

# About the Essays

Catholics accept Protestants as their fellow Christians. But Protestants do not always think of Catholics in the same way. They say the teachings of the Church are opposed to the teachings of the Bible. But Scripture, read in context, fully supports Catholic teaching. Some will claim they have no need of a church. They say, all they require is Jesus. However, Jesus established a church. And by the way, He established one church, not thousands. But thousands do exist. And that is because some men prefer their view of God to His. Others, though well-meaning, simply are not fully aware of what God requires of them. Nevertheless, it should be obvious to all that division was not a part of God's plan. For a God of truth and justice, is not a God of multiple choice. As we read in Ephesians 4:5, there is: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism."

We hear a lot about the need to accept Jesus. And of course, this is good. But if you reject Him on one point, you have rejected His authority (James 2:10). And if you reject His authority, you have rejected Him. And if you have rejected Him, you have not accepted Him.

The essays address the most common objections to Catholicism. In them is contained the biblical evidence for the Church's teachings. Quotes from the Early Church Fathers are also provided to show that the early Church and the Catholic Church of today are one and the same.

When it comes to Christian doctrine, our views should be based on the evidence and not the prejudice of others. In the movie, "To Kill a Mockingbird," Tom Robinson, a black man, is accused of a crime that he did not commit. The story takes place in the American South during the early 1930s. The jury was composed of local townspeople, all of whom were white. Despite clear evidence that indicated his innocence, the jury found Tom guilty. The verdict was not based on facts, but on the bigotry of the jury. If you were on that jury, would you have stood up for the truth, or would you have succumbed to peer pressure and gone along with the others? You are in such a position now. There is a great deal of prejudice against the Catholic Church. Can you examine the evidence without that prejudice affecting your opinion?

If we are to be honest with ourselves and others, we need to consider all the evidence before drawing any conclusions. Case in point: my wife and I attended a four-day parish mission. On the final day, the speaker offered to pray with anyone who needed it. My wife and I got in line. The process was simple. You tell the man what you required prayer for, and then he would pray for you. My wife went first. When she was done, she started to walk away. Then it was my turn. Because of the nature of my prayer request, the process changed a bit. I told him my problem, he asked me a question, and I answered.

As my wife was walking away, she happened to hear the question and the answer, but she never heard me say what my prayer request was. Here is how it went.

**Me:** I am pre-diabetic.

**Speaker:** Do you cheat?

**Me:** Yes.

Obviously, the man wanted to know if I was cheating on my diet. But not hearing my petition, my wife imagined some other type of cheating was being discussed. Her head spun around so fast I believe the earth wobbled on its axis. Luckily, I saw this out of the corner of my eye and called her back. I asked the man to tell her what we were talking about. Once he stopped laughing, he did. Obviously, having all the facts in this situation was important. Logically, then, how much more important would it be to have all the facts when we are talking about eternal truths.

Some see apologetics as a rejection of those who believe differently. And that would be false. Catholic apologetics rejects false ideas, not the individuals who hold those ideas. If you saw a friend attempt to drink a cup of bleach that he thought was a fruit drink, you would say something. The same principle applies to our faith. With eternity at stake, it would be foolish to ignore our differences. Pope Benedict XVI told the American bishops in 2008: "The Church needs to promote at every level of her teaching – in catechesis, preaching, seminary, and university instruction – an apologetics aimed at affirming the truth of Christian revelation, the harmony of faith and reason, and a sound understanding of freedom" (The Urgency of a New Apologetics for the Church in the 21st Century).

According to the Bible, apologetics is an important part of the Church's work. In Jude 3 we are commanded to "Contend for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints." Paul tells Titus to "Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the Faith, instead of giving heed to Jewish myths or to commands of men whom reject the truth" (Titus 1:13-14). Finally, Peter tells us to "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).

Vatican II was in full agreement in its "Declaration on Religious Freedom." It reads in part: "The Disciple is bound by a grave obligation toward Christ, his Master, ever more fully to understand the truth received from Him, faithfully to proclaim it, and vigorously to defend it" (No. 14). Jesus said that the truth would set us free. Common sense tells us that two opposing views cannot both be true. However, if the truth is to set us free, we must know what the truth is. Consequently, a vehicle is needed to explain and verify it. Apologetics is that vehicle.

For those who seek to defend the faith, a word of advice: Don't expect that everyone will convert once you have demonstrated the Catholic position. People remain outside the Church for various reasons. Some simply do not wish to abandon that which has been familiar to them. The deeper someone is immersed in a way of thinking, the harder it is to see any flaws in it. For some people, sentiment and friendships can take precedence over the truth. Also, do not be a bull in a china shop. As Peter said, defend the faith with gentleness and reverence.

Some leave or stay out of the Church because they are unwilling to accept one or more of its teachings. Whether those teachings are true is beside the point. As Scripture puts it: "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings" (2 Timothy 4:3).

This is due to our human nature. We tend to prefer things a certain way. Consequently, we can be inclined to see only that evidence that supports or seems to support our position. Evidence to the contrary, no matter how strong, is easily dismissed. We do this in politics, religion, and even in our daily lives. None of us is immune to this type of thinking. The question is, are we willing to see it?

No matter what we prefer to believe, reality is reality. I can decide not to believe in the law of gravity. But if I jump off a tall building, I am still going to make a mess on the sidewalk. That is how reality works. Facing reality may not always be pleasant or desirable. However, it is always the right thing to do.

When sharing the faith with others, it is possible for your intentions to be misinterpreted. Oftentimes people are insulted by any kind of correction. Be careful in the way you communicate. Pray that God would open the hearts of the people that you want to reach. Bear in mind that it is the Holy Spirit who converts hearts.

Regardless of the outcome, never be judgmental or demeaning. While you may not have won the person over, you may have planted a seed, a seed that may sprout and grow strong at some future date. Do not jeopardize that with the wrong attitude. Your objective should be to win souls, not arguments. I once heard Mother Angelica say, "An argument is an exchange of feelings. A discussion is an exchange of ideas. Discussions lead to truth; arguments lead to bitterness." I could not agree more. That is why the Scriptures tell us to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

When using the essays with family or friends, make sure that you read them first and understand them. You may want to highlight points that you think are important or that may have come up in past conversations. Before your discussion, you may want to consult books like Karl Keating's "Catholicism and Fundamentalism" or Rev. John O'Brien's "The Faith of Millions," as they cover the most common objections in more detail than I have.

The majority of the essays deal with objections raised by other Christian groups. Traditionally, these people were referred to as Protestants. Some object to the label. They claim they are not protesting anything. However, if you are a Christian, and your beliefs differ from those of the Church established by Jesus 2,000 years ago, you are in fact protesting that which God established. And thus, the label Protestant would be accurate. No offense is intended. I just need a word to use when referring to those Christians who reject Rome. And listing each of the thousands of Bible-only denominations or groups is just not practical.

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