



Introduction

I've noticed that most internet searches on Catholic faith return some results opposing the Church and Church doctrine. For years, Catholic apologists and theologians have been responding to the issues, yet arguments against the Church continue. It's as though throwing out facts and reasoning to support the Church is as effective as throwing eggs at a brick wall.

I wondered if a different approach might be needed, so I looked more closely at the arguments against the Catholic Church. Having been on the speech and debate team in high school and taken logic in college, I realized that most of the arguments do not even follow sound logical reasoning. Let me explain.

In logic, a fallacy is defined as an error in an argument's form or whose conclusion is not supported by the premise of the argument. For example, "Vote for me or the country will fall apart". This "false dilemma" fallacy presents only two options when there are many more options, and invokes fear to persuade people into a specific action. Thus, the statement is not logical and should be ignored.

This article is not a course on logic, so let's move on. Below are some common fallacies of logic, an example of how the fallacy works and how the fallacy is used to oppose the Catholic Church.

Personal Incredulity

The Personal Incredulity Fallacy occurs when one finds a concept difficult to understand, or simply does not 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 the personal incredulity fallacy. Thomas found it too hard to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Although he had trustworthy Apostles as eye-witnesses to the Resurrection, he simply shut down all arguments and refused to even consider what they were saying. He was wrong.

Some Catholic doctrine can be incredible to believe...Purgatory, transubstantiation and Mary's Immaculate Conception are common examples. So, the argument persists "Unless I see proof I will never believe." When a person's mind is predisposed to unbelief about something (like Thomas), it can be difficult or impossible to change their belief. In order to support their position of unbelief, they might "grasp at straws" and use many other forms of logical fallacy to prove their position.

Burden of Proof

The Burden of Proof Fallacy occurs when someone making a claim does not prove their claim to be true, but instead puts the burden of proof on another party to disprove the claim.

"Jesus was speaking figuratively when He said 'this is my Body, because you cannot prove He was speaking literally.'"

It's true, we cannot prove Jesus was speaking literally. But nor can anyone prove He was speaking figuratively. All kinds of rationale can be used to justify a figurative interpretation. Both sides can try to find supporting scripture



elsewhere but the bottom line is, taken only in the context of the Last Supper, one either has faith Jesus was being literal or one does not have faith. This argument is a mere opinion and should not even be discussed until proof of figurative interpretation is given.

The true problem with this argument, and any Burden of Proof Fallacy, is where does one draw the line? If one believes Luke 22:19 was a figure of speech (without proof), then how should other verses in Scripture be interpreted? The same false logic can be applied to anything Jesus said, simply to turn His words into the interpretation one already believes. Applying this logic, one could easily deny the second coming of Our Lord on the clouds as being figurative; but those who believe in a figurative interpretation at the Last Supper believe in a literal second coming "on the clouds". Why?

Faulty Generalization

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

"Jesus often spoke in parables. When He said 'this is my Body' it was a metaphor and not to be taken literally."

This fallacy is also used to support the figurative interpretation of Jesus' words at the Last Supper. It shows how sometimes one fallacy leads right into another to try to persuade the other party to change their position. The fact a person acts a certain way on some occasions, or even in most occasions, is not proof that they are acting that way in all occasions or any specific occasion. There is not much more to say here than, like the previous argument, there is no substance to it and there should be no discussion until it can be proven that the actions of Jesus on two separate occasions are linked.

"Peter could never be chosen by Jesus to lead the Church because Peter was a frail sinner who denied Jesus."

Another Faulty Generalization Fallacy. We all agree Peter appeared to be the least stable Apostle. However, this is not a reason to assume Jesus would make any particular decision about Peter. Peter's heart could have been totally changed by Jesus after the Resurrection or by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Nobody can know and with God "all things are possible". Peter's humanity and sinful nature is not proof that Peter was not chosen by Jesus to lead the Church.

Lack of Evidence

The Lack of Evidence Fallacy occurs when someone makes a claim, but has no way to prove the claim is true.

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

Fallacies often become a spider's web. This fallacy starts with Personal Incredulity, as the person finds the concept hard to believe in the first place. Then, the fallacy continues putting the Burden of Proof on the other person. Finally, this fallacy denies that the source of information of the other party is valid. It tries to limit the other party's ability to argue and forces them into the smaller arena of the arguer. We all agree the Bible is authoritative and useful. However, until one can prove that nothing is true unless it is written in the Bible, this argument needs to be thrown out.



Where this logic really goes wrong is the fact that only circular reasoning can prove it to be true. The Bible does not have a verse stating "Nothing is true unless written in this book", therefore if a person only believes what is in the Bible they have no reason to believe it is the only truth.

