

Know Your Faith

Session 1 – An Introduction to our Task

Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

V. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.

R. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

Some Introductory Comments

- **Ever been asked a question about your Catholic Faith that you could not answer?**
- **We'll try to keep this at a beginners' level. But please feel free to go deeper with questions.**
- **Mostly lecture, but time for questions.**
- **Bring a Bible (and a Catechism)**

What is Apologetics?

- “Providing a reasoned defense/explanation of the Faith.”
- Vatican II – “Since, in our own times, new problems are arising and very serious errors are circulating which tend to undermine the foundations of religion, the moral order, and human society itself, this sacred synod earnestly exhorts laymen- each according to his own gifts of intelligence and learning-to be more diligent in doing what they can to explain, defend, and properly apply Christian principles to the problems of our era in accordance with the mind of the Church” (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, no. 6*).
- Reason behind our beliefs.
 - “What moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: we believe "because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived". So "that the submission of our faith might nevertheless be in accordance with reason, God willed that external proofs of his Revelation should be joined to the internal helps of the Holy Spirit." Thus the miracles of Christ and the saints, prophecies, the Church's growth and holiness, and her fruitfulness and stability "are the most certain signs of divine Revelation, adapted to the intelligence of all"; they are "motives of credibility" (*motiva credibilitatis*), which show that the assent of faith is "by no means a blind impulse of the mind". (CCC 156)
- A defense against what?
 1. Misunderstandings
 - There are not over a hundred people in the United States who hate the Catholic Church. There are millions, however, who hate what they

wrongly believe to be the Catholic Church, which is, of course, quite a different thing. (*Bishop Fulton Sheen*)

2. Anti-Catholic notions
- 3) Syncretism and indifference
 - “A legitimate plurality of positions has yielded to an undifferentiated pluralism, based upon the assumption that all positions are equally valid, which is one of today's most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth” (Fides et Ratio, 5)

Why do apologetics? (An apologetics for apologetics☺)

- 1) Understand our own Faith better (Mike’s story)
- 2) Evangelization – meet people where they’re at and remove stumbling blocks
- 3) We’ve been directly challenged/questioned
- 4) We’ve been commanded to – “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Objections to doing apologetics

- 1) I just believe. I don’t need to know why. It’s about faith, not proof.
 - a. We’re not looking for “proof” like in the empirical sciences. We’re looking for the resonance between our faith and our reason.
 - b. Not having this background leaves one at a disadvantage in many evangelizing opportunities.
 - c. One of the characteristics of faith is that it seeks understanding. Faith touches the whole human person, including our human intellect.
- 2) No hope of coming to certain conclusions – disagreements have existed for centuries, we’re not going to resolve anything
 - a. Disagreements do not mean there is no truth. Disagreements mean some people have not arrived at the truth.
 - b. Disagreements do not mean we cannot have certainty. Disagreements mean some people use better methods and have better evidence at their disposal.
 - c. Discussion, examination, and debate are ways of coming to certain conclusions...not throwing our hands up in the air and ignoring disagreements
 - d. We all have the individual responsibility to adhere to the Truth. Seeking that truth involves examining its reasonable foundations.
- 3) “You can’t argue anyone into the Church/into faith...”
 - a. Apologetics is **NOT** about winning arguments
 - b. God does reach some people through the intellect
 - c. We can remove stumbling blocks to Faith
- 4) Religious disagreements cause fighting, intolerance, and wars – “live and let live”
 - a. Disagreements that devolve into violence or hate are abuses of human free will – an example of our fallen nature
 - b. But the misuse of something does not negate the proper use of that thing.

- c. “Live and let live” is way to *laissez-faire* an attitude when the salvation of souls is at stake. This is not a matter of what brand of cereal to eat. This is the question of our ultimate origins and destiny. It signals intellectual and spiritual laziness.
- 5) Ecumenically undesirable
 - a. “The way and method in which the Catholic faith is expressed should never become an obstacle to dialogue with our brethren. It is, of course, essential that the doctrine should be clearly presented in its entirety. Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism, in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss and its genuine and certain meaning is clouded. At the same time, the Catholic faith must be explained more profoundly and precisely, in such a way and in such terms as our separated brethren can also really understand” (*Unitatis Redintegratio, 11*)
- 6) You can be saved outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church, so what’s the point?
 - a. While this is true, the Catholic Church alone has the fullest means of salvation and those outside the Church are at a grave deficiency
 - b. Such a pragmatic attitude toward religious truth makes it seem “all about me” rather than about conforming to God’s will.
 - c. Jesus Christ is the Truth. To be a Christian, to be one who seeks Christ, is to seek the truth...for the truth’s sake.
 - d. The Eucharist, Mary, the Saints, the Pope, Confession, etc...
- 7) Relativism or Syncretism – more on these later

Three levels and their tools

- Theistic apologetics – Reason, History
- Christian Apologetics – Reason, History, the Scriptures, Miracles
- ***Catholic Apologetics – Reason, History, Scripture, Church Fathers***

Reading the Scriptures – 3 guides (CCC 112-114)

