economy. So the Creed tells us that story in brief terms and also explains how that story, or economy, is to be read rightly; it is story and doctrine together. In the twelve lessons that follow, you will be introduced to this “story in miniature” that is laid out in the Creed. In each successive session, you will be oriented as to where you are in the story, and you will learn how that story relates to your journey of faith.

The first pillar of the *Catechism* is divided into two sections. Section One, entitled “I Believe”–“We Believe,” looks at the universal human desire to know God, at the way God speaks to us through revelation, and at how we respond appropriately in an act of faith. Section Two is entitled “The Profession of the Christian Faith” and deals with the content of the Faith, our faith in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. It also speaks of the Church, of which the Spirit is the living soul.

All of this sheds new light on God’s plan for blessing us as we respond to the invitation to return to him. It might seem at first that phrases such as “act of faith” and “content of faith” are abstract and removed from your daily experience, but as you read, you will find that these difficult concepts are very much the matter of our daily walk of faith. As you progress through the four pillars of the *Catechism*, you will see that the Faith we profess in the Creed takes root in Catholic life through worship, moral living, and prayer. The story you come to know in the Creed will become your own story as you enter the journey and begin telling the story anew in your own life of faith.

ABOUT PILLARS: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE CATECHISM

The Structure of the Program

The four-part *Pillars* program is arranged and presented to correspond with the four parts of the *Catechism*, but also in accord with the ancient pattern reflected in the Scriptures, specifically in Acts 2:42, in which we read of the believers in the early Church that “... they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching [Pillar I] and fellowship [Pillar III], to the breaking of bread [Pillar II] and the prayers [Pillar IV].”

Pillar I – The Creed (The Story of Blessing in Miniature)

Pillar I: The Creed tackles the Faith we profess in the Creed. In this segment, we will study the first part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 1–1065. It describes the story of the Father’s plan of blessing, its origin in creation, its fulfillment in Christ’s redemption of the human race, and its sanctifying application to souls in the belief and practice of the Church in this age of the Holy Spirit. This course maps out the rest of the journey.

Pillar II – *The Sacraments* (The Blessing Revealed and Given)

Pillar II will take up the study of the liturgy and sacraments of the Church, the Faith celebrated (Nos. 1066–1690). The liturgy of the Church is considered both the engine of our earthly hope and as “heaven practice.” The sacraments are mystical reenactments of the story that makes Christ really present to us. In them and by them, our journey—and the whole story of God’s plan of blessing—coincide, just as the disciples on the way to Emmaus were turned around by the recitation of salvation history and the breaking of bread (see Luke 24).

Pillar III – *The Moral Life* (Fulfillment in Beatitude)

Pillar III addresses how we are to live the Faith we profess. This third pillar of the *Catechism* (Nos. 1691–2557) invites us to enter into the moral life of the Beatitudes. The grace we receive in the sacraments makes it possible for us to love our enemies and to embrace the paradoxical blessings of poverty, hunger, and mourning that Jesus gives us. As we participate in the sacraments, which both tell and make present the saving story, the graces of those sacraments enable us to make that story our own.

Pillar IV – *Prayer* (The Blessing Given and Received)

The living Christian must breathe, and that breath is prayer. In *Pillar IV*, we examine the fourth part of the *Catechism*, which introduces us to the mystical life. Just as we need the food of the sacraments for the journey, we also need the breath of the Holy Spirit. In prayer, we breathe in the blessings that God has given and whisper back to him our adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. In this way, we not only are drawn into the story, as in the sacraments, and not only make it our own, as in the moral life, but are conformed to it, made one with it, as the Father draws us up into the likeness of his Son. Paragraphs 2558–2865 in the *Catechism*, as well as a few excerpts from the works of the saints, will provide the matter for this fourth and final course of the program.

The Pillars Journey: From Blessing to Blessing

These four *Pillars* are not just foundations of the Christian life, and still less are they just categories of doctrinal content. They describe the journey from Blessing to Blessing. They can be thought of as four rungs on the ladder of ascent back to the Father that Jesus himself used as an image of himself and the Church he left us: “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51). That is what we come to see when we undertake in grace the journey from Blessing to Blessing.

