

You surely have been through it. There is a knock at the door. Outside is a man or woman with a big smile, an open Bible, and a bunch of questions designed to attack the Catholic faith. Or you are accosted on the street by someone who asks, "Have you been saved?" Or, outside church after Mass, you find people passing out leaflets opposing Catholic beliefs and arguing with any who object.

If you get into a discussion, it appears to go nowhere. You end up frustrated, and no one seems at all convinced by what you've said. The others walk away, apparently thinking even less of the Catholic faith than before. You didn't handle the situation well, and you sense it.

The moral is that knowing how to argue is just as important as knowing what to argue. If you have no appreciation of technique, all the knowledge in the world won't help you since you won't be able to pass it along. You can be a walking theological treatise, but if you antagonize opponents or talk past them, you've wasted your time and theirs. Similarly, it isn't enough to be a good conversationalist. That won't make up for doctrinal or historical ignorance. To be an effective apologist, you must marry delivery and content.

SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER

Know the Bible. No matter how fine your religious training, no matter how well you think you know doctrines or Church history, you need to be familiar with Scripture if you intend to make an impression on Fundamentalists. (Of course, you should be conversant with the Bible anyway, not just as preparation for dealing with non-Catholics.)

Concentrate on the New Testament, though not to the exclusion of the Old. There's no need to memorize multiple passages of the Bible, the way Fundamentalists do, but you need to acquire a basic knowledge of the whole of Scripture. You should be especially familiar, though, with the Gospels—if you aren't at ease with the details of Christ's life, you're in trouble. Frank Sheed, the street-corner apologist,

put it this way: "A Catholic apologist who is not soaked in the Gospels is an anomaly in himself, and his work is doomed to aridity."

The New Testament is short enough to be read during the evenings of a single week. Spend several weeks with it before doing anything else—and then read it regularly. You should not read the Bible to the exclusion of all other books (many Fundamentalists do this and thus lack perspective), but it has to be the ground on which your other reading rests.

You also will accomplish little unless you have a vibrant prayer life. A good way to pray is to meditate on biblical verses. Read slowly, sit back, think.

Prayer is essential in winning converts. In your heart, pray before a conversation, during the discussion, and after it. It is helpful to write down the person's name you spoke with, so that you will not forget to pray for them. It is a human tendency to measure the success of the discussion based upon how much you think the other changed his mind. But, in reality, "the greatest things on earth are done interiorly in the hearts of faithful souls" (St. Louis DeMontfort).

TECHNIQUE

In discussions, never be afraid to acknowledge ignorance. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. You'll survive, and so will your ego. The answers you give on other points will be taken more seriously if people you speak with see you're not trying to bluster your way through a discussion.

But, don't leave the questions unanswered. Tell the person that his question was a good one, and that you'll bring him the answer in one week. Then, go do your homework and follow up with him as promised. This method will be much more effective than shrugging your shoulders and giving a contrived response that does not even convince you.

You must be absolutely honest. Never pretend doctrines or facts are other than they really are. Don't avoid hard cases, and don't water-down doctrine just to please your listeners. There's no need to try to make hard truths palatable. Just state them as

they are—but first *know* what they are. If you can give only a one-sentence explanation of the Real Presence, you don't know enough to be discussing it. Admit this (to yourself, at least), then do your homework. An embarrassment today can result in fuller understanding—and better apologetics—tomorrow. When talk turns to awkward points of Church history, don't misrepresent them. Don't hide blemishes. Don't falsify. There's no need to. Put things in context, and recall that Scripture teaches that, while the Church itself can never be overcome by evil (Matt. 16:18), its individual members include sinners as well as saints (Acts 20:29).

WATCH YOUR TONGUE

Sarcasm always backfires. Avoid it, even when your opponents stoop to it. When they do, their consciences will annoy them later; don't allow them to justify their rudeness by exchanging wisecrack for wisecrack.

