



Arguments Against Catholicism are not Logical

Introduction

Since the day Martin Luther started his own church five hundred years ago, the Catholic Church (the Church) has had to continually defend itself from claims of heresy. Some claims go so far as to say Catholicism is a false religion.

For centuries, Catholic apologists and theologians have responded to the Church's antagonists, but to no avail. Attempts to knock down anti-Catholic arguments are like trying to knock down a brick wall by throwing eggs.

I wondered why centuries of rebuttals have done no good in ending the arguments against Catholicism. But now, I think I understand. Having been on the speech and debate team in high school and taken a logic course in college, I realized it's hard to defend against the arguments because they don't follow sound logic and reasoning.

Logical fallacies

In the study of logic, a *fallacy* is defined as an error in an argument's form or a failure in reasoning where the conclusion isn't supported by the argument. Fallacies are tricks or illusions of thought. Sometimes, the person applying the fallacy isn't aware of their error in thinking. Other times, the person may be purposely using false logic to trick others, like a magician. But don't be fooled!

For example, "Vote for me or the country will fall apart." This is an example of a *False Dilemma Fallacy*. False dilemmas oversimplify issues, presenting only two options when other viable options are available. One option is the claimant's desired choice, and the other option is highly negative or undesirable. This tactic attempts to trick audiences into choosing the option the claimant wants them to choose.

The purpose of this article isn't to teach logic, but to review common arguments against Catholicism and explain how their logic is flawed. The arguments are fallacies and should be rejected rather than debated.

Personal Incredulity Fallacy

The *Personal Incredulity Fallacy* occurs when someone finds a concept difficult to understand or simply cannot fathom how it works, so they conclude the concept must be untrue.

"Unless I see the nail marks in His hands, and put my finger where the nails have been, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe."

The Apostle Thomas gives us a classic example of personal incredulity. Thomas found it too difficult to comprehend that Jesus rose from the dead. He couldn't believe by faith or the testimony of trustworthy eye-witnesses. He shut down all arguments and refused to even consider what they were saying might be true. He was wrong. But this isn't about Thomas, this is about personal incredulity concerning Catholicism.

It's understandable, some Catholic doctrine can be incredible to believe. Purgatory, transubstantiation, the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption of Mary, and other Catholic beliefs are easy targets because there is no physical evidence to support them. Purgatory can't be seen or experienced in this life. The Eucharist appears no different after the Consecration than it did before. These concepts are pure matters of faith.

A doubting Thomas will never believe without physical proof, because the concepts are too incredible for them to believe. Lacking faith, they respond to any explanation with further resistance and more fallacies as they grasp at straws to prove their claims. Personal incredulity is just the opening to the rabbit hole of fallacies.



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Burden of Proof Fallacy

The *Burden of Proof Fallacy* occurs when someone making a claim doesn't prove their claim to be true. Instead, they put the burden of proof on the other party to disprove their claim.

I've watched enough court mysteries in my time, like *Perry Mason* and *Matlock*, to understand that when someone is accused of a crime they are not required to prove their innocence. The accuser has the burden to prove guilt. The defendant just needs to cast reasonable doubt on the accusation to be set free. The other thing I learned is evidence is not the same as proof. Evidence can be circumstantial and irrelevant. Proof leaves no room for doubt, and brings certainty to the conclusion of the evidence.

This is not how antagonists of the Church work. They make their claim, throw out circumstantial and irrelevant evidence which leaves much room for doubt, and lay the burden on the Church to prove its innocence. When the Church offers evidence in its defense, the antagonists immediately reject the defense and find the Church guilty.

The following are well-documented arguments against Catholicism, with explanations of why the arguments are unsound and illogical. Based on the circumstantial and irrelevant arguments given against Catholicism, any judge would throw the whole case out of court.

Attack the Person Fallacy

The *Attack the Person Fallacy* occurs when someone digresses from the actual subject and instead attacks the other person's character, reputation, or trustworthiness. By insulting and discrediting the person, the scheme is to bring doubt and suspicion on what the person believes.

Since the Church traces much of its doctrine back to Jesus and the apostles, there could be no better way of discrediting Church doctrine than to discredit the lineage of the Church. Arguments claim the Church became syncretized with pagan culture, taking on symbols, rituals and doctrine of Rome, destroying the pure faith of Jesus and corrupting the Church. Let's see if the evidence holds up.

