

Ten Reasons For Being A Catholic

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Only the violent will obtain the kingdom of heaven, Jesus Christ has said. (Matthew 11:12) For many people the first act of violence must be to think and reason and tear their minds free from prejudices and half-truths. Even if these unfounded certainties were as dear to them as father and mother, husband or wife, yet to obtain the kingdom of heaven they must leave them behind and follow truth wherever it may lead.

I. PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES:

1. There is a God, of Infinite intelligence and power, Creator of heaven and earth.
2. As our Creator and Lord, God has a right to reveal His will and demand our submission.
3. Such a revelation would be, moreover, an act worthy of His infinite kindness because:
 - (a) Experience shows that without it even the most intelligent men, as the philosophers of old, utterly fail to agree and find religious truth.
 - (b) God's commandments are laws of the greatest importance for the well being of mankind, since they express what His infinite wisdom knows to be necessary or best for men.
 - (c) On such a revelation, its truth and aids, will largely depend our chances of moral health and ever-lasting salvation.
4. We must demand solid proof that God has spoken, before we can, in reason, submit.
5. This proof can surely be (indeed it must be) real miracles, that is, such works as are an expression of divine wisdom and power and done to testify to the divine origin and truth of God's message. No man's claim to a divine mission can be believed without this sign of divine approval.
6. Of the great religions of mankind the founder of only one, Jesus Christ, can with certainty be proved — from trustworthy historical books and other documents — to have worked such miracles, in large numbers, to prove His mission.

Those who quarrel with these preliminary principles are referred to more extensive works of Catholic (or Christian) Apologetics. There they will also find chapter and verse for the proofs given below.

A few words must be added here regarding miracles. Many nowadays deny their possibility and refuse to consider all evidence to the contrary. But surely, God, the Creator of heaven and earth remains the master of His own handiwork. As every maker, He can change or destroy it at will. Moreover, the laws of nature, as other laws, are binding only on those who are subject to them. Plants are subject to the laws governing plants. They can, for instance, not leave the spot in which they are rooted to go out for a walk. Man, being superior to plants, is not bound by the same laws. He can not only move himself from place to place, he can also vitally interfere with the life of plants by grafting, pruning, transplanting, or destroying them.

Surely God, the supreme Law-giver is above the laws of all nature made by him. He, therefore, can interfere with them for any good reason. There can be no better one than to prove that He is giving special guidance to His helpless children on earth. Those who deny Him this privilege do not really believe that God is our Father Almighty. They either deny His power or His infinite kindness and mercy.

The Catholic Church had about 400 million followers in the world in 1950, 650 million in 1970 [and 1,200 million (in 2012) today]. She is mankind's greatest religion in numbers, geographical spread, and cultural achievement.

She claims to have been commissioned by Christ to safeguard, without error or loss, all those truths and means of grace which Christ has given to enable men to lead a true religious life.

She claims to be not only an easier and more certain way to eternal salvation, but the only official one, the one ordained by God for all men, so that all who through their own fault do not belong to her cannot obtain salvation.

How to prove the truth of her claim?

II. TEN ARGUMENTS IN OUTLINE:

1. You can fool all people some of the time and some people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.

The Catholic Church is unyielding in her principles; she prescribes some things which are hard to practise and teaches many doctrines which are hard to believe. In spite of this, her claim has been accepted for more than 1,900 years by the majority of Christians, including very large numbers of intellectuals and many of the best brains of mankind. With this enormous claim, she has successfully met the onslaught of centuries of scientific and pseudo-scientific criticism and emerged stronger than ever. If it were untrue, it would mean that the Catholic Church had succeeded in achieving the impossible, in what amounts to fooling all the people all the time, and that on extraordinarily hard terms. But such an exacting claim would never have been held by such large numbers of the learned for so many centuries if it were not able to produce positive and convincing proof.

(Protestantism, Hinduism, and, to a large extent, Islam, leave their adherents almost completely free to believe what they like. The adherence of their intellectuals is thus a tribute to the lack of restraint and definiteness, not to the reasonableness of these religions. Nor have Hinduism and Islam lived in a critical historical, scientific atmosphere as the Catholic Church has done for centuries.)

2. The Catholic position is held by the only large body of religious experts in the world.

Experts are people who — usually after a prolonged general education which develops a critical mind — devote much time and effort to the thorough study of a subject, considering all available evidence and counter-evidence. Above all, they must consider carefully the findings approved by large bodies of specialists. A man who on his own account wants to build a system of medical knowledge or physics or astronomy without seriously considering what has been found and approved by generations of other doctors, physicists, astronomers, cannot succeed in becoming an expert. The same holds good for philosophy and religion. Though one may claim to have as good a brain as anyone else, experience shows beyond doubt that no great and solid system of knowledge

can be constructed without the co-operation of numerous scholars, the test of a long critical examination, and the endorsement by generations of learned men.

