

Topic 13: Practical Apologetics

3/4/18

“In a society that rightly values personal liberty, the church needs to promote at every level of her teaching ... an apologetics aimed at affirming the truth of Christian revelation, the harmony of faith and reason, and a sound understanding of freedom, seen in positive terms as a liberation both from the limitations of sin and for an authentic and fulfilling life.” – Pope Benedict XVI

“Apologetics is important first of all within the Church herself. We need to give reasons for the faith not only to enlighten those who do not share it but also to strengthen those within the household of the faith.” - Francis Cardinal George

Key Scriptures

"Always be prepared to give an explanation to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence." – 1 Peter 3:15

“Contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” – Jude 1:3

Four effective approaches:

1. The ignorant Catholic

- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know"
- But **always** follow it with "but I will find out and get back to you."
- Then do it!

2. It's the principle

- Establish principles (from the Bible or other areas of agreement)
- Use them to show that Catholic beliefs are not in opposition to Scripture
- Then, either show Scriptural support for the doctrine OR ask why every doctrine must be explicit in Scripture
- Politely but firmly insist on sticking to one topic at a time.
- Pay close attention when reading the Bible – look for Catholic principles

3. That's my interpretation

- According to Protestant belief, you have just as much right to your interpretation as your questioner has to his
- Ask questions to get him to see this, e.g.

“Don’t you believe that as Christians we should go by the Bible alone? And that each person has the right to read and interpret Scripture as guided by the Holy Spirit?”

“Are you saying that I can’t interpret the Scripture as the HS is guiding me to do? Are you saying that your interpretation of Scripture is better than mine? How can you say that if everyone has the right to interpret Scripture? Do you really believe that or not?”

- Makes a key point about authority

- Remember the sentence: “I never said you stole money.”
4. Take the offensive
- First, focus the discussion on searching for the truth.
 - Then, ask questions about how your questioner's views square up with Scripture, thus using the Socratic method to help your questioner discover the truth.
 - Pay close attention to the context of any Scripture verses.
 - Affirm your belief in the contents of the Bible, but not in his personal, fallible interpretation of it.
 - Use the “ignorant Catholic” technique if you get confused.
 - Also useful for opening a conversation with folks who have left the church.

Remember:

1. The Bible is a Catholic book: the Church gave the Bible to the world. Nothing that the Church teaches is in contradiction to Scripture, properly understood.
2. There is an answer to every meaningful (i.e. not nonsensical) question about the Catholic faith.

Resources:

“Apologetics for the Scripturally Challenged” by John Martignoni, *This Rock*, May/June 2004.

“How to Be Offensive ... Without Being Offensive” by John Martignoni, *This Rock*, Oct 2004.

“Principled Apologetics” by Joel S. Peters, *This Rock*, Jan 2005.

“Apologetics Primer” by John Martignoni, *This Rock*, Mar 2004.

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