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A N S W E R S

ANTI-CATHOLIC MYTHS



Catholic Answers

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Jimmy Akin



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Introduction

“Everybody’s a critic.” So holds a common saying, and it’s certainly true that there is a lot of criticism in our world today!

Christians, in particular, can expect to be criticized. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11–12).

He also told his disciples, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19).

Knowing this, Christians can expect to be confronted by misunderstandings, hostility, and lies. Over time, all of these can combine to produce *myths*—popular, enduring ideas that aren’t true.

This is true for Christians in general, and it’s true for Catholics in a particular way. This is partly because of the divisions that have sprung up in the Christian community. Although Jesus prayed that all of his disciples be one (John 17:20–23), the devil has been able to divide Christians against each other.

In the years since the Protestant Reformation, the number of anti-*Catholic* myths has grown substantially. And although we should be thankful that the post-Reformation passions have cooled and many Christians are seeking reconciliation, the myths are still a problem.

In this short work, we will seek to dispel some of the most common anti-Catholic myths and show how you can deal with others. In the first part we will focus on myths about Catholic *history* and in the second part on myths about Catholic *doctrine*.

1. Constantine created the Catholic Church!

It’s well known that the Catholic Church claims to have been founded by Jesus Christ. During his earthly ministry, he told St. Peter, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Ever since, the popes—as the successors of Peter—have guided the Catholic Church.

This means that if you want to claim that the Catholic Church is *not* Jesus’

Church, you need an alternative account of where it came from. You need to find some point in history—other than the ministry of Jesus—where you think it started.

In order to dispute the Church's claim to being founded by Christ and, often, to suggest that Catholicism was a Roman corruption of original, pure Christianity, some in the Protestant community have claimed that the Catholic Church actually came into existence in the early 300s and that it was founded by the emperor Constantine. It's also claimed that he made this new Catholicism the state religion.

Neither of these is true.

Constantine was born around A.D. 272, and he died in 337. He was raised as a pagan, but eventually he became Christian. It's often claimed that he was the first Christian emperor, but there is some doubt about this.¹

When he was in his thirties, Constantine witnessed the persecution unleashed by the emperor Diocletian—the last and bloodiest persecution of the Church by the Roman Empire. Despite the horrors being inflicted on Christians, Constantine was converted.

At the time, the empire's government was confused, and a series of civil wars were underway. Constantine was in conflict with a man named Maxentius for control of Rome, and a climactic battle—known as the Battle of the Milvian Bridge—was approaching.

Before the battle, in which Constantine was greatly outmatched, he prayed to the Christian God and had a vision of a cross in the sky, along with the message “In this sign, conquer.”² He also had a dream instructing him to use this sign, and he placed it on the shields of his soldiers.

The particular form of the sign he saw was known as the *chi-rho*, after the first two letters of the word *Christ* in Greek (*christos*). *Chi* looks like the English letter X, and *rho* looks like the English letter P, so the *chi-rho* combines these two shapes (☩), to form what has become a common Christian emblem.

Constantine won the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and eventually became the sole emperor. But although he favored Christianity, he did not make it the official religion. That did not happen until decades after Constantine's reign.

In no sense, either, did Constantine found the Catholic Church. After he had his vision and dream, he took instruction in the Christian faith and eventually was baptized. He was joining a Church that already existed and

that was already called “the Catholic Church.”

In fact, people had been referring to it that way since the end of the first century. We know that because, around A.D. 108, we find St. Ignatius of Antioch using the term in his letters: “Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”³

Ignatius doesn’t bother to explain what he means by the term *Catholic Church*, which suggests that it was already in common use. That which would place its origin at least a few years earlier, in the late first century.

The term *Catholic* (Greek, *katholikê*) roughly means “universal,” and the term had been applied to the Church because of local factions that were beginning to break away from it in different areas. There needed to be a way to refer to the one Church that Christ founded, distinct from the breakaway factions, and so people called it the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church thus was not established by the emperor Constantine. It was around long before his time. He didn’t found it. He joined it.

2. The Catholic Church changed the Sabbath!

Observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work. . . . You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day (Deut. 5:12–15).

So says one of the Ten Commandments. Today, however, almost all Christians keep Sunday—the first day of the week—as a holy day, rather than Saturday, the seventh.

Some Christians think this is a mistake and hold that we should treat Saturday as the weekly day of worship. Notable among these are the Seventh Day Baptists, who were founded in the 1600s, and the Seventh-day Adventists, who were founded in the 1800s.

So, why do most Christians worship on Sunday rather than Saturday? To explain this, seventh-day Christians often blame the Catholic Church. They assert that the Church “changed” the Sabbath. As to when this occurred, they

will sometimes argue that it happened in the time of Constantine or at some other point after the apostolic age.

They sometimes claim that this represents an element of paganism—that Sunday is the “day of the sun,” and so worshiping on Sunday involves sun worship. Some even claim that Sunday worship is—or will become—“the mark of the beast.”

None of these claims is true. The notion that Sunday worship is the mark of the beast is an eccentric idea that Bible scholars do not take seriously. According to the book of Revelation, the mark of the beast is a number—666—that is placed on the hands or foreheads of certain people (Rev. 13:16–18). It has nothing to do with a day of worship (for more, see answer 13).

The claim that worshiping on Sunday involves worshiping the sun is similarly nonsense. People who go to Church on any day of the week—Sunday or otherwise—are praying to God, not to the sun. If the name of the day were a reliable indicator of who you were praying to, then those who worship on Saturday would be worshiping the pagan god Saturn, because Saturday is the “day of Saturn,” just as Sunday is the “day of the sun”!

And of course, the names of the days of the week vary from one language to another. For example, in Spanish the first day of the week is *Domingo*, meaning “the Lord’s day.” In fact, all the Romance languages of Europe name this day after the Lord, not the sun. And that’s a clue to the real reason why Christians worship on Sunday—because it’s the day that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead.

The Catholic Church has never denied that Saturday is the Sabbath. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) states: “Sunday is expressly distinguished from the Sabbath which it follows chronologically every week” (2175). So, the Sabbath has not been “changed.” It is when it always has been: Saturday.

The question is whether Christians are obliged to keep it, and the answer—as the New Testament makes clear—is no. St. Paul says, “Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:16–17).

Annual festivals like Passover, the new moons that began every month, and the weekly Sabbaths were the three types of liturgical days on the Jewish

calendar, and Paul indicates that Christians are not obliged to keep Jewish liturgical days. They were “shadows” that pointed forward to Christ, but now that Christ has come, they are not binding—any more than the Jewish dietary laws (Mark 7:19).

Although the Ten Commandments do contain universal moral principles (e.g., prohibitions on murder, adultery, and lying) that still bind us, they also contain ceremonial elements that pertained to the Jewish people in particular. The Sabbath command thus takes the general moral principle that we are to set aside sufficient time for rest and worship and mandates that the Jewish people prior to Christ do so on Saturday.

Notice that, in the text we began with, God cites the fact that the Israelites labored as slaves in Egypt and that God brought them out of this labor and gave them rest, and so he commanded them to keep the Sabbath. This was a commandment for the people of Israel; other peoples in the ancient world did not have weekly Sabbaths. Gentiles were not required to keep this law.

As Paul indicates, the commandment only lasted until the time of Christ, and so today nobody is bound to keep the Sabbath. But we do still need to honor the principle of setting aside time for rest and worship, so when should Christians do this? Already in the first century, we find them gathering together on the first day of the week—Sunday.

Writing around A.D. 54, Paul told the Corinthians, “Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come” (1 Cor. 16:1–2). Similarly, St. Luke reports that Christians gathered on the first day of the week “to break bread” (Acts 20:7).

The reason for these gatherings was that the Lord Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1, Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1). And so, this day became known as the “Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10).

At first, many Jewish Christians still kept the Sabbath as a matter of ancestral custom, but it was no longer binding, as Paul makes clear. What *was* binding for Christians was honoring the resurrection of Jesus, and this commemoration took place on the first day of the week.

The celebration of Jesus’ resurrection on Sunday is not something the Catholic Church introduced in a later century. The practice goes right back to

the apostles themselves.

3. Catholic holidays are of pagan origin!

Sunday isn't the only Christian holy day that has been falsely accused of having pagan origins. Others have been as well, including Christmas, Easter, and Halloween.

For example, the claim is made that Christmas is based on either the Roman celebration Saturnalia (a festival of the god Saturn) or the celebration of *Sol Invictus* (the “unconquerable sun”)—both of which happen in December. Easter is claimed to be based on the pagan celebration of the spring equinox, and its name on the pagan goddess Ishtar. And Halloween is claimed to be based on the Celtic holiday Samhain, which falls about halfway between the fall equinox and the winter solstice.

We'll address these alleged connections in a moment, but first let's look at the supposed common reason the Christian holidays were created. According to this narrative, the original pagan holidays were so deeply embedded in the culture of the time that leaders in the Church decided to promote the Christian ones as a way of letting Christians continue to celebrate at these times—but in a wholesome manner.

Supposing for a moment that this were true, we might immediately ask, “What's wrong with that?”

If there was social pressure on these early Christians to celebrate at a certain time of year, wouldn't it be a *good* thing to give them an alternative to celebrate that was in accord with the tenets of their faith?

