

Two-Minute Apologetics

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Below are some quick answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ's) that Catholics get.

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What does the word "apologetics" mean?

The word "apologetics" is derived from the ancient Greek word apologia, which means, an apology. Not an apology in the modern sense of the word - which is to say you're sorry for something. But rather, an apology in the ancient sense of the word - which is to make a reasoned defense of something or someone. In ancient times, the word apology referred to the case a lawyer would make on behalf of his client.

Apologetics is about building the case for our Faith...learning how to explain and defend our Faith. Basically, there are 3 types of apologetics: natural apologetics, Christian apologetics, and Catholic apologetics. Natural apologetics builds the case for truths we can know from the "natural" light of reason. Truths that can be known without any divine intervention. Truths which the articles of our Faith rest upon and build upon. Truths such as the existence of God, the innate spirituality of the human soul, the objective reality of right and wrong...truths that our faith rest upon and build upon.

Christian apologetics, on the other hand, builds the case for divinely revealed truths - truths that cannot be known by reason apart from faith. Truths such as the reality of biblical miracles, the divinity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, and the Resurrection to name a few.

Catholic apologetics encompasses all of Christian apologetics - since Catholicism is the fullness of Christianity - but Catholic apologetics tends to focus on those truths of Christianity that are not generally believed by non-Catholic Christians. Truths such as: the Catholic Church having been founded directly by Jesus Christ; the papacy; the Sacraments; the Immaculate Conception, and others.

Are there any basic rules for doing apologetics?

We need to always keep in mind 1 Ptr 3:15 which says, "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you..." **Always be prepared** Scripture tells us! So, how can we "always be prepared" to make a defense of our Faith?

Rule #1: **Pray**. Pray to the Holy Spirit. Pray that He will give you the courage to share your Faith and the wisdom to choose your words carefully and profitably.

Rule #2: **You don't have to know everything right now!** Just learn a little bit more about your Faith each and every day. Read Scripture. Read the Catechism. Listen to apologetics tapes. Read books on or by the Saints. Learn a little bit at a time.

Rule #3: Luke 5:10, "**Do not be afraid**, henceforth **you will be catching men**." Jesus said this to Peter, but **He's also saying it to us**. Will you make mistakes? Will you get into tight spots...when you start sharing your Faith with others? Of course you will, but Peter made mistakes! He got into tight spots. Yet, Jesus told Peter not to be afraid. Why? Because if we are sincere in our desire to share the truth with others...to share Jesus Christ with others...then Jesus will find a way to make something good come out of even our mistakes.

Rule #4: Always view a question about your Faith, or even an attack on your Faith, as an opportunity - an opportunity to share the truth. Stay calm and stay determined to bring light into darkness.

Rule #5: Don't get frustrated. Quite often Catholics get frustrated by what I call the doctrinal dance...you get asked about Purgatory, Mary, the Pope, the Sacraments all in rapid fire succession. Before you can answer one question, you're asked another. Just keep firmly, but gently, guiding the discussion back to one topic until you've said all you want to say...then move on.

Rule #6: Very, very important! **Never be afraid to say, "I don't know,"** when asked a question about your Faith. Don't try to "wing it." However, always follow, "I don't know," with, "But, I will find out and get back to you." And **make sure** you do!

If you follow these rules, you **will be** prepared the next time God puts you in a position to explain and defend your Faith.

Anything else we need to know about apologetics before we start engaging in it?

A few more basics about apologetics before we move into specific apologetics topics:

#1) Ingrain this into your psyche...the Bible is a Catholic book! The Catholic Church gave it to the world! Which means that there is nothing...**nothing!**...in the Bible that is contrary to anything in the Catholic Faith **and** there is nothing in the Catholic Faith contrary to anything in the Bible! Always remember that!

This is important to keep in mind because a lot of times folks will quote a passage from the Bible that "proves" the Catholic Church is wrong. Whenever someone quotes you a Bible verse that "proves" the Catholic Church is wrong on something, your response should be, "Amen, I believe what the Bible says! As a Catholic, I believe everything the Bible says! However, I don't agree with **your personal interpretation** of that passage." The reason you don't agree with their personal interpretation is because **100%** of the time that you are presented with a verse that "proves" the Church wrong, either: a) the verse has been taken out of context, or b) the verse simply doesn't say what they are trying to make it say.

#2) And this flows right from #1, the Catholic Church can be defended **solely** from the Bible better than any other Christian faith tradition can be. There is actually a good bit in the various Protestant faith traditions that does indeed contradict the Bible. So, do not be afraid to engage non-Catholics in a discussion of the Bible.

#3) If you are ever asked a question about your Faith that you cannot answer, don't worry. There is an answer, you just need to go and find it. Simply respond, "I don't know, but I will find out and get back to you." Then find out and get back to them.

As Catholics, we need to reclaim the Bible. **It is our book.** We need to read it, pray it, learn it, and use it to bring our separated brothers and sisters back to the Church. If you keep these things in mind, you have started down the road to being a very effective apologist for the Catholic Faith.

As Catholics, do we have to accept everything the Church teaches?

If you want to call yourself Catholic, but you want to pick and choose for yourself which of the Church's teachings to accept and which to reject, you give everyone else who calls themselves Catholic the right to do the same thing.

For example, you believe women should be priests...in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1577 states, "Only a baptized man validly receives ordination...For this reason the ordination of women **is not possible!**" You don't believe that...well, that's fine...**[RIP]** just tear that page out of your Catechism...you just made it a Catechism of your Catholic Church...not mine.

But remember, if you can throw doctrines out, so can everyone else who calls themselves Catholic. That gives Joe Parishioner over at St. Doubting Thomas Catholic Church the right to throw out the Church's social justice teachings...he doesn't feel like feeding the hungry, caring for the poor, and all that other "bleeding heart" stuff - Paragraphs 2401 -2463 **[RIP]**...he just made it a Catechism of his Catholic Church...not mine and not yours.

You believe contraception is okay? Paragraph 2370 says contraception is intrinsically evil! **[RIP]** Joe Parishioner doesn't like what the Church teaches on the death penalty - Paragraphs 2266-2267**[RIP]**. You don't like what it teaches on pages 55-60 **[RIP]**. He doesn't like what it teaches on pages 128-140 **[RIP]**

Can you see what's happening? I heard it said once that there is a shortage of vocations to the priesthood in the United States, but no shortage of vocations to the Papacy! If we don't believe in all of it, if we each appoint ourselves Pope and throw out a doctrine here or a doctrine there, then our faith is no longer Catholic.

I had a friend ask me why Catholics have Crucifixes in our churches...don't we believe Jesus has risen? Why do we keep Him on the cross?

First of all, you would want to check out 1st Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 23. Paul says, "...but we preach Christ crucified..." Why does Paul preach Christ crucified? Doesn't he know Jesus has been raised from the dead? Of course he does! But, he knows that it is through the power of the crucified Christ on the cross that the bonds of sin and death are broken. As Paul says in verse 24, Christ crucified is the "power of God".

1 Cor 2:2, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Again, didn't Paul know that Jesus had risen from the dead? Of course, he did.

Paul preaches Christ crucified because an empty cross has no power. The cross that bears the beaten, battered, and bloodied body of Jesus Christ, however, that cross is the "power of God". This is why, we "keep Jesus on the cross," because we, too, preach Christ crucified. The Crucifix reminds us not only of God's power, but also His love for us - giving His only begotten Son up for suffering and death.

Also, here in this life we do not share so much in the glory of the Resurrection, as we do in the suffering of Jesus on the cross; after all, we must take up our cross daily if we are to follow Jesus, as it says in Lk 9:23.

And, we must die with Christ in order to live with Him as Romans 6:8 tells us. Where did Christ die? On the cross. The Crucifix serves to remind us of these things.

One other passage to keep in mind is Galatians 3:1, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?" **Did you catch that?** Jesus was publicly portrayed, before their "eyes", as being crucified. Sounds kind of like they may have been looking at a Crucifix, **doesn't it?**

I had a theology professor who told me that Adam and Eve were just myths, and that the rest of Genesis was all just legends...is that what the Church teaches?

Absolutely not! The Church has always taught that Adam and Eve were real people and were the first human beings from whom all other human beings are descended. In 1950, Pope Pius XII, in Paragraph 37 of an encyclical entitled **Humani Generis**, states, "...the faithful **cannot** embrace that opinion which maintains **either** that after Adam there existed on this earth true men who **did not take their origin through natural generation from [Adam]** as from the **first parent of all, or** that Adam **represents a certain number of first parents.**" In other words, the Church teaches that all humanity descended from Adam and Eve. They had to be real for that to happen.

Paragraph #38, states: "This [encyclical], in fact, clearly points out that the first eleven chapters of Genesis...**do nevertheless pertain to history in a true sense...**" Again, Adam and Eve are not myths, and the rest of Genesis is not legend. They are history in a "true sense."

Paragraph #39: "Therefore, whatever of the popular narrations have been inserted into the Sacred Scriptures **must in no way be considered on a par with myths** or other such things..." Can it be stated any clearer than that?

And listen to what the Catechism says, Paragraph #375, "The Church...teaches that **our first parents, Adam and Eve...**" No mention of a myth here.

Paragraph #404: "By yielding to the tempter, **Adam and Eve committed a personal sin.** Someone please tell me, how do myths commit personal sins?"

Adam and Eve are not myths. Genesis does not contain myth or legend. That is Church teaching. Challenge anyone, who teaches differently, to produce their sources from a magisterial document. They cannot do it. They can, however, produce countless books and articles by "theologians". Not good enough.

A friend of mine said that his church takes the Bible literally, but that the Catholic Church doesn't...is that true?

Actually, there is no truth to that, whatsoever. Catholics interpret the Bible in a "literal" sense, while many fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and others interpret the Bible in a literalist sense.

The "literal" meaning of a passage of Scripture is the meaning that the author of that passage of Scripture intended to convey. The "literalist" interpretation of a passage of Scripture is: "that's what it says, that's what it means."

