



LAY CATHOLICS LEAVING THE CHURCH PROTESTANT MINISTERS JOINING THE CHURCH. WHAT IS GOING ON?

Many of you reading this column have a family member, co-worker or friend who was raised Catholic and is now active in another Christian church. It is probably accurate to say that in the past 30 years, large numbers of Catholics have left the Catholic Church to join another Christian church. Why is this? I am aware of the following reasons. You may be aware of other reasons:

- They were drawn to another church because they were spiritually searching and they found a church that was much more spiritually alive than their local parish. After a year or so in some Evangelical church, the former Catholic experiences a closeness to God and Jesus that he/she never experienced in the Catholic Church. He/she is now reading the Bible. God and church have become a very important part of their lives. If the former Catholic is really into his new found faith and church, he will, most likely, seek to persuade other family members to also leave the Catholic Church and join his friendly, spiritually alive and bible based church. I am sure some of you have had that experience.
- They were invited by a friend to visit his/her church and was attracted by what they experienced e.g. lively music, good preaching, focus on the Bible.
- A spouse was stronger in his/her faith and was able to influence the Catholic to join his/her church.
- Large numbers of Catholics are poorly catechized. They do not know why they believe what they believe and are unable to respond to non-Catholics who challenge them on why they believe what they believe.

The following are some examples of how evangelical or bible believing Christians challenge Catholics and their beliefs.

- “We only believe what is clearly stated in the Bible, Catholics believe in Tradition and man-made rules.”
- “We worship Jesus, Catholics worship Mary and the Saints.”
- “We believe one can only be saved by accepting

Jesus as one’s Lord and Savior, Catholics believe one is saved by good works.”

- “Our worship is spirit-filled, Catholic worship consists of lifeless ritual.”
- “We look to the Bible alone for what we should believe, Catholics look to the Pope. We believe that only the Bible is infallible. Catholics believe the Pope is infallible.”
- “We believe that God alone forgives sins. Catholics have to go to a priest to forgive sins.”

In addition, Catholics are challenged on why they believe in Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, statues, medals, the seven Sacraments and the Rosary. Sadly all too many Catholics are unable to explain why we believe in the above.

An Interesting Phenomenon

While we have large numbers of Catholics leaving the Catholic church to join a more ‘spiritually alive church’, a more ‘bible based church’, we have in the past 20 years a growing number of Protestant ministers being led by the Spirit to convert to Catholicism. We also have a number of lay evangelicals joining the Catholic Church and a number of people who were raised in the Catholic Church, join an evangelical church for years and now are returning home to the Catholic Church.

This phenomenon is amazing to me when I consider the following factors:

- Nearly all of the Protestant ministers now converting to Catholicism were raised in an anti-Catholic atmosphere.
- They were very well educated in their own religious beliefs. So it wasn’t as if they didn’t truly know what their particular church believed.
- Joining the Catholic church meant losing their jobs. Nearly all of these converts were Pastors in their churches. When they joined the Catholic Church they wanted to continue in Christian ministry. Some were able to do this, others were not.
- Often these men left vibrant faith communities to join a parish that may not have been very spiritually alive.
- They joined the Catholic church during a time when

the media highlighted all sex scandals and the cover-up of these by our bishops. Who needs to join such a church?

So why were these Ministers led to the Catholic Church?

Briefly, they were led to the Catholic Church as a result of extensive study especially into the roots of Christianity. All of these former ministers now believe that the Catholic Church is the one true church founded by Jesus Christ.

If you are interested in the amazing spiritual journey of these men and women, I suggest two books:

-Surprised by the Truth

This book is the story of eleven Evangelical ministers who are now Catholics. Nearly all of them were raised in an anti-Catholic atmosphere. They felt it was their solemn duty to lead Catholics out of their false church where people worshipped Mary, saints and statues. The book outlines biblical, theological and historical reasons why these ordained ministers were led into the Catholic Church. We have some copies of this book in our parish office and will have copies available outside church next weekend for \$10.00

-Journey Home - Marcus Grodi

Marcus Grodi, former Presbyterian Minister, is now host of a T.V. program called *The Journey Home* available on channel 169, EWTN. Each week he interviews a former Protestant minister or a former lay evangelical couple or a 'revert' - a person raised Catholic who left the Catholic church to join an evangelical church and has now returned home. *The Journey Home* program airs each Monday evening at 8:00 PM. I always tape the program and listen to it later. This past Monday the guest was Mike Gumbie, former Baptist/Pentecostal Minister. This coming Monday the program is from Ireland. I didn't know we had any Protestants over there, so I can't wait to listen to this interview. Consider telling family members who have left the church about this program.