- The best way to begin any questionable argument is with an undeniable fact, because it lends credibility to the argument. So, they begin...Emperor Constantine ended Christian persecution in 313 and converted to Christianity in 323.
- Then, throw in some *Anecdotal Evidence*, observations which are not relevant to the argument but can be used to cloud the issue. They continue...Catholic terms such as pope, transubstantiation, Purgatory, and so on aren't written in the Bible. The observation is correct, but immaterial. It is thrown in only so they can make a loose connection between Catholic doctrine and Constantine. No conclusion can be drawn from the observation. It's like saying, "I have an eye-witness that saw the defendant at the scene of crime." This alone is not conclusive proof of guilt.
- They use a *False Analogy Fallacy* to compare Catholic doctrine to paganism. They point out similarities in some Catholic rituals to a popular religion in Persia at the time called *Mithraism*, compare doctrine concerning Mary with the Isis-mother-goddess of Egypt, and equate patron saints to the Roman tradition of cities having a patron gods. The evidence is purely circumstantial. If Church antagonists could find written documents from Pope Sylvester communicating new rituals and beliefs to Catholics in Africa, the Middle East, and around the Roman Empire, they

would have a case. But no evidence exists to suggest Catholic doctrine changed during this time period. Observing that two things are similar is not proof they are related.

- They throw in a *Red Herring Fallacy* to mislead and misdirect. They quote 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, where Paul warns against being deceived by a “Great Apostasy” and then claim Paul was foretelling the downfall of the Catholic Church. There is no evidence tying the two events together. The “Great Apostasy” could be associated to any event in history, even Martin Luther.
- They use the *Cherry-Picking Fallacy* to leave out relevant facts which might weaken their case. For example, they fail to mention there are Church writings two hundred years before Constantine which support early church belief in the concepts of Purgatory and transubstantiation; even if the specific words were not used.
- Finally, they jump to a false conclusion: The Church is heretical, influenced by paganism, and not tied to Jesus and the apostles.

The evidence is all circumstantial, immaterial and irrelevant. The arguments are all hearsay and opinions. There are no historical documents or other evidence to support their claims. The entire argument should be thrown out of court.

One thing in particular concerns me about the above theory. It must mean they believe Jesus formed a church, let it go completely astray in less than three hundred years, then abandoned the church for twelve centuries until sending Martin Luther to fix it. If Jesus specifically did that and they believe there is no Purgatory, do they believe all Christians were condemned to eternal death for twelve centuries because they followed a false religion?

The next two examples are also personal attacks, but each applies a unique fallacy.

Appeal to Emotion Fallacy

The *Appeal to Emotion Fallacy* occurs when someone hopes to gain support for their claim through strong emotional responses, rather than valid arguments.

“The Church is prejudiced against women because it doesn’t allow women priests.”

Even many Catholics don’t understand the Church’s rationale behind not permitting women priests. Some Catholics refer to the shortage of priests and believe the ordination of women priests would solve the matter. All emotion aside, the Church can explain its official position on women priests.

“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’” (Mark 10:6). Jesus quoted this verse to confirm the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman. Jesus spoke of himself as the bridegroom (man) and the church as his bride (woman). In the Catholic Church, the priest is not just a pastor as in Protestant churches. The priest represents Jesus and stands in his place in the giving of sacraments. The Church represents the bride in the receiving of sacraments. If women took the place of Jesus as the bridegroom and gave sacraments to the bride, it would violate the sanctity of a man-woman marriage.

The Church also believes Jesus initiated the priesthood when he chose his apostles, twelve men. Ordaining only men as priests is seen as a constant, uninterrupted tradition started by Jesus, followed by the apostles, and supported by the Church Fathers.



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There is no intent of prejudice against women and no inference of inferiority of women. Women are permitted to serve the Church in all capacities not related to being a bridegroom. Women can become nuns, men cannot.

The argument is an obvious appeal to emotion. No righteous person would deny women equality and dignity. However, the reasons and essence of the Church's position are never addressed. No evidence is given to suggest the Church's reasoning is incorrect. Rather, the emotions are stirred up and the Church attacked.

Composition Fallacy

The *Composition Fallacy* occurs when someone assumes if one part of something is bad, the whole thing is bad.

"There has been child abuse in the Church and coverups, therefore the Church is evil."

The facts are undeniable. There have been cases of child abuse and coverup within the Church. However, it is a composition fallacy to accuse the Church, as a whole, of approving abuse because of those terrible incidents.

The Church painstakingly screens people and checks for history of abuse. The Church also requires youth ministers to take instruction on avoiding and recognizing abuse. The Church tries to prevent child abuse, but the problem is systemic within mankind's sinful nature. The Catholic Church is not the only guilty party.