Islam has few religious experts, because it has few students of religion with an enlightened and critical sense such as is developed by a good general education. Nor do its scholars generally study the criticism of their system by others. No more has Hinduism, for the same reasons, but also because it consists of a large mass of conflicting opinions and has never succeeded in building up a solid system thoroughly examined and approved for long by large numbers of scholars.

Protestantism, too, has not succeeded in laying the foundations and building the superstructure of a system that could stand the test and prove acceptable to a good proportion of its religious specialists. It has been from the start, and remains today, a babel of opinions.

The only religion which has the full approval of thousands of experts is the Catholic Church.

After a general education the Catholic priest has to go through a critical course of at least six years of philosophy and religion (in which the question of the need of proof is all the time squarely faced). While many of the more than 400,000 priests devote their whole life to a critical study of the foundations of their faith, many more are compelled by the nature of their work to re-examine their own position continuously. Though not all priests could be called experts in the fundamentals of their faith, most of them, and a number of laymen, have the knowledge and critical abilities required to be able to judge the value of the arguments of the experts. A religion held and endorsed for so many centuries by so many experts and near-experts — most of whom, if they adhered knowingly to a false or doubtful proposition, would only make themselves of all men the most miserable — a religion which, moreover, continues to draw its converts from among the most eminent of its adversaries, must be a sound, proven system. [A guide to the number of Catholic priests in the world would indicate that there were about 300,000 in 1945, 420,000 in 1970, 403,000 in 1985 and 410,000 in 2010.]

It may be objected that Catholic priests are biased, and the honesty of their position is suspect. But most of them could have succeeded in any other profession, which would have provided them with a better living than they can expect as priests. For the majority come from the middle classes and many belong to the best students of their schools. Moreover, by their celibacy, and many by their voluntary vows of poverty and obedience, they go against the strongest natural biases which urge man to get married, become the father of a family and be the master of his own actions and property. Such sacrifices people make only 'for their inmost convictions. So the bias of the Catholic priest is one of conviction, much more even than that of the doctor, teacher and scientist; not that of the quack or charlatan who does his tricks and cheats the people for private advantage.

3. With this claim and pointing to the fulfilment of the biblical prophecies and to the miracles of Christ and the Apostles as proof, the Catholic Church converted a substantial number of intellectuals and finally the entire nations of the Greek and Roman civilisations.

This she did by no other means than persuasion, at a time when that claim and those miracles could be most easily examined, and, if not true, disproved. Some have pretended to find a sufficient and final explanation for the success of the early Christian propaganda in the enthusiasm of the Christians, their expectation of the early coming of Christ and heavenly rewards, and their superb organisation. But as she offered no tangible advantages, except to the poorest, the enthusiasm and expectation, her driving force, could not have lasted for 300 years, in very unfavourable circumstances, if they had not derived their substance and strength from solid proofs. For during

those first three centuries the conversion of so many was effected in spite of the gravest social disadvantages and the continuous threat or reality of bloody persecutions, inflicted on defenceless victims by a powerful State.

4. Christ's revelation, which showed its divine origin by numerous miracles, was expressly given by Him for all men of all times. God must, therefore, have made some provision to keep it intact, free from error, and accessible to all men.

It seems absurd that God should work numerous miracles while granting a revelation and then, though commanding that it be taught to all mankind, provide no assistance, miraculous if necessary, to keep it intact and accessible to all. That provision has not been individual inspiration. Those who claimed such private inspiration failed to believe and teach one and the same thing. It is also not the Bible alone, since the Protestants and earlier dissidents, who wanted to base their knowledge of the revelation on the Bible alone, at once landed into such doubt, disagreement and confusion as to equal the philosophers. There is one system, and one only, that can claim such unity and continuity of doctrine as are the hallmarks of divine guidance, only one Christian institution which can have preserved Christ's revelation intact for all men — the Catholic Church.