Remember that God opposes the proud, even if they are right. "[T]he Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth" (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

Familiarize yourself with anti-Catholic literature. See what topics are emphasized: the Bible as the sole rule of faith, justification by faith alone, the Mass, prayers to Mary and the saints, and many more. See how the arguments, weak as they may be, are handled. You'll at once perceive that anti-Catholic materials are skewed, but if you can't think of complete and ready rejoinders, make notes and study up.

When arguing, keep your expectations modest. Don't expect conversions; they aren't overnight occurrences. Count yourself successful if your opponents leave with the feeling that there is a sensible Catholic response (even if not acceptable to them) to each of their charges. It would be a great spiritual triumph just to have an active anti-Catholic withdraw from the fray and mull things over.

Avoid technical words. Even Catholics can mis-

understand what is meant by "transubstantiation," "Immaculate Conception," "Mediatrix," and "merit." On the other hand, don't be monosyllabic. To oversimplify is to sidestep fine points; that's equally bad. Try to phrase doctrines in language your audience is likely to understand and be sympathetic to, but don't change what a doctrine means in order to win a sympathetic hearing.

Try to show a doctrine in relation to other doctrines. It's important to see the Church as a totality.

Avoid verse-slinging. It accomplishes little. You need to get some perspective—and you need to give your opponents some. Enter the discussion with a plan; know what the main points should be, then stick with them.

The most fundamental topic to discuss is that of authority: Whose do you trust, and why should I accept yours? Since there are tens of thousands of denominations all using only the Bible and claiming personal guidance by the Holy Spirit, what sets your church or pastor apart from the rest?

Fundamentalists concentrate on a few scriptural passages they hope are damaging to Catholicism. Take the initiative. Address their points, but don't allow them to ask all the questions. Ask your own. Point out the weaknesses of Fundamentalism.

AIM TO EXPLAIN

Don't argue to win. You can "win," yet drive people further from the Church. Argue to explain. Show Fundamentalists the Catholic position from the inside. This means reorienting them, giving them a new perspective. Remember, they think they take their beliefs straight from the Bible; in fact, the Bible is used to substantiate already-held beliefs. They begin with their own "tradition," which is generally their pastor's interpretation of the Bible. (For many Fundamentalists, their pastor is their pope. When confronted with hard questions, they don't turn to the Bible to discover the answers; they say instead, "Let us ask the pastor.")

No matter how well they have memorized it, Fundamentalists know little other than the Bible, which

they know only selectively. They know little Church history, little formal theology. They may never have seen a catechism (or even know what one is). You must provide the larger picture. If the topic is the interpretation of a scriptural passage, go to a good commentary and study up, but also go to the Fathers of the Church and learn what they wrote about the subject.

Tell your opponents you do this because it is unlikely that people who were writing when the Church was young and memories of Christ were vivid would erroneously report what beliefs the Church started with. If early Christian writers took it for granted that a sacrificial priesthood was set up by Christ (which they did), that fact is a powerful argument in support of the priesthood. If writers living a few years after Christ mentioned the Real Presence (which they did), that argues in favor of the Catholic interpretation of John 6. And so on.

DON'T CONFUSE TERMS

Know what Fundamentalists mean by particular terms. You can waste much time by discussing two different things while using the same terminology. Take *faith*. To Catholics, faith is the acceptance of revealed truths (doctrines) on God's word alone. This is called theological or confessional faith. But for Fundamentalists, faith is trust in Christ's promises. This is fiducial faith.

Tradition is another confusing term, as are *inspiration* and *infallibility*. See what Fundamentalist writers mean by the terms; compare them with Catholic definitions. If you don't define terms clearly, Fundamentalists will misunderstand your argument. And don't presume a question means what it seems to mean. Find out what your opponents are trying to say. Take time. If the question refers to the Virgin Birth, make sure they don't mean the birth of the Virgin.