According to the *National Children's Alliance*, the majority of offenders are a parent or relative of the victim. Many religious organizations and youth organizations have had a long and documented history of child abuse and coverup. If one wanted to shut down the Catholic Church because of child abuse, they should also shut down most churches and organizations, including the family.

Now, let's turn to attempts to specifically argue against Church doctrine.

Invincible Ignorance Fallacy

The *Invincible Ignorance Fallacy* occurs when someone refuses to accept or consider evidence and reason which doesn't support their existing beliefs. They object to other sources of reference as "excuses" or "anecdotal", without any proof that the sources aren't relevant or reliable. The purpose of this tactic is to limit the other party's ability to argue and to force the other party into the smaller arena of the arguer.

It would be easy to prove the apostles believed the Eucharist was the true body and blood of Jesus. The apostles taught their faith and practices to their disciples and the next generation of Christians. St. Ignatius of Antioch was a direct disciple of the Apostle John and successor to the Apostle Peter as Bishop of Antioch. Peter personally chose Ignatius to be bishop, so one would believe John and Peter had confidence in Ignatius carrying on the faith.

In Ignatius's *Epistle to the Romans*, written in 107, we read "I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham; and I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life." These words were written two hundred years before Constantine.

Logically, a written reference to the body and blood of Jesus in the year 107 by a disciple of the apostles should be enough to prove what the early church believed. But, the Church still isn't out of the woods. The antagonists throw out early church writings as being anecdotal or fake, without proof of such. This invincible ignorance closes the door to facts, and weakens the Church's defense. The reason for throwing out the evidence is also a fallacy.



Appeal to Authority Fallacy

The *Appeal to Authority Fallacy* occurs when someone cites an accepted authority as sole justification for their claim. The fallacy also occurs when the authority is misused or cited out of context.

"If it is not written in the Bible, I will not believe it."

This ideology is the justification for throwing out written documents and traditions that support the Catholic faith. Catholics and Protestants both believe, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching" (2 Timothy 3:16). Scripture is the ultimate authority in matters of faith, and no matters of faith should conflict with what is written in Scripture. There are, however, multiple issues with the ideology.

First, there is no verse in Scripture that specifically reads, "If it isn't written in this book, don't believe it." The phrase "inspired and useful for teaching" doesn't suggest or imply that things not written in Scripture are false.

Then, there is the problem that those who support this ideology don't even follow it. Here are some examples:

- The words "trinity" and "rapture" don't exist in Scripture, yet they teach these concepts.
- The title of "Reverend" doesn't exist in Scripture, yet they use this title to address their pastors.
- They don't cut off their hands when they sin (see Matthew 5:29-30).
- They don't follow Paul's command to follow traditions (see 2 Thessalonians 2:15).
- They don't acknowledge that many things are not written in Scripture (see John 21:25).

Finally, Catholic doctrine and traditions cannot be proven to conflict with Scripture. The fact some terms and concepts aren't literally written in Scripture is not evidence that those terms and concepts conflict with Scripture. Catholic antagonists give themselves the latitude to interpret Scripture as they see fit. However, even if it was only by interpretation Catholics believe Jesus when he said "this is my body", the antagonists disallow it. The rules of applying Scripture are not equal, and therefore an appeal to authority fallacy.

The best way to end this topic is to offer some fun trivia for consideration...

St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his *Epistle to the Philadelphians* in the year 107, "When I heard some saying, If I do not find it in the ancient Scriptures, I will not believe the Gospel; on my saying to them, It is written, they answered me, That remains to be proved." I think it is interesting that the very argument used to deny the Catholic faith is the exact argument used by some Jews in the first century to deny the Christian faith.

Quoting out of Context Fallacy

The *Quoting Out of Context Fallacy* occurs when someone uses a quote to make a claim without considering the context of the quote.

"Catholic tradition is against the Bible, because Jesus said, 'Why do you transgress the command of God because of your tradition?'"

In Mark 7:1-13, Jesus confronts the Pharisees concerning their traditions. In this passage, Jesus is clearly referring to Pharisee traditions that violate God's commandments, citing the commandment to honor father and mother. Jesus doesn't condemn all tradition, just those traditions that violate God's law. The verse is used completely out of context when applied to Catholic tradition, which has not been proven to violate any commandments.



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Furthermore, citing an isolated verse of Scripture without considering other verses is also quoting Scripture out of context. Cherry-picking is used to find a verse of Scripture that supports an argument, while ignoring verses of Scripture opposed to that argument. When it comes to discussions about Catholic tradition, antagonists never quote 2 Thessalonians 2:15, where the Apostle Paul instructs us to hold fast to both written and spoken tradition.