We even see things like this happening today. For example, the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah was historically a very minor holiday, but because of the influence of Christian culture and the social pressure to celebrate at Christmas time, many Jewish synagogues and families have promoted Hanukkah as an alternative celebration in accord with the principles of their faith.

That doesn't make Hanukkah a “Christian” holiday. Those who celebrate it aren't celebrating Christ and his birth. They're celebrating the rededication of the Jewish temple after it had been profaned by pagans.

In the same way, even if the Christian holidays were promoted as wholesome alternatives to pagan celebrations, that wouldn't make them

“pagan” holidays. Christians aren’t celebrating anything pagan on those days: they’re celebrating the birth of Christ (Christmas), the resurrection of Christ (Easter), and the saints in heaven (Halloween).

Protestants also are not immune to the practice of holding alternative celebrations. Some in the Protestant community aren’t comfortable with Halloween, and so in recent years they have been celebrating Halloween alternatives such as “Reformation Day,” because Martin Luther released his Ninety-Five Theses on October 31, or a “Harvest Festival,” because a major agricultural harvest occurs in the fall.

People of every persuasion can recognize that, if there is social pressure for your flock to celebrate a holiday that isn’t in accord with the principles of your faith, it can be a good idea to give them an alternative celebration that is. So, even *if* it were true that these Christian holidays were originally promoted as alternatives to pagan ones, that would be a *good* thing.

The question remains, though: was that really what happened, or is this a modern myth?

If you want to make a historical claim, you need to be able to cite evidence for it; so where is the evidence that these holidays started as alternative celebrations? We have the writings of Christians in every period of Church history, and so—if the alternative celebration hypothesis were true—we should find Church Fathers and others writing to each other and saying things like, “Let’s come up with an alternative celebration to protect our people from this pagan holiday.”

But we don’t find them saying things like that. In the early Church, there were a variety of dates proposed for the birth of Jesus, but we don’t find the supporters of December 25 proposing this date as an alternative to Saturnalia or Sol Invictus. Instead, we find them promoting it because *that’s when they thought Jesus was born.*⁴

Similarly, there is no evidence that Easter has pagan connections. Ishtar was a goddess in the ancient Near East (think: Iraq and Iran) in the centuries before Christ. The name *Easter* arose in England in the A.D. 600s, in a completely different culture. Even though they sound similar, there is no historical connection between the two words.

Further, *Easter* is just the name of the holiday in English. In Italian, it’s *Pasqua*; in Spanish, *Pascha*; in Portugese, *Páscoa*; in French, *Pâques*; in

Danish, *Paaske*; in Dutch, *Pasen*; in Swedish, *Påsk*; and so on. All of these derive from the Latin *Pascha* or Greek *Paskha*, both of which are terms for the Jewish feast of Passover (Hebrew, *Pesakh*).

This reveals the true origin of Easter: it celebrates the resurrection of Jesus, and it is celebrated in conjunction with Passover because Jesus was crucified at Passover and rose the following Sunday (John 19:14–18, 20:1–20).

The reason that Easter's timing is based on the full moon after the spring equinox is because that was the timing of Passover on the Jewish calendar. The Law of Moses required Passover to be celebrated on the fourteenth of the month of Nisan (Lev. 23:5). This is a spring month that contains the equinox, and because the Jewish months begin on the new moon, the fourteenth fell on the full moon. The timing of the feast thus is Jewish and biblical, not pagan.

Finally, Halloween is not based on a pagan holiday, either. Its name is a contraction of "All Hallows Eve." A "hallow" is a saint, and so Halloween is the eve of All Saints' Day.

All Saints' Day has been celebrated at different times in different places, but the celebration of it on November 1 is connected to Pope Gregory III's (r. 731–741) dedication of a chapel in St. Peter's Basilica to all of the saints in heaven on this day. That puts the eve of the day on October 31.

4. The Church used to chain up Bibles because it didn't want people to read them!

For some Protestant groups critical of Catholicism, it has been popular to claim that the Church "chained the Bible" during the Middle Ages to keep people from reading it and, such groups imagine, discovering true "Bible Christianity" for themselves.

It's true that, in some churches during the Middle Ages, the Bible was kept on a chain. But the purpose of doing this was the opposite of what is claimed.

The medieval flowering of Christian intellectual activity centered on the Bible as the revealed word of God. By that point in history, it had become possible to bind even large books in a single volume, but producing Bibles was nonetheless difficult and costly. The printing press hadn't yet been invented, so each copy had to be written out by hand. It required *hundreds* of hours to patiently copy the sacred text. Even if a person were able to carefully copy one verse a minute, it would take almost 600 hours of work to write out

the 35,500 verses in a Bible.

In reality, it would take far longer, for it was common to prepare *illuminated manuscripts*. These were a way of honoring God's word by accompanying it with beautiful and colorful designs. Not only would the text be carefully copied by hand in neat calligraphy, it would be supplemented by hand-painted illustrations. A key stage of illumination was *burnishing*, in which gold leaf was applied to the illustrations to make them come alive with reflected light.

Preparing an illuminated manuscript was a complex, multistage process that involved multiple people. The physical pages—typically made of parchment from animal skins—had to be produced first. The layout of the page would be planned, and the page would be lined with a ruler to maintain an even flow of text. Someone wrote the text in ink, using a reed or quill pen. The illustrations were sketched. Gold leaf was applied. The images were painted with additional colors. And ink borders were supplied to complete the illumination.

Through this difficult and complex process, scribes produced works of art that glorified God and are still treasured by art historians today.

Initially, the scribes who performed this labor were monks, so monasteries often had a room known as a *scriptorium* that was designed to allow multiple monks to pursue the craft uninterrupted. The demand for Bibles was so great, however, that eventually laymen who lived near the monasteries, and nuns in their own monasteries, were trained as scribes.

Such Bibles were fantastically expensive. As had always been the case in the days before the printing press, only individuals who were wealthy could afford personal copies. But institutions like churches, monasteries, and convents possessed them, and the scriptures were read aloud to the faithful at Mass. Given the expense of producing a Bible, it's no surprise that churches took security precautions to keep them safe.

This is the same reason that banks keep pens on chains—so people won't just walk off with them and they will be available for others to use.

Far from trying to prevent people from having access to Scripture, churches chained their incredibly rare and valuable Bibles to make sure that people would not lose that access, so that the word of God could continue to nourish the faith community.

5. The Crusades were unprovoked, unjustified acts of aggression!

The term *crusade* has been applied to a variety of conflicts, but when people talk about “the Crusades,” they are usually thinking of a series of military expeditions conducted between 1095 and 1271. To some, the term and those events have become an emblem of religious intolerance, Christian militarism, and Islamophobia.

The purpose of these expeditions was to reclaim territory in the Holy Land that had been lost to Muslim conquest and to protect the rights and freedom of Christians in the area—particularly the ability of pilgrims to visit the Christian holy sites.

To understand the Crusades, we need some historical background. When the Christian faith began in the first century, the Mediterranean world was governed by the Roman Empire. At first, the empire persecuted Christians, but eventually it was converted. This meant that Europe, much of the Middle East, and North Africa were all Christian territories.

However, when Islam began in Arabia in the seventh century, Muhammad gave it a strong military mandate, and Muslim forces began conquering the Arabian Peninsula. Because of his doctrine of *jihad*—“holy struggle” or “holy war”—Muslims saw it as their religious duty to conquer new territory and to forcibly convert the local populations.

A partial exception was made for Christians and Jews, who were allowed to keep their faith if they paid a special tax and acknowledged their subjection to Muslim authorities. This was in keeping with the Quran, which directs Muslims to fight against Christians and Jews “until they pay the tax in acknowledgment of superiority and they are in a state of subjection.”⁵

Very quickly, Muslim forces conquered half of Christian civilization, taking the Middle East and North Africa, leaving Christian lands only in Europe. And even these were threatened, with particular pressure being put on the Byzantine Empire, which was based in Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey).

In the 1000s, a Muslim group known as the Seljuk Turks conquered the Holy Land, taking it from the Arab and Egyptian Muslims who were previously in control and introducing a new and more brutal regime that killed thousands of Christians in Jerusalem. They also began denying Christians access to the holy sites, such as the place of Christ’s birth in

Bethlehem and the sites of his death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

At the same time, the Seljuks were threatening the Byzantine empire, and Emperor Alexios I called for assistance from Pope Urban II (1088–1099). The pope therefore began urging western Christians to come to the aid of their eastern brethren—to help defend the Byzantine Empire against Muslim aggression, to liberate the Christians of the Holy Land, and to ensure the ability of pilgrims to visit the holiest sites of their faith.

The result was the First Crusade (1096–1099), which was the most successful. It reclaimed key territory in the Holy Land, and four districts known as the “crusader states” were set up. These continued to be subject to Muslim attacks, and so over the next two centuries, additional Crusades were mounted to defend them, though they met with progressively less success. By 1281, the crusader states were gone, and the territory was back under Muslim control.

With this knowledge of the historical facts, it becomes clear that the Crusades were not unprovoked acts of aggression. They occurred after centuries of Muslim violence against Christians, and they were prompted by newer and graver aggression from the Seljuk Turks.