Let me give you an example to illustrate the difference. If you were to read a passage in a book that said it was "raining cats and dogs outside", how would you interpret that? As Americans, in the 21st Century, you would know that the author was **intending** to convey the idea that it was raining pretty doggone hard outside. That would be the "literal" interpretation...the interpretation the author intended to convey. On the other hand, what if you made a "literalist" interpretation of the phrase, "it's raining cats and dogs"?

The "literalist" interpretation would be that, were you to walk outside, you would actually see cats and dogs falling from the sky like rain. No taking into account the popularly accepted meaning of this phrase. No taking into account the author's intentions. The words say it was raining cats and dogs, so, by golly, it was raining cats and dogs! That is the literalist, or fundamentalist, way of interpretation.

If someone 2000 years in the future picked up that same book and read, "It was raining cats and dogs outside," in order to properly understand that passage in the book, they would need a "literal" interpretation, not a "literalist" interpretation. Now, think about that in the context of interpreting the Bible 2000-3000 years after it was written.

Literal, or Catholic, interpretation vs. literalist, or fundamentalist, interpretation.

How should I respond to someone who asks me if I've been saved, or born again?

Answer with a resounding, "Yes!" Tell them that it is through Baptism that you were saved, just as the Bible says in 1 Ptr 3:20-21 and that it is through Baptism, water and the Spirit, that you are "born again," just as the Bible says in John 3:5.

You see, many Protestants believe that they are saved by making one single act of faith at one single point in time in their lives. Nowhere does Scripture say such a thing. As Catholics, however, we believe that salvation is a process which begins with our Baptism and continues throughout our lifetimes, just as the Bible teaches us.

There are so many places in Scripture, which talk about how one is "saved", but not one of them says we are saved by one act of faith at just one point in time. As I just mentioned, 1 Ptr 3:20 says we are saved by baptism. In Hebrews 12:14 it says that we will not see the Lord unless we are holy, and that we have to strive for this holiness. In Matthew 6:14-15, it says we must forgive others or we will not be forgiven. Can you attain salvation if God hasn't forgiven you? No! So, our forgiving others is necessary for our salvation.

1 Tim 2:15 says that woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness with modesty. John 6:54 says we will have eternal life by doing something...eating the flesh and drinking the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Matthew 19, verses 16 and 17, Jesus is asked directly what one must do to have eternal life. Did He say, accept me into your heart once and that's it? No! Jesus said to keep the commandments and you will have life.

Yes, as Catholics we are born again. And, as Catholics we believe that we were saved, as Paul says in Rom 8:24; that we are being saved, as Paul says in 1 Cor 1:18; and that we will be saved, as Paul says in Rom 5:9-10, provided we persevere and keep our eyes on the prize. Salvation is a process, just as Catholics believe, and just as the Bible clearly teaches.

I have a friend who says that Baptism is a symbolic act and that it has nothing to do with salvation...how can I answer them?

Simple. By showing them what the Bible says. First, nowhere does the Bible say that Baptism is merely a "symbolic" act...that passage simply does not exist.

Second, let's see what the Bible does say about Baptism:

Ezek 36:25-27, it says, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses...a new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you...and I will put My spirit within you..." Here, in the Old Testament, we have a **foreshadowing** of New Testament baptism.

Now, let's see if the New Testament corresponds to what we just read in Ezekiel. Acts 2:38, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the **forgiveness of your sins**; and you shall **receive the gift of the Holy**

Spirit. Note that there is no symbolic language here...this is real! The Book of Acts says, "Be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins." Ezekiel says, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from your uncleanness." The Book of Acts says, "...and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Ezekiel says: "...and I will put My Spirit within you." Do you begin to see how God, in the Old Covenant, was preparing us for what He gives us in the New Covenant?

Acts 22:16 - "And now why do you wait? Rise and be **baptized**, and **wash away your sins...**" 1 Cor 12:13 - "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..." What body was that? The Body of Christ. 1 Ptr 3:21: "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you..."

Scripture simply does not support the non-Catholic notion that Baptism is symbolic. Scripture does very directly and very clearly support the Catholic teaching that Baptism saves us; that Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ; that Baptism washes away sin; and that through Baptism we receive the Holy Spirit...just as the Catholic Church teaches!

Why do Catholics confess their sins to a priest, rather than going directly to God?

Well, the quick answer is because that's the way God wants us to do it. In James 5:16, God, through Sacred Scripture, commands us to "confess our sins to one another." Notice, Scripture does not say confess your sins straight to God and only to God...it says confess your sins to one another.

In Matthew, chapter 9, verse 6, Jesus tells us that He was given authority on earth to forgive sins. And then Scripture proceeds to tell us, in verse 8, that this authority was given to "men"...plural.

In John 20, verses 21-23, what is the 1st thing Jesus says to the gathered disciples on the night of His resurrection? "Jesus said to them, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.'" How did the Father send Jesus? Well, we just saw in Mt 9 that the Father sent Jesus with the authority on earth to forgive sins. Now, Jesus sends out His disciples as the Father has sent Him...so, what authority must Jesus be sending His disciples out with? The authority on earth to forgive sins. And, just in case they didn't get it, verses 22-23 say this, "And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'"

Why would Jesus give the Apostles the power to forgive or to retain sins if He wasn't expecting folks to confess their sins to them? And how could they forgive or retain sins if no one was confessing their sins to them?

The Bible tells us to confess our sins to one another. It also tells us that God gave men the authority on Earth to forgive sins. Jesus sends out His disciples with the authority on earth to forgive sins. When Catholics confess our sins to a priest, we are simply following the plan laid down by Jesus Christ. He forgives sins through the priest...it is God's power, but He exercises that power through the ministry of the priest.

A friend of mine has been reading the "Left Behind" books that have all of this stuff about the "Rapture" in them...is there really going to be a "Rapture" like these books talk about?

No, there's not. The "Rapture" refers to a passage in First Thessalonians, chapter 4, which talks about Christians being "caught up" in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Many Christians believe, and the "Left Behind" books promote, that this being "caught up" to meet the Lord will occur before the Great Tribulation which is headed our way in the near future. Christians will simply vanish, meet Jesus somewhere in the air, and then return with Him to Heaven to await the end of time

But notice, in verse 17, Paul says that "...we who are alive, who are **left**," shall be caught up. Remember that...those who are "**left**" get caught up to meet the Lord.

The "Left Behind" books get their name from a passage in Luke 17 and a similar passage in Matthew 24 which talk about the coming of the Lord being like the days of Noah and the days of Lot. Matthew 24 puts it this way: "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man...they ate, they drank, they married and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Then two men will be in the field, one is taken and one is left. Two women grinding at the mill, one is taken one is left."

"See," Rapture enthusiasts say, "One is taken, one is left...the Rapture! Jesus takes the Christians and leaves behind non-Christians!" Two problems with that interpretation: First, Jesus' coming is being compared to the days of Noah and the days of Lot. After the flood, who was left? Noah and his family...the good guys...the bad guys were taken! After Sodom and Gomorrah went up in smoke, who was left? Lot and his daughters...the good guys...the bad guys were taken! Second, remember 1 Thessalonians? It says that those who are "left" get to meet Jesus in the air. The good guys are left behind to meet Jesus.

In other words, you want to be left behind so that you can get caught up in the clouds to meet Jesus in the air and accompany Him back to earth at His 2nd and final coming. There will be no Rapture like the one the Left Behind books talk about...that view is not scriptural.

The Bible clearly says that Jesus had brothers and sisters, but the Catholic Church teaches that Mary was a perpetual virgin...how can you reconcile those seemingly different positions?

Mk 6:3 says, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses, and Judas and Simon, and are not His sisters here with us?" We need to realize a few things here about these "brothers and sisters": #1, there was no word for cousin, or for nephew or niece, or for aunt or uncle in ancient Hebrew or Aramaic - the words that the Jews used in all those instances were "brother" or "sister". An example of this can be seen in Gen 14:14, where Lot, who was Abraham's nephew, is called his brother.

Another point to consider. If Jesus had had any brothers, if Mary had had any other sons, would the last thing that Jesus did on earth be to grievously offend his surviving brothers? In Jn 19:26-27, right before Jesus dies, it says that Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to the beloved disciple, John. If Mary had had any other sons, it would have been an incredible slap in the face to them that the Apostle John was entrusted with the care of their mother!

Also, we see from Mt. 27:55-56, that the James and Joses mentioned in Mark 6 as the "brothers" of Jesus, are actually the sons of another Mary. And, one other passage to consider is Acts 1:14-15, "[The Apostles] with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with His brothers...the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty." A company of 120 persons composed of the Apostles, Mary, the women, and the "brothers" of Jesus. Let's see there were 11 Apostles at the time. Jesus' mother makes 12. The women, probably the same three women mentioned in Matthew 27, but let's say it was maybe a dozen or two, just for argument's sake. So that puts us up to 30 or 40 or so. So that leaves the number of Jesus' brothers at about 80 or 90! Do you think Mary had 80 or 90 children? She would have been in perpetual labor! No, Scripture does not contradict the teaching of the Catholic Church about the "brothers" of Jesus, when Scripture is properly interpreted in context.

My Protestant friends say that their church goes by the Bible Alone, but that the Catholic Church has added a lot of man-made traditions to the Word of God...is that true?

No, it is not true. Protestants have as their sole rule of faith the written Word of God, which we find in Sacred Scripture. The Catholic Church has as its sole rule of faith, the entire Word of God, as it is found in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

All of the Word of God was at one time passed on orally...Sacred Tradition. Eventually, some of Sacred Tradition was written down...this became Sacred Scripture, which is written tradition. However, Scripture itself tells us that not all of the things that Jesus said and did were written down. And listen to what Paul says about "tradition":

2 Thes 2:15, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the **traditions** which you were taught by us, either **by word of mouth** or by letter." Traditions! **Traditions** taught **by word of mouth**, in other words, **oral tradition**, and traditions taught by letter. Traditions which they are being told to "stand firm and hold to". Sacred Scripture **and** Sacred Tradition.

