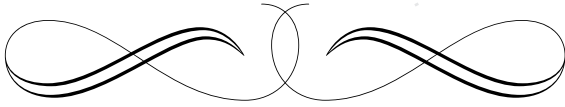


WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC



FINDING SOMEONE
TO LOVE
BY
STEVE BUJNO



*Why I Am Still a Catholic
Finding Someone To Love*

by
Stephen Bujno

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**ABOUT THE
WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC!
A SERIES OF BOOKLETS
by Ronda Chervin, Ph.D., Editor**

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!

Regarding the responsibility of the lay faithful,
Saint John Paul II declared:

At this moment the lay faithful, in virtue of their participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, are fully part of this work of the Church. Their responsibility, in particular, is to testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only fully valid response-consciously perceived and stated by all in varying degrees-to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society. This will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel. Our Lady of Fatima urged the exact same daily conversion of life for the salvation of souls and the salvation of the world.



Stephen Bujno lives in SE Pennsylvania with his beautiful wife Tina, daughters Nicole, Christi and Stephanie, and grandchildren Hannah, Aubrey, Savannah and Max. He is a life-long professional artist working along with his wife in her production pottery studio. Stephen has graduate degrees in Moral Theology and Philosophical Anthropology. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Political and Social Thought, focusing his research on ideal being, *a priori* love, and personagenesis in Rosmini and Dante.





The answer to the question of “Why I am still Catholic?” is, “I’m not certain!” I am a cradle Catholic. But that is not to say I did not choose this expression of faith, it’s to simply state that I was raised in the faith of my parents. I was baptized Catholic. That will classify you as



Catholic, but it brings little certainty to the notion that one is ‘still Catholic’. Concerning numbers alone, the majority of the Christian world was baptized Catholic. But because the majority of the world is not practicing their cradle Catholicism, apparently that baptismal beginning hits numerous faith-deadening obstacles. Even though quite a few individuals remain culturally connected to their childhood’s Catholic baptism, many less make it through

the cultural gauntlet. They never maturely embrace what began with water, the Spirit and the faith of Christ and His Body.

What's odd though is why we're astonished to meet someone who has remained in the faith of his or her childhood. It has become the exception. What's normal now is to have *grown up*, developing the ability to *see through* the naïve faith those dear nuns held precious. We are not accustomed to people remaining in their *childhood* Catholic faith anymore. During Holy Days, such as Christmas and Easter when the families are together, perhaps the parents and a child or two attended Mass that day. It's no surprise anymore that only a few in any *Catholic family* have remained Catholic, though most in the family *consider* themselves Catholic. And what a minimum expectation that is, to *remain* Catholic. The goal is not merely to remain Catholic any more than happiness in marriage is meant to *not* be divorced. Yet people stay in bad marriages, and too many stay in a relationship with God that takes no visible form. It might be that many don't recognize their own mediocrity. This mediocrity has taken the form of a therapeutic deism that now definitively defines our modern era. But even if this observation is true, it doesn't speak to why *I am* still Catholic.

So as I continue to ask myself that question, here's my thinking. The 20th century has brought much to shake the faith of individuals. It may not have been the worst of times, but between the wars that tested man's resolve and the technological leap that puffed up man's sense of self, we've become soft. We have become soft in character, and choose things that permit leisure over those self-imposed demands many attribute to their childhood Catholic faith.

“Oh, the Church and all its rules!” as so many think. And since to authentically live one’s Catholic faith is demanding, perhaps that speaks to why so many chose a faith expression that places very little demands of character on their Christian life.

The rise of church services that simply consist of popular music sung by the ‘worship team’ and inspirational talks given by the minister are a product of this therapeutic deism. This is the work of that Adversary. The Great Liar who is really bent on the ruin of souls. He has chosen mediocrity as his weapon. But it doesn’t work if it’s recognized, so he hides it by inverting St. Francis’ prayer. We want first to be consoled, to be understood and to be loved. We reason that if that’s what Christ does for His Church, than we want a church that does that for us. I say all of this to make a point. I have no powers greater than others to ferret out that Liar’s mediocrity. If this cradle Catholic remained Catholic, why? If others did not, why not? For me this is spiritually a real struggle... I live in a glass house so I keep the rocks on the ground. Perhaps my understanding that *it is a struggle* has kept me in my Catholic childhood faith. I don’t know. I’ve come to recognize those struggles in safe places.

For instance, during a Liturgy when there is an infant baptism, the experience I have borders on the dramatic. At least I feel that way when I mention it, though I would argue what I imagine depicts a scene both holy and accurate. When an innocent baby is baptized, what is there not to find adorable? Babies are lovable. Baptizing those adorable and lovable babies should make them even more innocent and holy. And it does. Yet in a healthy way I find this *safe* event somewhat unsettling. From the moment the water touches the forehead of that adorable cherub, and



the formula is spoken over that innocent child... from that very moment, he or she acquires an enemy of extreme power and cunning. From that very moment until the child's last conscious moment of his or her life, the Liar and every demon will have as their goal the ruin of that child's soul. I said

it borders on the dramatic, but isn't it accurate?

In some parishes it is a custom to hold the child up after the baptism, presenting them to both the congregation and to the crucifix. The congregation typically bursts into *awwws* and sometimes clapping. I can do nothing else during those moments than quietly pray that the angels of God surround that child and protect him or her from the snares that lie ahead. Sacred Scripture states the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. I do not discount grace by concurring with that point. What I mean to plainly observe is that his or her life will never be the same. This is personal. I know life for me has never been the same. That is the case for all cradle Catholics. Satan does not go after his own. And his ability to 'win' back the baptized is to let them grow up. Better yet if they prosper. Didn't Screwtape advise young Wormwood that if man finds his place in the world, in reality the world is finding its place in them? So the Evil One wants anxieties of life to press down, and the

dull mind of mediocrity to fester. This way the indifference of apathy will occur without notice or alarm. I think, by my account, to at least struggle with my faith was certainly part of the answer to why I am still Catholic. But I cannot take any credit for this observation, this grace. So why me and not others from my childhood?



Anyway, that is how my mind framed answering the question as to why I am still Catholic. It was important to disclose, but now I would like to begin my personal story from where my life is at the time of this writing. Starting from the end so to say, at least in terms of my experience thus far. In some ways things are better than I thought they would be. I am happily married to my wife Tina of nearly 28 years. We grew closer in love; in ways that the younger me wouldn't have known existed. I've learned that loving Tina, not aspects of her, but her as the person Tina unfolds features of a relation that are difficult to articulate. Towards the conclusion of my account you will notice how critical that love-formation discovery became for me...

in many ways it's the answer. I also think she has grown more physically beautiful to me over the years. When I was young, older people weren't very attractive in my mind. I thought as married couples aged, they probably hung on to the memories of their younger selves, remembering the good times. But I was wrong. Those memories are really something I cherish, but I've discovered that relational love has a way of revealing beauty. I didn't expect that.