Further, they were primarily defensive in character and had limited goals: protecting Christians in the east from the Seljuks, liberating those in the Holy Land, and ensuring the rights of Christian pilgrims to visit the holy sites.

This does not mean that nothing bad happened during the Crusades. Bad things happen in all wars; however, this alone doesn’t make them unjust or unprovoked. And in the case of the Crusades, it doesn’t make them evidence for claims of Christian intolerance or aggression.⁶

6. The Inquisition tortured and killed millions of witches/pagans/proto-Protestants, etc.!

As with the Crusades, “the Inquisition” is popularly offered as an example of Christian violence and intolerance, with many groups claiming large numbers of forebears who suffered because of it. And as with the Crusades, the subject of the Inquisition is complex and often misunderstood.

There wasn’t just one Inquisition but several, and they operated at different times in different countries. The fundamental purpose of an Inquisition was to protect the Catholic faith community when there were reports that people

who professed to be Catholic were secretly practicing and spreading ideas contrary to the Faith. When such reports were made, they had to be investigated to see if they were true, and so an inquiry—an inquisition—was held.

Inquisitions were not directed at non-Catholics. They only investigated people who professed the Catholic faith but were reported to be acting contrary to it. These could include people who were engaging in pagan practices, including magic, or whose ideas anticipated some that would later appear in Protestantism.

The historical Inquisitions varied in their approaches. Many were milder than the secular courts of the day (in fact, there are records of people committing blasphemy so that they could get their cases transferred to the milder Church courts), but they sometimes used techniques that today would be considered cruel. If people were found guilty and did not repent, or if they relapsed after having repented, they could be sentenced to death, with the capital punishment being carried out by representatives of the state.

This is very foreign to the way we approach things in liberal democracies today, but the measures were seen as necessary to protect the community. Heresy can kill the soul, which is worse than killing the body, so the idea was that if executing murderers was needed to protect the community, so was executing those spreading heresy.⁷

Lest it be thought that this was a uniquely Catholic approach, it should be pointed out that similar things have been done in every culture. The world is a violent place, and everyone's ancestors have blood on their hands. Pagans have persecuted Christians, as in the age of martyrdom. Protestants have burned witches and executed Catholic martyrs. Muslims have killed people who have left Islam. And states espousing atheistic ideologies—like Soviet Russia and Communist China—have persecuted and killed religious people.

None of this is to excuse or sweep under the rug acts committed by the various Catholic Inquisitions. It is to point out that these are not a uniquely Catholic thing.

Another issue is the number of people claimed to have been affected. This should neither be exaggerated nor minimized but treated objectively, in light of the historical evidence.

It's often claimed that the Inquisitions killed millions of people. Indeed,

witches and neo-pagans often claim that millions of their forebears alone were killed. However, this is not accurate. Historian of witchcraft Michael Bailey writes, “The total number of those legally executed for witchcraft across Europe during three centuries of major witch hunting activity was probably between 40,000 and 50,000.”⁸ This includes those executed by both Protestant and Catholic authorities.

But although accurate numbers are important for assessing the scale of historical violence, the ultimate question is not how many people were killed by one’s physical or intellectual ancestors. The people who committed these acts bear the responsibility for what they did. People today do not—*unless* they endorse them.

So, what is the Catholic Church’s attitude toward such things?

The Church recognizes that in the past, though it always “taught the duty of clemency and mercy,” its pastors had sometimes been silent when governments used “cruel practices” that were not truly “necessary for public order [or] in conformity with the legitimate rights of the human person” and that often they even “adopted in their own tribunals the prescriptions of Roman law concerning torture” (CCC 2298). The Church today accordingly condemns torture (2297) and rejects the practice of the death penalty (2267).

7. Catholic missionaries were imperialists who enslaved and impoverished native populations!

The Age of Exploration, which took place between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, created an unprecedented situation for the Church. With the discovery of vast new lands, it was realized that there were untold millions of people who had never been reached with the message of Jesus Christ.

Jesus himself had said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20), giving the Church its missionary mandate.

Missionaries therefore began undertaking the hardships and dangers that international travel posed at the time. They spread all over the globe, accompanying the explorers and bringing the message of Christ to people everywhere.

But there was a problem: the various colonial powers—primarily Spain and Portugal, but also France, England, and the Netherlands—that had discovered the new lands were also busy competing with each other to set up colonies. Each nation was seeking its own advantage and did not want to fall behind the others.

This meant that these powers also competed with —and, in many cases, exploited—the native populations of these lands. Worse, some of the exploiters cited their own Christian faith as justification for conquering, despoiling, and enslaving the native inhabitants.

What did the missionaries do? The Catholic ones complained to the pope about what the *conquistadors* and others were doing, and in 1537, Pope Paul III issued a document known as *Pastorale Officium*, in which he noted that Charles V, holy Roman emperor, had forbidden his subjects from enslaving or robbing native people in mission lands. He then adds to this injunction the ultimate Church penalty of *excommunication*:

Since we, therefore, are vigilant that these Indians, even if outside the bosom of the Church, are not deprived, nor are they to be deprived, of their freedom or the ownership of their goods, for they are men and, therefore, capable of faith and salvation, and, thus, they are not to be destroyed by enslavement but rather invited to life through preaching and example, and since we, moreover, desire to repress the nefarious undertakings of such impious [men] and to insure that the Indians do not become hardened against embracing the faith of Christ. . . we demand that . . . under your watchful attention you prevent with great severity . . . under pain of excommunication . . . each and every one of whatever rank from presuming in any way to reduce the aforementioned Indians to slavery or in any way to despoil them of their goods.

This was one in a series of documents in which the popes of the period took the side of the natives against those who sought to oppress them, citing both the fact that they were men (i.e., they had human rights) and that they could be turned away from the gospel by mistreatment. This was especially important, because the Church has always *forbidden* forced conversion. The gospel must be embraced voluntarily (CCC 160).

The Church thus recognized the native peoples as human beings who

deserved respect and who possessed precious souls in need of salvation from Jesus. They, like the Europeans, were those for whom Christ had died, and they must be treated as such. The Church thus sought to help the native peoples and protect them from exploitation.

Although this had an effect, it unfortunately did not mean that all exploitation stopped. Just as the pope today cannot snap his fingers and get Catholic politicians to enact Church teaching on subjects like abortion into public policy, the popes of this era had limited influence over secular powers.

The result was a period of both light and shadows, with both exploitation and the advance of the gospel. As in every era, the people of this one must be looked at realistically. None were perfectly good, and none were perfectly evil. Like us, they were complex individuals.

Recent popes have acknowledged this, including Pope Francis, who has stated, “I say this to you with regret: many grave sins were committed against the native peoples of America in the name of God. . . . Like St. John Paul II, I ask that the Church—I repeat what he said—‘kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters.’”

He went on to say, “Together with this request for forgiveness and in order to be just, I also would like us to remember the thousands of priests and bishops who strongly opposed the logic of the sword with the power of the cross.”⁹

8. The Catholic Church supported Hitler!

Here we have a charge directed against the Church as a whole. With any charge of this nature, we have to ask what is meant by it.

Obviously, not every Catholic supported Hitler. There were many Catholics fighting in the Allied armies against his forces. *They* were not supporting Hitler! Some Catholics did fight for or otherwise support Hitler. But today, some Catholics support abortion. That doesn’t mean you can say, “The Catholic Church supports abortion.”

If you want to make assertions about what the Church—as a whole—does or doesn’t support, you need to look at the Church’s teachings, which are proclaimed by the bishops in union with the pope. The responses of individual Catholics may or may not correspond to those teachings.

So, what did the Catholic Church teach about the ideals of Nazism? This

was expressed even before World War II began. In 1937, Pope Pius XI (r. 1922–1939) issued the encyclical letter *Mit Brennender Sorge* (German, “With Burning Concern”), which was an assault on Nazism and its “so-called myth of race and blood” (n. 17).

It was recognized—in advance—that the Nazis would not permit the distribution of this encyclical if they knew about it, so the Vatican had it covertly smuggled into Germany so it could be read from Catholic pulpits on Palm Sunday, circumventing Nazi censorship.

This is already a clear sign that the Church did *not* support Hitler. So, how did a myth to the contrary begin? Ironically, with a work of fiction—a stage play titled *The Deputy*, which was written after the war by a German Protestant playwright named Rolf Hochhuth. The play appeared in 1963, and it portrayed Pope Pius XII (r. 1939–1958) as actively working behind the scenes to support Jewish people during this era but as too timid to speak out publicly against the Nazis.

Afterward, in the hands of other authors, this portrait mutated into one of the pope being willfully silent, unsympathetic to the Jewish cause, and sympathetic to the Nazis. In 1999, British author John Cornwell released a book titled *Hitler’s Pope*, which portrayed Pius XII as positively antisemitic.