1 Cor 11:2, "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the **traditions** even as I have delivered them to you." The Corinthians are being commended by Paul because they maintain the **traditions** that he passed on to them. Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

2 Tim 2:2: "and what you have **heard** from me before many witnesses **entrust** to faithful men who will be able to **teach** others also." What we have here in 2 Timothy is an instance, in Scripture, of Paul **commanding** the passing on of oral tradition.

1 Thes 2:13, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the **Word of God** which you **heard** from us, you accepted it not as **the word of men** but as what it really is, the **Word of God**, which is at work in you believers." So, they received as the **Word of God** that which they **heard**, not simply that which they **read** in Scripture.

In other words, the Bible clearly supports the Catholic Church's teaching that the **Word of God** is contained in **both** Sacred Scripture **and** Sacred Tradition.

In 1 Timothy it says that Jesus is our sole mediator, yet we pray to Mary and the Saints. Is that going against the Bible?

1 Tim 2:5 reads as follows: "For there is one God, and there is **one mediator** between God and men, **the man Christ Jesus**..." "You see," we Catholics are told, "there is only one mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ. Therefore, praying to the saints goes against the Bible because you are making them mediators between God and man, you are diminishing Jesus' role as the sole mediator!"

Is that an appropriate interpretation of that passage? No, it's not and let's see why not. In the O.T. we see that Moses, Abraham, and Job interceded on behalf of others... that's mediating between God and man. We know that it is okay to ask others here on earth to pray and intercede for us.... that's mediating between God and man. So, I think, once again, we have a situation where a passage of the Bible is being **misinterpreted** and **misunderstood**.

There is only **one mediator** between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, but as members of the Body of Christ, He allows us to **share** in **His mediation**.

Also, Scripture tells us that we have only one foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11); but, Scripture tells us that there is more than one foundation (Eph 2:19-20). Scripture tells us that we have only one Lord, Jesus Christ (Eph 4:4-5); but, Scripture tells us there is more than one lord (Rev 19:16). Scripture tells us that we have only one Judge, Jesus Christ (James 4:12); but, Scripture tells us there is more than one judge (1 Cor 6:2).

Contradictions in Scripture? No! **Not when these passages are all properly understood in context**. Jesus **is** the only foundation; Jesus **is** the only Lord; and Jesus **is** the only Judge. But, we are members of Jesus' Body. Therefore, we are able, according to the graces given by Christ, to **share in** Jesus' role as foundation, as lord, and as judge, and in other aspects of Christ, as well. Another example, as a father I share in God's role as Father, by His grace. And, so also, we, and the saints in Heaven, and the angels in Heaven, can share in Christ's role as Mediator.

The Bible says to call no man Father, so why do we call our priests "Father"?

Matthew 23:9, "And call **no man your father** on earth, for you have **one Father, who is in Heaven**." Notice, however, that this makes no distinction between spiritual fathers, which is what our priests are to us, and biological fathers. In other words, if you interpret this passage to say, absolutely, that no man is to be called father, you cannot distinguish between calling a priest, father, and calling the man who is married to your mother, father.

But, is that actually what this passage is saying? Or is Jesus warning us against trying to usurp the fatherhood of God? Which, in many ways, is what the Pharisees and Scribes were doing. They wanted all attention focused on them...they were leaving God, the Father, out of the equation. Which is why Jesus goes on to call them hypocrites, liars, and whitewashed tombs.

If you interpret this passage from Matthew 23 as an absolute ban against calling anyone your spiritual father, then there are some problems for you in the rest of Scripture. For example, Jesus, in the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16, has the rich man referring to Abraham as "father" several times. Paul, in Romans chapter 4, refers to Abraham as the "father" of the uncircumcised, the Gentiles. That's referring to spiritual fatherhood, not biological fatherhood.

In Acts 7:1-2, the first Christian martyr, Stephen, referred to the Jewish authorities and elders who were about to stone him as brothers and "fathers," as does Paul in Acts, chapter 22. This is referring to spiritual fatherhood. So, if you interpret Matthew 23 as saying we cannot call anyone our spiritual father, then you have a problem with Jesus, Paul, Stephen, and the Holy Spirit...they must have all gotten it wrong.

It is okay to call priests "father", just as it was okay for Jesus and Paul to call Abraham "father" and for Stephen and Paul to call the Jewish elders "father." As long as we remember that our true Father is God the Father and that all aspects of fatherhood, biological and spiritual, are derived from Him. And as long as we do not allow anyone else to usurp that role in any way, shape, or form, as the Pharisees and Scribes were prone to do.

Why do Catholics call Mary the Queen of Heaven? Doesn't God rebuke the Israelites in the O.T. for worshipping a false goddess called the Queen of Heaven? Should we not refer to Mary with that title, therefore, since it is the title of a false goddess?

In Jeremiah 7:18, God is indeed upset with the Israelites for worshipping a false goddess called the "queen of heaven". However, just because God rebuked them for worshipping the false queen of heaven, doesn't mean that we cannot pay honor to the true Queen of Heaven...the Blessed Mother.

That type of thinking would lead you to believe that just because people worship a false god that they call "god," we, therefore, should not call the true God, by that same name...God...because that's the same title the idolaters use for their god! That is faulty logic and it makes no sense whatsoever.

Again, the fact that there is a false "queen of heaven", does not lead to the conclusion that we worship a false goddess when we call Mary the "Queen of Heaven." Just as the fact that there is a false "god", does not lead to the conclusion that we worship a false god when we call our Father in Heaven, God.

And there is a true Queen of Heaven, we see this quite clearly in Revelation 12:1, "And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars..." Let's see. There's a woman...she's in Heaven...and she has a crown on her head. I could be wrong, but I don't think it's the maid! No! It is the true Queen of Heaven, Mary, the mother of the male child who is to rule the nations.

We do not worship Mary, we honor her, just as Jesus honors her. So, there is absolutely nothing wrong, from a scriptural point of view, in calling Mary the Queen of Heaven, and in honoring her just as Jesus honors her.

In Romans, chapter 3, it says that none is righteous and that all have sinned, but the Catholic Church teaches that Mary is without sin...could you explain that in light of Romans chapter 3?

Romans 3, verse 10 says, "...as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one.'" Yet, James 5:16 says that the prayer of a righteous man availeth much. If absolutely no one is righteous, then who is James talking about? Luke chapter 1 says that Elizabeth and Zechariah were righteous before God. If absolutely no one is righteous, then how can that be? Is Scripture contradicting itself? No, the folks who interpret Romans as saying absolutely, without exception, no one is righteous, are misinterpreting that passage. They are failing to realize that the key to understanding Romans 3:10 is the phrase, "it is written."

Here in Romans, Paul is quoting from the O.T., Psalm 14 to be exact. In Psalm 14 it says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God. They are corrupt...there is none that does good.'" But then that same psalm goes on to talk about the "righteous." Well, if none has done good, who are these righteous the psalm is talking about? Obviously, when the psalmist says that none has done good, he is talking about the fools who say there is no God. He is not talking about absolutely everyone.

Just so Paul when he quotes from this psalm. Paul is not saying absolutely no one is righteous, if he was, then how do you explain all the Old and New Testament passages that refer to the righteous? In Romans 3:11 it says that no one seeks for God. Does that mean that absolutely no one is seeking God? No, to interpret it that way would be ludicrous!

Just so verse 23 which says that "all have sinned". Babies haven't sinned, have they? Little children haven't sinned, have they? No! This is not an absolute. There are exceptions. What about John the Baptist? Did he sin? Scripture says that he was filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. Can someone who is filled with the Holy Spirit his entire life ever sin? It's something to think about.

So, it is perfectly legitimate to say that these passages from Romans, when interpreted in context, in no way conflict with the Church's teaching on Mary being without sin.

Why do Protestants not believe John 6 when it says that Jesus' flesh is real food and that His blood is real drink?

I don't know! In Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22, Jesus says of the bread, "This is my body." He says of the wine, "This is my blood." Not "this is symbolic of," or "this represents," He says "this IS." In John 6, He repeats Himself, like He does nowhere else in Scripture, to emphasize the fact that He expects us to eat His flesh and drink His blood and that His flesh is real food and that His blood is real drink.

Anyone who says He is speaking symbolically, and not literally, simply is refusing to look at all of the facts. Fact #1: The Jews took him literally, verse 52. Fact #2: His disciples took him literally, verse 60. Fact #3, the Apostles took him literally, verses 67-69. If everyone who heard him speak at the time took Him literally, then my question is: Why does anyone today, 2000 years after the fact, take him symbolically?

Also, in verse 51, Jesus says that the bread which He will give for the life of the world is His flesh. When did He give His flesh for the life of the world? On the cross. Was that symbolic? If you think Jesus is speaking symbolically here when He says that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood, then you must also conclude that Jesus' death on the cross was symbolic...it wasn't really Jesus hanging up there...it was symbolic flesh and symbolic blood.

Jesus is clearly talking about the flesh that He gave for the life of the world...He did that on the cross. Those who believe He is talking symbolically here in John 6, have a real problem when it comes to John 6:51. Did Jesus give His real flesh and blood for the life of the world, or was it only His symbolic flesh and blood?

Many Protestants believe we are saved by Faith Alone and they say Catholic believe they can "work" their way into Heaven. How do you answer that?

First of all, I ask them to show me where in the Catechism, the official teaching of the Catholic Church, does it teach that we can "work" our way into Heaven? They can't, because it doesn't. The Catholic Church does not now, nor has it ever, taught a doctrine of salvation by works...that we can "work" our way into Heaven.

Second, I ask them to show me where in the Bible does it teach that we are saved by "faith alone." They can't, because it doesn't. The only place in all of Scripture where the phrase "Faith Alone" appears, is in James...James 2:24, where it says that we are not...not...justified (or saved) by faith alone.

