

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO APOLOGETICS

“Apologetics” simply means *giving a reasoned explanation for your faith*. A Catholic apologist charitably explains and defends Catholic doctrine using Scripture, history, and common sense.

Apologetics fulfills the command of St. Peter:



1 Pet 3:15–16: Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence....

A beginning apologist must remember the following points:

1. **Holiness.** Base all apologetics on the love of God and His Truth. An apologist who is not concerned with personal holiness will not be very effective.
2. **Charity.** Remember that you are a missionary, not a debater. Your goal is to explain and evangelize, not to win arguments. You must have charity at all times, even in the most heated discussions.
3. **Unity.** Begin by stressing that we agree with other Christians on many important points. Acknowledge the sincerity and zeal of our separated brothers in Christ.
4. **Study.** Be prepared to study at least 30 minutes three times per week. Read the Bible 20 minutes, and use the other 10 minutes to read a good Catholic catechism. In your study of the Bible, concentrate on the New Testament. Be sure to highlight important passages and use the cross-references and footnotes.

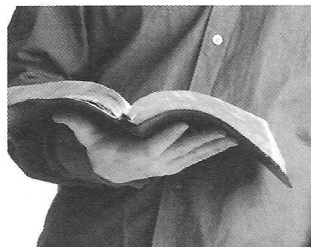
5. **Equal time.** Do not allow the non-Catholic evangelizer to take up all the time or ask all the questions. Divide the time equally and ask him a few challenging questions of your own.

6. **Focus.** Insist on staying on the main issues during the discussion. Don't let the other person ask a dozen different questions and expect you to answer them all in ten minutes. Explain the need to stay focused and to allow plenty of time for answers. The chief concern is to shed light on the truth, not to make cheap debating points.

7. **Topics.** Do not feel obligated to stick with the subjects non-Catholics bring up—especially if you're not familiar with them. Insist on talking about the Eucharist at the start of your discussion because it is so important and because it divides Catholics from virtually all Protestants. (See page 7.)

8. **Interpretation.** Do not accept the Protestant interpretation of a verse when it contradicts Catholic doctrine. Read it yourself *in context* and show how the verse can be interpreted to support the Catholic position. Protestants often distort Bible verses to fit their denominational teaching.

9. **Canon of the Bible.** Show how the Bible was put together by the Catholic Church. Stress the fact that Christianity was around for 350 years before the canon of the New Testament was determined. (See page 11.)





10. **Historical perspective.** Have non-Catholics stand back and look at Church history. Get them to see that many Protestant beliefs were *unheard of* for 1500 years after Christ established His Church. Never end a discussion without stressing the fact that *all* the early Church Fathers were Catholic in their beliefs. Know a few of the early Church Fathers well: especially St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Justin Martyr, and St. Irenaeus. (See page 9.)

11. **Knowledge.** Explain Catholic beliefs clearly. This is your primary task. Keep a good catechism handy for this purpose.

Don't try to defend a doctrine that you don't understand. If you don't know the answer to a question, honestly admit it and tell them you will get back to them later on the subject after you have done some study.

12. **Tempers.** Begin and end the discussion with *prayer*. Keep control of your temper. Apologize if you lose it. Calmly end the discussion if the other person becomes abusive in his approach. Insist that they refrain from abusive attacks on Our Lady and the Eucharist. Ask them simply to state where they disagree and why.

13. **Expertise.** Don't be afraid if you are not an expert in Catholic doctrine. You don't have to be; just give them what you know. If you can make just one good point, or correct just one misunderstanding, you have already accomplished a lot. Besides, the very fact that a non-Catholic met a Catholic who is polite, knowledgeable about the Bible, and concerned about saving souls will itself leave a good impression of the Catholic Church.

14. **Caution.** Be careful whom you let into your home! Being an apologist doesn't mean throwing away common sense when it comes to trusting strangers.

*Learn to explain your faith clearly,
defend it charitably, and
share it confidently.*

PRACTICAL POINTS ON BIBLE READING



1. Choose a good **translation** of the Bible. The three versions approved for liturgical use in this country are the 1970 *New American Bible (NAB)*, the *Jerusalem Bible*, and the *Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (RSVCE)*. We recommend the *RSVCE*, with the *NAB* as a back-up.¹

2. Get a Bible that is **comfortable to read**. Large print is generally best for most people. Those who have difficulty reading should get giant print.

3. Use Bible **tabs** and a **soft cover** Bible. This allows you to find verses quickly. Remember that time is critical in apologetics. You don't want to spend *your* 15 minutes looking up a Bible passage. Practice, and become proficient at quickly finding verses.

4. Pick a Bible that has **newspaper-type columns**. These are easier to read, and make passages easier to identify. Choose a Bible that has the cross-references and footnotes on the same page as this saves time. It is also helpful if your Bible has a dictionary and doctrinal index at the end.

5. Avoid arguments over **translations**. You can almost always defend the Catholic position from any translation. (There are exceptions: for example, the Jehovah's Witnesses have a very mangled translation called the *New World Translation*, which you should avoid.)

6. Stay away from arguments over the **Greek or Hebrew meanings** of the words.² Splitting hairs over the precise meaning of the original Greek

and Hebrew words is often used as a diversionary tactic by non-Catholics. Emphasize that the best Greek and Hebrew scholars were involved in giving us the standard modern versions and that you are willing to use any of these. Stress that *doctrinal differences are almost never due to bad translations*. We have excellent translations in our time, both Catholic and Protestant. The differences arise over what the words, accurately translated, *mean*. What we need are good cross-references, Church history, and reason.

7. Underline or **highlight verses** and **make notes** in your Bible. Your study Bible is not a decoration or family heirloom.

8. Don't try to memorize exact chapter and verse, except for a few critical passages. **Memorize the chapter or chapters**. If you have highlighted well, the doctrinally important verse will stand out immediately when you get within a chapter or two of it.

**When you read your Bible,
remember these three points:**

(1) Highlight

(2) Make notes

(3) Memorize

...And Don't Forget Your TABS!

¹ See our booklet, *Beginning Apologetics 7: How to Read the Bible—A Catholic Introduction to Interpreting & Defending Sacred Scripture* for practical tips and principles to help you read and interpret the Bible correctly.

² Obviously, a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew can be very useful for studying the Bible and refuting misinterpretations. However, you can be an effective apologist without knowing any biblical languages.