

What We Believe... Why We Believe It

By
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The Every Catholic Guy

Practical Apologetics—Part III

Today we're going to continue this introduction to apologetics. In the two previous installments, we covered things concerning the Bible. In this week's installment, we're going to talk about the other resources you'll need if you want to learn apologetics. Then I'll finish up next week.

There are only two reasons why Catholics learn apologetics. The most common reason why Catholics learn apologetics is, they want to learn the arguments in defense of certain Catholic doctrines, dogmas, and practices to reaffirm why they believe what they believe. I know that when I began learning apologetics, as I learned the various arguments it solidified my faith. I knew what I believed, but studying apologetics allowed me to articulate why I believed it.

The other reason Catholics learn apologetics is, they want to share the faith with others. It's one thing to be able to tell people what the Church teaches, but it's quite another to answer them about why the Church teaches something when they ask. Apologetics is great for that, and I hope you end up learning apologetics for both those reasons. I'm certainly going to give you what you need to learn!

Let's begin with the next thing in our list of necessary resources.

The Catholic Church is 2000 years old, and a lot has happened in that 2000 years, so to learn apologetics you need to learn about our history. That means reading books, of course.

The first book I'll recommend is named, oddly, *History of the Catholic Church*, by Dr. James Hitchcock, and you can get it on Amazon or from Ignatius Press. Dr. Hitchcock is, at this writing, perhaps the best living Church historian in the United States today. He lives and works near me in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. It is my hope to one day meet him, as I've been a fan of his work for about twenty-five years.

The other history book I want to recommend is (surprise!) *Church History* by Fr. John Laux. To the best of my knowledge, you'll have to get this one from the publisher, TAN Books. Originally written as a textbook for Catholic high school seniors or college freshmen, and only covering history up to 1940, this is by far my personal favorite of Church history works. Let me tell you why.

When I first became a Catholic, the priest who received me into the Church wanted me to go back to college to finish my degree. There was no Catholic school available to me where I was, so I went to a Church of Christ university—not exactly a pro-Catholic denomination.

One of the courses I had to take was Western Civilization, taught by the only genuine scholar I had in college, but he was a died-in-the-wool Church of Christ man. As we studied the begin-

nings of civilization, I quickly realized we would have problems when we got to the Christian Era.

I went to Father and said, “This professor is going to speak very badly about the Church when we get to the Christian Era. What do you want me to do?” Father replied, “Defend the faith.” I said, “He’ll fail me, Father.” He repeated, “Defend the faith.” I said, “But, Father, I can’t get my degree without this course.” Father repeated, “Defend the faith.” So I resolved to defend the Church, figuring the money for my degree was just wasted.

When we got into the Christian Era, the professor did indeed attack the Church. I had just finished reading Laux’s book, so every time I heard an attack, I launched a counter-attack. My fellow students hated me being there, because the professor and I would often spend the entire class debating the issues. Indeed, these debates were so entertaining that we often continued an hour or two after class!

Then came the evening of the final exam. The professor waited until everybody settled into silence, then he said, “Mr. Sixpack, thanks to you, I didn’t have a weekend off.” I thought I was sunk! He continued, “I spent the weekend poring over historical tomes to verify the correctness of what we’ve been discussing. I discovered that, without exception, you were absolutely right on every topic. Therefore, you are excused from taking the final exam; you’re finishing this course with an “A”.”

That’s why I love *Church History* by Fr. John Laux. That was the only history I’d read to that early point in my Catholic journey, and Fr. Laux certainly didn’t let me down!

One thing most Christians aren’t aware of is a field of study called patristics. Patristics is the study of the extant writings of the early Christians from the first century. We have so many of these writings that they fill thirty-eight encyclopedia sized volumes! So if you want to know what the early Christians believed and how they practiced their faith, you need to have access to patristics. Do you know what you’ll discover? They were all 100% Catholic to their cores!

Patristical writings are fascinating to me. You will likely find it engaging too, if our holy and ancient faith matters to you. Let me recommend a few sources, both in print and online. First is a 3 volume set called *The Faith of the Early Fathers* by William Jurgens. An even better resource is a four volume set called *Patrology* by Johannes Quasten. For the Catholic who wants to *really* get into patristics, there is the thirty-eight complete volume set I mentioned. It costs about \$2,100, and you can get it on Amazon. I’d love to have it, but my continued existence is too precious to me; my wife said that if I bring one more book in this house, she’s going to beat me with her broom.

So I did the next best thing. I went to <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>. Although they don’t have the entire thirty-eight volumes online, their collection is pretty impressive, so this is where I do most of my research these days. This is absolutely free, but if you’re willing to cough up \$19.99, you can download all the Church Fathers they have (which is *very* extensive), the entire *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa*, the Bible, and a whole lot more. I can’t recommend it highly enough!

Next week we’ll finish this up by covering resources that can show you in advance what your anti-Catholic opponent is going to say.

Got questions? Visit JoeSixpackAnswers.com for all your Catholic questions.