The book *Journey Home* contains 30+ stories of men and women, ordained and non-ordained who were led home to the Catholic Church. If interested in this book call 740-450-1175.

As I reflect on the phenomenon of Catholics leaving their church to join a "spiritually alive" church and Protestant ministers and lay people and former Catholics returning home to the Catholic Church, I think this is what is happening:

- If people are searching for a "spiritually alive" church,

good upbeat music, great preaching, few rules or traditions, there is a good chance they will end up in some evangelical church.

- On the other hand, if seeking people take time to study the history of Christianity, its origins, the Early Fathers of the Church there is a good chance they will join the Catholic church. Unfortunately, the vast majority of seekers will not study history and the Early Fathers. The great John Henry Cardinal Newman, former Oxford professor and Anglican clergy and convert to Catholicism, once said "to study church history is to be led into the Catholic Church".

A Big Need

A huge need in our church today is to educate children, teenagers and adults in the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. Even more so we need to help our young people and adults to have a strong personal relationship with Jesus. Every minister who converted to Catholicism and every Catholic who joined an evangelical church and returned to Catholicism will always be grateful for how their time in their Evangelical church led them to a strong personal relationship with Christ and a deep love of the scriptures. Catholics who have a strong personal relationship with Christ and know why they believe what they believe will rarely, if ever, leave the Catholic Church. The opposite is not true as the stories in the above mentioned books will show.

Resources: CD's and Books

As you know by now, I love to sell books at a big discount. Recently, I have become aware of an organization called *Lighthouse Catholic Media*. They produce CD's on many topics. They sell CD's for only \$2. Parishes can order large numbers of CD's and return what they do not sell. What a great deal. Next weekend we will have available some CD's from *Lighthouse* and some CD's from EWTN's *Journey Home* series. Now I would like to tell you a little bit about the CD's that will be available next weekend.

1.) Which Came First the Bible or the Church —Matt Arnold. This is an important tape because it deals with the important question of the relationship between the Bible and the church. Many, if not all of the ministers who converted to Catholicism looked *only* to the Bible for truth and guidance. After reading the Early Fathers, they found this to be an error. For the first few hundred years, the Early Christians did not have a bible to quote from. Instead they looked to church leaders to help them

know what was correct and incorrect doctrine.

2. Why a Protestant Minister Became Catholic. Scott Hahn PhD.

Of the Protestant Ministers who converted to Catholicism in the past twenty years, Scott Hahn is by far the best known. At one stage in his life he deeply believed that it was his solemn duty to lead Catholics out of their church. This CD tells the amazing story of his conversion to Catholicism.

3. Four Marks of the Church Part 1-2 - Scott Hahn

In the Creed that we recite each Sunday we say that we believe in *one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic* church. We teach that these are the four marks of the true church. In these two CD's, Scott explains in depth what we mean by *one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic* church.

4. Seven Reasons to be Catholic. Peter Kreft, PhD.

Raised a Lutheran, Peter Kreft took a course on church history from a well known Protestant historian and as a result was led into the Catholic church. Peter is now a Professor of Philosophy at Boston College.

5. Amazing Grace for Those Who Suffer. This tape should be helpful to all going through a bad time at this stage of their lives.

The following CD's are from the *Journey Home* program.

- **Todd and Beth Allen.** Both were raised in strong Christian homes. They became deeply Evangelical Christians. During that period of their lives they could never imagine themselves joining the Catholic Church. Yet, against great odds they Holy Spirit led them into the Catholic Church.
- **David and Barbie Walker.** Both were raised in strong Christian homes. At one stage both were in a Methodist Seminary studying to be ministers. One wonders how such people would be led to abandoning that dream and in a most unlikely turn of event, be led into the Catholic Church.
- **Travis Lawmaster.** Raised Catholic, attended a Catholic University but was led to join a non-Catholic Campus Ministry. He became very active in this ministry as a teacher and as an evangelist. The tape tells of how God answered Travis' mother's years of prayer to bring him back home to the Catholic Church. This tape and the above two tapes would be excellent to share with family members, co-workers and friends who have left the Catholic Church to join other Christians Churches.
- **Marcus Grodi** - is the host of the Journey Home

program. In this tape he shares with us several scriptures that were key to his conversion to the Catholic church.

