Lesson 1 Glossary — Scripture, Tradition, and Church Authority

Use this handout as a quick reference for the historical and theological terms in Lesson 1. Definitions describe how the terms are commonly used; Christian traditions sometimes define or apply them differently.

Apocrypha. A Protestant term for Jewish writings found in some ancient Bibles and in Catholic or Orthodox Old Testaments, but not in the Protestant Old Testament. The exact list varies by tradition.

Apostolic succession. The belief that the apostles' teaching and pastoral ministry continue through an ordered succession of church leaders, especially bishops.

Apostolicity. Connection or faithfulness to the apostles. The early church considered a book's apostolic origin or teaching when recognizing Scripture.

Canon. The recognized collection of books received as Holy Scripture. The word comes from a term meaning rule or measuring standard.

Canonical recognition. The church's process of discerning which writings belong to the biblical canon. To recognize a book is not necessarily to give it authority.

Catholicity. Universality or widespread reception in the church. In canon discussions, it asks whether a writing was broadly used among Christian communities.

Church Fathers. Influential Christian teachers from the early centuries of the church, such as Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Augustine.

Conciliar authority. Teaching authority exercised through a council of church leaders rather than by one leader acting alone.

Creed. A concise, public summary of core Christian beliefs, often written to teach the faith and guard against error.

Deuterocanonical books. The Catholic name for Old Testament books accepted as canonical by Catholics but not included in the Protestant Old Testament.

Deposit of faith. The body of apostolic teaching entrusted to the church. Catholic and Orthodox theology commonly describes it as handed on in Scripture and Tradition.

Divine accommodation. God's gracious use of human language, culture, and forms of thought so that people can understand his revelation.

Ecumenical council. A gathering of bishops intended to represent the worldwide church and settle major questions of doctrine or practice. Traditions differ on which councils are binding.

Exegesis. Careful explanation of what a biblical text means in its literary, historical, and theological context.

Formal sufficiency. The Protestant claim that Scripture provides the final, adequate rule by which Christian doctrine can be established and judged.

Hermeneutics. The principles and methods used to interpret a text, especially the Bible.

Illumination. The Holy Spirit's work of helping readers understand, receive, and apply Scripture. Illumination does not add new books or teachings to Scripture.

Inerrancy. The belief that Scripture, rightly interpreted according to its purpose and literary form, is true in all that it teaches.

Infallibility. Freedom from error. Christians apply this term differently to Scripture, the church, councils, or particular acts of teaching.

Inspiration. God's work through human authors so that their writings communicate what God intended as Scripture.

Magisterium. The teaching office of the Roman Catholic Church, exercised by the pope and bishops in communion with him.

Material sufficiency. The claim that the whole content of Christian revelation is present in Scripture, at least explicitly or implicitly, even if authoritative Tradition helps interpret it.

Patristic. Relating to the Church Fathers or to Christian thought in the early centuries of the church.

Perspicuity of Scripture. The teaching that Scripture's central message can be understood by ordinary believers using ordinary means, though not every passage is equally clear.

Prima Scriptura. The view that Scripture has first or highest place while tradition, reason, and experience also serve as authorities under it.

Rule of faith. An early summary of the apostolic message used to guide biblical interpretation and identify teaching that agreed with the church's received faith.

Septuagint. An ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, commonly abbreviated LXX and widely used by early Christians.

Sola Scriptura. The Protestant teaching that Scripture is the church's only infallible rule. It does not mean that creeds, teachers, reason, or tradition have no value.

Textual criticism. The comparison of surviving manuscripts to identify the earliest recoverable wording of a biblical text. It evaluates copies, not whether Scripture is true.

Theological inference. A doctrinal conclusion drawn from one or more biblical teachings even when the conclusion is not stated in the same words in a single verse.

Tradition and Sacred Tradition. Tradition means teaching or practice handed down over time. Catholic and Orthodox writers often capitalize Sacred Tradition for the apostolic faith transmitted in the church.

Vulgate. Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible, which became the standard biblical text of the Western church for many centuries.