So, one of the two main pillars of Protestantism...the doctrine of salvation by faith alone...not only doesn't appear in the Bible, but the Bible actually says the exact opposite - that we are not saved by faith alone

Third, I ask them that if works have nothing to do with our salvation...then how come every passage in the N.T. that I know of that talks about judgment says we will be judged by our works, not by whether or not we have faith alone? We see this in Rom 2, Matthew 15 and 16, 1 Ptr 1, Rev 20 and 22, 2 Cor 5, and many, many more verses.

Fourth, I ask them that if we are saved by faith alone, why does 1 Cor 13:13 say that love is greater than faith? Shouldn't it be the other way around?

As Catholics we believe that we are saved by God's grace alone. We can do nothing, apart from God's grace, to receive the free gift of salvation. We also believe, however, that we have to respond to God's grace. Protestants believe that, too. However, many Protestants believe that the only response necessary is an act of faith; whereas, Catholics believe a response of faith and works is necessary...or, as the Bible puts it in Galatians 5:6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love...faith working through love...just as the Church teaches.

How do I respond to someone who believes that only the "chosen" ones are saved? This person is a Calvinist. I realize there is the whole free will issue but I am curious as to the best way to respond to this person?

There are those among the Calvinists who believe that God has pre-destined people for Heaven, and that He has also pre-destined people for Hell. "Double predestination" is the term frequently used to describe this belief. They believe a person's fate is determined solely by God, and that the individual has absolutely no choice in the matter.

In essence, this boils down to a question of whether or not we have free will. Are we free to accept God or to reject God, or has that already been determined for us? If you can show someone who holds to this belief that Scripture is pretty clear that we do indeed have free will, then you just might plant some seeds of truth with them.

Luke 7:30, "...but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by [John the Baptist]." It was God's purpose that the Pharisees and lawyers be baptized by John - that they repent of their sins and turn to God. But they rejected God's purpose for them. How could they do that if they don't have free will? If it was God's purpose that they repent and be baptized by John, then if the strict Calvinist belief is true, they would have repented and been baptized by John, but they didn't and they weren't. They clearly exercised free will in opposition to the will of God.

Luke 13:4-5, " Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Jesus very clearly is saying to His listeners that they have it within themselves to change their fate. They are headed for death and damnation, but He tells them they can choose to repent and avoid that fate. In other words, Jesus clearly believes that these people have free will. If they did not have free will, they could not change their fate. And, if God has already predetermined their fate, then why would Jesus tell them they can change their fate?

1 Tim 2:3-4, " This is good and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

This pretty much seals the deal. God wants all men to be saved. It doesn't say God wants only the elect to be saved, but rather " all men." If God wants all men to be saved, then He certainly does not predestine any to Hell. Also, if God wants all men to be saved, and man does not have free will to oppose God's will, then all men are predestined for Heaven. Yet, no Calvinist would say that all men are among the elect. Which means, there is an inconsistency between this particular Calvinist belief and the Word of God.

A Baptist friend of mine asked me where in the Bible does it use the word Pope or say anything about the Pope?

Well, you will not find the word "Pope" in the Bible. Just as you will not find the word "Trinity," or the word "Incarnation" in the Bible. Yet, I'll bet your Baptist friend believes in both the Trinity and the Incarnation.

Just because a particular word is not found in the Bible, does not mean that we should not use that word or that the theology implied by that word is somehow unbiblical. The word "Bible" is not found in the Bible, so does that mean we should not believe in the Bible? Of course not.

The fact of the matter is, even though the word "Pope" is not found directly in the Bible, the underlying meaning of that word is. The word "Pope" is derived from the Greek word, "pappas," which means, "father" (Latinized as "papa"). In Isaiah 22, verses 19-24, we see God telling Shebna, who was the chief minister of the House of David, that he will be replaced in his office by Eliakim, and that Eliakim will have authority and will be a "father" [papa; pope] to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the House of Judah.

Also in this passage, God says that Eliakim will have the key of the House of David and that he "shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open."

This passage from Isaiah was obviously on the Lord's mind when he said to Peter, in Matthew 16:18-19, "And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church...I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven."

Eliakim was the chief minister in the House of David. What is the new House of David? The Church. Who is the chief minister in the Church? Peter, and his successors - the Popes. Eliakim was given the key of the kingdom. Peter is given the keys of the kingdom. Eliakim had the authority to shut and to open. Peter had the authority to bind and loose. Eliakim was a father to the those in the House of David, just so Peter is a father to those in the new House of David - the Church.

So, since Peter is a "father" to those in the Church, just as Eliakim was a "father" to those in the House of David; and the word "Pope" means "father;" then we can say that the underlying meaning of the word "Pope" is actually found in the

Bible - right there in Isaiah 22. And, we can further say, that Catholic belief regarding the role of the Pope is also found right there in Isaiah 22 and Matthew 16, as well as in other parts of Scripture.

I was talking with an Evangelical co-worker and he said the Bible teaches that once we are “saved,” we can never lose our salvation. Is that true?

Absolutely not. In fact, the Bible is full of passages that either directly or indirectly contradict this doctrine of “Once Saved, Always Saved.” For example:

Rom 11:17-23, “But if some of the branches were broken off [the Jews], and you, a wild olive shoot [the Gentiles], were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree [Jesus Christ], do not boast over the branches...For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you...Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in His kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off.”

Paul is talking about how salvation has come to the Gentiles, while many of the Jews have rejected it. And he makes it very clear that once you have been grafted into Christ, you must “continue in His kindness,” or you can also be cut off. So, even after you’ve been saved, you can still be cut off from Jesus Christ.

This is further seen in Galatians, chapter 5. Verse 1, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery [sin].” If once saved always saved is true, then one cannot “submit again” to a “yoke of slavery,” and Paul’s warning makes no sense.

But Paul goes on in verse 4 to say, “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” Paul is talking to Gentile Christians who had been wrongly taught by the Judaizers that they have to be circumcised and obey the Mosaic Law in order to be true Christians. Paul tells them that is false, and if they submit to circumcision and to the Old Law, they will be “severed from Christ.” If once saved always saved is true, though, they can’t be severed from Christ and, once again, Paul’s warning is meaningless.

We also have the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke chapter 15. The Prodigal Son was in his father’s house, and the father here is representative of God the Father. Then, the Prodigal Son leaves his father’s house and goes and lives a sinful life. In the end, though, he repents and returns to his father. After the Prodigal Son returns, the father says this of him in verse 24: “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

In Evangelical terminology, to be dead is to be unsaved, and to be alive is to be saved. Notice very carefully, though, that the father says the son is alive “again.” In other words, the son was alive, or saved, when he was in his father’s house at the beginning of the parable; was “dead,” or unsaved, when he left his father’s house and lived in sin; then was alive again, saved again, when he repented and returned to his father’s house. Alive, dead, alive again. Saved, unsaved, saved again. Once saved always saved? I don’t think so.

I need some help. Sometimes when I share my Catholic faith with people, they mention to me that Catholics like to drink alcohol and how wrong that is. How do I respond to this?

I would ask them to tell you where in the Scriptures does it say anything about drinking alcohol being wrong? Quick answer: it doesn’t. It says getting drunk is wrong, but it doesn’t say merely drinking is wrong. In fact, it tells us just the opposite:

1 Tim 3:8, "Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine..." Obviously, it is okay for them to drink some wine, they just cannot be addicted to "much" wine. Moderation is the key.

1 Tim 4:4, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." The materials from which alcohol is made are all natural materials made by God.

1 Tim 5:23, "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." Timothy is ordered to drink wine. All 3 accounts of the Last Supper in Matthew, Mark, and Luke have Jesus and the Apostles drinking wine (the "fruit of the vine").

Jesus' first miracle was to turn some 120-180 gallons of water into wine (John 2:3-10) for folks to drink. And, it was better wine than any of the wine that had already been served at that particular wedding.

Matthew 15:10-11, "Hear and understand, not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth..." Luke 7:33-34, "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard..." Now, what do you think Jesus was drinking that they would have called Him a drunkard? Grape juice? I don't think so.

Now, this is not to say that He was a drunkard - obviously He wasn't. But, the only way someone could even begin to make that case would be if He was known to drink wine. You could not falsely accuse someone of being a drunkard if they only drank grape juice.

In other words, Scripture gives strong testament to the fact that merely drinking alcohol is not a sin, but getting drunk on alcohol is.

I heard criticism about the luxuriousness of the Vatican and St. Peter's, while there are so many poor people. Where did the money come from to build these things? How much of parish money goes "to the Pope"? Can you please give me some defense of this line of questioning?

First of all, if someone is critical of the Vatican, are they also critical of the Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6)? By all accounts, the Temple of Solomon would have made the Vatican look rather poor by comparison. Should the Israelites not have built the Temple of Solomon? Should they have used all the resources that went into it to feed the poor instead?

John L. Allen, Jr., Vatican correspondent for the National Catholic Reporter, mentioned the following in a talk he gave for the "Church in the 21st Century Initiative," a few years ago:

"Contrary to popular impression, the Vatican is a spartan operation. Its annual operating budget is about \$277 million. The University of Notre Dame's annual operating budget, by comparison, is \$700 million. The Vatican's endowment is about \$770 million. By contrast, the University of Notre Dame's endowment is \$3.1 billion. The Holy See is indeed in need of financial support from the Catholic world, and American Catholics usually supply about 25 percent of the annual operating budget.

"What about the artwork—the Pietà, the Raphael frescoes, and so on? These treasures are literally priceless, but they appear on the Vatican books with a value of one euro. According to the [laws] of the Vatican City State, they may never be sold or borrowed against."

The "wealth" of the Vatican has accumulated over the centuries and is basically art work, historical documents, and buildings. The Vatican views these buildings, historical documents, and works of art as belonging to all peoples - they are merely under the care of the Vatican. They are not for sell because the Vatican doesn't view them as its personal property too sell. Why not sell all the works of art in the Louvre? Or in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art? Why not sell the Mona Lisa to feed the poor? Why don't museums sell off their Rembrandts and Van Goghs and Picassos to feed the poor?