I also have three wonderful daughters, all grown with children of their own. It's easy to see parts of yourself in your children; both those elements you're proud of, along with the features you've tried hard to overcome. In so many ways they are certainly mirrors of both Tina and me, and a mirror is honest if nothing else. I am very proud of them, but not for their accomplishments. Again, the younger me understood children as 'products' of the parents; something



that through intentional control could be both molded and formed. Rather I have found that you have to trust in them, in ways that are much harder than trusting in one's self. I think of Kahlil Gibran's poem The Prophet when he said, "You may be like them, but seek to not make them like you." I have not learned from them. To say one

has learned a lot from their children always appeared somewhat corny to me. But I have experienced much

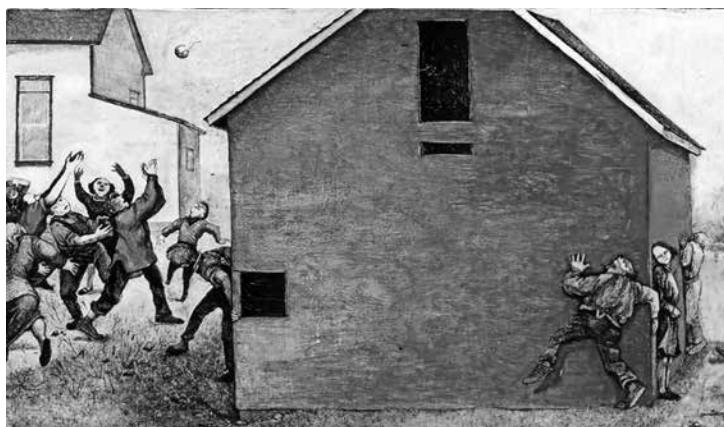
growth through and with them. They're making many of the choices I myself had made, both good and bad. That being the case, I've struggled with accepting the many times they would not heed my advice. Through my experience, I wanted them to recognize the distinction between a wall and a hurdle, between a dead end and a winding path. I recall specifically praying once, "Father, allow my children to be pliable and receptive to my well-earned wisdom. In so many ways, I know what is genuinely good and better for their happiness, but they will not listen." God's response was, "That is exactly what I have felt towards you all these years."

For me that moment became an opportunity of grace. You will see how that observation helped answer the question as to why I am still Catholic when I share my struggle between 'proving' or legitimizing my faith and the notion of 'surrendering' or allowing things to work through me. And concerning my grandchildren, I am fortunate to have such a concrete demonstration of hope in my life. Isn't hope defined as some future possible good, really the fuel that prods us on any journey of worth? To once again nod back to Gibran, he said that parents are the bows from which the children are sent forth. The archer (God) sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, so the parent's bending should be for gladness. I've learned they're going to go and see places that I am unable to imagine. So in the end, this entire story is not really about me; it actually never was. I didn't expect that.

Yet I am part of the story, so to now go back to the actual beginning, let me begin by saying that I grew up very fortunate in a small Italian neighborhood in the coal region of NE Pennsylvania. I had an intact family, a brother

and two sisters. I don't remember ever being hungry. Realistically we were materially poor. I knew that then. My family never ate out; not a point of suffering with an Italian mother who was of course a wonderful cook. But money was only spent on necessities. If I needed, though wanted is a better word, \$5.00 for a date, my father would sometimes reluctantly give in. But he would say it had to come out of the meat money envelope. Presumably meat was an expendable and yes they did keep it in an envelope marked 'meat'. We also never went on a single family vacation. I was in my teens before my oldest sister and her husband took me along with them... there's an upside to being the bambino!

But the neighborhood was our playground. All my friends lived houses away. The park, which was our summer home, was just one block over. We all went to St. Joseph's Catholic school, only one more block down the street. Everyone in the neighborhood who went to that school attended the same church right next door. Every mom and



dad, and all the kids were Catholic. And everyone went to Mass. We saw each other every Sunday. The kids, whose

parents suspected them of trying to skip, had to bring home a bulletin as proof of attendance. That was then. I don't think it's the case any more. I don't know exactly how many remain true to the faith we were given in our youth. I also don't know how many have simply remained cultural Catholics, or left for other faith expressions or have simply declared themselves secular. But it's probably safe to say the numbers don't look good. I don't think the fine Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy that taught us would be impressed, even if they wouldn't necessarily be shocked.

This is not an indictment on any of my childhood friends who have left the Catholic faith. Their reasons must vary tremendously. But somehow God's grace was operative in my life, perhaps in a way that was absent in theirs. My mother's endless prayers must certainly account for much. But I would think their mothers also prayed, or as we would say, did a few 'laps around the Rosary beads'. It can't be that I was just fortunate...I don't believe that. I must have cooperated with that grace in some ways they haven't, which would be a grace itself not originating in me. I must have made some choices different through that grace, that's probable. I must have paused for introspection when they didn't, or simply felt the tug to reconsider the faith while they placed it aside. I don't doubt they are certain they have made the correct decision, no less so than I have the confidence that my embracing the Catholic faith was proper. I think back to our baptisms. Knowing that all of us had the same enemy of extreme power and cunning, tirelessly working against us, why was I one who remained? It just makes me wonder exactly why I am still Catholic, but some others I grew up with are not! On that point I am earnest and there is no judgment in either my heart or head.

So looking back on that childhood, in many ways it was idyllic and somewhat naïve. Perhaps those words always belong together and may explain to a degree the dropping away of so many. There must have been something, or there is something that affected all of us as we reached physical, emotional and spiritual maturity. Maybe we all had a fish-or-cut-bait moment. Decisions are hard amidst confusing circumstances. Once childhood peels away, you realize life is not idyllic but flawed, sometimes tragically. Something occurs in the movement from naivete to cynical adulthood. It's always easy to tell when people are growing up — they begin to complain about life and others. That typically happens in one's teen years to early twenties. It's the point where angst and emancipation meet, and it simultaneously breeds discontent and liberty. It's an emancipated life free to

go anywhere, but no map to know where to go. Even if you don't know where to go, you tend to know where you don't want to go and that's where you've been. Where you've been is the



status quo. In my neighborhood culture, being a devout Catholic was the status quo. Wise 18-year-olds begin to think for themselves. I did. And I began to reconsider my Catholic faith.

In a sad ironic twist, this paired concoction of teenage pseudo-wisdom and principled driven self-assurance typically lines one squarely with the present culture. I see myself in many of the students that I teach each year. It provides insight, a retroflection into my own spiritual

journey since high school. I shake my head at some of their reasoning, because I was certainly like many of them. Today I find them to be hyper-critical of anything that smacks of Church teaching. But they swallow whole without discretion what the culture feeds them. In many ways, the young of that age cherish the impression that they are steering their own ship, but in fact are nothing but dead wood floating down the cultural current. In daring to be different, they conform to the current culture, and unbeknownst adopt



the new status quo. These accusations can certainly be laid at the feet of every generation. They are emblematic and the manifestations of every era. Our cultures change, but Satan's tactics do not. We know Satan does not win by appearing as a demon. Presently he is making certain our anxieties of life seem

more pressing than the spiritual, he dulls our faith with mediocrity and makes the whole business of religion so impersonal and convoluted that apathy appears as the only solution. Perhaps this is the basis for those hypercritical charges against the Church's teaching... oh, those rules. In fact, I think that was the case for me. But then one summer, a single Biblical verse brought me grief.