Fundamentalists may say, "Let's start by admitting that the Bible is the sole rule of faith." Translation: "Let's admit the Church has no authoritative role; all answers to religious questions are to be

found on the face of Scripture only." Don't agree to it. It just begs the question, and it's untrue. As a counter, ask your opponents to try to prove that the Bible was intended to be the sole rule of faith. The Bible makes no such claim—in fact, it denies it (1 Cor. 11:2, 2 Thess. 2:15, 2 Tim. 2:2, 2 Pet. 1:20, 3:15-16)—but you have to know which verses to cite to prove it.

Discuss the history of the Bible. You need to make plain it was the Church that formed the Bible, not the Bible that formed the Church. Note, too, that the New Testament wasn't designed as a catechism. It was written to people who were already Christians, so it couldn't have been intended as the sole source of religious teaching. In the early years, teaching was oral and was under the authority of the Church, which also decided which books belonged in the Bible and which did not.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

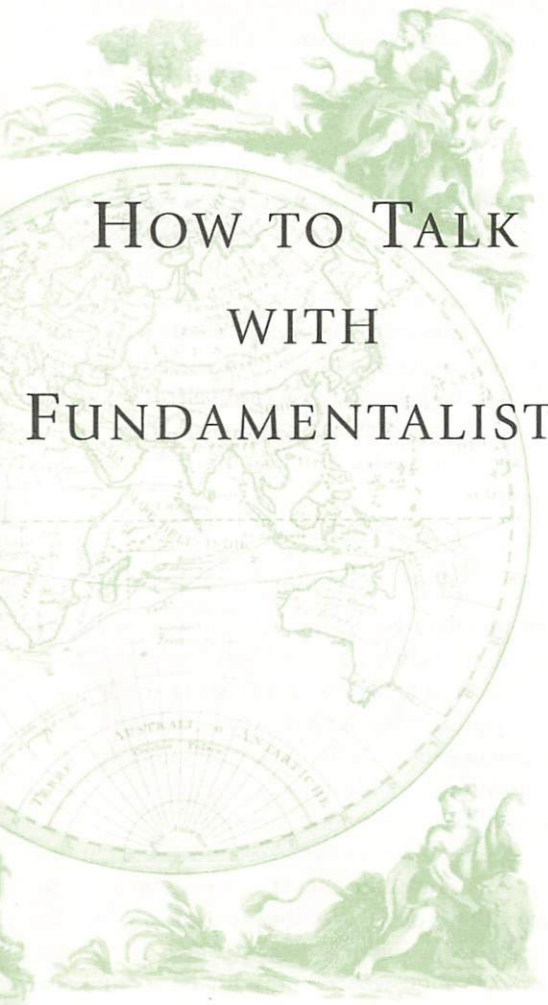
Bishop Fulton Sheen once wrote that few Americans hate the Catholic Church, but millions hate what they mistakenly think is the Catholic Church. You need to show Fundamentalists what the Church really believes.

Take up a single topic at a time; look at it leisurely, from several angles; and, don't let the discussion wander to other topics or it will bog down and accomplish nothing. Never presume Fundamentalists know what you mean even by what you think are simple terms like *soul*, *revelation*, or *Mass*. If they did, they wouldn't have such odd ideas of what the Church stands for. You have to speak with them the way you would speak with uninstructed Catholics.

Remember, their knowledge of the Church is based almost entirely on what they have heard from the pulpit or in anti-Catholic tracts. They are working in good faith, but they have been misinformed. Perhaps they should have done more homework, but the fault isn't theirs completely. They trust the sources they've had, but now they should be shown there is more to consider.

Remember, too, that the faith to believe is a gift. Not a few converts to Catholicism have expressed that what drew them to the Church was not primarily the strength of argument, scriptural proof, or one's ability to articulate the faith, as important as those factors are. What drew them were Catholics whose lives gave irresistible witness to the faith they professed. "[R]everence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15).

Non-Catholic Churches & Movements



HOW TO TALK WITH FUNDAMENTALISTS

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