After *Hitler’s Pope*, numerous authors criticized Cornwell’s work and the broader anti-Pius narrative. Cornwell walked back claims he made in the book, and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* concluded that the charge that Pius XII was antisemitic lacks “credible substantiation.”¹⁰

Pius XII’s birth name was Eugenio Pacelli, and on April 28, 1935, when he was the Vatican nuncio (ambassador) to Germany, he gave a speech in which he stated that the Nazis “are in reality only miserable plagiarists who dress up old errors with new tinsel. It does not make any difference whether they flock to the banners of social revolution, whether they are guided by a false concept of the world and of life, or whether they are possessed by the superstition of a race and blood cult.”

Pacelli went on to play a prominent role in how the Church dealt with the Nazis. In his book *Three Popes and the Jews*, Rabbi Pinchas Lapide states that Pius XI “had good reason to make Pacelli the architect of his anti-Nazi policy. Of the forty-four speeches which the Nuncio Pacelli had made on German soil between 1917 and 1929, at least forty contained attacks on Nazism or

condemnations of Hitler's doctrines. . . . Pacelli, who never met the Führer, called it 'neo-Paganism.'"

In 1938, Pacelli cited the roles of Abraham and Jesus in the Christian faith and declared that "spiritually, we are all Semites." He also contributed to the writing of *Mit Brennender Sorge*. During the war, as Pius XII, he oversaw Catholic efforts to save Jewish lives from the Nazi Holocaust. This included providing financial resources, issuing false baptismal certificates to allow Jews to pass as Christians, and hiding Jews in churches, convents, monasteries, and the Vatican itself.

Rabbi Lapide estimates that these efforts saved between 700,000 and 860,000 Jews from the Nazis—more than any other relief effort at the time.

What about the claim that Pius XII was silent about Nazi treatment of Jews during the war? Well, how vocal he could afford to be was a judgment call.

On the one hand, the people Pius XII was helping expressed a desire to keep a low profile. Rabbi Lapide reports on the case of a Jewish couple from Berlin, the Wolffsons, who had been hidden in a convent while Pius XII arranged for them to escape to Spain. After the war, they stated, "None of us wanted the pope to take an open stand. We were all fugitives, and fugitives do not wish to be pointed at. The Gestapo would have become more excited and would have intensified its inquisitions. If the pope had protested, Rome would have become the center of attention."

On the other hand, Pius XII did make public statements. Joseph Lichten of the Anti-Defamation League notes that, after Germany took over Italy and began arresting Jews, "The pope spoke out strongly in their defense with the first mass arrests of Jews in 1943, and *L'Osservatore Romano* carried an article protesting the internment of Jews and the confiscation of their property. The Fascist press came to call the Vatican paper 'a mouthpiece of the Jews.'" ¹¹

When Pius XII died in 1958, Israeli representative to the U.N. and future prime minister of Israel Golda Meir stated, "During the ten years of Nazi terror, when our people passed through the horrors of martyrdom, the pope raised his voice to condemn the persecutors and to commiserate with their victims."

Similarly, after the war, Albert Einstein said, "Only the Catholic Church protested against the Hitlerian onslaught on liberty. Up till then I had not been interested in the Church, but today I feel a great admiration for the

Church, which alone has had the courage to struggle for spiritual truth and moral liberty.”¹²

The myth of Pius XII’s indifference to the plight of Europe’s Jews, like the myth of general Catholic support or sympathy for Nazism, is not only unsupported by the facts but also refuted by them.

9. The Church is against science!

Any time a person makes a vague and sweeping claim like “The Church is against science,” it’s important to ask what this would even mean. Taken at face value, the claim would mean that the Church—or at least its hierarchy—is opposed to the scientific enterprise as a whole.

In other words, *nobody should be a scientist*. Laboratories should be torn down. Scientific experiments should not be done. Their results should not be reported. We should not use science in developing technology to improve human life. And all the scientific literature developed in prior centuries should be suppressed.

Even a moment’s consideration reveals that the Church takes no such attitude toward science. On the contrary. Church documents reveal a history of Catholic appreciation for science.

Consider this quotation from the *Catechism*, which is just one among many:

The question about the origins of the world and of man has been the object of many scientific studies which have splendidly enriched our knowledge of the age and dimensions of the cosmos, the development of life-forms and the appearance of man. These discoveries invite us to even greater admiration for the greatness of the Creator, prompting us to give him thanks for all his works and for the understanding and wisdom he gives to scholars and researchers (283).

The Church runs its own astronomical observatory system, as well as a special organization dedicated to the appreciation of science—the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Members of the academy include numerous distinguished scientists, including many Nobel laureates, and they are appointed to the academy based on their contributions to science, without respect to whether they are Catholic or even believe in God. Members have included famous scientists such as Niels Bohr, Alexander Fleming, Werner

Heisenberg, Stephen Hawking, Max Planck, Ernest Rutherford, and Erwin Schrödinger.

Given all this evidence, it is clear that the charge that the Church is “against” science is sweeping and unjust hyperbole. Stated in this blanket form, the claim is simply indefensible.

But could a narrower version of the claim be defended? Here, many might point to the Galileo affair in the 1600s, which dealt with the question of whether the earth or the sun is at the center of the universe. (In fact, the Galileo affair is virtually the *only* historical episode cited to show that the Church is “against” science.)

The Galileo affair is more complex than we can go into here.¹³ Suffice it to say that modern science does not recognize *either* view being debated in the 1600s as correct. Neither the earth *nor* the sun is the unique center of the universe (if it even has one), and the two bodies actually orbit the solar system’s center of mass, which is near but not always inside the sun.

Unfortunately, in the time of the Enlightenment, the Galileo affair became part of an anti-Catholic narrative that sought to damage the Church by portraying Galileo as a “martyr for science” and the Church as fundamentally opposed to the scientific enterprise.

This ignores the long history of scientific contributions that had been made not just by Catholics but also by those who were clerics in the Church. Famous Catholic scientists prior to Galileo included Robert Grosseteste (c. 1174–1253), Albert the Great (c. 1206–1280), Roger Bacon (c. 1214–1294), William of Ockham (c. 1288–c. 1348), Nicolas of Cusa (1401–1464), Thomas Linacre (c. 1460–1524), and Nicolaus Copernicus (1475–1543).

Since Galileo’s time—in addition to countless Catholic laymen and women who have been scientists—clerics who have made dramatic contributions to science include the father of genetics, Gregor Mendel (1822–1884), and the father of Big Bang cosmology, Fr. Georges Lemaître (1894–1966).

In view of all this, the Galileo incident is entirely too slender a reed to support the charge that the Church is “against” science.

However, often the real dispute isn’t about science. Too often the charge of being “against” science is a stand-in for another complaint. Usually, it is about Catholic moral teachings, such as those on abortion or human sexuality. An issue-by-issue discussion of these subjects goes beyond what we

can do here, but it is not the science that is in dispute. Instead, moral and philosophical principles are at the center of the disagreement.

If people have moral or philosophical disagreements with the Church, they should be honest about this and say so—rather than making the unjust and inaccurate charge that the Church is against science itself!

10. The Catholic Church “adds to the Bible”!

In Protestant circles it’s often charged that the Catholic Church “adds to the Bible” in two ways that are considered contrary to biblical teaching. It is said that (1) Catholics have additional *books* in their Bibles that aren’t in Protestant ones, and that (2) Catholics have *teachings* and *practices* that aren’t mentioned in the Bible. These are the two kinds of things that have been “added”—illicitly, in the view of many Protestants.

Concerning the books of the Bible, critics sometimes point to passages like this one:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (Rev. 22:18–19).

It’s then argued that, by including books in Scripture that Protestant Bibles don’t have, the Catholic Church falls afoul of this warning. But there are several problems with this claim.

First, the verse isn’t saying what the critic thinks. In Greek, the word for *book* is *biblion*, and in the first century, this term referred to a very small book that almost always took the form of a scroll. The Bible is much too big to ever have fit in a single scroll, and when Revelation was written the New Testament had not been assembled into a single volume. So what the verse is actually doing is warning against tampering with the text of the *book of Revelation* (which does, indeed, discuss plagues, the tree of life, and the holy city New Jerusalem).

Still, we can reasonably take the principle that we shouldn’t tamper with the text of Scripture and apply it to the Bible as a whole. It *would* be wrong to add a book to the Bible that isn’t Scripture—and it would be wrong to *subtract* a

book that *is* Scripture.

This passage thus becomes a two-edged sword. If Catholic and Protestant Bibles have different numbers of books, is one group adding or is the other subtracting?

Some Protestants argue that the Council of Trent (1545–1563) “added” seven books to the Bible (1–2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Sirach, Wisdom, and Baruch), as well as parts of two others (Daniel and Esther).

These are known as the “deuterocanonical” books. However, that council wasn’t when the books came to be considered canonical. It was the point at which it was *infallibly defined* that they are sacred and canonical, but they had been recognized as Scripture *far* earlier.

Protestant Church historian J.N.D. Kelly writes that the Christian scriptures “always included, though with varying degrees of recognition, the so-called Apocrypha, or deuterocanonical books.”¹⁴

When local early Christian councils like the Synod of Rome (382), the Council of Hippo (393), and the Council of Carthage (397) drew up lists of the canon of Scripture, they included the deuterocanonical books. These councils simply summarized the standard belief among Christians in their day, and so these books were recognized as canonical at the time Scripture was being canonized.