In my senior year of high school, I had a wonderful English Literature instructor. In recognizing the decline of voluntary reading, he queried the students in the beginning of the year as to what books they've read over summer. Today, most high school students have a 'summer project' reading, which was not the case when I was young. When he asked the class what books they had read over summer, I

recall being the only one to respond. I asked if the Book of Revelation would be considered literature. He responded, "Yes." I told him I read it over summer. And I did, though I don't recall why exactly. I imagine intrigue with the 'end times' of the late 70's and early 80's played a role. But he asked me if I understood what I read. I said that I didn't, and he admitted the same. What I didn't share was the one verse in particular that had troubled me quite unexpectedly. Of the letters to the Seven Churches, the Church of Laodicea was neither hot nor cold. About that Church St. John was instructed to write, "So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth." When I share that verse today with young people, they tend to smirk or giggle. It seems hyperbole, meant only to get a rise. Or worse, it is seen as the threatening rant of a God who's Church is playing the guilt card... get to Mass or I will vomit you out... ha, what a thought! I didn't think any of that. I felt that that 'lukewarm' charge was leveled against me.

I had only missed a liturgy on Sunday or any Holy Day twice since my youngest memories, though I never used the term liturgy then. To be too sick to attend Mass was to be too sick to leave my room or the house. That was the house rules. Those were the days before the gobs of electronics and entertainment possibilities that are now in nearly every child's room that keep them indoors voluntarily. The point is that I would drag myself to Mass sick or not, what a small price to pay for the opportunity to play outside. But anyway, I was a good kid.



I thought that sincerely. Sure the Nuns called the house more than a few times to report my parochial school antics. But as they always told my mother and my mother told me, “He never starts trouble, but is always there when it is going on.” That aside, I was also known to be friendly and compassionate... my mom said they’re going to write on my tombstone, “He would talk to anyone”. I really didn’t think I was bad. But now I had the frightening sense that neither was I good. If I was neither good nor bad, that must make me lukewarm. And through my reading the Bible I’ve found out that that is the worst type of person to be. I literally remember asking myself, “How mad must God be to want to vomit you from His mouth?” I wondered if that is what He thought of me? It scared me.

There was no drastic change in my life or of my attitude towards the Catholic faith. But I was more agreeable to being involved with my parish’s Youth Group. So it did have that effect. I had attended parochial school until 8th grade. But because there was no Catholic high school in my area and the fact that I wanted to play for my public high school’s football team which was legendary in Pennsylvania’s NE coal region, my religious education



THE INDOMINABLE BERWICK BULLDOGS

would now have to be supplemented with lay teachers at CCD classes. At that time in my parish, once you were a sophomore in high school (9th grade freshmen went to Junior High), you had the option to attend youth group

rather than CCD instruction. I sort of got into it. To a certain degree it was a little odd for an athlete, as it wasn't the coolest thing to do. But I was internally struggling with this notion of being lukewarm. My parish priest, Fr. Dominic Mammarella, was rather avant-garde which made the whole experience more amiable. He himself was a weight lifter, and donated all of his equipment to the youth of the Italian neighborhood a decade or so earlier. That contribution became the foundation of the Kennedy Club that led to an interest in fitness for many young people at the time. He also for special occasions... think prom dates... would lend out his mid-sixties Avanti from time



to time, though unfortunately that had waned by the onset of my own driving years. Anyway, this priest embraced many aspects of the Charismatic Renewal during its rise to popularity in the 70's. That movement blended into the formation of those in the youth ministry.

So being involved with the youth group at St. Joseph's parish meant being exposed to this experiential charismatic movement. I was attracted to it. The parish was very traditional, but Fr. Mammarella, always keen to see an inroad to the young, allotted a Charismatic Mass each Wednesday evening. It was so different. There was

lively music, of which at times I myself participated in by playing the alto saxophone. I think, looking back now, what attracted me so much was not the novelty of the experience, but that it invoked a genuine spiritual fervor in so many within the community. Yet it was Catholic; it was still Mass, but a Mass where one's faith came alive. And it wasn't simply the young who were embracing it. I have many memories of the 'old' Italian women clapping and singing their hearts out. This gave me pause. I was always a reflective person... that kid 'over there' with a blank stare. I think this movement in my little ethnic parish brought an inward faith outward. And because it seemed to cross generational lines and was authentically Catholic, that hit me as something that was certainly not lukewarm. I didn't want lukewarm.

This movement in my parish coincided too with the beginnings of the national youth rallies held at Steubenville University. My recollection is that there were only a few of us from St. Joseph's that attended those summer conferences initially. But I was hooked. There I witnessed students totally unashamed of their Catholic faith. In fact, they



wore it on their sleeves... in a good way. The music was upbeat and motivating. The speakers seemed passionate

and convicted. The outdoor Mass, really under a huge tent, was nothing like I witnessed before... these people, both young and those 'older' adult leaders wanted to be there.



I remember some singer named Amy Grant... this was of course before her rise to popularity as a Christian singer and songwriter... who played a late night coffeehouse set. I returned home different. Those kind of glowing experiences seem to wear off, but I plateaued a little higher than

I was prior to my Steubenville experience. I would by my thinking, without hesitation, go again. And over the next few summers, I did.

My parish, spirited on by our pastor's enthusiasm raised money, and within a couple of years St. Joseph's youth group filled two school buses en route to Steubenville. We were intent on combining our spiritual acumen and Italian heritage, so they had red T-shirts made for us. They were printed with an enflamed heart surrounded by the words, "*Forte e Gentile.*" It's hard to impress what this meant for me. It seemed to address my concern of being lukewarm. But the expression I was experiencing wasn't a dull, overly serious piety disconnected or distancing me from my pursuits of friends and sports. This fit my life. There was nothing odd about it in my thinking, nothing compromising, nothing lukewarm.

Though there is one brief experience worth noting. It happened during a late afternoon conference. The tent was

filled with youth. I was sitting near the back of the crowd, almost outside the tent. This young man, slightly older than myself, kept staring over at me in an excited way, with an almost ‘moment of discovery’ expression on his face. After the talk, he came directly over and told me that the evening before he was in private prayer. God had asked him to write down some thoughts. He then went on to tell me that God further told him that on the next day, he would be shown who those words were for and he was to pass them along to that person saying that God has a message. Now, I am not one to overly spiritualize an event. I was skeptical... God has a note for me?

The text was benign, even somewhat general. That made me think, ‘why not?’ The gist of it was about increasing in strength spiritually, that I would know death and God wished to break me down. It also revealed that I have to do this willingly, by embracing my weaknesses so that I might know God’s strength. It ended by letting me know that I should always look to Christ’s resurrection as my own, and that I will know great power and true strength because of Christ. This handwritten note from God was two pages in length. I actually have since given it to my youngest daughter. I did this not to dismiss it, but knowing that it might not be only for me. But I can’t deny that through the years I haven’t sought inspiration and even comfort in it as a ‘word’ of God for my own life. A personal God writes personal notes. This personal relationship discovery would ultimately become a theme for both a recovery and discovery in my faith life. But more on that later. It would be impossible to overstate how those few summer experiences changed me. In subsequent years, I returned as a young adult leader. There was a certain vindication in my faith concerning that role. To return as an example and guide is

all other level of commitment.

