

WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC

To Whom Shall We Go?
You Have the Words of Eternal Life
(John 6:68)

By

Albert E. Hughes, Lt. Colonel, USAF, (ret);
B.S., M.S., M.M.



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May you find life with abundant joy in the Body of Christ.

Al Hughes

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About the
WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC
Series of Booklets

by Ronda Chervin, Ph.D., Editor

(Dr. Ronda is a Professor of Philosophy,
a Catholic writer, a Presenter on Catholic TV and
Radio and a Dedicated Widow)

In the year 2016 I read somewhere that 60% of Catholics have left the Church or only attend occasionally!

I was shocked! Myself a convert from an atheist but Jewish background, Jesus, manifested and coming to me, in the Catholic Church is the greatest joy in my life...from time into eternity!

How could it be that so many Catholics have lost faith in a church that offers so much?

I believe it was the Holy Spirit that suggested to me a remedy.

Suppose the parish racks had little booklets written by strong believers, such as myself, describing why we are still Catholics in spite of many of the same experiences which have alienated other Catholics! Such a series of booklets could attract wavering Catholics or be given by strong Catholics to family and friends who have left us. In this way our series was born.

So, now I address all wavering Catholics, and all those who have left the Catholic faith, and beg you to give us one more chance. Could it hurt to say a little prayer, such as this?

Jesus, if you are really the Son of God, and you want me to receive fullness of grace through the Word and Sacraments in the Catholic Church, open me to the witness of the writers of these booklets. As they tell me why they are still Catholics, please tell me why I should still be a Catholic!

ABOUT THE COVER

Even as Christ gives his flesh and blood to the faithful, even as hosts of martyrs have given their flesh and blood, even as many faithful Catholics stand also ready to do, so too does the pelican, who in times of famine rips her own flesh and blood as food, so that her young may live.

Thus the pelican mother is symbol in life and in art, of Christ and mother Church who feeds her flock.



*Pie Pelicane, Jesu Domine,
Me immundum munda tuo sanguine:
Cujus una stilla salvum facere
Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.*

St. Thomas Aquinas

Bring the tender tale true of the Pelican;
Bathe me, Jesu Lord, in what Thy bosom ran
Blood whereof a single drop has power to win
All the world forgiveness of its world of sin.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

For
Shannon, Katie, and Martha



In Memoriam
Gloria Jean Hughes,
December 17, 1945 - July 25, 2015



"She'd say something profound, almost off-handedly, and even follow with a laugh - her special Jeannie laugh - to soften, but not contradict the truth of what she said. She really did have her unique style."

Linda Wade Williams

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INTRODUCTION

The boys in the office called you “little conscription.”

Albert E. Hughes Sr.

“Your father...,” my grandmother once said, “... is a good man.” So he was. He was faithful to my mother; kept beans on the table, a roof over our head. Returning after World War II, he worked long hours as the business manager of a sugar mill in south Louisiana and was home every night to have supper, read his newspaper, read a book, and go to bed. My dominant memory of him is the back of his newspaper. I write this without rancor. That is just the way it was. He was unchurched, never spoke about religion except once when I was 15. He took me aside and said, “Never marry a Catholic and it would be best if you never dated one.” That was his sum total of religious comment and instruction for me.

My mother, who taught high school and dreamed of a Ph.D., someday, was my mentor and friend. She taught English and history, kept house, raised my sister and me, and worked her way up eventually to an M.A. and finally to an Ed.D. She was a non-practicing southern Baptist;

never discussed religion with me, either, but each Easter (once each year) she attended a different Protestant church. She obviously was searching, but would never go to the one Church that would satisfy.

Together, they taught by example a strong sense of integrity and love of learning – so long as we stayed away from Catholic influences. They did what they could to isolate me from the French Catholic girls of south Louisiana, who made up 80% of the date-and-marry population of my school.

At the ripe old age of 14, I followed their example: declared myself an agnostic. (Even at that early age, it was clear to me that atheists could not present their case with evidence. From nothing, only nothing comes. I assumed Christians had no evidence, either.)

REACHING ADULTHOOD

The Making of a Cold Warrior



At twenty-one, I entered active duty as a Second Lieutenant at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. It was Bastille Day, 1962; the buildup for the Vietnam War was underway: there were 2,000 lieutenants on base that day. With a B.S. in Electrical Engineering, I went right to work as a systems engineer in the Radar Reconnaissance Systems Department on the RC-135B development program.