Again, from John Allen's essay: "About 20 years ago, Peter Drucker, the management consultant, concluded that the three most efficient organizations in history were General Motors, the 19th-century Prussian Army, and the Catholic Church. He put the Church on his list because it manages to hold a worldwide organization together with an exceptionally small central headquarters. For the 1.1 billion Catholics, there are about 1,700 people working in the [Vatican]. As Drucker pointed out, if the same ratio were applied to our government in Washington, D.C., there would be 500 federal employees working in the capital, as opposed to roughly 500,000."

Just give people the facts about the Vatican's "wealth," and let them decide for themselves.

I was in a religious discussion today and was asked why our commandments are different than the Protestant version. Can you help?

Our 10 Commandments do not differ from the Protestant version in content, there is simply a difference in how they are organized. The Protestants first two commandments are: 1) I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have any false gods

before me; 2) Thou shalt not make any graven images...you shall not bow down to them or serve them. And, their last commandment is simply: Thou shalt not covet.

The 1st two commandments, Catholic version are: 1) I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have any false gods before me; 2) Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. And, our last two commandments are: 9) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife; 10) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods. So, the Protestants combine our #9 and #10, into their #10. While we combine the Protestants' #1 and #2, into our #1. Now, some folks say that the Catholics purposely leave out the graven image reference that we find in Protestant Commandment #2 so that we can worship our statues and all that kind of rot. Which is probably what this person you were talking to was getting at; but, you can take anyone to page 496 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and show them that we did not leave out the prohibition on worshiping graven images.

In the left hand column of that page, you will see the whole first commandment written out just like it appears in Exodus 20. You have the long version on the left, the shorter version in the middle, and the traditional version for catechesis on the right. Notice the mention of graven images under Commandment #1?

In essence, we simply don't write the whole thing out, because we know that bowing down to (worshiping) graven images falls under: "Thou shalt not have any false gods before me." Just so, the Protestants shorten the commandment about coveting. Go to page 497 of the Catechism (or to Exodus 20) and see all the things that are included in the, "Thou shalt not covet," section. The Protestants don't write out all those things, they just say, "Thou shalt not covet."

Does that mean they left out part of the Commandments so that they could indeed covet some things? No. It's understood that "Thou shalt not covet," covers all of those things. Just like Catholics understand that, "Thou shalt not have any false gods before me," means that we should not worship idols, or graven images, as false gods.

I'm a Born-Again Christian and I was wondering why the Catholic Church doesn't do the altar call to have people accept the Lord Jesus as their Lord and Savior since it says that you must make this declaration to be Born Again?

The Catholic Church does, in a sense, make an altar call at every Mass. When people approach the altar to receive Communion, they are indeed accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, as they accept His body and blood into their bodies. Jesus says in John 6, verse 51 and following, that unless you eat His flesh and drink His blood, you have no life in you. If you eat His flesh and drink His blood, you will have eternal life He says, and He will raise you up at the last day.

He repeats Himself on this matter in John 6 like He does nowhere else in Scripture. Catholics take Jesus' words literally - we believe what He says. That is why we believe we receive His actual body and blood during Communion (or the Lord's Supper as you might call it). So when a Catholic approaches the altar to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, they are saying with their bodies, "I believe." And just minutes before they approach the altar, they have, with the recitation of the Nicene Creed, declared with their lips that they believe. They believe Jesus is the Lord and Savior of mankind and they believe He is present - Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity - in the Eucharist that they receive.

My question to you, however, is where does it say that someone must make a "declaration" in which they "accept the Lord Jesus as their Lord and Savior" in order to be born again? Nowhere does the Bible say such a thing. In fact, the Bible says that one is born again by being baptized. John 3:3-5 says that unless one is born of water and the Spirit (baptism) one cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

So it is through water and the Spirit that one is born again. All Catholics, by virtue of their baptism, are Born Again Christians. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that one should not make a declaration that Jesus is their Lord and Savior - we need to constantly proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ - but the Bible does not say that one is "born again" by making such a verbal declaration of acceptance of Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. And, I assume you want to go by what the Bible says, right?

How do I answer my father-in-law (a Methodist) when he says he read the Catechism and it says that only those belonging to "The Church" will achieve salvation.

First, ask your father-in-law if he agrees with the statement that one must be a member of the Body of Christ in order to be saved. As a Methodist, he should say that he agrees. Then point out to him that the Bible tells us that "The Church" is the Body of Christ (e.g. Col 1:24). So, when we say that one must be a member of "The Church" in order to be saved, what we are really saying is that one must be a member of the Body of Christ in order to be saved.

So, I think there should be agreement between the two of you on that once “The Church” is identified as the “Body of Christ.” The real question is: Is the Catholic definition of “The Church,” as being the Catholic Church, the correct definition of what the Church is? Or, is the Methodist definition of “The Church,” which is generally along the lines of: All those who have accepted Jesus into their hearts as their personal Lord and Savior regardless of what denomination they belong to, the correct definition? (For an in-depth treatment of this topic, go to: www.biblechristiansociety.com and order the free talk - CD or mp3 download - entitled, “One Church.”)

Regarding what the Catechism teaches about “no salvation outside of the Church,” we need to look at a few paragraphs:

#846: "Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it."

#847: "...Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation.

#848 says: "Although in ways known to Himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please Him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men."

What do these paragraphs tell us? 1) If you knowingly reject the Church and its teachings as the “ordinary” means of salvation, you cannot be saved. 2) Ignorance of Christ and His Church does not automatically incur damnation, nor does it automatically result in salvation, either. In other words, someone who is not formally a Catholic “may” be saved, if they have lived an extraordinary life, through some “extraordinary” means by which God joins them to the Body of Christ, the Church.

However, as #848 states, we (Catholics) have the “obligation” to evangelize all men. Why? Since Catholicism contains the fullness of revealed truth, it is logical to say that any person’s best chance of getting to Heaven - of obtaining that holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14) - is to be 100% Catholic and thereby have access to all the grace that God provides through the Sacraments, particularly through the Eucharist and Confession, as well as all the other treasures of the Church.

What is this about the “brothers” of Jesus in the Bible? Did Mary have other children besides Jesus?

No. The Church teaches that Mary was a perpetual virgin. Yet, as you mention, the Bible does indeed mention the “brothers” of Jesus. Mark 6:3, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon...”

The “brothers” of Jesus are clearly mentioned, and named, in the Bible. So, Mary must have had other children and the Catholic Church is wrong when it dogmatically teaches that she was a perpetual virgin, right? Well, not so fast.

First of all, let’s look at Matthew 27:55-56. Here we see named some of the women who were at the Crucifixion. “There were also many women there, looking on from afar...among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses...” It seems that the James and Joses identified in Mark 6:3 as the “brothers” of Jesus, indeed had a mother named Mary, but it was not the same Mary who was the mother of Jesus.

Furthermore, let’s look at Galatians 1:19. Paul is talking about when he went to Jerusalem to consult with the chief of the Apostles, Peter, and while there, “I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother.”

So, we have James, the “brother” of Jesus as mentioned in Mark 6:3, and James, the “Lord’s brother,” as mentioned in Gal 1:19. And this time James, the Lord’s brother, is identified as an apostle. So, if I’m a Bible-only believer - in other words, if the Bible is my sole rule of faith when it comes to all things related to the Christian Faith - then I have to admit that the James in Mark 6:3 and the James in Gal 1:19 are the same James; after all, how many brothers named “James” would Jesus have?

But there’s a problem for those who would say this James is the son of Mary, the mother of Jesus. You see, this James is clearly identified as an apostle. Yet, of the two apostles named James that we find in the list of the twelve apostles (e.g.,

Matthew 10:1-4), one of them had a father named Zebedee and the other had a father named Alphaeus - neither one of them had a father named Joseph! Which means, neither one of them was Jesus' sibling. Neither one of them had the same mother as Jesus. So, the James mentioned in Mark 6:3 and Gal 1:19 as a "brother" of Jesus, is a brother in a broader sense of the word, he was not a brother in the sense of having the same parents.

Now, Catholic tradition (small "t" tradition), often identifies the James in Galatians 1:19 as someone who was not one of the twelve apostles. However, someone who goes by the Bible alone and who does not put any stock in "tradition" cannot use the argument from tradition, because they only accept the Bible as the authority in matters Christian. So, using the Bible alone, one cannot argue that the James in Gal 1:19 is a "third" James who had at some point been named an apostle because the Bible nowhere mentions such a thing.

So, when we look at the "brothers" of Jesus in the broader context of Scripture, rather than just focusing on Mark 6:3, we see that the argument against the perpetual virginity of Mary has no foundation in the Bible.

I'm reading a book that refers to the Catholic Church as being the "harlot of Babylon" as found in Revelation chapters 17 and 18. How would you respond to that?

I would respond by showing that Jerusalem actually fits the description of the harlot of Babylon, while the Catholic Church does not. Rev 17:1 refers to the "great harlot." How is the nation of Israel, with Jerusalem as her capital often referred to in the Old Testament? As a harlot. Why? Because the relationship between God and Israel was often described in marital terms. Therefore, when Israel would worship false gods, she was described as a harlot. Hosea 9:1, "Rejoice not, O Israel...for you have played the harlot, forsaking your God. You have loved a harlot's hire upon all threshing floors." So we see that Israel is often referred to as a harlot in the Old Testament.

Rev 17:9-10 refer to the seven heads (verse 3) of this beast the harlot is riding on as being "seven hills." This is why a lot of anti-Catholic folks identify the harlot as the Roman Catholic Church, because Rome is a city on seven hills. However, we see that the seven hills pertain to the beast on which the woman is seated, not the woman herself. I believe, as do most scholars I've read - Catholic and Protestant - that the beast is indeed symbolic of Rome and the Roman Empire. But, if Rome is the beast, then that "proves" the woman sitting on the beast is the Catholic Church, right? Not so fast.