Let’s review what you will need to complete this first part of our journey through the *Catechism* and a few other practical matters about how *Pillar I: The Creed* study works.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Materials You Will Need

In each session, we will break open the *Catechism* and begin to explore the journey God has set before us, moving from Blessing to Blessing. For every session, you will need:

- Your *Pillar I: The Creed* Study Set
- A copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Second Edition*
- Writing materials to take notes
- Optional materials: Although not necessary for the course, the book *From Blessing to Blessing*, by *Pillars* author Sean Innerst, provides a foundation for the study. The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which summarizes the material contained in the *Catechism*, may also prove helpful.

For more information about these and other resources, visit AscensionPress.com.

Order of Study

Following your first class session, which will introduce you to the course, each class will follow a similar format. The Study Set is divided into four parts: two parts to be done at home and two parts to be done at the group session.

AT HOME



1. Part One—Getting Your Bearings

Begin each lesson by reading this overview at home. This will provide you with the objectives for the lesson and introduce you to the topics to be covered.



2. Part Two—Questions to Guide Your Reading

Now you are ready for the “heart” of the lesson—reading the *Catechism*! These questions will help you identify and remember the key concepts that you will read about in the assigned *Catechism* readings. Part Two also includes key glossary terms related to the lesson. An answer key is provided on the page following each set of questions.



GROUP SESSION



3. Part Three—Presentation Outlines

Having completed your at-home preparation, you are now ready to “dive deeper” into the topics and themes that you read about in the *Catechism*. During the group session, use these outlines to follow along with the DVD presentations and take notes.



4. Part Four—Group Discussion Questions

After the presentation, you will break into small groups. You will have the opportunity to share what you have learned and to consider how these topics relate to your life and to the lives of those around you.

Group Session Format

Each group session is ninety minutes long, including a forty-five minute audiovisual presentation, and a small-group discussion period. As noted above, you are encouraged to use the *Presentation Outlines* to follow along with the presentations and to take notes. During the presentations, you will at times be directed to specific *Catechism* paragraphs, so be sure to have your copy of the *Catechism* with you.

The audiovisual presentation will be followed by group discussion. Remember, the more you give, the more you will receive! The “Ten Commandments for Great Small-Group Discussions,” included in this section, will help you to navigate that part of the class experience. Charity is the key to success in small-group discussions.

You will likely find that sharing and listening to the experiences and impressions of others will greatly enrich your own study; by shifting the focus from the head to the heart, the *Group Discussion Questions* will help you gain not only intellectual understanding, but spiritual growth as well. In addition, these discussions provide a chance for you to get to know others and to experience in a direct way the communion in faith, hope, and love that we share in the Church.

Additional Program Features

Look out for these additional features that are included throughout the written materials in your Study Set. They are designed to further broaden and enrich your learning experience.

- **Into Focus:** Various topics of interest relating to each lesson are featured, such as the development of Church teachings and doctrines.
- **Myth Buster:** Debunks myths and commonly misunderstood issues surrounding the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- **Going to the Doctor:** The doctors of the Church are quoted extensively in the *Catechism*. This feature highlights some aspect of a doctor’s work or life.
- **Saint and Scripture Quotes:** Inspirational quotes highlighting each lesson’s topic.

Ten Commandments for Great Small-Group Discussions

1. Work to build trust and intimacy within your group.
2. Get to the heart of the question; don't simply skim the surface.
3. Give everyone in your group a chance to talk. No speeches!
4. When you share, try to connect your thoughts to those of the previous speaker, which helps to build bridges.
5. When someone is speaking, everyone else should listen.
6. Never ridicule another's answers.
7. When you disagree, do so with respect.
8. Do not fear silence.
9. If you have not completed your homework, answer only the questions you have done.
10. Enjoy yourself!

[Thanks to the Denver Biblical School for supplying these.]