There's another aspect of this Steubenville experience that should be noted. At that time, there was a priest who was rising in popularity as a Catholic evangelist. His name was Fr. John Bertolucci. He was a diocesan priest from Albany, NY who was a prominent speaker at the Youth Conferences. As chance would



have it, his car broke down on the highway as he was passing through my hometown of Berwick, PA. Well Fr. Mammarella, though genuinely ready to lend hospitality was also aware of the opportunity this provided for this 'celebrity' priest to meet the parishioners of St. Joseph's. The phone chain began passing along the news there would be a special charismatic Mass that particular evening. I remember there being a lot of excitement about this happening. The Mass was something special for our youth group, and like the logo on our T-shirts, our hearts were aflame. It went well and we loved it. But we were hoping this was the beginning of something. So Fr. John Bertolucci was invited back, and he did accept.

Now we can plan an event. And plan we did, and it went even better than before. After Mass, Fr. Bertolucci made himself available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or as we all called it, confession. I found nothing peculiar about my experience in the confessional. But, within a half hour after the 'line' died down, I received a phone call from Fr. Mammarella. He said Fr. Bertolucci was 'impressed' with my confession and they would both like me to join them for dinner at the rectory. I'm in! I know the Italian ladies

who cooked for him. I went, and it was a pleasant evening, though I wondered about the invite. [As a serious side note, I should state here that Fr. Bertolucci was unfortunately a contributor to the scandals that rocked our American Catholic Church. I do not know the details, and never bothered to search for them in his particular case. All I know is that he remained a priest until his death, living at home in Albany with no ministerial contact of any sort]. I mention this only to say that there is nothing of that sad truth found in my story or contact with him. That is not said to vindicate him in any way, only to make it clear that all of this being unknown at the time to both the St. Joseph's community and myself made Fr. Bertolucci nothing but a blessing to our little 'movement'.

Anyway, I think Fr. Mammarella's sense that I had a priestly vocation may have been part of the lure. He would always pretend to reach into his suit jacket's inside pocket saying, "I have the papers ready to sign." At the time of this writing, he is 93 years old. He also recently celebrated my dear mother Rose's funeral Mass. Even there he retold how he always thought I had a vocation to the priesthood, pinning it on the thought that he always found me to be a kind person. That did, and does my heart good to hear it. So to finish this part of my story, I also recall that Fr. Bertolucci wanted to walk me home that evening to meet my parents. My house was just two blocks away. Arriving at my house, my father Charles had a proud moment. My good mother Rose on the other hand was embarrassed that such a well-known priest had visited our home and seen her while she was in her curlers and nightgown. But before we left the rectory, I recall sharing my 'note' from Steubenville with Fr. Bertolucci. I was hoping to gain some insight from this spiritual man, about a note that I was

given on his 'spiritual' turf. His only response was to hang on to it, saying that maybe it would make sense some day.

I also responded directly to Fr. Mammarella's question about my considering the priesthood... it came up that evening. I jokingly said that if he would give me his Avanti, I would enter the seminary. He responded that it was already spoken for; it was to be given to his nephew. Knowing that was the case beforehand, I feigned a 'sigh' of relief and chided, "Oh well then I guess I'm getting married!" Wrapping this part of the story up though, my Catholic faith remained strong during my mid to late teen years. But as I graduated high school and was accepted to Gettysburg College, where I also played football, my affiliation to St. Joseph's became limited to college breaks and summers. Eventually the only connection was holidays, where I was visiting my mother and attended Mass with her.



Yet there was another tract of my spiritual journey that coincided with this charismatic foundation of my faith. It was a non-denominational evangelical movement in my little town that plays directly into the question as to why I am still Catholic. A friend of my brothers from high school had moved back to town. He had become a minister, and wished to start up his own church, the New Covenant Christian Center. I was living back in Berwick at this time. I had been injured in football; and in deciding to change my major, transferred to a local state school. That way I could save money by living at home and commuting to college. It also gave me chance to work on the side, so

I began apprenticing with an artist friend named Vince Castellano. We were liturgical artists, which involved creating or refurbishing stain glass windows, statuary, altar furniture, etc. This was an opportune way to incorporate my love of art, my new major, with a connection to my Catholic faith.

Scott, my brother's friend-turned-minister, was a painter by trade. Vince hired him to help on a local Baptist church where we were doing some restoration on the windows at the time. Our discussions, as you could imagine, were often centered on our Christian faith. Even the Baptist minister of the church we were working on became part of the dialogue. He was impressed with how we as 'young' people seemed to be so passionate about our faith. Anyway, Scott found a small church on a side street nearer the East end of Berwick. We began to make it habitable and worthy of a Christian service. Vince and I willingly helped out of Christian charity. I recall planing the wooden door, fixing the leaded glass windows or at least patching them up, and so on. I don't recall how he got his initial congregants, but before too long he had a couple dozen people for a start-up church. Fr. Mammarella, who seemed to be ahead of the curve on the ecumenical front, wanted to support any efforts to infuse Christianity into the community. For a limited time, the St. Joseph's Bible Study group (which included my mother Rose) would meet at Scott's church, this New Covenant Christian Center. This of course was not intended to support their theology, but to simply be charitable Christian friends and recognize the portion of truth that we did share.

Even with good intentions, a rift began... you probably saw that coming. Some of the members of the Bible Group,

and others of St. Joseph's Church found a new home in this Christian Center. From this entanglement then, theological discussions ensued between 'them' Non-Denominationals and 'us' Catholics. Fr. Mammarella stayed above the fray, but others accused Scott of 'sheep stealing'. I think there was something to that, but since they went so willingly, it's fair to ask if those leaves wouldn't have fallen off of the tree eventually anyway. But this is an important part of my story, and helps form an answer to the question as to 'Why I am still Catholic'. Those who left did so because they agreed with the arguments they were hearing. I don't recall what exactly was the content of those 'arguments' but they centered on how necessary were the formalities and rituals of this huge Catholic Church we cradle-Catholics were born into.

At the base of the division was the necessity to be 'born again' in terms of an adult spiritual renewal. From that came the idea that there should be some sort of affirmation of this renewal expressed in a sense of feeling alive in Christ. Nothing there is necessarily outside of an authentic Catholic spirituality, after all the Charismatic movement shared that experience. But the Catholic Church is the 'big guy' on the block. It's both easy to throw stones at the Church and to treat it solely as an institution. The Church appeared as an institution that seemed to have so much dirty laundry and skeletons in the closet. Many then formed the conclusion that it is best to get 'out' of the Church, and be an independent Christian. This 'evangelical movement' was proposing restorative features to the Christian faith, and 'proving' many errors within the Catholic Church.

This by contrast then, automatically affirms those who choose to be real Christians 'outside' of an institution.