By summer of 1966, I was a 25 year old bachelor Captain stationed at Patrick AFB (the Cape Canaveral headquarters base), as the Program Manager for classified Doppler radar development and systems deployment on the Air Force Eastern Test Range. The Apollo moon landing, Titan and Minuteman ballistic missile test programs, among others, were active at the time. Bachelor life under the Florida summer sun, living on a sailboat at Diamond 99 Marina, seemed like heaven on earth.

That Fall, we were installing one of my radars on the west end of Bermuda. My temporary quarters were at Hamilton AFB on the east end.

Near sunset, one evening, I wandered into a bar right on a wharf near the base. There was a small tramp steamer tied up alongside, blocking the setting sun. I joined a couple at the bar, drinking Bass Ale. They were traveling on that steamer as guests of the Skipper. With them, I tried my first ever bottle of Bass. It was at that bar that I evoked, in conversation, my firm commitment to remain a lifelong bachelor, and announced fealty to Bass Pale Ale. No more beer for me, and certainly, no wife!

I had no way of knowing that SHE was just five months away. That SHE would change everything. Back in Florida, nature took its course. I married the girl on “the boat next door” the following year.



Courtship: Con Amour, Ship of Chaperone, following

Gloria Jean “Jeannie” McCaffery was Catholic, and faithfully so. Her foster father – a Boeing engineer on the Apollo program, had overcalled my father’s advice to me. Jeannie had been warned never to marry an engineer, a military man or a non-Catholic. I was forbidden fruit on all three counts!

It took the birth of two daughters and eleven years of prayer on Jeannie’s part to move me, under influence of her happy faith, from a pessimistic agnostic (probably there is not a God) to an optimistic agnostic (gee, I hope there is a God!) However, with hope, but no faith, I needed evidence of God and recognized none.

During those eleven years I was promoted to Major; we spent a year at Fairbanks, Alaska. I was stationed at Clear AFS, just south of Fairbanks as the Standards and Evaluation Officer for Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) operations. Three years later, we were in the far eastern Caribbean. There, I took command of Antigua Air Station, West Indies.



Paradise Commander takes command

ON BECOMING A CATHOLIC

If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts. (Psalm 95)



1978: In Rome, it was the year of three popes.

Twice in as many months, Jeannie and I, with the whole Government of Antigua hierarchy, British and Canadian expatriates, and much of the city population, attended a Papal Requiem Mass. The Catholic Cathedral was filled to overflow each time. Still an agnostic, I was moved in sympathy with the visible grief in the crowd – though most of them were Anglicans. On 16 October of that year, (now Saint) John-Paul II ascended to the throne of Saint Peter. From that time onward, I am the most blessed of men.

“A month later, in the middle of November, I awoke on an unusually cool tropical Saturday morning. On mornings like that, sights and sounds and smells carry with undiminished vigor. I awoke to clanking pots and pans. The sound filtered through the kitchen screens, across the side yard past the tamarind tree and broadcast into

the bedroom through open shutters. And there was the crackling sound of grease tap dancing on a hot pan. Jeannie was cooking breakfast under the careful supervision of Mr. Fluff, the house cat. The smell alone – the bacon, not the cat – was a call to action.

“Wandered over to the open shutters facing the side yard, I looked out on the crisp, cool morning. Behind the laundry hut, under the Tamarind tree, patches of sunlight and shade were dancing on the lawn to light airs. ‘Wonderful,’ I thought, ‘If there was a God, he’d make a morning like this!’”

“With the hint of a chuckle, a voice I did not know said, ‘Why don’t you pretend to believe and see what happens?’” (*Paradise Commander*, p. 84, 85)

I want to assure you; the first time the Lord of the universe speaks directly to you, it really gets your attention! And in this case, the hint of humor and the question, itself, had to be taken as a dare. So I took it on. After eleven years and several Catholic introductory courses taken to satisfy curiosity and to better understand my wife, I knew how to fake it. I could pretend-Catholic all day long. And so I did; for two weeks I did.

The miracles began the last Saturday of November, at the time of my elder daughter’s sixth birthday party. The first miracle lasted from

11:00am to 4:30pm. Jeannie, our maid Dorsett, and I knew exactly the what and the why. The dozen or so neighbors who saw it were awe struck, but clueless.



Paradise, where miracles began!

In the midst of a month long, ceaseless monsoonal tropic rain throughout the north east Caribbean, the Lord held back the rain over my yard, and my yard only, precisely for the time that I had requested in a prayer shortly before 11:00am.

(Not all the details of all the miracles to be mentioned in this limited booklet can be described, but you can read it all, yourself, in *Paradise Commander*. More background information is available in my wife's life testimony titled, *Saint*

Jeannie's Shiny Black Shoes.

