

Apologetics: Intro and How-to

Meeting: 15 January 2016

What is apologetics?

- 1: systematic argumentative discourse in defense (as of a doctrine)
- 2: a branch of theology devoted to the defense of the divine origin and authority of Christianity
(<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apologetics>)

Why in the first place?

- Scripture says that we should be good apologists.
 - "...but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you**, yet do it with gentleness and reverence" 1 Peter 3:15
- Apologetics serves as a sort of pre-evangelism for many.
 - The goal is not to force the conversion of someone, but to **remove false ideas of God and replace them with sound truth.**
- It helps in answering the question of why one should be Catholic.
 - It leads up to faith.
 - By gaining greater knowledge and developing a more solid ground on understanding of the truth, one can be better prepared for placement of faith.
 - Reducing ignorance by defending truth can help reduce misconceptions about the truth.
- In this day an age of increasing global secularization and waning faith, we, as Catholics, should be prepared to respond to the challenging questions that the world provides us.
- Actually understanding why we believe what we believe gives us the ability to justify our beliefs with reason and faith, without being justified entirely by blind faith.

What are the focus and goals of apologetics?

- Two of the Spiritual Works of Mercy are relevant to apologetics.
 - Instructing the ignorant.
 - Counseling the doubtful.
- As apologists, we should not defend the faith with an attitude of arrogance and superiority.
 - We shouldn't be on the offensive.
 - Our job is to defend the faith and reduce ignorance about it. **The conversion of one's heart is up to God.**
- **Our main goal is to reduce ignorance and provide the reason for our faith, hopefully preparing one to accept the truth.**

Sources:

Christian Guard, "[What Is Apologetics and Why Does It Matter?](#)"

New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, "[Apologetics](#)"

Preparing for Apologetics

1. Always Defend the Faith
 - When you find yourself in a situation where the Catholic Church or faith is being attacked or denounced you will be called to defend it, even if you aren't sure how to do it well
 - The best way to prevent being caught off guard is to assume you will eventually find yourself in this situation and prepare for it

- This can happen in conversations with family, friends, coworkers, and even other Catholics
 - It is not a matter of if you will need to defend the faith but when
2. Prepare in Knowledge
- If you are going to defend Church teaching you first have to know Church teaching
 - This may be a challenge if you are poorly catechized, but there are many sources you can learn from such as
 - The Catechism of the Catholic Church
 - Scripture accompanied by proper interpretation
 -
 - Start by learning to defend the teachings most commonly attacked and learn more from there
3. Spiritually Prepare
- The best way to become a better apologist is to become a better Catholic. People are often more inspired by the expression of a belief than the preaching of it (although both are needed)
 - Our faith must be exercised publicly. Along with the graces we get from that it can inspire others or cause them to either question or criticize you, and from there the apologetics can begin
 - Fast and pray for graces from Our Lord and intercession from the Saints.
 - Go to confession often
 - Hold an extreme reverence for the Eucharist
 - Humble yourself

Talking about faith to different audiences

The four Gospel writers used different narratives and styles to address particular audiences.

- The evangelists recognized the different arguments needed to persuade their audiences and utilize them in their respective books.
- St. Paul does this when he preaches at the temple of the unknown god in Acts 17, using what the audience already knows and recognizes as a foundation on which to build his argument for Christianity.

There are **three main goals of apologetics** on which my below material is based (Dr. Paul Coulter, [“An Introduction to Christian Apologetics”](#)):

1. Arguments for the truth of Christianity
2. Arguments refuting accusations made against the faith
3. Refutation of opposing beliefs

There are also **four different types of audiences** to which apologetics is relevant ([Real Life Apologetics](#)):

1. Oneself (in times of doubt, for instance)
2. Believers (in their own times of doubt - this is a spiritual work of mercy: counseling the doubtful)
 - a. May be doubting the truth of the faith
 - b. May be unsure or have misconceptions about certain practices/traditions (I don't understand why we...?)
 - c. May be considering other religions or be unsure why Christianity is any better
3. Skeptics (have reservations about Christianity; honestly seeking the truth)

- a. Why be Christian?
- b. May face some of the same questions as believers
- c. May or may not accept arguments based on the Bible
- 4. Critics (not open to Christianity, merely out to antagonize believers)
 - a. A relationship with the other person is stressed here; it is unlikely that your conversation will have any effect except to further distance the two parties otherwise

Using questions to gauge under which category your audience falls will help determine what sort of arguments will be effective or acceptable to your audience.

Finding common ground

In the case of skeptics and critics, these audiences may share varying amounts of common ground, and it's important to determine how much.

- The Nicene Creed is a valuable resource here, since it essentially summarizes what Catholics believe, roughly from most basic to most specific. Different groups will diverge in different places, and any shared beliefs form a foundation upon which acceptable arguments and ideas can be based.
- St. Paul's preaching in [Acts 17](#) (the temple of the "unknown god") is a good example of this.

Three general questions

1. What is the point I'm trying to argue?/What is my goal?
 - a. See three main goals of apologetics above
2. Who is my audience?
 - a. See the different types of audiences above
 - b. Also, where are they in terms of faith? An atheist? Pagan? Buddhist? Muslim? Protestant? Fellow Catholic? With how much of our creed do they agree?
3. What is my relationship to this person?
 - a. Relationships are important: How does a complete stranger react to a discussion of religious beliefs? How does a friend or family member? This can affect comfort level and how your argument is received, which can influence the result.

Living With Non-Catholic Family Members

See "[Six Rules for Dealing with Non-Catholic Family and Friends](#)" for all of the quotes.