I wanted to be a 'real' Christian. Neither of these faith expressions was lukewarm, so that solved my first crisis. But they both couldn't be true, so that became a factor concerning my Christian growth. Which of the two were valid? After all, on the surface the argument that the early Church was less ritualistic than the present day Catholic Church seemed a no-brainer at the time. Did St. Peter wear a tiara and hold a mitre? Was he carried around in a *sedes gestatoria*, the ceremonial papal chair? Did the first Apostles wear clerical vestments? No, and all of these became nagging discrepancies. Then add to that the sense of freedom or lightness in which starting fresh with one's faith provides. Could these coupled together, being 'born again' with the added value of no longer being deceived, become my choice? Should I no longer remain Catholic?

I first tinkered with the thought of sidelining with the New Covenant Christian Center. By that I mean that maybe I could formally be a Catholic, but go to this start up church frequently; hedge my bet, so to say. How's that for being non-committal? After all, Rev. Scott was friendly and I think even now, he was quite genuine at the time. I should mention that my brother was married in that church. He became impatient waiting for his annulment from a previous marriage. We were told that the process takes time even when it is very likely to be granted. So because a mix of impatience and indignation doesn't lend good counsel, the thought of having his old high school classmate officiate his wedding appeared attractive. But that's just a side note, although I mention it because it was another layer of connection to this church. But for me to have two feet spanning two different faith expressions just seemed another manifestation of being lukewarm. I didn't want that.

My grasp of what was going on with the New Covenant Christian Center was the pastor's disdain for the Catholic Church. If he was genuine about anything, he was genuine about that. I wasn't taken aback so much that he recognized the distinctions and didn't hide what he saw as truth or error. I suspected a certain lack of gratitude, which grew in me as a just indignation. After all, we reached out in solidarity with our 'brother Christians' and made an effort to support Scott in his ministry. So many of us helped clean up and restore his church building. And more than a handful of us attended his first service. That's where any thought of 'leaving' the Catholic faith waned quickly, and here's why. At this time our Catholic faith was still intact. We, who were to attend his first service, had no intention of missing Mass that Sunday. The service times wouldn't allow us to remain for his entire inaugural service, but at least we were there to support Scott. His message during the sermon was quite a shock. I don't recall the specifics,



but it was aimed directly at the Catholic Church and he looked directly at 'us' Catholics in attendance. There were

no innuendoes that might simply be misinterpretations. The Catholic Church was in error, and he wanted us to know the truth.

We walked out mid-service, only so as to be on time for the beginning of Mass at St. Joseph's. But later that afternoon, it prompted Scott to ask us if we left because we were offended by his words. We assured him that indignation was not our motive, but made the point it would've been appropriate given the charity we offered. We thought that of all the Christians denominations present in the community, it was only the 'Catholics' from the West End who befriended Scott. Our congregation alone worked on fixing up the New Covenant Christian Center church building without recompense. We reminded him that it was the Catholic Bible study group that chose to temporarily locate themselves with his own, until he was able to build up a core of attendees.

The exchange was frank, but not terribly unpleasant. Personally, there was something that got me thinking that Scott was biting the hand that fed him. He himself thought it was about his commitment to speak the truth and that alone. I would've agreed with the approach if he presented it as more of a paradox. Perhaps if he would've mentioned there's something to be said for those you disagree with doctrinally to be the very ones who gave their time and talents personally. I would've loved to rather have heard him say, "I disagree with my Christian brothers and sisters, but they love me and I love them." But he didn't. So I saw his approach as a clear lack of charity. Gratitude is not expressed by mere words. We all knew our 'teachings' were in conflict on major points. For someone to admit that is not being judgmental. But this was not about differences.

I sensed that there was a touch of, “you’ve helped me, but that was God’s way of getting you here and now giving me the opportunity to expose you to the errors of your Catholic faith.” I have a faint recollection of him actually admitting that maybe God’s plan was to bring me to him so I could hear the truth. This all would’ve been enough to turn me away, but it was not all, and what followed was key to keeping me in the Catholic faith.

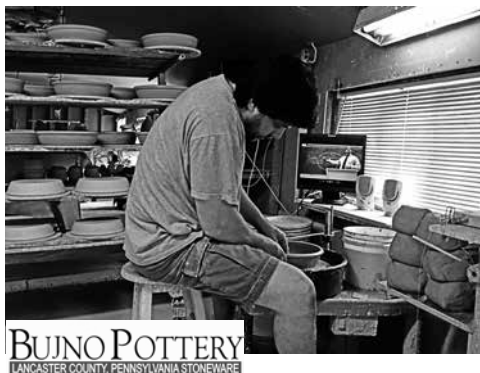
It became apparently clear to me that Scott was not that deep into theology. Perhaps if he were, that in itself would have been a ‘mark’ against his spirituality. What I mean is that many independent church pastors see formal education as ‘worldly wisdom’ and a part of the institutional Church they contrast themselves from. For instance, in the many religious discussions I had with Scott, his understanding of transubstantiation was that that power is not something the ordained priests have alone, but belongs by authority to any minister commissioned by God. In fact during his first service, he went through what appeared to be a ritual including the words of institution. What struck me in all of this was that he didn’t grasp that even a doctrine of a ‘real presence’ as he purported would put him squarely in the domain of those whom he doctrinally opposed. I thought to myself, “How can somebody miss that?” Now there were also other theological concerns that I didn’t think he worked out very well, but there’s no need to list them here. But in order for me to be able to dialogue and respond to his critiques, I was prompted to delve into apologetics. Apologetics at the time was something that was just beginning to sweep through the Christian world. But more on that part in particular is next.

So to wrap up this chapter of the story of why I am still

Catholic, two moments of grace appeared and should be noted. First off, when Scott asked me directly why I would not make that final ‘leap’ and leave the Catholic faith, I told him that I was now certain God was calling me to stay in the Catholic Church. I still had many questions, and I even thought the Church had some theological baggage that needed to be discarded. But with my vibrant faith awakened, I seriously thought I could do more good by ‘changing’ the Church from within rather than ‘revealing’ any errors from without. I didn’t see it at the time, but I had some over-important sense of self that led me to believe I would be a ‘stealth’ reformer. I couldn’t really tell you what I thought needed reform in particular, but I did think it is certainly better to do it from the ‘inside’. Oh how arrogant I was, and wish I could go back and slap that younger me. I’m sure God was very impressed... ha! But grace was at work.

I knew I was maturing spiritually, but it also had become evident that there was so much about my Catholic faith I simply did not know well. I clearly told Scott that I would not tell God what to do with my life, in other words I intend to be pliant. But I would not leave a faith that I didn’t understand very well. That was the second mark of grace. Perhaps this went hand in hand with my sense of personal growth and Church reform that both knowledge and understanding was key. I think that has become a hallmark of my spiritual journey and this is one of those major points, looking backwards, as to why I am still Catholic. This ‘moment’ was a choice of which path to take. To either leave or stay, I became convinced that knowing about one’s faith was necessary to be both intellectually and spiritually honest. To leave what one does not know well is the move of a fool. What I cannot speak to is why I had

such grace to think those thoughts or the good counsel to respond in such a way. In all humility, it's simply hard for me to make out how one's heart and mind are nudged this way or that. It really is a mystery, one that's true for both faith and love. And love was next!



