

A New Apologetics: Sharing the Fire of Catholic Faith Thoms Groome, LA 1/3/09

Catholic Faith: most likely to be lived from personal conviction – in community
Need to embrace and make “the Faith” our own – for vital commitment
Faith as gift of God’s grace; but works through human persuasion

Apologetics: from the Latin *apologeticus*, to defend *and* persuade
Need both: “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you the reason for the hope that is in you, speaking gently and respectfully” (1 Peter 3:15)

Old apologetics: mostly habit, apathy, and fear – the biggest
Habit: socialized in a “life-style enclave” (ghetto). Catholicism as cultural marinade
“Catholic and Polish.” Few left in postmodern world, not even my Irish village

Apathy: has explained why many leave and many stay – feel comfortable
But many who leave join other churches; spiritual needs not being met
Stayers in spite of disagreements, scandals, exclusion, poor parishes, etc.

Fear: Catholicism as one true faith from God through Jesus to Church
Disobey or leave at risk of eternal damnation - “hell to pay”
Unworthy of freedom, truth, and beauty of Gospel faith (See Jn 6: 60-69)

For Reflection and Conversation

What do you find “persuasive” about your Catholic faith?
What is your own best strategy for persuading others?

Need a *new apologetics* appealing to deepest human desires and longings
Persuading by rational coherence; to recognize richness of Catholic faith
Witnessing how life-giving it is for person, community and “world” (Jn 6:51)

Pope Benedict: “Sometimes we are looked upon as people who speak only prohibitions. Nothing could be further from the truth! Authentic Christian discipleship is marked by a sense of wonder. We stand before the God we know and love as a friend, the vastness of his creation, and the beauty of our Christian faith.”

Apologetics of Early Church used *rhetoric* to defend and persuade
Appeal to become “fully alive to the glory of God”
Emotive and enticing language; no authoritarianism or threat

Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) welcomed neophytes “to the brighter and more fragrant meadows of this second Eden,” for “in the laver of regeneration, the Lord God has wiped away all tears from every face. No more shall you mourn but you shall ever keep high festival, clad in Jesus Christ as in a garment of salvation.”

Benedict; “Christ’s light beckons you to be guiding stars for others, walking Christ’s way of forgiveness, reconciliation, joy and peace” (to Youth at Dunwoodie).
Aristotle distinguished three forms of rhetoric: *pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos*.

Pathos: appeal to people’s emotions and desires for happiness
Logos: logic and reasoned argument; by rational coherence of truth claims
Ethos: credibility of speaker and of “fruits” in daily life

Pathos & B: Gospel can satisfy “a world that longs for genuine freedom, authentic happiness, and the fulfillment of its deepest aspirations.” Catechists to lay out “magnificent vision of a world being transformed by the liberating truth of the Gospel”

No better way to live than following Jesus as “way, truth, and life” (Jn 14:6)

Beatitudes: “*Happy* are those who . . .”

Love, even of enemies, is ultimate fulfillment of human vocation

Logos & B: “The profound harmony of faith and reason;” “intellectual conversion is as necessary as moral conversion for our growth in faith.” “Christ is the truth which gives meaning to human existence, and the source of that life which is eternal joy”

Catholic Christian faith makes eminent good sense; is a coherent world view

Must frame around its central convictions and hierarchy of truth: God as Triune, Jesus Christ, goodness of person and life in world, community of faith, Eucharist

Ethos & B: Christians to create “a culture of life,” promoting “life in abundance” “Called to draw all people into this mystery of light”; to share “Christ’s saving word as good news to the men and women of our time, as heralds of hope.”

Christians to be witnesses to our faith by living it with joy

Lived faith most effective evangelization; “by their fruits” (Mt 7:16)

Remember the “martyrs” who nurtured your own faith

For Reflection and Conversation

Your responses and additions to my proposal of a “new” apologetics?

How might you integrate such apologetics into your catechesis and pastoral ministry?

Appeal to people’s desires, their best interests, what they long for in life.

Encourage reflection; to reason, remember and imagine; to probe, question, and analyze what is “going on” and what really matters

Share Christian dogmas and doctrines, sacraments and spirituality, morals and values in ways that are both appealing and rationally persuasive – that attract and make sense

Present Christian life as fulfilling, happy and promoting true freedom

Encourage people to see for themselves, to make their own the truth and beauty of

Christian faith for their lives. Invite to decision by their own convictions, to integrate life and Christian faith into lived faith

B: “Let us turn to Jesus! He alone is the way that leads to eternal happiness, the truth who satisfies the deepest longings of every heart, and the life who brings ever new joy and hope, to us and to our world. Amen” (Yankee Stadium – of all places).

For further reading, see Thomas Groome, “Benedict XVI: Pilgrim of Hope with a New Apologetic,” in *Catechetical Leader*, July/August, 2008, Vol 19, No 4