Here is something fascinating. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his letter to the Philadelphians, around 107 AD., "*I heard some saying, If I do not find it in the ancient Scriptures, I will not believe the Gospel.*" So, the argument to oppose tradition of the Catholic Church is the exact same argument used by some Jews to deny the Gospel of Jesus. If the people who denied the Gospel of Jesus because they could not find evidence in the Old Testament were successful, then there would not be a New Testament. Limiting the scope of information accepted as truth can never lead to the full truth.

Quoting out of Context

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. Jesus said 'Why do you transgress the command of God because of your tradition?' and Revelation says 'if anyone takes away from the words in this prophetic book, God will take away his share in the tree of life.'"

When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees about tradition, it was clear that He was concerned about traditions that violate God's law. It is not within the context of Jesus' quote to say all tradition is wrong. If any Catholic tradition opposed the Bible, then this verse would apply. However, although not all Catholic tradition can be confirmed by Scripture, there is no Catholic tradition that opposes Scripture.

Concerning the quote from Revelation..."What does 'this prophetic book' refer to? The New Testament did not exist as a book when Revelation was written. John wrote this verse referring to the contents of Revelation, the 'prophetic book' he was writing. Based on this verse, it is logical to say we should only believe things about the end times that are specifically in the book of Revelation. It is not logical to generalize this verse to a New Testament 'book' that did not exist at the time.

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

I hesitate to return to this argument, already proven to be a fallacy, but there is another consideration...Quoting out of Context. When the verse "*All Scripture is useful for teaching...*" is quoted, what scripture existed at the time? The only thing considered as "Scripture" at the time of Paul was the Jewish Torah. In fact, eleven books of the New Testament were not even written at the time Paul wrote his letter to Timothy. If one wanted to be logical about it all, then one would say this verse could not apply to books unwritten at the time, so it would invalidate even Revelation. This is why we "walk by faith". Logic is not the answer. It is not the fact the Bible contains a verse that says "all Scripture is useful" that we believe the Bible. We believe by faith, and we "use the Bible for instruction", not take it literally as the only truth.

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.



Arguments against Catholicism are not Logical

"The Catholic Church is a heretical church. This is true because my parents, who were good Christians, taught me."

Don't get me wrong here. Catholics are as guilty as anyone when it comes to applying the Genetic Fallacy. Nobody should be judged solely based on race, heritage, religion, looks, etc. I heard testimony by a Catholic priest that he was walking through an airport while wearing his collar. A man approached him and immediately began to deride and accuse him of child abuse. Why would anyone walk up to a total stranger and start accusations without knowing anything about them? Enough said.

Strawman

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 have a right to do with their body as they please. The Catholic Church is prejudiced against women because it teaches against contraception and abortion."

The actual subject is totally missed in this argument. The Church's position on abortion and contraception is based on the Church's mission to proclaim God's law. If abortion is against God's law, then the Church must be against abortion. Abortion activists should not attack the Church, who is only "the messenger". If the Church would change her stance on abortion, it would not change God's position. Therefore, arguments against the Church in this matter are not valid.

The above argument also falls to a fallacy called Appeal to Emotion. To say the Church is "prejudiced against women" is nothing more than an attempt to predispose the hearer against the Church with an emotion-invoking opinion which has not been proven as fact.

Composition / Cherry-Picking

The Composition Fallacy occurs when someone assumes that, if one part of something is bad, the whole thing is bad. The Cherry-Picking Fallacy occurs when someone makes a claim and presents only partial facts to support their claim when other facts are available. I group these two fallacies together, using the following example:

"There is child abuse in the Catholic Church, therefore the Church is evil."

First, I must say there are two provable facts...1) There have been occurrences of child abuse in the Church and 2) the Church definitely mishandled many of these situations. I am not condoning either of these actions. I believe even one occurrence of abuse would be too many and nobody guilty of child abuse should be allowed to continue with any ministry in the Church. However, the argument above is still illogical.

It is a Composition Fallacy to say the Church, as an organization, is evil or approves abuse because there has been abuse and someone tried to cover it up. Many organizations have codes of conduct, but it is still up to each individual to follow the code and each manager to enforce it. If a manager tries to cover up the actions of an employee, it cannot be assumed the Board of Directors approved the manager's actions. To assume the Catholic Church, all the way up to the Pope, was aware of and approved child abuse is illogical.

It is a Cherry-Picking Fallacy to quote statistics about abuse within the Catholic Church and not mention at the same time abuse in non-Catholic denominations and other religions. There is likely no organization immune to



abuse. In fact, most occurrences of child abuse (30%) take place within the family. If we follow the bouncing ball of composition logic, we could say "Families account for most child abuse, therefore families are evil and nobody should have a family."

Etymological

We could call this the "meaning of words" fallacy. The Etymological Fallacy occurs when someone makes a claim or inference about a term's original or current meaning.