I am an artist. My bachelor degree is in fine arts. I walked into the studio class one afternoon, saw this young lady and though you must know I am not prone to romantic notions, laid eyes on the girl I

knew I would marry. I didn't know her name; that's a story in itself on how I came to discover her name was Tina. But now I had confirmation that my vocation truly was to marriage. Fr. Mammarella's Avanti really had nothing to do with it. I really never doubted that, but now it appeared to have a concrete resolution. I did introduce myself, we did date for a couple years and on one knee near the edge of a steep cliff (infer what you may), she accepted my proposal of marriage. And during those three or four years prior to our marriage, I was quite open and very public about my faith. Tina somewhat jokingly says now that I came across a little extreme, though her meekness stopped her from saying 'odd', which is what I would have thought of myself.

Now Tina was not Catholic. That didn't bother me in the least; in fact I can't recall it being a point of topic either way. She was very accepting of my faith expression. Tina grew up Lutheran, but after her parents divorced she

occasionally attended a congregation that I think was an Assembly of God or Pentecostal church. I even recall that her mother and previous long-time boyfriend also went there for worship service. She never spoke ill of it; she wouldn't. Though she did share some odd experiences such as someone in the congregation standing up to call out another 'brother' from his sinful ways. It was something akin to public confession, but someone else confesses your sins for you out loud... God, please no!

But as college age students are typically romantic in both their relationships and views of the world, my life course was now matched with someone I loved. And my life course was going to be in the Church. Tina would simply be along with me, in the Church. It wasn't even part of a discussion for either one of us, it just seemed natural that what I was pursuing was a good thing, and she wanted to be part of it. There's no doubt I was in love with Tina and wanted her to join me on what I probably in all honesty considered a quest; one that would not be lukewarm to be sure. It's probable that I sensed a grandiose mission afoot... remember that note I received at Steubenville promising great power and strength in Christ? Prior to marriage, Tina and I spent many hours at the local CCM house (Catholic Campus Ministry). Fr. Chet, the priest who resided there, and Sister Anita whom was there so often, became a positive influence on both of us. In fact, Fr. Chet witnessed our wedding and Sister Anita played guitar during the liturgy.

Just prior to the wedding I moved down to Lancaster County, PA, and sort of settled in an apartment we picked out together. Tina was working up state at the time in the mental health unit of a women's prison, but after the wedding, moved into *our* first apartment. It was three rooms above a

barn. Tina was working with the developmentally disabled and I was working in a pottery studio full time. I look back on those times with great fondness. The only thing missing was children. We both loved kids and couldn't wait to start a family. Within four months, Tina was expecting; how exciting that was. As for my faith, this was a time where I grew spiritually to no longer *question* my Catholic faith as a lawyer picking apart witnesses. I wanted to learn by asking questions and to delve deeper into apologetics. I bought the books, listened to the cassettes and tried to bring up the topic with others whenever it seemed agreeable to do so... agreeable to me that is.

In all honesty I have mixed feelings about the whole apologetics experience. On a positive note, it continued to build up my fervor. I studied the arguments for the faith, and against the faith. I spent time to learn about other Christian denominations and sects. I studied the Reformation period and grew increasingly more interested in the Church Fathers. I began a ministry at my local parish entitled *Fidei in Nuce* (Faith in a Nutshell). Through the blessing and guidance of my good parish priest, I developed treatises that I used in the parish classes from the usual topics covered by apologetics; the primacy of Peter, the Eucharist in the Church Fathers, Purgatory, etc. This time also coincided with the popularity of St. John Paul II's so-called 'Theology of the Body'. That was a particular topic of interest. This venture gave me a taste for teaching to be sure. But it also gave me an insight into how much I did not know. Or better stated, might have known, but couldn't properly articulate to either my own satisfaction or put in the broader context of my Catholic faith. I guess this was another grace. I began to intellectually and spiritually mature in my studies, but more importantly, I

was becoming aware that without some direction, I would never know what was missing. Self-study has its limits.

With that in mind, I decided that I needed to validate my knowledge of the faith. It was time to pursue a graduate degree in theology. St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philly was an hour away. I heard it mentioned on one of the cassette tapes I listened to, so that was a plus. I did check into other programs, but this seemed the best bet in terms of curriculum, professors and location. I did not have an undergraduate degree in theology, so there was prerequisite course work to complete prior to entry into what is now the Graduate School of Theology at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. But things were brewing in and with my faith at this point that would come to fruition later; grace comes in seed form.

First I was quickly becoming disillusioned with popular apologetics. It often had in my view this semblance of aggression and was based more on the cult of personality than on the willingness for authentic study or dialogue. I found popular apologetics somewhat superficially presenting the faith. It was what I perceived as a random shotgun approach of either shooting or deflecting bullets to and from various positions. One's intent was to reduce the other side into submission. One side would find a Biblical text that 'proves' their position, and the other side would counter with some notion that it's either misinterpreted or taken out of context. Everything seemed to rest on what one could prove and typically whatever 'side' you were on seemed to have the better points.

I think I experienced a lot of self-affirmation on both sides of the debates. This is not to pass judgment on apologetics *per se*, but to simply articulate what I imagined



was Avery Cardinal Dulles' point when he was referring to those practitioners whom oversimplify and syllogize an approach to the faith. Couple this with my personal aversion to self-marketing, which in my view seemed to be the staple of the cottage industry template the so-called professional apologists employed, and I found myself within a minor crisis. After all, hadn't I simply been involved with the same type of delivery with my own *Fidei in Nuce* ministry, just on such a small scale? Perhaps. I think on one

level, I became indignant; that was one of those things brewing. But I also became more committed than ever to recognizing this resistance as a point of consolation in my own spiritual life. I was being deflected from, or better put, directed towards a change in vocation. Delving into the academic world smoothed any dismay and reoriented the trajectory of my faith.

I was fortunate at St. Charles to have some very learned and articulate instructors. Those of us in the 'lay' program shared the same professors as the seminarians. I was sitting in front of priests and lay teachers trained at institutions such as the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Accademia Alfonsiana. I don't think that makes any professor a better teacher, but I wanted to be certain of authentic and orthodox instruction. Those credentials seemed to provide solace for me; St. Charles was even

jokingly referred to as the 'little Vatican'. Going for my graduate work at St. Charles would take care of those 'things' I might have been missing studying on my own... and it would also be safe theologically. Too, my perception towards the popular apologetics movement seemed to be vindicated. In one way, I found a similar reaction from the professors, who would even comment outside of class that so many of the apologists are hacks (Dulles himself used that description). But my formal studies were not to vindicate a position, nor even to simply fill in the gaps apologetics left out. In my formal studies there was no sense of winning, or to be proven right. The knowledge I was gaining appeared to belong to a more sober and mature faith. The presenters of those taped conferences and lectures never left me with that impression. I may be entirely wrong on these points, but it's how I felt.

At that time, the Religious Studies program offered masters with concentrations in Systematic, Morality, Sacred Scripture or Christian Spirituality. Of course, they're simply concentrations where the division among them is merely a focus. I decided, contrary to the expectations of, but with the full pleasure of my fine Redemptorists priests, to not pursue studies in Systematic Theology. I chose Moral Theology. I mention this choice of specialization, as I think it adds a layer of thought as to why I am still Catholic. I recognized that to study moral theology was to witness how grace, coupled with the truth of love works itself out in all relational aspects of man. These aspects lead to and are meant to bring all human actions voluntarily to a love-vision of God. The whole concept seemed poetic, and appealed to my creative and artistic personality. Again, whether correct or not, the disillusionment I still felt from popular apologetics turned me away from systematically

studying anything in theology. I didn't want to begin with what the Church teaches, then methodically work through it, demonstrating its consistency and truth.