First, some general points for dealing with non-Catholic family who (presumably) you want to become Catholic.

- There is no "silver bullet" argument which will compel them to become Catholic. You are in this long term.
- It is hard to convince family members via argument because:
 - you know each other too well to take the other person's arguments as seriously as they should be taken.
 - emotions tend to run high and often result in both sides saying things they regret. When this happens it usually only results in the other person becoming more stubborn in their position.

There are **six general rules** to follow:

1. Don't Argue

- a. You can have a calm, respectful discussion about your differences, but if things start getting heated you should back off.
 - b. You should not be pressuring the other person.
 - c. "We have to remember that we can win an argument but lose a soul; win the battle but lose the war. We have to bite our lip and grimace inside."
2. Love Them More Than Ever
 - a. This will help heal any wounds in the relationship caused by your differences.
 - b. It is a powerful argument in and of itself, as well as making it easier for you and your family member to discuss things calmly.
3. Pray and Make Sacrifices
 - a. "we often spend our time fuming and creating imaginary arguments in our heads when we should direct our energy and time to serious prayer. Make a prayer list and be persistent in prayer."
4. Study the Catholic Faith
 - a. If you are hoping someone might convert, then you should be prepared for them to come to you with questions.
5. Show the Lord's Joy in Your Life
 - a. Show that your faith makes a difference in your life and that you are happy with it.
 - b. If we're constantly grumbling and groaning we're not making Catholicism seem terribly attractive.
6. Ask God to bring someone else to influence them for the Faith, since they won't listen to you
 - a. If you can't directly convince the person (as is usually the case) then ask God to send them someone who can.
 - b. Do this especially if you aren't on speaking terms with the person anymore.
 - c. Remember it's not your job to convert people, it's the Holy Spirit's. Trust that He knows what He's doing.

Conversational Tips:

- **Don't try to view the discussion as an argument that you need to win.** The focus is on bringing the other person to God, not winning a debate. The mentality of winning an argument interferes with a productive discussion.
- **Do not expect to convert/change the person you are speaking with in a single conversation.** The more realistic goal would be to leave the other person with something to think about.
- **Don't let your emotions rule you.** If you can't stay calm, you should probably stop the conversation. Strong emotions can generally interfere with having a rational discussion, increasing the possibility of entrenching the other person further. It takes practice to stay calm when someone is attacking your beliefs, so you will probably have a harder time staying calm than you would think.

Be intellectually honest and humble:

- Admit when you're wrong.
- Don't talk about what you don't know.
- Don't overstate your argument.
- Don't make it sound like only a fool would disagree with you.

Be charitable, gracious, never insult the other person, and avoid being abrasive.

- We are called as Christians to be loving and charitable people.
- People are more likely to listen to what you have to say when you treat them well (and not listen to you if you treat them poorly).
- If you are unable to do this, step away from the conversation, as you will probably entrench the person further in their views rather than bring them towards God.

Ask questions and listen to what the other person is saying:

- Understanding (exactly) what someone else believes is important, as it both allows you to tailor what you say to that person and it shows that you are listening to the other person. As the [Aggie Catholic Blog](#)'s "Do's and Don'ts of Evangelization and Apologetics" says:
 - *"It is more important that you really understand where they are coming from and try to meet them at that place, than it is that you find the perfect answer to a supposed question. Nobody likes a one-sided conversation."*
- When someone makes a claim, the questions "what do you mean by that?" and "why do you think that's true?" are useful for understanding what exactly a person believes.
- Questions can help a person see the discrepancies in their views, such as saying "you believe this correct? But if that's true doesn't that mean ...?"
- However: Don't feign ignorance or confusion when you ask questions, as this can be very annoying to the person you are talking to.

When making a case for Christianity and/or Catholicism:

- Give evidence:
 - Don't say that if they become Christian their life will get better:
 - *"Don't make arguments that by becoming a Christian, your life will improve. It certainly might in some aspects, but the Bible usually talks about how much more difficult life will now become BECAUSE you are a Christian. Good things will follow, but trying to build a 1:1 case, or that Christianity provides 'the good life' will always backfire eventually."* (["Apologetics - Application, Tips, and Dangers"](#))
 - Don't use experiential Arguments:
 - *"Most people are not going to change their deeply held convictions or worldview based on the experiences of another person. Think about this for a second. Would not the advocates of just about any religion make such claims? When the Mormon presents their 'burning in the bosom' case, do you as a Christian convert? Why should they convert for your story? I'm not saying do not present your story. Stories can be powerful under the right conditions, and possibly foundational for our own personal faith. But, they should not be your primary mode of evangelism. People should believe Christianity because it is true, not because you do."* (["Apologetics - Application, Tips, and Dangers"](#))

Don't overcomplicate things:

- Don't use Catholic/Christian "jargon": It may confuse the person you are talking to or simply put them off and distract them. If you do use specifically Catholic/Christian terms, explain them, even ones you might assume they already know. (Aggie Catholic Blog, "Do's and Don'ts of Evangelization and Apologetics")
- BUT don't "over-explain yourself. Too much of a good thing is still too much."

Let the other person walk away if they want:

- Consider offering the other person to meet with them again about the topic.

Other Resources:

Cross Examined, "[Advice to Young Aspiring Apologists](#)"

Tilled Soil, "[Forest for the Trees? Keeping apologetics grounded and apologetics method](#)"

Christian Research Institute, "[Witnessing Tips: Apologetics, Truth, and Humility](#)"

Cross Examined, "[Seven Tips for Good Christian Case Making Conversations](#)"

Sources for Learning the Faith

[Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)