This is confirmed by a comparison between the New Testament and the Old. The Jewish prophets had spoken of 'the age of the Messiah', as the fulfilment of the old covenant, as the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, in which also the non-Jews were to enter. Christ claimed to found that new kingdom, to give a more abundant outpouring of divine grace and truth for all men. The truths revealed to the Jews in the Old Testament, although they were mostly truths accessible to the human intelligence, but entrusted to a small compact nation, were safeguarded not only by their Bible, but also by an authorised teaching body and occasional extraordinary teachers who had to prove their authority by miracles. If a book was not sufficient to safeguard religious truths among a little nation, how could a great number of mysteries be kept intact by a mere book among people of all degrees of culture, spread over the face of the earth? An extraordinary divine guidance cannot be absent in the new dispensation if it is to be the fulfilment of the old. That guidance might have been given by God to every individual follower of Christ or reader of the Bible. But, as daily experience clearly proves, He has not done so. It can, therefore, have been given only to the society or Church founded by Christ which, though progressing in the understanding of the revealed truths, has never wavered in her allegiance to the teachings entrusted to her by her Founder.

5. Christ's words clearly imply an infallible Church to teach all men.

He said: "Teach all nations... to observe all things I have commanded you," a command which can be fulfilled only if the Church is kept free from error. Therefore, He also added while giving this command: "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth," and "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." He also said: "He that believes and is baptised shall be saved; he that believes not shall be condemned" — but God cannot reasonably condemn people for refusing to believe a fallible Church. (See Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16.)

Christ said again: "The Spirit of Truth will teach you all truth," (John 16:13) "will lead you into all truth," (John 14:26) "will bring all things to your mind whatsoever I have said to you," et cetera. "He that hears you, hears Me; he that despises you, despises Me" (Luke 10:16). "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (John 20:21) "If (the sinner) will not hear the Church, let him be to you as the heathen and the publican." (Matthew 18:17) This arrangement, this promise of Christ, which is divine and has been endorsed by His many miracles, must be fulfilled. No Church claims, nor can

be said to fulfil, this tremendous promise except the Catholic Church, which alone speaks with a certain voice and an authority which reminds us of Christ Himself.

6. Only the Catholic Church, which goes back to the very persons of Christ and Peter, holds their commission to teach from Jesus Christ Himself.

Churches like the Protestant ones, founded many centuries later, some of them by very un-saintly men, chiefly in opposition to teachings of the Church commissioned by Christ, can have no share in that commission — nor in the promise that He would be with His teaching Church always, even to the end of the world.

7. “The Church of God,” Saint Paul tells us, expressing the conviction implied in the writings and Acts of the Apostles, is “the pillar and ground of truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15)

The Protestant Churches, which teach conflicting opinions about even the most important traditional doctrines of Christianity, cannot be said to fulfil that role. “You change already,” Bossuet (died in 1704) objected to them, “and, therefore, you are not the truth”; for the only change compatible with the possession of the truth is an organic one, a deepening of the understanding of doctrines, not a changing of their very meaning. A Church, moreover, which is to be the pillar of truth, preserving it intact for mankind, must ever fight and reject error. The relentless war against all change of the traditional teachings of Christ, begun by the Apostles, the Catholic Church has continued to wage, without relaxation from the earliest centuries till our own days: whilst the Protestant Churches afford a secure home for all opinions and heresies, even those solemnly rejected by the universal Church more than fifteen centuries ago. (For example, how many Protestant unitarian churches can you think of?) Thereby they make it evident that they are not the pillar and ground of the truth, but are separated from the true Church of Christ.

8. The Church of Christ must be one united, visible Society, with one Government, and one doctrine.

Christ and His Apostles insist on this. Christ speaks of “My Church” (not Churches), and compares it to a kingdom, a sheepfold, a city, a vine, a net holding good and bad fish. “No kingdom divided against itself can endure,” He says. One selected body of men must unitedly rule His Church: “Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in heaven, et cetera.” (See Matthew 16:19 and 18:18.) (See also the texts quoted in No. 5.) Saint Paul tells us that the faithful must be “one body,” “one body in Christ,” “one body and one spirit,” that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism,” and both He and the other Apostles use the harshest of terms against all who teach doctrines different from those taught by the authorised teachers in the Church. Only in the Catholic Church are these characteristics of the true Church of Christ fulfilled: one Government, one Society, one Faith, one Doctrine. Those, therefore, who broke away from that one Society and one Government, broke away from the Church of Christ. Moreover, the unity found in the Catholic Church is in itself a miracle. “Therein,” says Archbishop Sheehan, “lies the miracle of her unity, that she, while teaching what is hard to believe, while prescribing what is hard to practise, while rejecting all compromise in faith and morals, yet holds her vast following together in willing submission.”

9. That the Catholic Church is the Church of Christ is also evident from the fact that she alone follows the constitution laid down by Him.