I understood this systematic theology, being based on Divine Revelation as something clean, laid out, and set. But moral theology in many ways is 'messy'. It's not that its vague or convoluted of course, because it is very clear in its understanding and study. It also takes full account of Divine Revelation, but it begins with what is here and now and in front of me among people. There is nothing as varied and as tangled as human relationships, and I was trying to answer questions in my own chaotic life. Aren't we all? A genuine morality doesn't construct an approach or remedy to a solution that can be systematically applied. Not that there isn't something to that approach found in casuistry. But aligning one's actions towards a loving God is



personal, and not 'outside' of the person. I think of the distinctions Gabriel Marcel makes in this regard between a problem and a mystery. A problem has a solution and can be 'fixed', a mystery is

something one is involved intimately with and though there is a certain direction, including principles to apply, the experience can never be exhausted.

If this appears philosophical, it should, because that discipline is intertwined with the field of morality. If this were not so, one would only need to consult Canon Lawyers or moral caseworkers. Catholic morality takes Sacred Scripture and systematic aspects of the Faith to

weave into an authentic spirituality. I never interpreted an approach to Catholic morality that seeks the *what* of an action, but the *why*. Do not interpret that as to mean the intention is primary. It is not. Morality makes judgments primarily on the *what*. What I specifically mean as the *why* here is my desire to discover the motivation of the action and intention. I wanted to understand what develops *in* the human soul to seek the *why* and *what*. In short, rather than some clinical analysis of a person's actions, my concern is what has enveloped the whole person to bring them to that choice. It is sort of like asking the *why* of 'why I am still Catholic', which to me is certainly tangled and a very real mystery.

Now this nuanced transition in my academic life is relevant to why I am still Catholic because the inquisitiveness in my studies was personal. My whole academic career is a venture of working out *my own* questions. I imagine that is true for most everyone in theology, philosophy, psychology and the like. But the questions of systematic theology weren't pressing for resolution on my spirit. I found them quite relevant, but settled. For instance, it can be said *this* is what the Church teaches, and *this* is why the Church teaches such and such. In my view, whether correct or not, systematic theology, which includes both those good and the bad apologists, is in the realm of explaining not discovering. I guess some might argue they are discovering new ways to explain the faith, and that leads to a discovery of a fuller truth. Perhaps that is why those *celebrity* apologists who converted into the Catholic faith stand as examples (or successes?) of individuals who have discovered the truth through reasoned arguments.

And although there is a kernel of truth that reasoned

arguments play a part in one's spiritual growth, I don't think, in actuality, they play a very significant role. Could someone be rationally brought into the faith? Was Peter convinced 'fishing for men' makes more sense than the fishing enterprise he was currently involved with? What about the conversion of Matthew the tax collector, or Mary Magdalene? I would imagine that the ways in which the Spirit brings someone into the fullness of truth vary tremendously; everyone's journey is a winding path. But didn't Augustine in the end simply surrender? I think, on some level, to believe one has 'figured it out' is nothing more than a way for that individual to save face. It's easier to keep one's own intellectual pride if the claim was you were mistaken or misled in previous doctrinal stances but it was your intellect that ferreted out those errors. I think that's why some 'converts' become zealous practitioners of wanting others to find the wholeness of the truth, which sometimes boils down to accepting Church doctrines. The emphasis here is on doctrines that they themselves have found through reasoned apologetics. It all becomes some sort of vindication. I believe, in reality, it was their hearts which were moved; their wills were conformed to Christ. I am not trying to be overly critical, but as this relates to my own story, the intellect is involved, but it's not primarily a 'figuring out'. If it is a knowing, it is a knowing in the heart not the mind. This is important, because everything for me was becoming understood in terms of love and relation.

Anyway, I saw moral theology as the frontier. And the questions that pressed upon me became the impetus for my next graduate degree, a masters in Anthropological Philosophy from Holy Apostles College and Seminary (enter here my relation with Dr. Ronda Chervin). I wanted to know what it meant to be a human person. It's a simple

question with no simple answers. I developed a thesis that coupled that investigation with liturgy, interpreted much broader than rites. It's difficult to express how this all has contributed to my thinking and has solidified me in my Catholic thinking. But this is not the forum to expand on any of that or how it relates to my current project on philosophical love, psychology, the human person and culture (I working through these big questions as I continue my academic pursuits of a Ph.D. at the Global Center for Advanced Studies, Research Institute Ireland. The key to all of this concerning the issue as to why I am still Catholic is that I love the art of inquiry. A friend of mine who is Jewish, was at a time considering converting to Christianity. He was torn between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, the latter of which I share both an affinity for and a great deal of reverence towards. I don't think he left his Jewish faith (we've since lost contact), but he was leaning towards the Latin Rite. The reason was, as he put it, "Your Church at least tries to explain things, with the Orthodox they are simply content to leave it at the level of mystery." I don't think that's far off and I share that attraction.

I would like to begin my conclusion by talking a little more about the foundational contribution Tina has made in regards to why I am still Catholic. After ten years of marriage, Tina surprised me by deciding to enter into the fullness of faith with the Catholic Church. I say surprised, because the differences between us denominationally speaking, although present, were never issues of division between us in practice. We went to Mass together every Holy Day. Even in the early days of our marriage, if we went to an ELCA church for her, it was before attending Mass at the local Catholic parish on that same Sunday for me. On

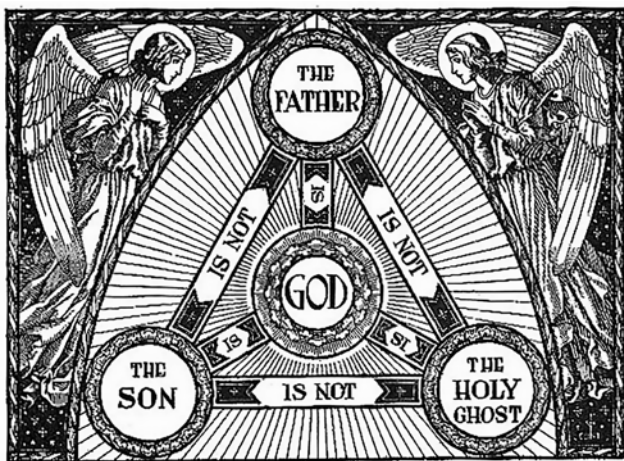
those days Tina didn't receive Communion at the Catholic Mass and I didn't receive communion at the Lutheran service. There was a mutual respect for each other's beliefs and practices, although we were both probably working out the meaning in all of this.

