

What We Believe... Why We Believe It

By
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Practical Apologetics—Part I

I'm going to begin sharing with you the little bit I know about apologetics—both the how-to's of argument, what to argue, and research. I hope you enjoy it!

Almost everyone has been through one of these three scenarios.

You hear someone knocking at the door, usually at the most inconvenient time, so you answer the knock and a man outside on your porch is standing there with an open Bible and a wide grin. As soon as you ask him what he wants, he says, "Are you saved, friend?"

You tell the man you're a Catholic, hoping that will scare him off, but he opens the satchel on his shoulder and pulls out several Bibles. He asks, "Which would you prefer—the New American, the Revised Standard, or the Douay-Rheims?"

At this point you realize there is no escape without appearing to either not care about Christianity, or that you're a mindless automaton who checks in your brain at the church door and mindlessly accepts whatever the priest tells you.

Or you come out of church after Mass to find people in the parking lot distributing tracts against Catholic belief. You try to get to your car before one of them confronts you, but you make the mistake of looking one of them in the eye and he rushes over to you, because you can't weave through the crowd quickly enough to get away from him. In an insistent voice he says, "Here's a tract on the idolatry of the Mass. Read it."

You say, "No, thanks. I'm not interested." So he begins telling you, almost word for word, what is in the tract. He keeps backing you up toward the curb while talking, until you are forced to either engage him or walk out into traffic. You try being brusque with him to the point of being almost uncharitable, but even that doesn't deter him.

Or maybe it starts in a social setting. After your pro-life meeting when everybody settles back for a little conversation and a cup of coffee, fundamentalists begin to seek out Catholics to save them from the evil clutches of Rome. You see what's going on, so you sit in the corner to have your coffee, trying to be unnoticed, but one sits down with you anyway. Before you can ask her about her opinion on any nonreligious topic, she leans over and asks, "Wouldn't you like to have an absolute assurance of salvation?"

You reply, "Sure, but..." She interrupts you by whipping out a heavily highlighted New Testament to rebut the comment you never had a chance to make. From there on it turns out to be a long evening that steadily goes downhill from there.

Regardless of the scenario, you know the person talking to you is taking things out of context, but you can't recall what the context is. A lot of snappy answers to your adversary's comments are on the tip of your tongue, but they never make it past your teeth and out of your mouth, and later you'll want to kick yourself for not being quick-witted. Some of the questions being asked, you haven't the foggiest notion of what the answer should be, and you're left with the nagging feeling your opponent is on to something (heaven forbid).

You end up dissatisfied, and no one—least of all you—seems at all convinced at what you have said. In fact, your adversary seems more set in anti-Catholic prejudices than ever. You didn't handle the situation well, and you know it. Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said, "There are not one hundred people in the United States who hate the Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive the Catholic Church to be." And you've just managed to confirm your opponent's worst suspicions about Catholicism.

The point to all this is, it's just as important to know how to argue as it is to know what to argue. First of all, you need to realize that every tenet of Catholic belief can be proven from scripture, history, and logic & reason. The next thing you need to be aware of is that becoming an apologist requires an adherence to St. Benedict's motto: *Ora et Labora*. You have to begin your formation as an apologist with prayer. You will accomplish nothing—and I do mean nothing at all—without a serious prayer life. Even good works, such as "instructing the ignorant", will go nowhere unless you place everything in God's hands.

Therefore, it is my intention to show you how to argue, what to argue and the best tools to use for both study and presentation, such as Bibles, Patristics, and books, videos, and audios. So I suppose you can consider this a resource lesson.

Let's begin with Bibles. Every apologist should have and use a King James Version of the Bible (KJV). The reason for this is, the vast majority of Protestants (especially fundamentalists) use the KJV. It's the Bible we Catholics have, except it's incomplete—it's missing the seven books Martin Luther removed: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, I Maccabees, II Maccabees, as well as parts of Esther and Daniel.

Every Catholic, apologist or not, should have the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSVCE). The KJV's real name is the Standard Version, but it has over 1500 errors. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, Bible and language scholars of every sort—Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and secular scholars—came together to revise the Standard Version. Hence the reason we have the Revised Standard Version (RSV). The RSV is the most accurate English version of Scripture there is. In fact, when Bible scholars use an English version of the Bible, they always turn to the RSV because of its accuracy.

Finally, there is the New International Version (NIV). While not absolutely necessary, you may want to get an NIV because of its popularity among Protestants, if you think they will be those you most engage in apologetical discourse.

We'll continue with a look at the necessary resources next week. I'm engaging in this series of discussions so you can better know What We Believe... Why We Believe It.

Got questions? Visit JoeSixpackAnswers.com for all your Catholic questions. If you can't find an answer, go to the "Ask Joe" page and ask me directly.