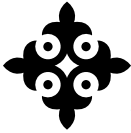
“...pretend...and see what happens...” The Voice had said. That first miracle was an afternoon happening, the first of many. The second was the following morning, Sunday before Mass. I asked the Lord to direct me to the church denomination of His choice. Minutes after the question this answer was presented. “Your spiritual home is the Roman Catholic Church.” (*Paradise Commander*, p. 94)

Reason #1: Why I Am Still a Catholic!
Because the Lord of the universe sent me
there and nowhere else.

MIRACLES GALORE

We praise God by recalling his marvelous deeds.

(Cassiodorus)



“Yet, within a week I began to have doubts; not about my experiences (the miracles), but about my worthiness. What if I didn’t measure up? Could I come this far and still be lost?” (*Paradise Commander*, p.95)

There was an answer to this question, too. It came after a few days as the worry began to take hold and build. This answer formed in a sequence of clouds which I observed, to the north of our house across the road and out over the Atlantic.

You must know, first, that at the latitude of Antigua, the wind is out of the east 361 days per year, on average. Yet on this day of interest, the wind was out of the west. Very rare! Second, though clouds often present familiar shapes and images to the mind, they are independent of one another; never have I heard of another case where a sequence of three clouds crossing the same point in the sky related a coherent story, followed by- That Voice again, saying with that familiar

chuckle, “My heart is big enough for everyone, even for you!” (p. 95.) That third cloud was large, hovered (while other clouds continued to drift by) and expanded while maintaining its position. It was blue sky empty except for the white outline of a classic Valentine heart!

Reason #2: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

At this early point in Faith, it became clear that I was acceptable to the Lord as I was in my beginnings of obedience to His clearly expressed will. With his acceptance of me at this juncture, I was not about to back off, not then, not now; because the same reasoning has held throughout these following 38 years. If you know the will of God for yourself, obedience is essential.

I spoke with Fr Power, who was on my protocol list, regarding baptism. We agreed to wait until after my Christmas visit to Houston. My father had died some years earlier (before the Antigua assignment, while I was a Senior Director of the Space Defense Center) and my mother had remarried after five long years of grief. I wanted to break the news of my decision to be baptized Catholic before the fact, expecting there might be an uproar in my mother’s family.

In Houston, Jeannie and I decided to attend the midnight Mass at a neighborhood church, Christmas of 1978. Delayed while getting two sleepy little girls to the car, we arrived right at midnight. Within minutes, we encountered the only angel that I am absolutely sure was in fact an angel.

“To say the church was packed would hardly be sufficient. The whole church... a proverbial sardine can. Jeannie, carrying two year old Katie, was the last one in. She squeezed and pushed through the outer door, barely into the vestibule. Carrying our six year old Shannon (both girls were asleep) I was left teetering on the outer threshold. Literally! That is where I was and what I was doing! Prayer time! “Lord. The children can’t see, much less hear!

“Immediately, I saw a bald headed usher, way down front in the center aisle, right in front of the altar. He started elbowing and pushing his way up the center aisle. I knew that I knew that he was coming to us, don’t ask me how.” (*Paradise Commander*, p. 96)

Bottom line? He pushed his way all the way to the vestibule, across the packed vestibule until we were nose to nose and yelled over the noise of the crowd, “I have four seats down front! Would you like them?’ We would.” (p. 96)

In fact, those seats were on the altar stage two steps from the back corner of the altar. The children definitely could see and hear. We were right in the middle of the action with altar boys and other servers all around us. An angel? Bald headed ushers don't disappear instantly! This one did. The details of that encounter cover nearly two pages of *Paradise Commander*.

Reason #3: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

While I have become aware that angels abound, nowhere else have I actually encountered one, knowingly, except in a Catholic Church!

Only the most obvious and relatable miracles can be included in brief, in the limits of this little booklet, but know that there were and are others; that miracles abound. There were miracles of healing as well, three of which I will relate in brief.

“One night, early on, we awoke to little Katie's crying; really more screaming than crying. Jeannie jumped up and ran to the front bedroom... I heard Jeannie yelling, ‘Al, Katie is burning up with fever! Go get the thermometer!’ (I found the thermometer and brought it to her.) ‘Never mind.... Shusssh! I laid hands on her, prayed, and the fever just left. She's cool and sound asleep.

She's just fine.' And she was. We went back to bed and slept soundly through the night." (*Paradise Commander*, p. 109)

And this one.