Even concerning the *dogmatic* divisions, there was no *relational* divide between us. Though there was an occasional question or two Tina would ask. As a matter of fact, one time after Mass she simply commented on how it appears odd that of all those 'Catholics' who receive the Eucharist, certainly some do not *actually* believe in the substantial presence of Christ. She went on to say that here she sits in the pew and does not receive Communion, but actually believes as the Catholics do. I felt no desire at that moment to 'teach' or convince her to 'join'. I do recall mentioning in a matter of fact way, that only the Roman Catholics and Orthodox believe what she was expressing. I simply stated, "If that's what you believe, I don't know why you're not Catholic?" She just smiled; this was a few years before she informed me that she wanted to enter the RCIA program for instruction and formation.

Now this is important not just that my wife was further affirming the faith that I was choosing more deeply, that would surely add to the reason why I am still Catholic in itself. But in the years following Tina's entry in the Catholic faith, it became apparent to me that our relationship gained something I didn't realize was missing. Even though there was no tension in our relationship when we were *separated* denominationally, the unity between us increased when we were *brought together* inside the Church. It's hard to describe; the Orthodox aren't entirely wrong to leave some things in the realm of mystery. With benefit of reflection,

I would say now that we experienced a fullness of unity, not entirely like, but also not unlike that which Tina experienced with her entry into the fullness of the Catholic Church. Her relationship ‘with God’ changed, and our relationship with ‘each other before God’ changed. This *relational* understanding of my faith with and in Christ became apparent by the modeling of Tina and our own faithful unity in marriage. It wasn’t that I rediscovered the obvious, i.e., one’s spiritual life and faith in Christ is ultimately relational. It seemed much more peripheral, yet strikingly profound in the way it affected my thought. There was nothing *about* Tina that I loved, as much as it was *Tina* that I loved. In other words, I never fell in love, nor could sustain a love, if it was only about the idea of Tina or the many things that I found attractive about her. It had to be a love about Tina the person.

I immediately began to see Christ (think Trinity) separate from precepts or systematic truths, yet not



disconnected from the expressions of those truths. I no longer understood this Triune God to simply be the law

and basis behind that wonderful mystery of morality that I found so attractive. I understood Him as the Person behind that wonderful mystery of morality. In an odd, but honest and real way, my philosophical pursuits explained things to my mind and heart that my theological studies didn't quite ignite. I can't explain why. It's one thing to grasp this thing between man and God as being relational, but yet another thing to determine that relational aspect as a Person... three Persons to be accurate. I have come to this conclusion by philosophically understanding liturgy as primarily



relational. That came to fruition, as stated during the pursuit of my graduate philosophy degree. I liked Jean-Yves Lacoste's notion that liturgy does violence to the *being-in-the-world* in the name of the *being-before-God*. In plain simple terms, God re-

forms the deepest part of the human person, by destroying the *worldliness* in him. He is for us and we are for him. Isn't that exactly like marriage? I think the answer to why I am still Catholic is that because I discovered love with someone in this world, I have found not something to love in God, but God as *Someone* to love.

I'm not fond of trite slogans. I hope that stating, 'you must love Someone and not something' does not appear as one. If it seems to be a simple answer to the simple question, "Why am I still Catholic," it is not. There is no little distinction between knowing you're in a relation and experiencing a relationship that is never exhausted.

My marriage demonstrates that to me. After all, didn't Augustine begin his *Confessions* with the notion that our hearts would find no peace until they found rest in God? If I wanted one, could there be any proof of such a notion? Could the peace I have found be complete in this life? If the peace that satisfies is not a finite peace, we should not continue to look for it in this finite world of ours. It's connected, for me, to the future love that my marriage, here and now both points to and also embodies. I am still married because the richness of the relation cannot be exhausted between Tina and me, nor can it be as ever fertile and plentiful outside of our covenantal relation. For both of us there is always a new re-vealing of love. In my experience, the being-in-relation continually does violence to the *being-for-oneself*.

I had so many opportunities to share this rich experience at Berks Catholic High School, where I taught Junior Theology. Everything I presented in teaching was done in terms of a relation. For instance, my students, like most young people, saw the 'requirement' to attend liturgy on each Sunday and Holy Day as simply a rule. I would not be putting words in their mouths to share that I've heard, "God knows I love Him. I don't need to go to church to show that. I can just as easily pray at home." I usually responded, "All right, how would that play out with your boyfriend or girlfriend?" With that I continued, "I want you to not visit with your girlfriend for the next 3 months. You also can't text, tweet, face time, snap chat or just plain-old call her either. If she gets upset, just let her know that you don't need to do any of those things to show you're in a relationship, because she already knows that. But do reassure her that, once a week while you were home, you thought about her." They got that, but I am not naïve

anymore to think an argument works. I know this faith experience is not about knowing. It's about a realization that enters the heart of each person.

Twice a year our high school took around 40 of the upperclassmen on a three-day Kairos retreat. Those students who had graduated and returned to visit often said that that was the single most moving and memorable experience of their four years. A Kairos retreat, if you do not know, is a high school/college level version of the Cursillo Retreats, both based on Ignatian spirituality. It's a very reflective opportunity for the students that also involves small group sharing.

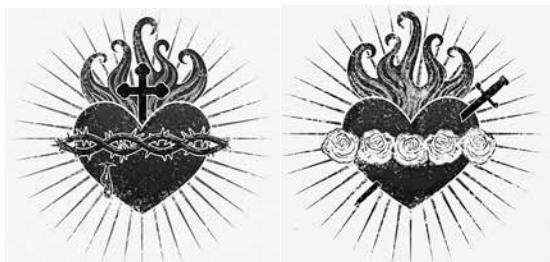
A select half-dozen former retreatants are accepted to return as student leaders for the next Kairos. They have the opportunity to share *their* stories. How often this reveals the struggles they themselves have faced, and it demonstrates that things aren't always as sunny as they appear. Dealing with the divorce of their parents is a constant topic that comes up in their speeches, and also in those small groups. But the adult leaders, of which I was one, also got to tell their stories. You've read about a portion of mine in this booklet. But we had also to choose opening and closing songs that roughly matched up to the theme of our talk.



I say this as a connection to this writing, because my opening song was Queen's "Find Me Someone to Love". The corresponding point is that nothing made sense for me until I realized I wasn't looking for a *what*, but a *who*. An image of God is not

enough, and the reality is that everyone needs to let his or her guard down at some point. We all need to admit that at our deepest level, what we all really want is *someone to love*. We want someone who places no conditions on love. I tell them *God is that Someone!*

And all of this ironically becomes a way of knowing. Love does not prove, but it affirms knowledge. That wasn't what I expected. I said I would not leave a faith I did not understand well. As it turns out, there was nothing doctrinally that I needed to understand better, but rather the understanding was a penetration of the mystery of a Person. Remember, I wanted to be a 'stealth' reformer within the Church? That one must of made God laugh... I hope! As it turns out, it was through the Church that I was stealthily reformed. That took care of the first concern my teenage self struggled with. What about my concern of being neither hot, nor cold but lukewarm? No, this type of relationship, as both liturgical and personal, personifies that flaming heart I once wore on my youth group T-shirt... it's hot! But I still have no answer as to why certain graces were given to some and not others. Though I know why I did cling to faith of my childhood. I now know that I'm still Catholic because I am in a love-relation that cannot find satisfaction outside of the Body of the Person who first loved me.





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