"In the original Greek text Jesus calls Peter Petros (masculine form of rock), then says on this Petra (feminine form of rock) I will build my church. Therefore, Jesus was not talking to Peter about being the rock of the Church."

The original Greek text clearly uses two different forms of the word rock. That cannot be denied. However, the problem with this argument is that Jesus spoke Aramaic, not Greek. And there is only one Aramaic word for rock. Nobody can speculate what led the original Greek scribe to use different forms of the word rock in the text. This is likely a translation anomaly.

With over 100 English translations of the Bible, it can be very easy to get confused by the meaning of any specific word in the Bible. Different translations use different words that are similar in meaning but can be interpreted in a slightly different way. Let's see an example of that.

Defying all Logic

In reality, there is no fallacy called Defying all Logic. I use this term, however, because this next argument is illogical on so many levels it defies logic. Let's take a look.

"Catholicism is not a Bible based religion, because Catholics believe salvation is by works and they ignore Romans 3:28 which says salvation is through 'faith alone'."

"Catholicism is not a Bible based religion". The argument begins with a double-whammy of fallacies. First, this is a classic Smoke and Mirrors tactic. This type of tactic states an opinion as though it were truth. Unless an unbiased study conducted by an uninterested third party proved there is no Biblical basis to Catholicism, this statement must be considered nothing more than opinion. Under the covers, this is also an Attack the Person Fallacy, attempting to undermine the credibility of the opponent and render their defense ineffective.

"Catholics believe salvation is by works". The argument continues with another double-whammy of fallacies. The Strawman Fallacy, discussed above, is also used to distort the opposing position to an extreme and then argue against the extreme. Here, Catholic doctrine concerning works is distorted into saying Catholics believe works lead to salvation. Then, the rest of the argument attacks this distorted view of Catholicism. The arguer has, most likely, also committed the Invincible Ignorance Fallacy. This fallacy occurs when the arguer completely ignores any evidence to the contrary of their position and refuses to become fully knowledgeable about a subject before speaking about it. The Catholic Catechism clearly teaches Catholic doctrine on salvation to be: Salvation comes from God's grace and our response to His grace, then works are the result of our response to His grace (paraphrasing). Only those who have never read the Catholic Catechism would believe Catholics teach salvation by works. Whether or not some professed Catholics adhere to this teaching is a completely different story.



"Salvation is by faith alone". The argument concludes with multiple fallacies. First, a Quote Mining Fallacy. Quote mining occurs when one states part of a quote and leaves out parts of the quote necessary to understand the quote's full meaning. The literal translation of the original (Greek) text of Romans 3:28 is *"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law."* The above argument conveniently omits *"apart from works of the law"*. In this verse, Paul was conveying the message that works "of the law" do not save. Paul was addressing Jews who believed that gentiles should be circumcised (adding a Quoting out of Context Fallacy). "Works of the law" are not the same as "good works". This verse simply means that "following the rules" does not lead to salvation. Good works is a completely separate topic (adding a Strawman Fallacy). This part of the argument also falls to the Misquoting Fallacy. As one can see, the word "alone" does not appear in the original text. The word "alone" was added by Martin Luther. Those who support Luther's translation say Luther was simply clarifying what Scripture meant and he did not change the Scriptural meaning. What they are admitting is they believe in Luther's interpretation, not the Church's interpretation.

All in all, this particular argument contains no less than eight fallacies of logic. There would be no purpose to any Catholic defending the faith against such logical errors, as the arguer will never be persuaded by logic to change their opinion.

Conclusion

Logic cannot be applied to faith. Jesus and the Father are one, and nobody gets to the Father except through Jesus. We believe this. We believe this by faith. There is no logical reason or proof that Jesus is who He said He was. There is no verse in the Old Testament telling us a man named Jesus would proclaim He and the Father are one and salvation would only come through Jesus. This is what confused the Jewish nation. Even with the Bible, without faith we are lost. The Father gives us the grace to believe in His Son, Jesus. We respond in faith and we are saved.

Arguments against the Catholic Church, especially arguments rife with logical fallacies, are not valid attempts to tear down the Catholic Church, her doctrine or her traditions. Catholics believe in the Church, as we believe in Jesus, by faith not by sight. St. Thomas Aquinas was correct when he said *"To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible."*

For this reason, I personally avoid discussions with anyone trying to convince me the Catholic Church is wrong. I admire and believe in everything that Catholic Apologists do. Even if the arguments are illogical, we still need to have answers and apply some reasoning to our faith. *"The proofs of God's existence, however, can predispose one to faith and help one to see that faith is not opposed to reason."* (Catholic Catechism, 35). However, those who are predisposed to opposing the Catholic faith will not be persuaded by logic. Until the Holy Spirit changes their heart, the eggs of logic will simply continue to splatter against the brick wall. My response...is simply to pray for them.