"Maybe a couple of weeks later, another healing occurred. For some time Patches (one of our three dogs) had been sick and getting sicker. The vet... said he could not help. So whatever Patches had, progressed. Then one day, Patches was found lying in the weeds, clearly dying. Jeannie called over a passel of kids playing in the yard.... They all laid hands on Patches.... After a couple of minutes of prayerful 'treatment', Patches got up most casually and ambled away. Months later, when we left the island for good, he was still in good health and on duty in front of the house." (*Paradise Commander*, p. 110)

There is one more healing I must report, perhaps the most dramatic of all. It occurred at Patrick AFB early in 1983, just before I retired from the Air Force.

"...on a Sunday, Jeannie and I were at Mass. During communion I held the cup over at the left side of the congregation, serving a line of parishioners. When she was still two back in the line, I recognized a neighbor who lived on base a block away from us. She looked devastated.

“Everything about her face said fear and trembling..., deep dread to the threshold of hopelessness. Then she was right before me. At the instant she touched the cup, something went from me to her. It was...a launch of energy, taking no longer than it would take to say, “Huh!” ...it went from my entire body, a movement of Spirit. It was Power.

“Perhaps you know the gospel passage. Jesus is in a crowd. A woman touches his robe. Then Jesus asked, ‘Who touched me?’ When all denied it, Peter said, ‘Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.’ But Jesus said, ‘Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me.’ Lk 8:44-46 NRSV

“The event revealed to me that He was in me, and I in Him, as Scripture promises all who follow Him. (John 14:18-23 NRSV) He was with me and using me in my obedience.

“A week or so later, the rest of the story was told me. That Friday afternoon, in a physical breast examination by her doctor, a rather significant lump was found. The doctor was sure, it was a cancer; she should return on Monday for a confirming biopsy. How far had it advanced? The fear of cancer was on her mind as she came to the cup on Sunday.

“The next day, Monday immediately after the communion “event”, she reported to the doctor for the biopsy. No lump was there or anywhere! There was nothing to biopsy!”

Reason #4: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

Obvious miracles frequently were coming at us in the context of the Catholic faith and nowhere else. And this continued throughout the remainder of our Antigua tour, only subsiding in frequency slowly as the years went by. We understand that, consistent with Christian Scripture, there is a spiritual blindness that had been lifted from our eyes. Such a grace is a gift, a gift given us in the context of our Catholic experience – our experience of obedience.

A CHANGE OF NAME, A TRANSFORMATION OF CHARACTER

**In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius,
a centurion of the Italian Cohort... (Acts 10:1)**



“We had parallel stories. He was a commander assigned in a foreign country. He would have been in command of between 100 and 300 souls, as was I. His family was with him, a devout man who feared God with all his household. He heard a heavenly message and responded with obedience. He stood at the threshold, converted and was baptized. Finally, he and his wife received the Holy Spirit.... Now, I also was at the threshold, soon I would be at home in the Spirit....” (*Paradise Commander*, p. 97)

And so, at baptism, I took his name as my baptismal name, an old custom in the Catholic Church. About two weeks after baptism, the following occurred, as related in *Paradise Commander*, Chapter VIII, *Reign of the Paraclete*, beginning on page 99.

“When the day of Pentecost had come... suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the house... Divided tongues, as of fire...appeared among them...All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2:1-4 NRSV)



Pentecost, Acts 2: 1-4

What happened to me on or about the 19th of February, 1979 was right in line with that which happened in the upper room almost 2000 years ago. Jeannie, my wife, had a similar experience months before I did. This happened an hour or two after I prayed for the Holy Spirit.

“In the middle of the night, I awoke with a start. I was already praying aloud, speaking rapidly in a strange language. Fully awake, immediately I knew what was happening... There was the sound of wind roaring through the house, (it was a calm night; the trade winds were nearly still) and I felt like I was burning up... This went on for what seemed like a couple or three minutes, then the tongues started to taper off. With a thank you ‘Our Father. Who art ...’ I slept the night away.” (The full account, in great detail, is at *Paradise Commander*, p, 100)

I reported the encounter to Jeannie in the morning and both of us then and there vowed total, unconditional obedience to God. As to my own transformation, I described it to Jeannie that next morning as “Yesterday I was self-centered, today I am other-centered.”

Reason #5: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

While I fully acknowledge that there are many Pentecostal Christians in the various Pentecostal churches, as well as they are widespread throughout the Catholic Church, our own experience is in the context of the Catholic Church; our Spiritual home as revealed by God early in my Catholic journey. Further, we were

deeply aided in our quest of informed obedience by the Catholic Charismatic communities of Southern California, and by the Catholic Charismatic Benedictine Monasteries at Pecos, NM and San Luis Obispo, CA.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

I perceive that I am dealt with by superior powers. This is a pleasure, a joy, an existence which I have not procured myself. I speak as a witness on the stand, and tell what I have perceived. (Thoreau)



Obedient to another encounter with That Voice (Paradise Commander, p. 117) and through other timely indications, I retired from the USAF at Patrick AFB the end of May, 1983; early retirement was totally against my will. I loved my career, my job at the time, and the people I worked with and for. I was Chief of Plans and Requirements, conducting long range planning for Cape Canaveral and the entire Air Force Eastern Test range; well respected by my command and peers, energized by my work, and could have stayed another seven to nine years according to USAF policy at the time. But I had vowed obedience and there was no turning back. The will of the Lord for me was made clear. I resigned.