He wanted His Church to have a visible head, a ruler who would have supreme authority and command. This office He entrusted to Simon Peter when, before leaving His flock, He made Peter the shepherd in His own stead: "Feed my lambs... feed my lambs... feed my sheep." (John 21:16-17) He had promised it to Peter when He gave him the new name "Rock" (Cephas, Peter), (John 1:42), and said "upon this rock I will build my Church," (Matthew 16:18) thus clearly indicating that in His Church, Peter was to be the foundation of its unity, strength and permanence, a role which, in a society, only the supreme ruler can fulfil. He also entrusted to him "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (i.e., the Church), by this figure of speech again showing that Peter was to be in full charge. (Matthew 16:19) And He bestowed on Peter the independent power to give to give laws and change them:

"Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven," a power of command which is fully endorsed by God ("in heaven"). (Matthew 16:19)

This outstanding position of Peter is borne out by other statements and actions of Christ and of the Apostles and by the way Peter took over the leadership after Christ's ascension.

It is also clear that this office, entrusted to Peter in the first place, was meant by Christ to be permanent, for:

(a) It is only on account of the office of supreme ruler that Peter is the rock or foundation of the Church, giving it cohesion, strength and permanence. This rock, the office, must remain as long as the Church is to remain, that is, for ever.

The Church would collapse if the rock were taken away from under it. Thus, the office cannot cease at Peter's death. This is implied in the very words of Christ: "You are Rock (Cephas, Peter), and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18).

(b) Christ as founder determined the kind of constitution His Church was to have. No one has the right or power to change that constitution but He Himself. As we have seen, He gave to His Church in Peter a monarchical constitution. There is no sign in the Bible or early history of the church that He abrogated it.

(c) The office was instituted for the benefit not of Peter but of the Church. She needed a firm foundation for her unity and permanence. She had to be ruled by appropriate laws. Her members, the sheep, needed the guidance and care of a shepherd. Much more than during the lifetime of Peter and the other Apostles, when in the course of centuries, the impression of their personalities would fade and the Church was to expand over the whole world and embrace all peoples and cultures, would guidance and a safeguard for her unity and strength be badly needed. While providing it for a time when it was hardly required, Christ could not have neglected to provide it for many centuries, when it would be indispensable to safeguard His Church from certain destruction.

(d) Although in the beginning the exercise of that supreme authority was little needed, we find traces of it already from the end of the first century (Pope Clement); and long before the year 400 A.D. we find it plainly acknowledged by the whole Church, in East and West. In those early centuries, tradition was strong and the battle for its preservation fought with fierceness. The bishops of Rome had no means to impose their authority by force.

And self-interest would have allied itself with piety to urge the other bishops to resist such an encroachment on their rights. The Popes could, therefore, not have succeeded in building up supreme, illegal authority without leaving clear traces of a long and violent battle on the pages of history. The absence of traces of such battle, in a matter then undefined, can only mean that the authority of the Popes was generally recognised to be of divine origin, instituted by Christ Himself.

10.

On this Church God continues in our days to impress the stamp of His miracles.

In Lourdes, “patients have been cured almost instantaneously of various affections, such as peritoneal tuberculosis, cold abscesses, osteitis, suppurating wounds, lupus, cancer, et cetera.” Thus the well-known American doctor and Nobel-prize winner, Alexis Carrel, says in his book: “Man the unknown” (see pages 144-145).

“These miracles the Church readily submits to the scrutiny of her severest critics (as in the Medical Bureau established at Lourdes), and have been acknowledged after careful examination by several prominent non-Catholic doctors and intellectuals as beyond all possibility of doubt.” Of these proofs, one may say with Saint Augustine: ‘All this if it be not true, You Yourself, O God, do fool us!’

The Catholic Church is easily the most misunderstood and slandered institution in the world. Because of the enormity of her claim, she has been forced ever to stand in the thick of all mental struggle. She provokes many to eternal struggles, continuous discussion and attack. She is never allowed to rest. Failure to hold even one of her defined doctrines would spell certain disaster. As her divine Master, she is “set for the fall and the resurrection of many and a sign which shall be contradicted.” (Luke 2:24) Continuing His mission, she meets His fate.

Christ and His Church concern every man most closely, infinitely more, than anything else in the world. For Christ, who worked those numerous miracles to prove His divine mission, has said: “What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world but suffer the loss of his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). And in His final command to His Church: “Go into the whole world and teach the gospel to every creature; he that believes and is baptised shall be saved, he that (through his own fault neglects to listen or enquire and thus) believes not shall be condemned.” (Mark 16:16).