Rev 17:18 says this: "And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth." Some argue that the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth is Rome. But, if verse 9, which refers to the beast the woman is seated upon, is referring to the city of Rome; and verse 18, which refers to the harlot, is also referring to the city of Rome, then the beast and the harlot are one and the same. Both are the city of Rome.

But, these are clearly two separate entities, so if one is Rome, then the other has to be another city - Jerusalem makes sense.

Some may say, "Well, of course the beast is Rome - the city on seven hills - but, the harlot is the city within the city, Vatican City, where the Catholic Church is headquartered." The problem is, though, there was no such thing as Vatican City until the early 20th century. When John wrote Revelation, he spoke of the harlot in the present tense: "...IS the great city which HAS dominion over the kings of the earth." He could not have been referring to Vatican City.

Rev 17:16, "...the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh, and burn her up with fire." Does that mean that Rome will burn Vatican City? (There goes a bunch of tourist revenue!) If the beast is Rome (or the Roman Empire), and the harlot is Jerusalem, then we can see here a clear reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, by Rome, which sacked and burned Jerusalem in 70 A.D. - leaving her naked and burned up with fire - just as the Bible describes the harlot of Babylon.

Finally, the harlot of Babylon is referred to as the "great city," in Rev 17:18 and in a few verses in chapter 18. Yet, Rev 11:9 says, "...and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the GREAT CITY which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified." The "great city" is where their Lord was crucified. Where was Jesus crucified? Jerusalem.

Catholics say that faith and works are necessary for salvation and that one has to be baptized in order to be saved; yet, the Good Thief did no works and was not baptized, and still Jesus told him he would be in paradise. Doesn't this prove Catholic teaching is false?

No, it does not. Luke 23:42-43, "And he [the Good Thief] said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power.' And He [Jesus] said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'"

Is the Good Thief saved? Obviously he is, based on Jesus' words. Does this prove that works and Baptism have nothing to do with one's salvation? Definitely not. Let's consider first the "works" part of this.

My question to anyone who says the Good Thief did no works is this: If he had not opened his mouth in defense of Jesus, would he have still been saved? Maybe, but we don't know for sure. However, we can say with great confidence that he would not have received Jesus' promise of Paradise if he had remained silent. So, the next question is: Was verbally defending Jesus while hanging on a cross, which prompted Jesus' promise of Paradise, a work?

Indeed it was, especially when you consider what the Good Thief was going through. Many people do not realize that when one is crucified, they usually die by asphyxiation. Fluid slowly collects in their lungs making it harder and harder to breathe, until it gets to the point where they literally suffocate. In order to breathe, one must lift themselves up from their hanging position and take a breath. Well, to do that, you have to push up on two feet that just happen to have this huge nail sticking through them. This is why they broke the thieves' legs to make them die quicker. By breaking their legs, it prevented the thieves from lifting themselves up to get air.

In other words, the mere act of breathing is something that is extremely painful. So the Good Thief, in order to speak, had to first press up on his feet to get air, which caused excruciating pain, and then he used some of this very precious breath to speak in defense of Christ. I consider it an incredible work for someone with nails through his hands and feet - struggling to breathe because of the fluid building up in his lungs - to use some of his precious breath to defend Christ. In spite of all his misery and pain, he thought of someone else before himself. How can anyone claim the Good Thief did no works?

Finally, let's address the Baptism issue. The most important thing to remember here is that the New Covenant had not yet been instituted - the Old Covenant was still in effect. The Old Covenant equivalent of Baptism was circumcision (Col 2:11-12). This thief being a Jew, he was undoubtedly circumcised. Therefore, the fact that he wasn't baptized, as far as we know, is not relevant in this situation. Was Moses baptized? Was David? Was Abraham? No, but they were all circumcised and they were all saved - under the Old Covenant.

I have a question for you that my son asked. In the Creed we read: "He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead." His question is: At what time does this judging occur? Directly after death or at a later time?

There is a particular judgment at the moment of death, and there will be a general judgment at the end of time. The particular judgment is more like the kind of courtroom judgment we think of when we hear the word "judgment" - a determining of guilt or innocence.

At the moment of our death, we will be judged and our eternal destination - Heaven or Hell - will be decided. As it says in Hebrews 9:27, "...it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment." We can see particular judgments for Lazarus and the Rich Man after their deaths (Luke 16:22-23). Paul laments how he would prefer to leave his body and be with Christ rather than stay here on earth (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:21-23), implying a particular judgment at the moment of death. We also see Scripture speak of the spirits of the just who have been made perfect and are already in Heaven (Heb 12:23), again implying a particular judgment after death.

However, the word "judgment" is often used to mean "vindication" or "defense." The general judgment, or Last Judgment, will not be so much one of deciding guilt or innocence - Heaven or Hell - as it is a judgment of the triumph of good over evil. Judgment in this sense would mean a vindication more than a courtroom style judgment. So, the Last Judgment is the final vindication of good over evil - the final and complete victory of good over evil that takes place at the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time.

At the Last Judgment the workings of God's plan in salvation history, and every individual's role in that plan - for good or for evil - will be revealed to all (Catechism #677-679). Luke 12:2-3, "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the rooftops."

Is there a scriptural reference that I can point to as justification for Catholics referring to Mary as the “Ark of the New Covenant?”

Well, we need to first turn to Rev 11:19, “Then God’s temple in Heaven was opened, and the **ark of His covenant** was seen within His temple; and there were flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, and earthquake, and heavy hail.”

Then, we need to remember that there were no chapters and verses in the original, so we go on to read, in Rev 12:1, right after John says the **ark of the covenant** is seen, “And a great portent appeared in Heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” The woman, who brought forth the male child that will rule all nations (verse 5), is Mary. Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant. As the Ark of the Old Covenant bore the Word of God in stone, so the Ark of the New Covenant bears the Word of God in the flesh.

There is a fascinating parallel between chapter 1 of Luke and 2 Sam, chapter 6:

2 Sam 6:2, “And David **arose** and went with all the people who were with him from Baale Judah [which was **a city in Judah**] to bring up from there the **ark of God**.” Lk 1:39, “In those days Mary **arose** and went with haste into the hill country, to a **city of Judah** ...”

2 Sam 6:9, “...and David said, ‘How can **the ark of the Lord come to me?**’” Lk 1:43, “And why is this granted me, **that the mother of my Lord should come to me?**”

2 Sam 6:10, “...but David took [the ark] aside to **the house of Obededom** the Gittite.” Lk 1:40, “and she entered **the house of Zechariah** ...”

2 Sam 6:11, “And the ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obededom the Gittite **three months**; and the Lord blessed Obededom and all his household.” Lk 1:56, “And Mary remained with [Elizabeth] about **three months** ...”

2 Sam 6:12, “So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obededom to the city of David with **rejoicing** ...” Lk 1:47, “...and my spirit **rejoices** in God my Savior...”

2 Sam 6:15, “So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord **with shouting**.” Lk 1:42, “...and [Elizabeth] exclaimed with **a loud cry** ...”

2 Sam 6:16, “As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David...King David [was] **leaping** and dancing before the Lord...” Lk 1:41, “And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe **leaped** in her womb...” Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant. Mary, the God-bearer.

Lk 1:35, “And the angel of the Lord said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the **power of the Most High** will **overshadow** you...” Ex 40:34, “The cloud [the shekina glory cloud of God] **covered [or overshadowed]** the tent of meeting, and **the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle**.” The tabernacle which just so happened to contain...the **Ark of the Covenant**. Same verb is used in both places, “to overshadow”, or “to cover”. 1 Kings 8:10-11, “And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; **for the glory of the Lord filled the** house of the Lord.” Again, the shekina glory cloud **covered or filled** the house of the Lord.

The same verb again as used in Lk 1:35. This time, however, instead of it being the tent that Moses constructed in the desert, it was the newly completed temple in Jerusalem which Solomon had built. And, again, the same verb “to overshadow”, is used in all three places. And, what was in the holy of holies in the temple? **The Ark of the Covenant**. Still not convinced?

I have an Evangelical friend at work who claims that the Catholic belief in Purgatory is not scriptural. What should I say to him?

2 Sam 12:13-18, “David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die.’ And the Lord struck the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and it became sick...On the

seventh day the child died.” Catholic Scriptural Principle #1 – there is punishment for sin even after one has received forgiveness.

Rev 21:27, “But nothing unclean shall enter it...” The New Jerusalem – Heaven. Catholic Scriptural Principle #2 – nothing unclean, nothing with the stain of sin, will enter Heaven.

Mt 5:48, “You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” That’s because of Principle #2 – nothing unclean will get into Heaven.

Heb 12:22-23, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living god, the heavenly Jerusalem...and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect...” The spirits of just men, made perfect. Catholic Scriptural Principle #3 – there is a way, a process, through which the spirits of the “just” are “made perfect.”

1 Cor 3:13-15, “...each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day [judgment day] will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” Where is this place that a man, after he dies, suffers loss, as through fire, but is still saved. Hell? No, once you’re in Hell, you don’t get out. Heaven? No, you don’t suffer loss in Heaven.

Mt 12:32, “And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” Implies forgiveness in the age to come. Where can you go to be forgiven in the age to come? Heaven? You don’t need forgiveness. Hell? There is no forgiveness. Catholic Scriptural Principle #4 – there is a place, or state of being, other than Heaven or Hell.

Now, let’s summarize these four scriptural principles: There is punishment for sin even after one has received forgiveness. We have to be perfect as the Father is perfect, because nothing unclean will enter Heaven. There is some way, or process, by which the spirits of the just are made perfect. There is a place besides Heaven or Hell where you can suffer loss, yet be saved, but only as through fire; and where you can be forgiven of sins from a previous age. It all adds up to one inevitable conclusion - the Catholic teaching on Purgatory is indeed scriptural.

My brother-in-law lives in [up-state] New York. His parish priest conducts "general confessions" and gives general absolution. Now my brother-in-law believes that he (no one) needs to go to private confession. Is this true? Please help me to respond to this.