Around Labor Day that year I signed in at Seattle University. We had received confirmation

that I was to pursue a Master of Pastoral Ministry. With military retirement and the GI bill, there was barely enough money to survive.

The classes were right up my alley: theology, psychology, philosophy, ethics, counseling, and behavioral dynamics analysis in class and in subgroup interactions among fellow students. All this was applied to my practicum, the RCIA, the Rite of Catholic Initiation for Adults. And it was in the practicum, experienced as an RCIA team member in a local church that I began to understand and appreciate the Liturgical philosophy and processes of the Catholic Church. Angst over my retirement began to subside.

Above and beyond all that, I discovered the world of the early church. I relished the writings of the Fathers of the Church. I already was familiar with the Scriptural writings of Saints Peter and Paul, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and James, but there also exist writings of Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Clement of Rome and Irenaeus of Lyons – and many others – many of them martyred, from the first century onward. And through them, we know the detailed history and experience of the earliest Christians, from the very beginning. For instance....

Do you know that the Apostle John personally

taught Polycarp, who taught Ignatius of Antioch, who taught Clement of Rome (who became the fourth Pope)? The Catholic Church has ancient writings about, often written by, each one of them.

Do you know that the Charismatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit, from Pentecost onward, repeats in a consistent cycle every six to seven hundred years, and that after each major council, the Church is in an uproar that lasts about 100 years before everything settles down? We are well into a cycle of uproar now, which may explain a lot of the current troubles!

Did you know that there is an existing description of the first century Mass? That its elements and practices still are clearly seen in the Mass of the 21st century? The early Mass is documented in The Didache, written in the latter half of the first century. It is available. Read it sometime!

These are just three examples. A lifetime of discovery awaits your survey of all that is available and known about the early Catholic Church!

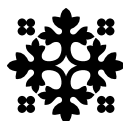
Reason # 6: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

For 38 years I have been involved in the discovery and experience of the Catholic Faith-record. I never will complete the

journey, but I have reached a point of certainty: first, there is no historical contest. The Catholic Church of today is the same and only church founded by Jesus in his Apostles. Second, the fundamental teaching – the dogma – of the Church today is the same as taught by the Apostles, and third – through obedience, I no longer “believe in God,” but “know Jesus the Christ.” And He surely knows me. As my wife said on several occasions, “No mere man can ever separate me from Jesus.” Or from His church, she meant as well.

DISCOVERY OF LIFE'S PURPOSE

The Lord will provide. (Gen 22:14)



We were in Seattle for nine months. Money was running out and I had to get back to earning an income. But I could find work nowhere. Not in the Church, not in aerospace, my former active duty occupation. But we were learning that through obedience, the Lord would provide our needs, if not our wants.

“The Lord will provide, but he seems to enjoy the cliffhanger! We were down to the last month. Our landlord knew it and he had another tenant in waiting. He was pressuring us to get out, but we had nowhere to go. (8:00am on a Tuesday morning) I was dressing to get to a 9:00am class half way across Seattle. Exasperated, I answered (the ringing telephone.) ‘Hello?!’ Short pause.

“Then a voice, not that Voice, said, ‘Can you be on a plane at 11 o’clock this morning?’

“‘Sure,’ I said. ‘Where is it going?’ Longer pause. Mild laughter.

“My secretary took the day off, and I hardly know what I am doing! I guess I should introduce

myself. This is Tony Rodriguez, Personnel Director for Federal Electric Corporation at Vandenberg AFB in California. We would like to talk with you. Can you make the plane?’

“Sure. What do I do now?’

“Just go to Sea-Tac Airport. The tickets are already there waiting for you. I’ll pick you up in Santa Maria.’ I did, and he did.” (*Paradise Commander*, p. 122.)

Bottom line. We moved to Santa Maria, joined St. Louis de Montfort parish and I went to work at Vandenberg AFB that July. Any miracle there? I had not applied to them for a job. You decide!