1. Be attentive to the “content and the unity of the whole of scripture”
2. Read the Scripture within "the living Tradition of the whole Church"
3. Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

The importance of the Church Fathers

- Proximity to the Apostles (Handout)
- A lens for reading scripture
- Avoidance of innovation – concern for maintaining the Apostolic Faith
- A window into the belief of early Christians
- Critical for the development of an articulated orthodox Christianity
- Addressed nearly all the issues we address today

Our approach

- 1) Clarify misunderstandings – state the Catholic position clearly; Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church
- 2) Address the objections' main points, especially scriptural arguments
- 3) Provide scriptural warrant for Catholic position
- 4) Use reason, history and Church Fathers to show the ground for the Catholic position

Two positions that might prevent us from even getting started

Relativism

- “There is no objective truth ‘out there,’ independent of me. Truth is relative to the observer, and *what is true for you, may not be true for me.*”

Reply 1: This is self refuting. Is this statement true for everyone? Is it absolutely true that there are no absolute truths? Is truth absolutely relative? Can I know for certain that I cannot know anything for certain?

Reply 2: Practically speaking, we only really hold this for religious and moral truths. No one really claims relativism for mathematical proofs, or meteorological events, or high voltage warnings. No one wants a relativist surgeon or pilot. We are relative about things that **happen to us subjectively**. I can be cold and you can be hot, but the temperature is not relative. Our feeling is relative. I perceived my desk chair to be big in kindergarten, now I perceive it to be small. My perception was relative. The desk's height was an objective reality. So in making things about God and morals only “relative” truths, we're saying that they are truths about *our experience rather than things “out there” in the world*. We reduce “Thou shalt not kill” to “I'm really put off emotionally and psychologically by killing.” We reduce the Great “I AM” to my own “I feel that he is, but you may feel differently.” When we do this, we're stepping out of the realm of moral and religious discussion altogether, and are now talking about psychology.

Reply 3: If I have a quarter in my hand, I don't care how you feel about it or if you disagree, or if 98% of the world disagrees, or if everyone born in North Dakota disagrees. It doesn't matter. The fact of the quarter being in my hand is what makes it true, none of that other stuff. If you disagree, you are not “also right in your own way.” You are wrong. Here's the kicker: is God more real or less real than a quarter? If less real, than the relativist **presupposes** atheism, and is not really a relativist. If God is more real than a quarter, then God is more concrete and is even more True. In either case, the relativist is out of a job. And if the relativist doesn't believe in the absolute truth about the position of a coin, ask him for his bank account routing number.

Syncretism

- “All religions are basically the same. They're just different paths up the same mountain; different ways to reach the same goal. All religions agree on the basics: do good, avoid evil; love one another. The different religions are just different

expressions of the same reality. *It doesn't matter which you profess, so long as you are sincere in your beliefs.*"

Reply 1: Christianity is different in that we are not going up the mountain. God has come down and cut us a path. It is not a man-made path. There would be no reason to *a priori* prefer one over the other if it were. But the Christian claim is that it is a God-made path.

Reply 2: Not all religions have the same goal. Christianity's goal is to share in the divine life of the Trinity; to be sons and daughters of God.

Reply 3: Agreement on moral issues is not the "basics" of religion. Morality is written into our hearts. Catholics call it moral law. Of course Jews, Muslims, Hindus, etc. believe in doing good and avoiding evil. But not because of religion; because they are human. Don't reduce religion to a simple moralism.

Reply 4: Since when did sincerity become the criteria for the value of an idea? Is it fine to be a sincere Nazi? A sincere Satan worshipper? I can be sincere, but be sincerely wrong.

Reply 5: Sharing some realities is not the same as being the same reality.

Reply 6: This is one claim ("They're all the same") that most religions deny. Odd?

Reply 7: Various religions contain contradictory, mutually exclusive truth claims about central realities. (God is Trinity, God is not Trinity. Jesus was God, Jesus was not God.)

Reply 8: Christianity's central claims are wholly unique. God became man in an historical person. This man rose from the dead to reconcile us to God. He instituted one Church and gave it His (God's) authority. And on and on and on.

Some details

- Our calendar of topics
 - February 8th – The Bible Alone?
 - February 15th – Are you Saved? Are you Born Again?
 - February 22nd – The Eucharist
 - March 1st – No Session; Join us For Dr. McNamara's Presentation in the MC Chapel
 - March 8th – Confession
 - March 15th – No Session; Parish Mission
 - March 22nd – Purgatory
 - March 29th – The Papacy
 - April 5th - Mary
- Questions
- Books for sale

Apologetics in the Church - an encounter between faith and reason

- Scripture:
 - Acts 17:18 - Paul enters into discussion with the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. Paul used the language of the Stoics.
 - Colossians 2:8 - A warning against being lead astray by deceitful philosophies.
- Early Church
 - Justin Martyr
 - Tertullian: “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? The academy with the Church?”
- Aquinas/Aristotle
- Raphael rooms – School of Athens; Disputation on the Eucharist
- Vatican I
 - Rationalism
 - Fideism
- JPII – Fides et Ratio