THE FEATURES OF THE CATECHISM

A Practical Guide

While the four pillars provide the primary structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the book also contains several features you should note as you begin your study. They include:

A Paragraph Numbering System. The *Catechism* contains 2,865 numbered paragraphs, with one to several sentences each. The paragraph numbers (in bolded text) allow readers to find and refer to paragraph contents more easily. The *Pillars* program (and other catechetical works) refer to the *Catechism* by these paragraph numbers (“No. ____”), rather than by page numbers. Passages that are paraphrased or otherwise referenced, rather than quoted directly, are preceded by “see No. ____.”

Headings and Subheadings. The *Catechism* is also arranged under various headings and subheadings, which can be seen readily by turning to the table of contents at the front of the *Catechism*. We've already mentioned the four major divisions (“pillars”). These are further subdivided into “Sections,” “Chapters,” and “Articles.”¹ In the text, the roman-numeral headings may contain additional unnumbered minor subheadings.

While the easiest way to refer to the contents of the *Catechism* is by the bolded paragraph number, occasionally we will refer to one of the headings or subheadings. For example, “The dogma of the Holy

¹ Note that in “Part One: The Profession of Faith,” Section Two, the Articles are further divided into subject paragraphs, which are not to be confused with the systematic paragraph numbers throughout the text.

Trinity” [the minor subhead] begins at paragraph 253 [the paragraph just following the minor subhead].

You might wonder why we are giving this much attention to the arrangement of the text. As you will see, the arrangement is often not just merely a matter of managing the subject matter, but can give us important clues about what the *Catechism* teaches.

Cross-References. Many of the *Catechism* paragraphs are accompanied by marginal cross-references that point to other paragraph numbers in the *Catechism* that address the same or similar issues. For example, No. 28 addresses the human quest for God and other religions; this paragraph is cross-referenced to No. 843 in the same pillar and sixteen other paragraphs (Nos. 2566 and 2095–2109) in the third pillar on the Christian moral life. You needn’t look up all these other paragraphs as you do your assigned reading, but if some topic interests you, or if you have additional questions on a particular topic, you will often find further information to elucidate or clarify it in the cross-referenced paragraphs.

Footnotes. The *Catechism* also includes footnotes at the bottom of nearly every page. These identify the biblical or other sources of quotations or references within the paragraphs. These numbered footnotes refer to the smaller superscript numbers at the end of quotations or other sentences that require notes. When a source is not quoted verbatim, its reference is often preceded by the abbreviation *Cf.* (from the Latin *confer*), which means “compare.” The biblical abbreviations in the references will be familiar to most readers, but even if you are new to the Bible, it is not hard to figure them out. In many editions, a list of abbreviated biblical books is on the last page. (See also “Index of Citations.”)

Small-Print Sections. Every so often, you will find sections of text with smaller print. Some of these are longer quotations from various sources that may be indented from the left margin. Other small-print passages give a little more detailed or technical information. At times these may be harder to understand because of the use of philosophical or theological terms, or because of the level of historical detail. If you have trouble with those, don’t worry. The vital information for most of us is contained in the normal-size print.

“In Brief.” At the end of each article in the *Catechism* (or at the end of each paragraph in the second section of the first pillar) you will find “In Brief” sections, which give shorter summary statements of the most important items in the preceding material. These can be very helpful as memory aids for students or for formulating simple catechetical or faith lessons for teachers.

“Index of Citations.” At the back of many editions of the *Catechism* is an Index of Citations that lists all the scriptural citations and quotes from other Church documents. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is literally saturated with Scripture. All the books of the New Testament are quoted from or cited, as are nearly all the books of the Old Testament. The first part of the index lists the verses cited in their biblical order and then lists the paragraph or paragraphs in which each verse is referenced. This means that if you are reading your Bible and want to see what the *Catechism* might have to say about a particular verse, you can look it up; that is, you can use the *Catechism* as a biblical commentary!

The second part of the Index of Citations lists all the other non-scriptural Church documents cited in the *Catechism*. These include ancient creeds and councils, local synods, liturgical and papal documents, and other works by the fathers, saints, and doctors of the Church, as well as other important ecclesiastical writers.

Subject Index. At the back of the *Catechism*, you will find a topical or subject index, which can be very helpful if you want to search the *Catechism* on a particular subject. Some newer American editions of the *Catechism* also have a helpful glossary of terms at the back.

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