A year later, my life purpose began to emerge. Our parish did not have an RCIA program when we arrived, and that was OK by me. I devoted myself to my new job. That paid off well. I was promoted to branch manager, then department manager in little over a year. But then, Fr Anthony, our pastor, announced that an RCIA program was to be established. With mixed emotions, I revealed my Seattle University studies and my practicum. Immediately, I was appointed founding Director.

Jeannie and I organized the program with a team of volunteers. Jeannie managed hospitality and I both managed the program and taught scripture for the first six years. Realizing that my

strength was in the teaching and not in detailed administration and record keeping, I found a replacement director with such talents, but continued to teach. All together; in Washington, California and later Texas, I taught for 25 years. Yes, Texas.

But before we get to that, I should mention that in a separate program at St Louis de Montfort; simultaneously, we organized and ran monthly weekend retreats. I was the Retreat Master once again, exercising my experience from the practicum. We established sixteen small prayer-and-sharing communities in the parish.

Reason #7: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

A Bishop of ours once advised, “If you don’t like your work, it is someone else’s work. If you love your work, it’s your work.” Teaching on my feet was becoming my God given calling. My life’s work. Aerospace work put the beans on the table, but teaching other converts became my obsession and joy.

Moving to Texas, again obedient to spiritual indications and guidance (Jeannie was quite sure Saint Mary was operative in this move), I continued to teach until I realized I was getting stale and



As I lay dying

burned out. I also tired quickly and only later realized slowly, I was dying. At the threshold of a massive heart attack, a quad bypass saved the day. That was ten years ago: probably a cliff hanger miracle. I had been ignoring symptoms for over a year. In the emergency room the doctor exclaimed, “I have good news and I have bad news. You haven’t had a heart attack, but it may occur in the next five minutes!”

Before the tiredness set in, I was teaching undergraduate classes down the hall from Ronda Chervin, Ph.D., a professor and Catholic philosopher of great renown. She literally nagged me into joining her writers group. On the first vocal reading of my first short article, the group loved it and I was hooked! That reading and several following spawned several chapters of my first book, *Paradise Commander*. My joy in standup teaching was only surpassed by my joy in creating the written word.

Reason #8: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

Do you not see a pattern? In a secular sense, I thought my calling and life's work was in the Air Force. I considered it my professional joy. However, following my vow of unconditional obedience (key to everything that followed), the Lord first assured my retirement income, then moved me to training at Seattle while securing my minimal financial needs, on to teaching at Santa Maria and then to writing at Corpus Christi. He crafted in me an active Catholic evangelist – beyond my wildest dreams. None of this was my own plan and doing.

When riding a roller coaster, all you can do is hang on and wait for the next curve or drop. That is a good description of our life in Christ since – let me repeat for emphasis – since the occasion of our vow of obedience. It is not that any of this was forced. We could have gotten off the roller coaster at any time. Not a chance! We joyfully lived out our years with the fascinating question, “What’s next?” In all this, I learned my true identity and purpose in the Lord’s plan.

Earlier, I mentioned the Scriptural phrase, The Lord Provides.... I always took that as “provides our basic needs if we remain in His will.” It was

not evident to me in the writing of *Paradise Commander*, but my second book, a booklet of 50 pages, *Saint Jeannie's Shiny Black Shoes* was produced so fast after her death, that I began to suspect that I was getting some unseen help. Under the duress of my wife's departure after 48 spectacular years, I did not try to analyze what was going on with any diligence.

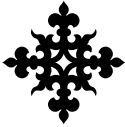
But the unseen assist was evident in the writing of the more difficult analytical work, *Buddy, Can You Spare a 'Digm*. I had the chapter list, which came to me unbidden in bits and pieces, but as I began to write, I realized I did not have the material or the substantiated insights to complete the task proposed by that outline of chapter titles. I wrote what I could, and every time I approached the limit of my means, exactly what I needed to continue would be presented to me by a friend or associate or by other means. None of it was requested by me and the few who knew what I was writing only had a general idea of what I was attempting. Yet each time I needed assistance, exactly the right input would appear. Is there an explanation?

Reason #9: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

It goes back to my understanding of the Transcendent response to an unconditional

vow of obedience. As mentioned in *Paradise Commander*, p. 139, and again in *Buddy, Can You Spare a 'Digm?*, the response is not to make a robotic slave of the obedient one, but to take on a junior associate in the work of the Lord. Not to take on the role of a latter day Apostle (that is the job of the Bishop), but in our case (my wife included) to become as teaching, writing, living lay examples of a modern day quest of sanctification. Thus, the assist given to this subordinate by “the boss”, as needed.

BUT, BUT, BUT....



“But how can you remain a Catholic with all those horrid priests that prey on little boys?” I knew you would ask. So let’s look at the facts, head on!