But why did the Council of Trent feel the need—after so many centuries—to infallibly define the matter? It was because the newly begun Protestant movement had been *denying* the scriptural status of these books. In other words, because the Protestant Reformers were *subtracting* books that Christians had long regarded as Scripture.¹⁵

What about the charge that the Catholic Church has teachings and practices not found in the Bible? Protestants hold that we should form our teachings and practices “by Scripture alone” (Latin, *sola scriptura*), and so they claim that, if these cannot be proved from Scripture, we should not hold them. This is why they object to “adding” such things.

In the first place, this charge is overblown. Protestants themselves will admit that a doctrine or practice doesn’t have to be *explicit* in Scripture. It is enough that it be based on biblical principles. The doctrine of the Trinity is an example. It is nowhere spelled out in the Bible, though the Bible contains passages that imply God is a Trinity, and the early Church developed the

teaching from these passages.

In the same way, Catholics recognize that Scripture also contains principles that support various doctrines and practices, such as purgatory and asking the saints for their intercession.

But what about the doctrine of *sola scriptura* itself? Does it meet its own test? Since it's a doctrine, we'd need to find Bible verses that state or imply it, and . . . we can't.

Sola scriptura was not the way Jews in the Old Testament era or Christians in the New Testament era formed their doctrine. They recognized that God's word was authoritative, and although God's word was found in Scripture, it was not found *only* in Scripture.

For example, during his earthly ministry, Jesus taught his followers many things, and these were not immediately written down in new books of Scripture. Instead, they were passed down in the form of apostolic Tradition—literally the handing-on of knowledge—and only later were *some* of them written in Scripture.

Yet they were still authoritative. This is why the apostle Paul tells his audience, “Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thess. 2:15).

Furthermore, the early Christians recognized that the Holy Spirit guides the leaders of the Church in giving authoritative teachings about the meaning of God's word, such as at the Council of Jerusalem in A.D. 49 (Acts 15:1–31, Gal. 2:1–10).

New Testament Christians thus recognized God's word as being found in both Scripture and Tradition and as being authoritatively interpreted by the Church's teaching authority (Latin, *magisterium*).

There are no verses in the Bible that state or imply that this pattern is to change in the post-apostolic age. (Quite the contrary! Compare, for example, 2 Timothy 2:2 with 4:6–8.) Therefore, *sola scriptura* does not meet its own test. It is self-refuting.

Further, by ignoring the apostolic traditions passed down alongside Scripture, Protestants can—once again—find themselves “subtracting” from God's word.

11. Catholics think you need to earn your salvation!

The idea that Catholics think you need to earn your salvation is another holdover from the Protestant Reformation. When the Reformation began, Protestants preached that we are justified “by faith alone” (Latin, *sola fide*). They then accused Catholics of teaching a false gospel that based salvation on good works.

To support their position, many pointed to verses like Romans 3:28, which states, “We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.” In his German Bible, Martin Luther even added the word *alone* after *faith*, though this word is not in the Greek, and so it generally isn’t found in Protestant Bibles today.

One problem with the Reformation-era use of this verse is that Paul probably does not mean by “works of the law” what many suppose he does. If you examine the context immediately before and after this verse, you will see that Paul is discussing the possibility of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles.

When he denies that people are saved by “works of law,” then, the law he is thinking of is the Law of Moses. He’s saying that one does not need to be circumcised and become a Jew to be saved. In essence, he’s making the same point in the letters to the Romans and Galatians that the Council of Jerusalem made in Acts 15.

But if Paul is saying that works of the Mosaic Law are not necessary for salvation, he’s not talking about “good works,” which is what the Reformation-era controversy was about. On this subject, Paul insists that they are part of the Christian life, saying that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

So, what does the Catholic Church teach, and how does it relate to this set of issues?

Although Catholics don’t use the formula “by faith alone” (because it conflicts with the language of Scripture; see James 2:24), it is possible for this formula to be given an acceptable meaning. As Pope Benedict XVI stated, “Luther’s phrase ‘faith alone’ is true, if it is not opposed to faith in charity, in love. . . . So it is that in the letter to the Galatians, in which he primarily developed his teaching on justification, St. Paul speaks of faith that works through love (Gal. 5:6).”¹⁶

But does the Church teach that we need to do good works to enter a state of

justification? No. The Council of Trent states, “None of those things that precede justification, whether faith or works, merit the grace of justification” (*Decree on Justification* 8).

In fact, Catholic theology holds that it is *impossible* to do supernaturally good works before we are justified and become “a new creation” by God’s grace (2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15). Good works thus *flow from* the state of justification. They do not bring us into it.

God does promise to reward us when we cooperate with his grace and perform good works. He “will reward each one according to his works: to those who, by perseverance in good work, seek glory and honor and immortality, eternal life” (Rom. 2:6–7, LEB; cf. Gal. 6:7–10). However, these rewards are based purely on God’s promise, for, “With regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man. Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality, for we have received everything from him, our Creator” (CCC 2007).

Thus, we *do not* “earn” our salvation. The Catholic Church does not teach salvation by works.

Fortunately, as Reformation-era passions have cooled, Catholics and many Protestants have realized that they are closer together on these issues than they thought, and in 1999 the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. In 2006, the World Methodist Council also signed it, and in 2017 the World Communion of Reformed Churches did the same. Unfortunately, the myth of salvation by works still persists in many circles.

12. The Eucharist is cannibalism!

Jesus taught, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). Similarly, St. Paul wrote, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16).

Based on passages like these, the historic Christian churches—including the Catholic Church, the Orthodox churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and others—have understood Jesus as teaching that he is really present in the Eucharist. This view is even found, with modifications, in Protestant groups

including Lutherans, among others.

But most Protestants do not believe in the Real Presence as Catholics and some other groups do, and some even accuse Catholics of committing cannibalism with the Eucharist. Sometimes they also add that the Old Testament forbade the consumption of blood.

On its face, it makes no sense for those who disbelieve in the Real Presence to make this charge. If Christ was only spiritually or symbolically present in the Eucharist, then he *couldn't* be cannibalized when people consume it, and people wouldn't be consuming his blood. But a critic might respond that what Catholics (and certain other Christians) *believe* about the Eucharist implies cannibalism.

We have a natural repugnance to cannibalism. In our culture, we often associate it with serial killers. But even in primitive societies where it is practiced, cannibalism is a gruesome, bloody process that destroys the bodies of departed human beings and does not treat them with the respect they deserve.

This does not happen with the Eucharist. To see why, let's do a thought experiment. Suppose that scientists found a way to miniaturize human beings so they could do delicate surgeries inside another person's body—like in the popular 1966 film *Fantastic Voyage*. Further suppose that, to do the surgery, the miniaturized people enter the patient through the mouth.

Would we say that this is cannibalism? No. Cannibalism involves chewing up another person's flesh, swallowing it, and digesting it. That's not what's happening with the surgeons.

Christ is not miniaturized in the Eucharist. Instead, his glorified body in heaven becomes present in the consecrated elements and is not hurt in any way when people receive the Eucharist. His glorified body is not chewed up, digested, or used as a source of nutrients. Jesus' body and blood remain whole and undigested under the form of bread and wine. He is completely unharmed.

When the consecrated elements cease to have the form of bread and wine, the Real Presence ceases. God may make "the body and blood of Christ enthroned gloriously in heaven" (Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God*) simultaneously present in the Eucharist, but they are in no way damaged. Therefore, no cannibalism occurs.

Instead, we come into profound communion with Christ, and he gives us his grace through his flesh and blood, through which he saved us on the cross. As the *Catechism* states: “What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit, preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace” (1392).

Similarly, the Old Testament prohibition on consuming blood forbade its consumption—where blood was eaten and digested as a food. Christ’s blood is not digested, and so the Eucharist does not violate the Old Testament prohibition on blood consumption.

This prohibition was part of the dietary regulations that kept Jews culturally and religiously distinct from their pagan neighbors. Globally, many cultures use blood in cooking (e.g., blood sausages like the “black pudding” eaten today in England), and Jesus removed these dietary restrictions when he “declared all foods clean” (Mark 7:19).

The reason Israelites were prohibited from consuming blood was ritual: the blood represented the life of the animal, and so it belonged to God, the giver of life. Such ritual requirements are gone today, and now God gives us spiritual life through Jesus and the reception of his blood, as he himself taught.

If consuming the Eucharist were cannibalism, then saying the elements are merely symbolic would not solve the problem. In that case, Jesus would be commanding us to *symbolically* cannibalize him. This would be as problematic as making the symbolic commission of any intrinsically evil act (e.g., rape, sodomy) part of a sacrament.

For all these reasons, the cannibalism charge is thus easy to make, but hard to defend.

13. The mark of the beast—666—refers to the pope!

Some claim that the pope’s title “Vicar of the Son of God” in Latin is *Vicarius Filii Dei*, and when you add up the Roman numerals in this title, you get 666. Therefore, the pope is the Antichrist.

How is this supposed to work? The numbers we use today weren’t around in the ancient world, and so different cultures used the letters of their alphabets to double as numbers. In Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—the biblical

languages—every letter had a numerical value.