Faulty Generalization Fallacy

The *Faulty Generalization Fallacy* occurs when someone makes a claim based on general examples, without proof the general examples apply to the specific example.

Even those who support literal interpretation of the Bible believe Jesus was speaking figuratively when he said to cut off our hands when we sin (Matthew 5:29-30). But then, they apply the concept of figurative speech anywhere in the Bible they like: specifically referring to the body and blood of Christ (Matthew 26:26-28).

Although it's true Jesus spoke figuratively at times, applying this concept wherever one wants in Scripture is faulty generalization. There is no proof Jesus was speaking figuratively at the Last Supper. Stating the intent of Jesus was to speak figuratively is nothing more than an opinion and cannot be accepted as factual evidence.

Let's look at the other side of the generalization coin. Why don't they believe Jesus was speaking figuratively when he said he would be coming back in the clouds? It seems like they apply the figure of speech concept only to the verses in Scripture they don't want to believe in the first place...taking us back to personal incredulity.

Genetic Fallacy

The *Genetic Fallacy* occurs when someone passes judgement on something as good or bad based on its origin, without knowing or applying facts.

"Jesus would never have chosen Peter to lead the church, because Peter was a frail sinner who denied Jesus."

It's obvious that Peter was the least stable apostle. Peter even said to Jesus at their first meeting, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). Peter's origins were steeped in frailty, misunderstanding, sin, and lack of faith. However, Peter's humanity and sinful nature isn't proof that he would be overlooked to lead the church. Jesus often chose the meek and lowly to humble the proud.

The argument against Peter ends with his denial of Jesus at the cross. Other facts, written in the book of Acts, are completely left out of the argument. Peter's genetics completely changed after he received the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts clearly documents the change in Peter and his leadership role within the church.

The argument against Peter is just a clever ruse to dismiss the concept of a pope. By calling Peter's leadership into doubt, the concept of a pope could be more easily rejected. Peter was never referred to as pope in the Bible, but his important role in the formation of the early church is clear.

Strawman Fallacy

The *Strawman Fallacy* occurs when someone misrepresents an argument to make it easier to attack. The actual subject of the argument is never really addressed.

"Women should have the right to do with their body as they please. The Church is wrong for denying women the right to contraception and abortion."



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This is a strawman fallacy because the actual subject is totally missed in the argument. The Church has a mission to uphold God's law and communicate God's law to mankind. If the Church believes contraception and abortion are against God's law, then the Church is compelled to say so. The Church is not in a position to change its teachings and doctrine concerning social issues based on social trends.

If one wanted to argue that God approves of contraception and abortion, that is one matter. But attacking the Church for performing its duty to God and upholding what it believes to be God's law is unwarranted.

Blind Arguments

There isn't a fallacy called "Blind Arguments". I use the term only to call out a few final arguments which, if the antagonists would open their eyes to the facts, wouldn't be arguments at all.

"Catholicism is not a Bible based religion" is false. The Mass contains over a hundred references to Scripture, the sacraments are all scripturally based, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is abounding in references to Scripture.

"Catholics worship Mary" is false. It might be true that some Catholics go overboard. However, the official teaching of the Church is documented in the Catholic Catechism, paragraphs 964-975. Devotion to Mary is essentially different than the adoration given to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Her role as intercessor and guide in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ.

"Catholics believe salvation is by works" is false. "Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation" (Catechism 161). "No one can merit the initial grace which is at the origin of conversion" (Catechism 2027).

"Catholics deny Romans 3:28, which says salvation is by faith alone" is false. The word "alone" never existed in the original text of the Bible. The word "alone" was added by Martin Luther in defiance of the Catholic Church. For proof, read *An Open Letter on Translating* by Dr. Martin Luther. Also, read about Martin Luther on *Wikipedia*. Luther appeared to suffer from psychological distresses such as scrupulosity, anxiety, hypochondria and guilt. These personal issues became the motivation for his teachings and break from the Church.

Conclusion

There is no hard, valid evidence to support any claims against the Catholic Church. On the other hand, there is no lack of opinion, unbelief and hatred against the Church.

I don't throw eggs at brick walls and I don't defend the Church. A doubting Thomas will never believe without physical proof and a change of heart. No logical argument will be able to change the mind of one with personal incredulity and a cannon full of fallacies. My response to any doubting Thomas is to pray for them.

Should an inquisitive unbeliever ask me about the Church, I am always ready and fully equipped to explain the Catholic faith. But only to the open-minded.

St. Thomas Aquinas said it best, "To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible."