

## **Defending the Faith I (Basic Apologetics)**

### **With a Question about Mary, Our Mother**

“There are not one hundred people in the United States who hate the Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive the Catholic Church to be.”  
-Archbishop Fulton Sheen

+ 1 Pet 3:15-16: “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence....”

There are a significant number of non-Catholics that wrongly think we Catholics worship Mary, pray to statues, etc. It can be difficult to discuss our faith with non-Catholic Christians because there is not a “level playing field.” Catholics follow (1) Sacred Tradition and the (2) Bible and are led by the (3) Magisterium (the teaching authority of the Church). We call these the “three legs that hold up the stool.” If one leg is missing, the chair falls. Many churches don’t claim to have Sacred Tradition and they have no Magisterium. Even our Bibles are different. In our Bible we have 73 books, but many churches have Bibles with only 66 books. The Catholic Church does not rely on Scripture alone.

*The Sacred Scriptures referenced below are paraphrased unless they are in quotations.*

#### **Sacred Tradition**

Why do we have Sacred Tradition? Let’s begin to answer this question with questions. Let’s use both faith and reason.

- How did we get the Bible? (Answer: Through Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium.)
- What did Jesus say—write the Bible or go out and preach? (Answer: Preach; the Gospel was presented orally first.)
- What came first—the Church or the Bible? (Answer: The Church.)
- Where does it say in the Bible to use the Bible alone? (Answer: It doesn’t.)

Some Bible verses that support Sacred Tradition:

- + 1 Cor 11:2: “...hold fast to the traditions, just as I handed them on to you.”
  - + 2 Thess 2:15: hold fast to traditions, whether oral or by letter.
  - + Jn 21:25: not everything Jesus said and did is recorded in Scripture.
  - + 2 Tim 1:13-14: follow my sound words; guard the truth.
- Catholics believe that Sacred Tradition does not contradict the Bible.

#### **The Bible**

- Catholics believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and that it does not contain any errors.
- Also, the Bible has many literary styles, so in some parts it can be difficult to interpret. (See 2 Pet 3:15-16: Paul’s

letters can be difficult to grasp and interpret.) Many parts are to be taken literally and some metaphorically and also in other ways. What the sacred writer intended to say is critical. If we took every part of the Bible literally, many of us would not have right eyes or right hands (See Mt 5:29-30: “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away....”).

- The Catholic Church believes that Bible came through the Catholic Church, headed by Jesus, who sent the Holy Spirit to guide it and keep it from erring in matters of faith and morals; thus, the Catholic Church believes that the pope in union with the bishops should ultimately interpret the Bible, so as to keep the Church of one mind and heart. (See 2 Pet 1:20: no prophecy is a matter of private interpretation.) Otherwise, with everyone interpreting the Bible as he or she wishes, multiple denominations develop. Many statistics show that there are well over 25,000 different Protestant denominations.

#### **Magisterium**

- This idea was mentioned a little from the previous heading of “The Bible.”
- The Catholic Church believes that Jesus set up a teaching authority, the Magisterium (pope with bishops).
- More paraphrases (the Catholic Church considers the pope and bishops as today’s apostles):
  - + Mt 28:18-20: Jesus delegates all power to the Apostles (teach, baptize, and make everyone disciples of the Church).
  - + Jn 20:23: power to forgive sins.
  - + 1 Cor 11:23-24: power to offer sacrifice (Eucharist).
  - + Lk 10:16: power to speak with Christ’s voice.
  - + Mt 18:17: power to discipline.
  - + Mt 18:18: power to legislate.
- Using the authority granted to Her by God, the Church first named the 73 books of the Bible. See the last article on the next page regarding the canonical books of the Bible and how it was chosen through Sacred Tradition.

#### **The Catholic Church is Holy**

Before going any further, the Catholic Church is holy, because the Blessed Trinity is present with billions of angels and saints. However, every one of us who is living on earth now and is trying to represent Jesus in the Church is a sinner. Unfortunately, when a few members of the Church sin in big ways or teach falsehoods, those watching can tend to focus on the flaws of its members and stereotype the whole Church. In some cases, this leads to “throwing out the baby with the bath water.” If someone can find a few big flaws in some members of the Church, he or she might try to “throw out” the priesthood, the sacraments, other dogmas and doctrines, teachings, and “anything Catholic.”

#### **The Church is Traditional—It Hands on Truth from Generation to Generation**

What was happening in the first 600 years of the Church, way closer to the time when Jesus walked the earth? Some

accuse the Catholic Church of “getting off track” around 1400. The best thing to do is to read the early Church Fathers (e.g., St. Irenaeus, St. Justin the Martyr, St. Augustine, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, etc.), and to tell others to read them. Here one sees what was really going on—way before the Protestant Reformation that began in 1517. For example, in 1964 the Mass looked just like the Mass of 595, the year it was codified by St. Gregory the Great. So if others accuse the Church of “getting off track” in 1400, then we could tell them what the Mass of Christ looked like centuries before the Reformation.

### **Two-Part Question About the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Let’s answer one key, two-part question now. Was Mary conceived without sin and did she sin during her lifetime? The Catholic Church believes that, through Sacred Tradition, the Bible, and the Magisterium, Mary was conceived without sin and did not sin during her lifetime. This is a difficult question to answer. One will not find an explicit answer in the Bible, but will find instead an implicit answer—one that is implied. We know that the Bible contains no errors. So one might object and quote St. Paul: “All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). So how could Mary be sinless?

What did St. Paul intend? The Catholic Church thinks he was instructing the Romans on the universal sin of humanity, not intending to spread a Marian dogma. (Marian Dogmas would come later in the Church—a whole other area that would take a lot of time to discuss.) St. Paul was talking in a collective way, and not in a distributive way. (Collective means “almost everyone”; distributive means “every single person.”)

How could this be? The Greek word for “all” that is used in Rom 3:23 is *pas*. There are numerous examples in the New Testament where “all” does not mean “each and every person without exception.” The Greek word *pas* is used wherever you see “all” underlined in the examples below.

1. 1 Cor 15:22: “For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life.” Enoch and Elijah did not die, but were assumed into heaven while still alive (see Gen 5:24, Heb 11:5, and Kings 2:11). In the second part of this verse... will all be brought to life? I think you and I believe that some will not accept Christ. So this “all” really means those who accept Jesus, not every single person without exception.

2. Mt 3:5-6: “At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to [John] and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River....” We know that each and every person in Judea was not baptized in the Jordan. Pontius Pilate did not come; neither did King Herod. This would be a “collective all,” not a “distributive all.”

3. Rom 15:14: “I myself am convinced about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to admonish one another.” Only God has all knowledge, not any of us human beings.

From these three examples, we see that the Bible does not always use “all” literally.

So what are some Bible verses that imply that Mary was without sin?

+ Lk 1:28: “Hail, full of grace...”

+ Lk 1:30: “you have found favor with God.”

+ Gen 3:15: complete enmity between woman and Satan (holiness vs. evil; opposites)

The Catholic Church believes that Jesus saved Mary, and that He applied saving grace to Mary at her conception; thus, she was immaculately conceived. The Church believes that God lives in the “eternal present,” and that all time—past, present, and future—is present to Him and that He can do anything He wants. (Lk 1:37: “...for nothing will be impossible for God.”)

### **How the Books of the Bible were Chosen**

We, as Catholic Christians, use a Bible that has 73 books (called the canon of Scripture); there are 46 books in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament. The canon of Scripture was settled at the Council of Rome in 382, under the authority of Pope Damasus I. This canon included the Septuagint, or Alexandrian Canon (written in Greek) of the Old Testament—46 books. It was soon reaffirmed on numerous occasions. The 73 books were affirmed at the Council of Hippo in 393 and at the Council of Carthage in 397. In 405 Pope Innocent I reaffirmed the canon in a letter to Bishop Exuperius of Toulouse. All of these canons were identical to our modern Catholic Bible. The Church also reaffirmed the 73 books of the Bible at the Councils of Florence (1442), Trent (1546), Vatican I (1870), and Vatican II (1965).

So why do Protestants have 66 books—seven less books? Historically, near 100 A.D. Jewish leaders rejected seven of “our books” [Wisdom, Sirach, Judith, Baruch, Tobit, and 1 and 2 Maccabees], mainly because they could not find versions of them written in Hebrew. This Jewish version is called the Palestinian Canon. In 1529, Martin Luther chose the Palestinian Canon, using the same reason to reject the seven books—he could not find the Hebrew version.

However, close to 1950, archaeologists found Hebrew copies of the seven books in question in the Dead Sea scrolls at Qumran. Who would have known?!

In the New Testament, there are about 300 quotations taken from the Septuagint, which was used by Jesus and the New Testament writers. If Jesus used the Septuagint, we had better do the same.

To go deep with scriptural references to Catholic teaching, visit: **[scripturecatholic.com](http://scripturecatholic.com)**.