Your brother-in-law's parish priest is doing something he should not be doing. If he knows the teaching of the Church on this matter, yet does it anyway, it could have serious consequences for his soul. And, if your brother-in-law no longer goes to private confession, it could have serious consequences for his soul, as well.

General confession and general absolution are the exception, not the rule. They are to be used, for example, in instances where the priest does not have time to hear the confessions of all those who wish to confess, and there is a danger of death for those who wish to confess but are unable to. The perfect example is if a priest is ministering to troops who are about to go into battle. If there are hundreds of troops who wish to confess, but only limited time before they go into battle, then the priest can give "general" absolution. However, any troops that survive the battle, then have to make a private confession and receive private absolution, or the general absolution is of no effect.

Or, another example, would be in situations where there are a large number of penitents and insufficient number of priests to hear their individual confessions in a reasonable time, and it may be many months before a priest returns to hear confessions again. This could be the case in a remote village in say Siberia, Africa, or South America.

In other words, the need to use general confession and general absolution at a parish in the United States is almost, if not entirely, non-existent.

You need to have your brother-in-law read the Catechism of the Catholic Church, pages 357-374, particularly paragraphs #1456 ("Confession to a priest is an ESSENTIAL part of the sacrament of Penance..."); #1483 (In case of grave necessity recourse may be had to a communal celebration of reconciliation with general confession and general absolution”), and #1484. He then would need to go to his priest and discuss this situation with him in light of the teachings of the Church on this matter as clearly given in the Catechism.

I was taught from other Christian churches that baptism must be by immersion, but the Catholics sprinkle. I see nowhere in the Bible (that I can find) where it specifically states there is a certain way to be baptized, just that it says "by water". Can you tell me if there is any material on the matter or is that an "open to interpretation" thing?

In the Didache, which is one of the earliest, if not the earliest, non-scriptural Christian writings, it says this about Baptism: "The procedure for baptizing is as follows: after repeating all that has been said, immerse in running water 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'. If no running water is available, immerse in ordinary water...If neither is practicable, then pour water three times on the head 'In the name of the Father...."

Again, this is not Scripture, but this is a window into the practices of the early Christians who learned directly from the Apostles and those appointed by the Apostles to leadership roles within the Church. They were baptizing folks by immersion and by pouring, or sprinkling.

Ezekiel 36:25-27, "I will SPRINKLE clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you...and I will put My Spirit within you..." What do you think is being talked about here? Water...a new spirit...cleansed of your uncleannesses? Baptism...by sprinkling.

Nowhere in the Bible does it say one has to be immersed in order to be "officially" baptized. People will point to Jesus' baptism accounts which say that He "came up out of the water," and use that to claim He was immersed. However, if you read all four of the accounts of Jesus' baptism side-by-side, you can make a very strong case that when it says, Jesus "came up out of the water," it does not mean He came up from under the water (immersion), but rather that it means He came up out of the river onto the bank. If you had a child swimming in a pool and you called to them and they "came up out of the water," what would that mean? That your child was underwater but is now above water, or that he had come out of the pool altogether? It would be the latter.

Finally, in 1 Cor 15:29, Paul notes that there were folks baptizing on behalf of the dead. And, he doesn't specifically repudiate the practice. So, the Scripture tells us that there were Christians baptizing folks on behalf of the dead and nowhere does the Scripture say this should not happen. Paul himself offers no criticism of the practice. Why then does anyone believe that baptizing on behalf of the dead is not an acceptable Christian practice? Why? Because of the authority of the Church to decide such matters. Just as the Church can say that baptism on behalf of the dead is not acceptable, in spite of it clearly being practiced by some Christians in Scripture, so the Church can decide on the method of baptism. It has Christ's own authority to bind and loose on earth. And, what it binds and looses on earth, is bound and loosed in Heaven.

By the way, one can always elect to be fully immersed when baptized into the Catholic Church, and I know of folks who have done so. In other words, immersion is not a practice that is forbidden by the Church, it is just one that is not used as often as pouring.

We are homeschoolers who have a very good friend who's a "Bible-Only" Christian. I try my best to be polite, explaining the best I can about what Catholic-Christians believe. During Lent, I took her to the Stations of the Cross at our parish, since her church "didn't do much before Easter." She seemed to enjoy it, even kneeling at the appropriate times (after several stations). However, when we got in the car, she questioned me on Veronica - saying she is not in the Bible and so on. How should I respond about Veronica? I am a convert of 12 years, so I'm comfortable with Sacred Scripture/Tradition, but our friend was really bothered by the fact that there is no "Biblical" evidence for Station 6.

You can start by telling her that the tradition of Veronica and the stations of the cross dates back to the earliest centuries of Christianity. No, nothing about her in the Bible. But, not everything that happened during Jesus' Passion is recorded in Scripture. For example, the Bible doesn't tell us which shoulder Jesus carried His cross on. So, what if a movie shows Jesus carrying His cross on His left shoulder, when He actually carried it on His right shoulder? Or vice versa? Is that necessarily a bad thing?

To believe that the only things that happened to and around Jesus during His passion are the things recorded in the Bible, is to leave a whole lot of gaps in the story. The Bible simply doesn't cover 100% of what happened. So, are we necessarily wrong to believe Veronica wiped Jesus' face, just because the Bible says nothing about it?

I would simply ask her if she believes that everything that happened to Jesus during His Passion is recorded in the Bible? If she says, "Yes," then go through one of the accounts of the Passion and ask her why it only takes a few minutes to read about every single thing that happened to Jesus in a period of time that is somewhere around 16-20 hours long.

If she says, "No," that not everything that happened to Jesus during His Passion is in the Bible, then I would ask her if that doesn't mean it is at least possible that Veronica did indeed wipe Jesus' face on His way to Calvary. She pretty much has to say yes, that it is a "possibility." If she says, "No," it's not at least a possibility, then I would ask her why. If she says, "It's not in the Bible," then go back to the 1st question above.

If she says, "Yes," it could have happened, then simply tell her that it is not an article of the Catholic Faith that it did indeed happen. But, based upon the best information we have, we believe this 2000-yr. old tradition to be true. Therefore, we use this tradition as a point of meditation and prayer. It's just that simple. One doesn't have to believe that Veronica wiped the face of Christ in order to be Catholic. And, if she didn't wipe His face, that still doesn't nullify the prayers we pray at that particular station of the cross. God knows our intent and our hearts and He uses our prayers regardless of whether Veronica actually wiped the face of Christ or not.

I have your CD, "Apologetics for the Scripturally-Challenged," and I really liked the "Twelve Questions for Protestants" at the end of it. Do you have any more questions along those same lines?

Indeed I do...many. One question, in particular, that I like to ask folks who believe in the dogma of Sola Fide - salvation by "faith alone" - has to do with James 2:26. James 2:26 reads as follows: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead."

With someone who believes in salvation by faith alone, I take them to this verse and simply ask: "Would you please explain to me what this verse means?"

And I point out to them that this verse is drawing a parallel between the body and the spirit on the one hand, and faith and works on the other hand. Faith is analogous to the body, and works are analogous to the spirit. The verse clearly expresses a simple truth, both body and spirit are necessary in order to have life - physical life. So, and I make sure to emphasize this point, for the analogy to hold, both faith and works are necessary to have life - spiritual life.

Which means the Protestant dogma of salvation by faith alone - Sola Fide - is one that will not lead to life. As the body alone, without the spirit, is dead, so faith alone, without works, is dead - as Scripture explicitly states in James 2:17. And dead faith does not lead to salvation.

Now, some defenders of the Sola Fide dogma will say that this verse, as well as all of the 2nd chapter of James, is simply saying that faith without works isn't really faith. They will tell you that a "true" faith is a faith that works, but that the works have absolutely nothing to do with your eternal salvation. They say that works "show forth" your faith, but that it is faith alone that saves you - works have no impact whatsoever on your salvation.

If you hear that argument, then simply take their interpretation and try to plug it into this verse. Let's try it: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works isn't really faith." What happened? The analogy between body/spirit and faith/works broke down. By plugging in the "sola fide" interpretation, you have radically altered the verse. In order to fix the analogy, we have to change the verse yet again: "For as the body without the spirit really isn't a body, so faith without works really isn't faith."

By plugging in a sola fide interpretation, the verse becomes nonsensical. Are the bodies down at the morgue not really bodies? Of course they are! But they are dead bodies - without life. Just so, faith without works is really faith, but it is dead faith - without life. In other words, there is no such thing as salvation by faith alone - works are necessary to complete faith (James 2:22).

Another way you could read James 2:26, using a sola fide interpretation, is: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so works show forth faith." Huh? No matter how you try to do it, forcing a sola fide meaning into this verse just doesn't work. Faith and works are both necessary for spiritual life, just as body and spirit are both necessary for physical life.

Where in the Bible does it say anything about the Mass and the notion of it being a sacrifice?

Malachi 1:11, "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts."

When this passage from Malachi was written some 450 years before Christ, the Lord's name was not great among the nations - the word "nations" referring to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were pagan and they worshipped numerous gods. Sacrifice was not being offered to the Lord God in all the nations. So, this verse from Malachi is essentially a prophecy that refers to the time after Christ has risen from the dead and the Lord's name was indeed made great among the nations through the spread of the Gospel.

Now, what does it say will be happening among the nations once the Lord's name has been made great among them? It says from the rising of the sun to its setting incense is offered to the Lord's name and a pure offering. (Most Catholics should be familiar with this verse since it is in the Eucharistic prayer - "From east to west a perfect offering is made.")

Let's look at that a bit more closely. First of all, this verse is referring to the worship of God, which is the context within which sacrifices, or offerings, are made to God in Scripture. Secondly, the offering spoken of here is twofold - an offering of incense and a "pure" offering. How many churches do you know of that offer incense at any of their worship services?

And what is this "pure offering" referring to? What is the only "pure" offering that has ever been made to God? The offering of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross at Calvary. In other words, this verse from Malachi is telling us that from the rising of the sun to its setting (all day long) some sort of worship service will be taking place among the nations (the Gentiles) in which they offer incense and the only pure offering that has ever been made - Jesus Christ.

What type of worship service do you know of that takes place in all the nations, all day long (every hour on the hour), where the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is continually offered to God? The Mass. Malachi 1:11 is a prophecy that perfectly describes what is happening at the Mass.

In the New Testament, Paul also very clearly describes the Mass as being a sacrifice when he links the "bread" and the "cup of blessing" to the sacrifices of Israel and to the practice of the Israelites eating the sacrifice that has been offered (1 Cor 10:16-18). Again, this is a description of the Mass where we participate in the body and blood of the sacrifice - Jesus Christ - by eating what has been sacrificed - Jesus Christ.

So, it is very clear, from Scripture, that the worship of God involves incense and a pure offering, or sacrifice. And, in New Testament and Old, we see the actions of the Mass described exactly as we experience them in the Catholic Church today. The Mass involves a sacrifice, the once for all - all time and all people - sacrifice of Jesus Christ. I will continue this discussion in my next article by looking at the Letter to the Hebrews.

Where in the Bible does it say anything about the Mass and the notion of it being a sacrifice? (Cont'd from last week.)

Last week I talked about the Mass as sacrifice as seen in Malachi 1:11 and 1 Cor 10:16-18. This week I want to talk about how the Letter to the Hebrews reaffirms the notion of the Mass being a sacrifice.

Let's look first at Hebrews 5:14, "Since then we have a great high priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God..." So, we see that Jesus is our high priest. What does the Bible tell us is the function of the high priest? Heb 5:1, "For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins."

Jesus is our high priest, and a high priest's duty is to offer sacrifice for sin. Now, how long is Jesus to be a high priest? Heb 5:6, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." So, Jesus is our high priest forever, and the duty of the high priest is to offer sacrifice. So, if Jesus is going to be our high priest forever, then He needs some sacrifice to offer on our behalf forever, as it says in Heb 8:3, "...hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer."

What does Jesus offer? Heb 9:12, "He entered once for all into the Holy Place taking not the blood of goats and calves, but His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."

By reading Hebrews chapters 4 through 10, it becomes very apparent that the Old Covenant offerings of animals were merely a prelude to the pure offering (Malachi 1:11) of the New Covenant - Jesus Christ Himself. The offering of the high

priests of old in the earthly Holy of Holies, was merely a dress rehearsal for the offering of the eternal high priest in the true Holy of Holies in Heaven.

Heb 9:24, "For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf." Jesus has entered Heaven and forever presents His once for all offering to the Father on our behalf. He is not, however, continually re-sacrificed, "for then He would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world" (Heb 9:26), rather He eternally presents His once for all sacrifice.

Every time a sinner turns to the Father for forgiveness, Christ, on our behalf, in effect says to the Father, "See, Father...see what I did for John. For Jim. For Sharon. For Megan. For Julia. For Bob." He eternally offers His sacrifice on our behalf.

What happens at the Mass, is the priest, acting in the person of Christ, offers to the Father that same offering that Christ offers in Heaven. Heaven and earth are intertwined at the Mass and we actually enter into the offering of Christ's blood that our High Priest eternally makes to the Father in the Holy Place, which is why the Mass is indeed a sacrifice.

One last thought, relating to the use of incense at Mass. In Revelation 5:8 and 8:4 we see golden bowls of incense, which represent the prayers of the saints, brought before the throne of God. If they're using incense in the heavenly Mass, what's wrong with using incense to symbolize the prayers of the saints, here on earth, especially since Malachi 1:11 says that it will be used in worship services? "For from the rising of the sun to its setting...in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering."

I am active in many groups/teams that are made up of various faith based beliefs. Activities include faith based programs and services such as KAIROS prison ministry. At some of these a communion service is offered. I have been told that communion by someone other than an ordained priest, from the lineage of Peter, is not communion and there is no problem. It is just a symbol and not a real communion. What is the ruling on taking communion at these services?

In some of the various Protestant and Evangelical congregations, their belief regarding communion is very close to what Catholics believe. However, only a priest ordained by a bishop who has authentic apostolic authority can effect the change of bread and wine into the real body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ. Which means that these congregations, even though they believe they are receiving the Real Presence, are not actually doing so. They are receiving a piece of bread and some wine.

In most of the Protestant, Evangelical, and non-denominational congregations, however, not only do they not have a validly ordained priest, but they also do not even believe in the Real Presence. Their communion service is meant to be merely a symbol.

So, either way you look at it, it is essentially correct to say that in the Protestant, Evangelical, non-denominational, and other such communities, communion, or the Lord's Supper, is merely a symbol. The question is, does that make it okay for Catholics to receive? The answer is: No, it does not.

In the Catholic Church, we believe the reception of Communion is the sign and symbol of union - union between Christ and those who receive Him, and union between all those who receive Christ in this sacrament.

In a marriage, the physical union of husband and wife is the sign and the symbol of union between the two. If there is no union - no lifelong commitment - then the sign of union should not take place. Which means sex outside of marriage is a lie - you are saying with your bodies that a union exists, that a commitment has been made, when no such union actually exists.

Just so, it is a lie for someone who is not Catholic to receive Communion in the Catholic Church, when there is first no union with the Catholic Church. When you receive Communion in the Catholic Church, you are saying with your body that you are in union with the Church and that you believe as we believe. And not just in regard to the Real Presence, but also in regard to the Pope, to Mary, to the other Sacraments, to the Communion of Saints, the priesthood, salvation, and so on. If there is no union, there should be no Communion.

The same holds when you receive communion in a non-Catholic faith tradition. You are saying, with your body, that you believe as they believe. You are telling everyone present that there is essentially no difference between what they believe

about communion and what you, as a Catholic, believe about Communion. You are telling a lie with your body. That is why Catholics should not receive communion, or the Lord's Supper, outside the bounds of the Catholic Church.

Jesus said: "No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit' (John 3:3-5). I have seen a good number of non-Christians living a righteous life. Will they not enter the Kingdom of God?"

The Church teaches, as God clearly states in John 3, that Baptism is necessary for salvation. The Church believes that God wants all men to be saved, and therefore gives all men the opportunity for salvation. The "ordinary" means of salvation is through the Sacraments (beginning with Baptism) given to us by God through His Church. But, the Church holds out the possibility that there is some "extraordinary" means of salvation known only unto God, by which those who are not physically baptized may still receive the grace of salvation through Christ Jesus.

As St. Paul says in Rom 2, when speaking about those who have not the law, "...their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

The Church teaches that non-Christians who are invincibly ignorant of the truths about Jesus Christ and His Church, "may" be saved. In other words, it is possible for them to be saved, if they are indeed righteous, if they have never been told about Jesus, and had no way of finding out about Him and thereby believing in Him. If, however, they have been exposed to Christ, and know something of the claims of Christianity, yet have either rejected those claims or not investigated those claims (willful ignorance), then they may indeed have a difficult time come Judgment Day.

This is why it is so incumbent upon us, as Catholics, to do all in our power to bring Christ to the world, to bring Truth to the world. The best chance any person has to be with God in Heaven for all of eternity is to be a Catholic who is devout, regularly receives the Sacraments, and does all in their power to be holy. It is difficult enough to be holy with all the graces available to us as Catholics, how much more difficult for those who do not have Baptism, who do not regularly go to Confession, and who do not regularly receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist! Therefore, we cannot simply sit back and say, "Well, these are good people, surely God will take them to Heaven even though they are not Christian." That is gambling with someone's soul based on a personal opinion, or on a "feeling."

By our Baptism we are all called to evangelize. If it's not something we are comfortable doing, then we need to pray to God to give us the strength and the wisdom to get out there and do it anyway. The lives of souls are at stake.

No one can say whether or not someone will end up in Hell, that is a judgment reserved for God alone. However, one can indeed say that getting to Heaven is not an easy thing and that we need all the graces possible in order to persevere in holiness to the end, and that the greatest graces available to us are found in and through the Sacraments. Therefore, one can conclude that those outside of the Sacraments have the odds stacked against them.

Where in the Bible does it say anything about priestly celibacy? I have a friend who says that the Catholic Church is going contrary to the Bible by requiring celibacy for its priests.

There are two main Scripture passages that I turn to for support of the Church's teaching on priestly celibacy. The first of these is Matthew 19:12, "For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it."

When Jesus says that there are those who have "made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," He is speaking figuratively, not literally. He is referring to those who live a celibate life in order to better serve the kingdom of heaven. Who do we know who fulfill these words of Christ? Who do we know that has taken a vow of celibacy - who has made themselves eunuchs - for the sake of the kingdom of heaven? Baptist ministers? Evangelical pastors? Episcopal priests? No, no, and no. No slight intended to the aforementioned ministers, but Catholic priests are the only ones I know of who fulfill these particular words of Jesus.

Here in Matthew 19:12, we see Jesus Christ saying something that applies most directly to Catholic priests. So, the discipline of priestly celibacy - and it is a discipline, not a doctrine - is indeed biblical

Now, the other Scripture passage I mentioned in support of priestly celibacy is 1 Corinthians 7:32-34, "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided."

Paul is telling us that one can best serve the Lord, and His people, by remaining unmarried. Not to say that you cannot serve the Lord while married, but rather to say that you can be more single-minded in serving the Lord if unmarried. It is simply a matter of common sense that when a person is single, they have more time to be about the affairs of the Lord than they do when they are married, and certainly when they are married and have children. The married man is indeed anxious, as Paul says, about worldly affairs and his interests are indeed divided.

So, in 1 Corinthians 7, we have another passage from the Bible that supports the practice of priestly celibacy. For those who argue against the Catholic Church's practice in this regard by saying it is unbiblical, what they are actually doing is showing their lack of knowledge in regard to what Scripture really says.

It is also worth noting that a life of celibacy - priestly or otherwise - is a sign pointing to the hereafter. As it says in Matthew 22:30, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." So the example of celibacy given to us by our priests is a foreshadowing of our life to come.