Latin did something similar, but only *certain* letters had numerical values (e.g., I = 1, V = 5, X = 10, L = 50, C = 100, D = 500, M = 1000). If you then take *Vicarius Filii Dei* and add up its Roman numerals *individually*, you get 666. In Revelation 13, John sees a beast arising from the sea, and we're told that its number is 666. John writes, "This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666" (Rev. 13:18, ESV).

Since John expects his first-century readers to be able to calculate the number—and since he himself had done so—what language should we try to do the calculation in? John thought in Aramaic, which used the same number system as Hebrew, and he was writing in Greek, so it should be in one of those languages that we do the calculation.

Also, since he and his first-century audience could perform the calculation, the man that the beast represents must have been alive in the first century. Yet, ironically, the people who support the papal Antichrist theory hold that there *weren't* any popes in the first century. How could John have expected his audience to calculate the number of the pope if the papacy was an "invention" of a later century?

Furthermore, although some have referred to the pope as "vicar of the Son of God," this is *not* one of his official titles. Those are listed in the *Annuario Pontificio* ("Pontifical Yearbook"), published annually by the Vatican press. They are Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Jesus Christ, Successor of the Prince of the Apostles, Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Sovereign of the Vatican City State, Servant of the Servants of God.

The closest title is "Vicar of Jesus Christ" (Latin, *Vicarius Iesu Christi*), but this does not add up to 666.

Some claim that the phrase *Vicarius Filii Dei* is printed on the papal tiara (a special kind of crown worn by past popes). These reports are false. None of the tiaras had this phrase, and popes today do not use tiaras.

One might argue that the pope can still be *described as* the vicar of the Son of God, even if it isn't one of his titles, but this is an arbitrary methodology. If you get to make up your own description of someone and you can arbitrarily pick the numbering system you want, you can *always* engineer something

that will add up to 666.

The children's TV character Barney may be a cute purple dinosaur, but that doesn't mean he's the Antichrist (CVte pVrpLe DInosaVr = C+V+V+L+D+I+V = 100+5+5+50+500+1+5 = 666). The *Vicarius Filii Dei* argument is often made by Seventh-day Adventists, whose founding prophetess was Ellen Gould White (ELLen GoVLD VVhIte = 50+50+5+50+500+5+5+1 = 666).

Finally, although you *can* get 666 by taking each Roman numeral as an individual digit, out of its immediate context (*VICarIVs fILII DeI* = V+I+C+I+V+I+L+I+I+D+I = 5+1+100+1+5+1+50+1+1+500+1 = 666), Roman numerals need to be read in context. Placing a smaller number to the left of a larger one results in it being *subtracted*, not added. Thus "IV" means 4, not 6. In the same way, "IC" and "IL" mean 99 and 49, not 101 and 51. Read this way, *Vicarius Filii Dei* is 660, not 666.

So, let's reject such unreliable, arbitrary calculations and ask the question we should be asking: was there anyone in the first century whose name added up to 666 in a way that John and his readers could have calculated?

From Revelation, we know that the beast has seven heads, and we are told, "The seven heads are seven mountains. . . . They are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while" (Rev. 17:9–10).

The seven mountains have been identified since ancient times as the seven hills of Rome. Interpreters thus have commonly understood this beast as the pagan Roman Empire that persecuted Christians in John's day and in the early centuries.

As seven kings, the beast's heads are seen as connected to the line of first-century Roman emperors. Like these emperors, the beast blasphemes God, persecutes the saints, rules the world, and receives worship from all but Christians (Rev. 13:6–8). It also has the number 666 (Rev. 13:18), which is what "Nero Caesar" (NRWN QSR) adds up to in Hebrew and Aramaic (N+R+W+N+Q+S+R = 50+200+6+50+100+60+200 = 666).

We thus have reason to link the beast with the line of Roman emperors. And, although there may also be a future fulfillment of this prophecy, the Antichrist *won't* be the pope. John tells us that "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in

the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 7).

The pope is the *last* person who would deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. His job is *based* on the fact Christ became incarnate. He supposed to be the vicar of the Son of God, right?

14. Catholics worship Mary and the saints!

To evaluate this claim, we have to determine what is meant by “worship.” Originally, the term referred to the condition of being worthy, and it had no specific connection to the concept of God. Thus, even today, various officials in British government are referred to as “your worship.” It’s just another way of saying “your honor”—the phrase we use for judges in America.

The basic concept behind *worship* is thus giving a person the honor he is due. However, in contemporary American English, the term has become exclusively associated with giving honor to God. Understood this way, do Catholics worship Mary and the saints?

The Bible repeatedly acknowledges that it is legitimate to give proper honor to different human beings. We find this sentiment expressed in passages like:

- “Honor your father and your mother” (Exod. 20:12, Deut. 5:16).
- “Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (Rom. 13:7).
- “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (1 Pet. 2:17).

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary even prophesies that she will be given a special form of honor, as the mother of Christ, for the rest of history: “Behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:48–49).

So, it is legitimate to show honor to other people, including people like the Virgin Mary and the other saints. The question is whether what Catholics are doing amounts to giving them *divine* honor, or the worship due only to God.

Some use a numerical calculation to argue that they do so. They may point to the rosary, in which ten Hail Marys are prayed for each Our Father. But

does how often you address someone reveal who you regard as divine? In the course of daily life, ordinary people address other human beings—their bosses, their spouses, their children—far more often in numerical terms than they say prayers to God. But this doesn't mean that they regard other human beings as deities. Counting how often one addresses another human is simply not a reliable indicator.

The real question is whether Catholics regard Mary and the saints as deities, and the answer is no. The Church is clear in its teaching that they are finite creatures, not the infinite, uncreated God. Like us, they are recipients of God's grace, not God himself.

What about “prayers to the saints”? Again, this involves a confusion of terms based on how the English language developed. In colloquial American English, “pray” indicates an act of worshiping God. However, the word is derived from the Latin word *precare*, which means “to ask/implore/entreat.” By the 1300s, the English phrase “I pray thee” was used as a way to make a polite request—i.e., “I ask you.” “I pray thee” was later contracted to the single word “prithee,” which is rare in modern American English but common, for example, in Shakespeare.

In American English, the word *pray* eventually came to be restricted to acts of worshiping God. However, this was not its original meaning. Still, the original sense of the term is preserved in settings like law courts (where the phrase “My client prays that the court . . .” still means “My client asks that the court . . .”) and in Catholic circles (where it indicates *asking* the saints for their intercession).

If you read the *Catechism* and other official Catholic documents, you won't find the phrases “praying to the saints” or “prayer to the saints.” These are colloquialisms used by English speakers. What you will find instead is the phrase “intercession of the saints” (cf. CCC 956, 1434), which expresses more precisely what Catholics are asking when they “pray to the saints.” They are asking the saints for their intercession—i.e., they are asking them to ask God to grant their prayer requests.

In other words, they are asking the saints to be prayer partners with them. This does not amount to divine worship any more than when Protestants ask other people here on earth to pray alongside them.

15. Catholics commit idolatry by using statues of saints!

Idolatry involves worshiping a statue as a god. That isn't what Catholics do with statues of saints. Such statues do not represent gods. They represent human beings or angels who happen to be with God in heaven.

All practicing Catholics are aware that statues of saints are not gods, and neither are the saints they represent. If you point to a statue of the Virgin Mary and ask, "Is this a goddess?" or "Is the Virgin Mary a goddess?" you should receive the answer "no." And if this is the case for the Virgin Mary, the same will be true of every saint.

Idols are objects people worship as gods. As long as we aren't confusing a statue with a god, it is not an idol, and the commandment against idolatry is not violated.

This was true in the Bible too. At various points, God commanded the Israelites to make statues and images for religious use.

In the book of Numbers, the Israelites were being bitten by poisonous snakes, and God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole so that those bitten could gaze upon the bronze serpent and live (Num. 21:6–9). The act of looking at a statue has no natural power to heal, so this was a religious use. Only centuries later, when people began to regard the statue as a god, was it being used as an idol and so was destroyed (2 Kings 18:4).

God also commanded that his temple, which represented heaven, be filled with images of the inhabitants of heaven. Thus, he ordered that craftsmen work images of cherubim (a kind of angel) into the curtains of the Tent of Meeting (Exod. 26:1). Later, carvings of cherubim were made on the walls and doors of the temple (1 Kings 6:29–35).

Statues also were made at God's direction. The lid of the Ark of the Covenant included two statues of cherubim that spread their wings toward each other (Exod. 25:18–20), and the temple included giant, fifteen-foot-tall statues of cherubim in the holy of holies (1 Kings 6:23–28).

Since the ascension of Christ, the saints have joined the angels in heaven (Rev. 6:9, 7:14–17; CCC 1023), making images of them in church appropriate as well.

Furthermore, with the Incarnation, Jesus inaugurated an age in which God himself took on visible form. It has been natural since then for Christians to depict Jesus in religious art. This includes the Protestant community, where

two-dimensional images of Jesus (paintings and illustrations) are common. Adding a third dimension to make a statue does not change the situation. All today recognize that images of Christ and the saints are merely symbols of the individuals they represent (a precursor of modern photographs). They are not idols.

Some may ask, “What about when Catholics kneel in front of or even kiss a statue of a saint? Isn’t that idolatry?”

Scripture contains numerous, totally innocent examples of kneeling (Judg. 7:5–6), bowing (Gen. 23:7, 12), prostration (1 Sam. 25:24), and kissing (Gen. 27:6). These are physical acts that take their meaning from context. They are outward expressions of an attitude of the heart, but they can convey different things. Kissing your mother and kissing an idol of Ba’al are different. The outward act may be the same, but they convey different attitudes of heart—one indicating filial affection and the other divine worship.

Using these acts to worship the true God is legitimate. People devotionally knelt (1 Kings 8:54), bowed (2 Chron. 7:3), and prostrated themselves in God’s presence (Deut. 9:18), and devotionally kissed Jesus (Luke 7:38).

Using these same actions to show respect or affection for another human being is not wrong. People may kneel before a king or queen, bow to another person in greeting, or kiss them as a sign of affection.

Today, Catholics who use such voluntary devotional practices are in no danger of thinking that a statue or icon is a deity. It’s universally recognized that statues and icons are mere symbols of Jesus and the saints, and kneeling before or kissing them is a symbolic way of expressing affection, like kissing the photograph of an absent loved one.

16. Indulgences are permission to indulge in sin!

Indulgences are a much-misunderstood concept, and there are many myths connected with them. One is that the Church used to “sell” indulgences. This is not true. Instead, it was once possible to gain an indulgence for making a charitable donation, which is not the same thing.

Another myth is that indulgences involve a permission to commit sins. Some have even portrayed indulgences as being a pardon for sins that have not yet been committed.

This is not the Catholic understanding. Here is how the *Catechism* defines

indulgences:

An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints (1471).

To understand this, we need to clarify a couple of concepts. One of these is “temporal punishment.” This is an unfamiliar idea to many Christians, who are more familiar with the idea of eternal punishment.

However, when we read Scripture, we discover that sin has more than one type of effect. In the case of mortal sin, one of its effects *is* eternal punishment (that is, being lost or going to hell) unless a person repents. Thus, St. Paul writes: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

However, sin also can have consequences that don’t result in people going to hell. They are called “temporal punishments” because they only affect people for a time—unlike the eternal punishment of hell.

Thus, the book of Proverbs states: “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:11–12).

This is not just an “Old Testament” principle, because the author of Hebrews quotes this passage and applies it to the Christian age:

If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb. 12:8–11).

Thus, even when we've been forgiven of the eternal consequences of our sin, God may still have us face unpleasant—but temporary—consequences to help us grow in holiness.

This is similar to how a parent may tell a child, “I forgive you, but you're still grounded for a week, so you learn your lesson.” Now, suppose that the child takes this to heart and goes out of his way to demonstrate this. Without being asked, he cleans up his room, helps his sister with her homework, and takes out the trash. The parent may conclude that he doesn't need to be grounded for the full week.

Indulgences work on the same principle. By giving the Church the power of binding and loosing (Matt. 16:19, 18:18), Christ gave it the ability to pastorally intervene to help the faithful grow in holiness, and one of the ways this principle came to be applied was with indulgences.

As the definition of an indulgence shows, they are not permissions to sin. Neither are they pardons for sins that haven't even been committed. Instead, they are a reduction of the *temporal* consequences that follow from sins that have *already* been repented of and forgiven. They are granted when the faithful seek to grow in holiness by voluntarily doing things to please God.

An indulgence is the equivalent of a parent saying to a child, “It's okay. You've learned your lesson. You're not grounded anymore.”¹⁷

17. The Catholic Church hates and oppresses women!

This charge takes a variety of forms. Sometimes the Church's teachings regarding divorce, contraception, and abortion are cited as evidence for its supposed misogyny. Other times it will be argued that there is a double standard on sexual morality, with purity and virginity held up as ideals for women but not for men.

In its moral teaching, though, the Church holds everybody—male and female—to the same standards. And far from targeting women somehow, those teachings embody basic moral truths that have the effect of *protecting* everyone, including women.

So, what about the extreme claim that the Catholic Church “hates” women? People can make any claim they choose, but if they want you to believe it, they'd better give you evidence that backs it up. The more extreme the claim, the more evidence they'll need.

On its face, the charge is implausible. The majority of active Catholics are, in fact, women. This would not be the case if they felt themselves to be positively hated by their own Church.

Further, who is supposed to be hating them? Presumably, the idea that “the Church” hates women would mean, at a minimum, that the Church hierarchy does so—that is to say, the pope and the bishops.

Hatred involves intense and enduring anger. What evidence do we have that the pope and the bishops—as a group—experience intense and enduring anger toward women in general? None!

In fact, the Church holds that a woman, the Virgin Mary, is the greatest of all human beings. As the *Catechism* states, “The Father blessed Mary *more than any other created person* in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places and chose her in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love” (492). “Full of grace, Mary is the most excellent fruit of redemption” (508).

Consequently, “Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realization of the Church” (507). And all are to regard her as an example: “While in the most Blessed Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle, the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in holiness. And so, they turn their eyes to Mary: in her, the Church is already the ‘all-holy’” (829). This is not the language of “hating” women!

What about the charge that the Church “oppresses” women? We again must ask what evidence there is for this claim.

Many have pointed to the fact that the Catholic Church only ordains men to the priesthood; yet the vast majority of members—including Catholic men—are not ordained. Further, nobody—male or female—has a “right” to the sacrament of holy orders. “Like every grace this sacrament can be received only as an unmerited gift” (CCC 1578).

Christ defied other cultural norms (e.g., Matt. 6:1–18, 9:1–17, 15:1–20, 21:12–17), so he wouldn’t have had a problem with ordaining women to the priesthood if it were simply a matter of culture. Yet Christ chose only male disciples to be his ministers (Matt. 10:1–4), and the Church is bound by his choice.

However, this does not mean that the Church devalues women or the roles they play in society. By creating us “male and female,” “God gives man and

woman an equal personal dignity” (CCC 2334). “Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity, though in a different way” (CCC 2335).

And the Church advocates full participation of women in society:

There is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic state. This is a matter of justice but also of necessity. Women will increasingly play a part in the solution of the serious problems of the future (John Paul II, *Letter to Women* 4).

18. The Church opposes contraception because it wants to out-populate other groups and dominate the world!

Some imagine that the Church’s prohibition of contraception (and abortion) is part of a cynical plan to grow its membership and thus its power and influence in the world.

Is there any reason to think this is true? It’s easy to speculate about people you don’t like and attribute bad motives to them based on nothing but your own conjecture, but it’s another to provide evidence to back up your claims.

So, where are the leaked Vatican documents that reveal the demographic takeover plans? Where are the secret recordings of officials from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith discussing it? Where are the memos between cardinals? Where are the population projections and feasibility studies showing how soon the takeover can be accomplished?

If there were some Church-wide or even hierarchy-wide conspiracy, there should be evidence of it somewhere. But there isn’t. The truth is, none of these sort of things exist.

Also, it’s not like we don’t know the reasoning behind the Church’s teaching. In the 1960s, after the birth control pill had been developed, there was a question as to whether it would fall afoul of the Church’s traditional understanding of contraception. Pope John XXIII thus convened the Pontifical Commission on Birth Control to investigate the question, and it was subsequently expanded by Pope Paul VI.

The commissioners debated the question and submitted their reports to

Paul VI. Subsequently, these were leaked to the press, and nowhere in the leaked documents is there any indication that the commissioners who supported the Church's traditional teaching on contraception did so in order to aid a Catholic demographic takeover.

Let's also ask what kind of policy the Church would have announced *if* it had such a goal. In that case, the popes should have announced a policy that not only sought to maximize the number of births among Catholics but to *minimize* the number of births among non-Catholics. The Church would have announced something like, "It is a sin for Catholics to use contraception and abortion, but this is a specifically *religious* duty, so it doesn't apply to non-Catholics. They are perfectly free to use contraception and abortion."

But that's not what the Church teaches. Instead, it teaches that both contraception and abortion are matters of *natural law* and are binding on *all* people, regardless of their faith. Married couples of any sort should not use contraception, and no child at all can be killed by abortion!

In fact, when Paul VI reaffirmed the Church's traditional teaching on contraception and abortion in his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, he addressed the document not just to Catholics but also "to all men of good will"—indicating that its message was for the whole world and not just for Catholics.

If there were a demographic takeover plot, you might expect to see other Church teachings in support of it. It would be in the Church's interest, for instance to change its teaching on marriage to allow infertile couples to take new partners in hopes of bearing children; yet the Church continues to teach—as Jesus did—that marriage is for life (Mark 10:11–12). You might expect the Church to allow men to have multiple wives as some other religions do; yet the Church insists that marriage is between one man and one woman.

Further, if the Church did have such a motive, it would not permit parents to regulate childbirth by means of natural family planning. Yet it does. In fact, in *Humanae Vitae* itself, Paul VI stated, "With regard to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time" (10).

The question, therefore, is not whether there can be situations where it is reasonable to limit the number of children a couple has. The Church acknowledges that there can be. Instead, the question is about which *means* are moral to use when this is the case. And as it has always done, it promotes moral means and opposes immoral ones—irrespective of the impact on its membership numbers.

19. Why do anti-Catholic myths exist?

We have been using the term *myth* to refer to a popular, enduring idea that isn't true. People have a lot of ideas, not all of them are correct, and sometimes a false one will become popular and remain so for a long time, resulting in a myth. Understood that way, there are bound to be anti-Catholic myths, because there are myths on every subject.

Many myths begin because of a superficial plausibility an idea has. In other words, at first glance, it can appear true, and it requires deeper thought to reveal its falsehood.

In the ancient world, many people thought that the earth is flat—because standing on its surface, it looks that way! The earth is so big that its curvature is not obvious to the naked eye, and so the idea of the flat earth had superficial plausibility.

By the time of the Greek philosophers, however, enough careful observations had been made that it was discovered that the earth is actually round. (So, in Columbus's day, people did not still think that the earth was flat—that is *itself* a myth.)

This *superficial plausibility* is frequently needed for a false idea to be popular and enduring. If an idea were obviously false to everyone, it wouldn't become a myth!

But what's plausible to one person and what's plausible to another can vary. To a person who has never studied history, any number of claims may sound plausible—yet the same ideas will strike a historian as laughable.

This is one of the reasons why the historical myths covered in the first part of this booklet seem plausible to many non-Catholics: they simply aren't familiar with the relevant periods in history. For example, they aren't familiar with the history of the Catholic Church in the first few centuries, so the idea that Constantine founded the Catholic Church can seem plausible to them

(see answer 1).

Besides superficial plausibility, there's another factor that frequently needs to be present for a false idea to turn into a myth: how well it fits a narrative.

Narratives, in this sense, are familiar, stereotyped stories that people tell. You see them all the time in the news: “New study has alarming finding”; “Politician you love-to-hate commits new outrage”; “Letting people decide what to do with their own money is bad, while letting the government decide what to do with it is good”; and so on.

Narratives can contain elements of truth, but they also contain elements of distortion. The reason the media uses them is that they feel familiar to people and tend to confirm ideas people already have—a phenomenon known as *confirmation bias*.

Anti-Catholic myths are often variations on one of two narratives. Some follow the theme “The Catholic Church habitually *does* bad things”—as with many of the historical myths—or the more specific theme, “The Catholic Church habitually *teaches* bad things”—as with many of the doctrinal myths.

These twin “Catholic = bad” narratives reflect an underlying hostility toward the Church, and we should not be surprised by it. Jesus told us, “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you” (John 15:20).

People who harbor ill will toward the Church—or its hierarchy (including some Catholics, of both progressive and traditional inclination)—feel confirmed in their biases when they hear something bad about the Church, and they're more inclined to believe it—without stopping to cross-examine it and see if the evidence supports the claim.

This can lead people to fail to check their sources—allowing ideas to go unchallenged, and false claims to propagate as myths.

In some cases, the ill will can be strong enough that the root of a myth is actually a *hoax*. There have been people who have knowingly manufactured false quotations and attributed them to Catholic sources. Though discredited today, an anti-Catholic myth was popular for a long time that held Jesuits take an oath to “hang, burn, waste, boil, flay, strangle, and bury alive” Protestants. However, the quote was entirely fictional, and scholars do not take it seriously today.

This leads us to our last subject.

20. How should we deal with anti-Catholic myths?

One of the first things to do is be clear about who has the burden of proof: it is the person who wants another to change his view.

If someone wants you to believe something—like one of the myths we’ve covered—it is up to him to provide you with evidence for it. You are not obliged to believe what he says without evidence, and you are not obliged to go dig up evidence for your position. It’s *his* job to do research to justify the view *he* wants you to adopt.

As a result, you are perfectly entitled to say, “That’s an interesting claim. What evidence do you have for it? Why don’t you get back to me after you’ve done some research and let me know what you find?”

On the other hand, if you want to show him that what *he* believes is false, then *you* shoulder the burden of proof, because now you’re trying to convince *him*. In this case, you need to provide him with evidence, and that means doing research if you don’t already have evidence at hand.

Another key step in dealing with anti-Catholic myths is getting clarity on what is being asserted. Often, these myths take the form of vague, sweeping claims—like the Catholic Church is “against” science or “hates” women (see answers 9 and 17).

When confronted with such a claim, you should probe exactly what it means. A starting point is taking the claim at face value, using the absolute form in which it is stated. This will reveal the implausibility of the claim as stated and help show the critic that he is making an unjust and overbroadly claim.

When the claim is then refined into something more concrete (e.g., the Galileo affair was unfortunate or women can’t be ordained to the priesthood), it will be easier to deal with.

Another useful approach is to consider whether the question can be turned around. Maybe the Crusades were defensive rather than offensive wars (answer 5), maybe Catholic missionaries were trying to protect native populations (answer 7), and maybe the Protestant community has been “subtracting” from the Bible (answer 10). This “perspective flip” also can be useful in helping a critic gain a new perspective on the issue.

When it comes to research, there are many books available refuting common charges. I would recommend my own *A Daily Defense: 365 Days*

(Plus One) to Becoming a Better Apologist.

The internet is also an invaluable resource. We have many resources available for you at Catholic.com, and a few online searches will turn up many more.

Be careful when evaluating a source. Consider how evenhanded, professional, and scholarly it is. Does it cite primary sources that you can check out and read in context? Or does it come across as slipshod and unreliable?

You should be honest about the evidence, not ignoring the fact that Catholics can make mistakes and commit sins. This is to be expected since “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15).

People of every perspective are sinners, and if the critic can admit that the problematic actions of his group don’t automatically disprove his own beliefs, he should be able to acknowledge that the sins of Catholics do not disprove Catholicism.

The key principle that should inform our discussions is *love*. We should be loving people. Certainly, this should be true of Christians, for Jesus taught the ethic of love: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). And the same applies to non-Christians. Everyone should be loving.

It can be helpful to remind a critic of this fact and consider how it should inform our discussions. As we’ve noted, very often anti-Catholic myths are fueled by ill will toward the Church. This can lead people to make rash judgments. These occur when a person “even tacitly, assumes as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral fault of a neighbor” (CCC 2477).

The *Catechism* continues:

To avoid rash judgment, everyone should be careful to interpret insofar as possible his neighbor’s thoughts, words, and deeds in a favorable way: Every good Christian ought to be more ready to give a favorable interpretation to another’s statement than to condemn it. But if he cannot do so, let him ask how the other understands it. And if the latter understands it badly, let the former correct him with love (2478).

Critics should be invited to consider the extent to which they have been rash in their judgments concerning the Church. Have they assumed something to be true because they want it to be true? Have they really investigated the

evidence for themselves and considered it from a Catholic perspective? Or are they just repeating something, without checking it out, because it fits with a negative narrative about the Church that they like?

In pointing this out—or in any interaction with a critic of the Church—we need to remember that the ethic of love applies to us as well. One of the consequences is that we should treat other people the way we want to be treated. As Jesus taught in the Golden Rule, “Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them” (Matt. 7:12).

Therefore, if you don’t want someone to mock your position, don’t mock theirs. Even if they mock anyway, be prepared to “turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39), for “a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

As St. Paul says, we must interact with others “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), and as St. Peter says, “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet. 3:15).

1 Some early sources claim that Philip the Arab (reigned A.D. 244–249) was a Christian emperor. See Eusebius, *Church History* 6:34.

2 See Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 1:27–31.

3 Letter to the Smyrneans 8:2.

4 See Jack Finnegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), §§ 552–569. See also “Was Jesus Born December 25th?” online at JimmyAkin.com.

5 Quran 9:29, Shakir translation.

6 For further discussion of the Crusades, see books like *The Crusades Controversy: Setting the Record Straight* by Thomas Madden and *God’s Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* by Protestant author Rodney Stark.

7 cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II–II:11:3.

8 Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present (Critical Issues in World and International History)* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), p. 175).

9 Address, July 9, 2015.

10 S.v. “Pius XII.”

11 “The Vatican and the Holocaust: A Question of Judgment—Pius XII & the Jews,” online at JewishVirtualLibrary.org.

12 For more see Jimmy Akin, “How Pius XII Protected Jews,” online at Catholic.com.

13 For a fuller treatment, see the book *Galileo Revisited* by Pascal Scotti.

14 J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines, Fifth, Revised* (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 1977), 53.

15 For more on early Christian recognition of the deuterocanonicals, see my book *The Fathers Know Best* (ch. 22), and for a history of the Bible and how it came together, see my book *The Bible Is a Catholic Book*.

16 General Audience, Nov. 19, 2008.

17 There is more to say about indulgences and the biblical principles underlying them. For a discussion, see my book *The Drama of Salvation*.

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Jimmy Akin is an internationally known author and speaker. He is the senior apologist at Catholic Answers. Jimmy has a degree in philosophy from the University of Arkansas and has worked professionally as an apologist for more than twenty-five years. His areas of expertise include apologetics, biblical studies, patristics, canon law, liturgical law, and philosophy. He is the author of numerous books, booklets, and articles. Jimmy's apologetic articles may be found online at catholic.com and his personal website, jimmyakin.com. He is a regular guest on *Catholic Answers Live* and also appears on other radio programs and podcasts.