First, we need to know the actual magnitude of the problem. According to

“...the 2015 Annual Report on clergy sexual abuse ...released by the National Review Board of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops...between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015, there were seven substantiated allegations against clergy for the sexual abuse of minors that were made by current minors. Given that data covered priests (35,987) and deacons (16,251), this means that) 0.01 percent of the 52,238 members of the clergy had a substantial allegation made against him; conversely, 99.99 percent did not.

Why is this not being widely reported by the media?”

Further:

“...81 percent of the victims were male,

and most were postpubescent; 16 percent were under the age of 10. Which means that homosexuals accounted for the lions share of the problem, though no one will mention this fact. ...it is still the gay priests who are doing the molesting.”

(Quoted text may be read in its entirety in *Catalyst* July/August 2016 edition, page 7.)

You do the numbers. That computes to one pedophile attack on a little boy, five homosexual assaults on post-pubescent male minors and one attack on a female minor, age not specified, during the entire reported year.

In contradistinction, I have read estimates as high as 10% sexual abuse of all types in the general public. On average, your little boy, or little girl for that matter, is far safer with a priest than with a relative!

So why all the attacks on the Catholic Church? Three reasons, I believe; first, the only prejudice acceptable in this country anymore is prejudice against Catholics. We live with that every day. Second, in the National media, good news is not news. The stress is on reporting bad news, the more scandalous the better. That sells papers and builds radio and TV audiences. And what is more scandalous than a bad priest? Unfortunately, a multitude of good priests are suffering from broad

brush condemnation. Third, follow the money. The church always is assumed to have deep pockets for the taking. And some of those accusations are false, as well. Now back to our subject, Why I Am Still a Catholic!

THE FINAL FOUR

Who do you say that I am?

Jesus



When it comes to the question, “How many independent, non-Catholic churches are there in the country?” the last number I have read is, about 36,000. There are a host of major and minor disagreements among them. They all believe and infer, despite their differences, to teach the Truth; but there is only one body of Truth. All are based on their reading of Scripture, resulting in teachings according to leadership opinions. And furthermore, the Scripture they depend upon is incomplete, since Martin Luther, an excommunicated Catholic monk, removed several books and other passages from the Scripture as established centuries before.

In contradistinction, in the Catholic Church the Scripture we have today is complete, as established by the Church and as taught consistent with the teachings of the early witnesses: the Apostles and Church fathers in succession.

(In some non-Catholic congregations, the

preachers are fired if they don't preach what the folks want to hear. The result, collectively among them, is intellectual anarchy. They have no Magisterium, no final teaching authority, no dogma that can be traced to the earliest witnesses of Christ-in-the-flesh.

One of the many complaints against the Catholic Church is that we don't keep up with the times. We are not modern enough in the view of many, some of them even within the Church. But you must understand that the mission of the Church is inherently conservative. She cannot bend to the varied winds of fad and experimentation. The mission of the Church is to preserve and promulgate the teaching of Jesus Christ and His Apostles.

Reason #10: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

There is a natural tendency to re-interpret Christian teachings with one eye to modern times, but the Magisterium of the Catholic Church assures that the intent of first century dogmatic teaching is not violated in the name of modernization. It is the Magisterium that guarantees unity in teaching, stability in practice and continuity throughout the ages. The result

is that the Catholic Church, remaining faithful to Jesus, the Christ, is the oldest continuously operating organization on the planet, by far: 2000 years. My allegiance, my obedience is to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit; and I am assured that the Catholic Church as it is today is that same Church founded by Jesus in Peter, with the secured line of the priesthood of Christ and with all the powers granted to the Church by Jesus.

Speaking of powers, there is the confessional. Only God can forgive sins, because by its very definition, sin is an offense against God. However, Jesus gave His church, through his Apostles and successor priesthood of the bishops and priests, the power to bind and the power to loose sins.

...you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church... I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven. (Matthew 16:18, 19)

Of course, you can go straight to God in prayer for the forgiveness of your sins, but it is presumptuous on your part to be assured that your sins really are forgiven. You can't possibly know

the mind of God beyond the revelation of Christ. On the other hand, if you receive absolution from a priest, in valid sacramental form, you may be assured that your sins are forgiven.

Reason #11: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

The pure of heart may see God, and valid confession with absolution by a priest (assuming prior baptism and good standing in union with the Catholic Church) is the best first step toward sanctification, holiness and purity of heart.

It amazes me that so many people will confess belief in Jesus and then make him out to be a liar – based on their rejection of certain clear, direct teachings of His. Especially, His clear establishment of the Eucharist.