Book — Essentials of the Faith—A Guide to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, by Fr. Alfred McBride

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a 600+ page book and not an easy read. That is why I love to recommend books that are shorter, easy to read and yet give us a good summary of the teachings found in the *Catechism*. *Essentials of the Faith* is one such book. It is 200 pages long and very easy to read. In each chapter, Fr. McBride.

- Opens with a *story* or some event that relates to the subject matter.
- Gives a *summary* of Catholic teachings on a particular subject e.g. angels, original sin, Mary's Immaculate Conception, the Sacraments, moral teachings, the Trinity etc.

Reflection — In my humble opinion this section of each chapter should have been called “summary statements” because in it Fr. McBride usually gives summary statements in a question and answer format. For example in a chapter on Mary the *reflection* piece consists of the following two questions.

What is the Church's teaching about Mary's assumption?

“The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven, where she already shares in the glory of her Sons' Resurrection, anticipating the resurrection of all member of his Body” (*Catechism*, 974).

Should we honor Mary and pray for her intercession?

We venerate Mary for her faith and obedience. We pray for her intercession as our heavenly Mother (cf. *Catechism*, 971).

- **Glossary** or explanation of certain words e.g. Assumption, Paschal Mystery, Particular Judgment.
- **Life Application** - This section consists of questions that help us apply a particular teaching to our lives. These questions are also suitable for a small group wanting to study this book together.
- **Focus** - This is usually a quote by some famous or not so well know writer about the topic. In McBride's chapter on the holiness of the church and how God guides his church despite her lack of holiness, the

Focus statement is:

To be holy is not to be perfect yet. The Church's obvious human imperfections have been an occasion for scandal and apostasy for Centuries. But paradoxically this very fact is also a powerful argument for her divine nature. This is cleverly brought out in Boccaccio's story of Abraham, the medieval Jewish merchant in The Decameron. Abraham is contemplating becoming a Catholic. He tells his friend, the bishop of Paris, who has been trying unsuccessfully to convert him, that he has to go to Rome on business. The bishop is horrified: "Don't go! When you see the stupidity and corruption there, you'll never join the Church." (This was the time of the Medici Popes, who were notoriously worldly and corrupt.) But Abraham is a practical man. Business calls. Upon his return to France, he tells the bishop he is now ready to be baptized. The bishop is astounded, but Abraham explains: "I'm a practical businessman. No earthly business that stupid and corrupt could last fourteen weeks. Your Church has lasted fourteen centuries. It must have God behind it."

Peter Kreft, *Fundamentals of the Faith*

Each chapter is only three pages long. I highly recommend this book. We sold a hundred copies of it this past Easter. I have ordered another 100 copies of the \$12.00 book, which will be sold for \$5.00

If you have any comments or reflections on this, I would love to hear them.

Feast of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven

This Tuesday, August 15th, is the Feast of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven. This is one example of a Catholic belief not found in the Bible. When it comes to beliefs, Catholics look not only to the written word of God, the bible, but also to the *Apostolic Tradition*. Catholics believe that when Mary's life on earth was completed, she was assumed body and soul into heaven. In 1950, Pope Pius XII solemnly declared this doctrine to the world with these words:

***The Immaculate Mother of God,
the ever Virgin-Mary,
having completed the course of her earthly life,
was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.***

In speaking, thus, our Universal Shepherd was declaring the Assumption of Mary to be an article or dogma of Catholic faith. The Pope's declaration did not answer the question of whether Mary actually died or not prior to her Assumption.

When Pius XII declared the Assumption of Mary to be

a dogma or doctrine of the church, he was not proposing for belief a tenet of faith that Catholics had never heard of before. Belief in Mary's Assumption into heaven goes back to at least the sixth century.

If Mary was without sin there was no reason for the resurrection of her body to be delayed. As with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, our church believes that it was "fitting" that the body which tabernacled or housed the Savior of the World should not suffer decay. It is "fitting" that she who gave birth to Jesus should be with him bodily in heaven where she adores him in the glory of his risen and glorified body. In reflecting about this doctrine of our church, it may be helpful to keep in mind that it is not without precedence. The Hebrew Scriptures tell us that both Enoch (Genesis 5:24 & Sirach 49:14) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:1-12) were taken bodily into heaven.

In the doctrine of the Assumption, The church tells us that God wishes to save not just our souls but also our bodies. Mary in her heavenly state stands as a symbol of the first fully redeemed person-soul and body. Mary's assumption is a reminder of what is in store for all of us. The church celebrates this feast of Mary on August 15.

Have a great week,

