

St. Paul's Apologia

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St. Paul is truly a beacon of light for Catholicism. The Apostle is responsible for a large portion of the New Testament; through which he explained key theological concepts and engaged a sizeable amount of evangelization throughout the Roman Empire. During these labors, St. Paul often practiced apologetics: the explanation and defense of Christian truth. In this endeavor, he was building on the foundation set by the Lord Jesus Christ. A few selections from St. Luke's book of Acts reveals a Pauline apologetic record that is salient in the early Catholic Church.

Acts 17:1-16 records St. Paul visiting the region of Macedonia, circa A.D. 50, during his second missionary journey. The Apostle, along with Silas, Timothy and Luke, passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, arriving at Thessalonica. Here, the text says: "there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead." The Apostle strategically picked the local synagogue to announce and justify the Good News; a pattern employed by the Savior (cf. Mt 13:54; Mk 1:21; Lk 6:6; Jn 6:59). These synagogues were centers of Jewish social life that conducted activities such as worship, prayer, law courts, and elementary schools. This was an ideal setting for spreading the Gospel. Appropriately, the term "argued" (Greek: *dielexato*) in Acts 17:2 is rendered as "reasoned" in the *Rheims* and *Knox* translations; implying not a hostile tone, but rather a rational explanation and defense of Christianity.

Continuing our investigation of St. Luke's narrative, Acts 17:16-34 reveals one of the most significant apologetic episodes in the New Testament. The location is the Grecian city of Athens; once the center for Greek art, architecture, literature and politics. St. Paul sailed to this city after stops at Thessalonica and Berea. In Athens, the Apostle witnessed Gentile idolatry, and was moved to launch his famous speech for Christianity at the place called the Areopagus on Mars Hill. The Apostle left a tour de force for apologetics and theology; addressing essential topics such as true philosophy, the incarnation of the Savior, the resurrection of the dead, natural law, God's creation, and the unity of the human race. It is recommended that this lengthy and fascinating section from Acts 17:16-34 be read in its entirety. St. Paul concludes by saying: "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a Man whom He has appointed, and of this He has given assurance to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). For the Apostle, the Gospel is truly universal or "catholic."

A final glance at St. Luke's divine tome finishes with Acts 28:17-31. The scene is St. Paul's imprisonment in Rome, circa A.D. 60, after his third missionary tour. The Apostle was under a kind of house arrest for about two years, and although there were some restrictions to his freedom, he still managed to spread the Gospel. Acts 28:23-24 reads: "When they [local leaders] had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging

in great numbers. And he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said.” St. Paul appears as a tireless advocate for Christian truth.

The above portions from the book of Acts testifies that St. Paul’s apologetic practices follow an earlier foundation begun by the Redeemer. Clearly, apologetics has a rich Biblical foundation, and has been part of the Catholic Church’s tradition for two millennia. We will soon investigate the first pope, St. Peter, who also engaged in apologetics in early Catholicism.

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