...”take, eat, this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant...” (Matthew 26: 26 ff.)

But of course, those not Catholic, have no priest. No priest, no Eucharist. And so they say, “He really didn’t mean that!”

Reason #12: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

Well, I believe Him and so did the Apostles (except maybe Judas Iscariot) and the earliest Church Fathers, many of whom were taught by the Apostles or by the nearest successors to the Apostles. I receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, generally five times each week. What are you doing?

“JOY. A fruit of the Holy Spirit, which helps one to serve God cheerfully. St. Thomas says, ‘Joy is not a virtue distinct from charity, but an act or effect of charity (love).’ Among the four necessities for canonization enumerated by Pope Benedict XIV is that the candidate should have displayed an expansive joy in his life and influence, however melancholy his natural temperament may have been.” (*A Catholic Dictionary*, Donald Attwater, Ed.)

A year ago, as my wife lay dying, the lead hospice lady asked me, “Why do you seem so happy?” The answer I gave them was not wrong, but woefully incomplete. I, myself did not fully understand either, until this writing and reference to the above definition.

“As Jeannie’s life was closing, we had met every commitment we had made to God in His expressed will; to our children in their care and education;

and to one another in chaste, faithful, undying love. Furthermore, I had met my commitment ... to myself, while learning the true meaning of love by following behind the example of an orphan child, Gloria Jean 'Jeannie' Hughes; trying to mimic some measure of her charm, grace, humility peace, charity, loving kindness and solicitude that all who ever met her came to know of her." (*Saint Jeannie's Shiny Black Shoes*, p. 43.)

For 37 years we had kept our vow of unconditional obedience and had worked hard "in the vineyard" to fulfill the specific will of God for us. (Read *Paradise Commander and Saint Jeannie's Shiny Black Shoes* for a full account.) In her last lucid days Jeannie said to our doctor and to me, "I just want to see Jesus!" And so do I, at the time His will for me is fulfilled.

Reason #13: Why I Am Still a Catholic!

For 38 years now, by obedience to the will and leadings of the Lord, I am a lay Catholic evangelist: a Charismatic (Pentecostal) Catholic, Scripture catechist (teacher), retreat master, spiritual director, and author of this, my fourth book. And my younger daughter is following my path in her own right and

duty with all-consuming joy. I finally live in that joy far beyond happiness, beyond understanding, regardless of circumstance. You may martyr me with criticism, insults, ostracism, violence, or physical death, but you cannot remove my joy, neither in this life, nor in my hope of eternal life with Christ.

FROM A LETTER TO THE MAGNESIANS

Let us not be insensible of Christ's loving kindness. For if he had acted as we do, we would have been lost indeed. Therefore let us become his disciples and learn to live in the Christian way;... cast out the evil leaven that has become old and sour, and replace it with new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. He must be the salt of your lives, so that none of you become corrupt, since it is by your wholesomeness that you will be judged.

I would have you all guard against falling into the snares of false doctrine. Take care, then to be firmly grounded in the teachings of the Lord and his Apostles so that you may prosper in all your doings both in body and soul, in faith and love, in the Son, and in the Father, and in the Spirit.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr



Psalm 40

I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.

He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord.

You have multiplied, O Lord, my God,
your wondrous deeds
and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you.

Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.

I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.

I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
see, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O Lord.

I have not hidden your saving help within my
heart,

I have spoken of your faithfulness and your
salvation;

I have not concealed your steadfast love
and your faithfulness from the great
congregation.

But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation say
continually,
“Great is the Lord!”

As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God.

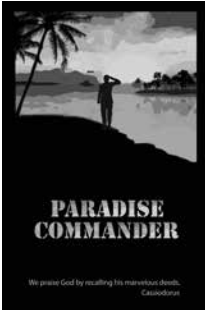
Verses 1-3, 5, 8-10, 16,17 NRSV

*Brothers and Sisters,
Do Not Be Afraid
to welcome Christ and accept his power.
Do Not Be Afraid.
Christ knows “what is in man.”
He alone knows it.
So often today man does not know what is
within him,
in the depths of his mind and heart.
So often he is uncertain about the meaning of
life on this earth.
He is assailed by doubt, a doubt that turns into
despair.
We ask you therefore, we beg you with humility
and trust,
let Christ speak to man.
He alone has words of life, yes, of eternal life.*

Saint Pope John Paul II
From his initial homily as pope, October 22, 1978

Other books by Albert Hughes

PARADISE COMMANDER
SAINT JEANNIE'S SHINY BLACK SHOES
BUDDY, CAN YOU SPARE A 'DIGM



You can read articles and interviews by Al Hughes on the web at

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