

Letter of response from S. Ray August 9, 1994

Response to a challenge to our conversion from an Episcopalian priest

Dear Friend:

Rarely does one receive a thoughtful letter, much less a letter as long and probing as yours. People have forgotten the fine art of writing since we have phones, modems, faxes, easy transportation, etc. With the demise of the fine art of writing, the art of thinking has also suffered. I was amazed by your letter, pleasantly so, and wish we had talked about these things long ago. Why were you holding out on us? You knew the beauty of the liturgy and the riches of sacramental Christianity and didn't share those riches. (Endnote 1) Janet had read *Evangelical Is Not Enough* by Thomas Howard several years ago (a copy of his postcard is enclosed). The subtitle is *Worship of God in Liturgy and Sacrament*.

Also, it seems you have some good jokes you've been holding out on. Come clean Mike, share your wealth! Don't let the fear of someone misunderstanding your intent deter you. There are worse things than being a proselytizer.

How many people do you think have responded to our book *Crossing the Tiber*, considering nearly 100 copies are "out there"? I am not asking you about Catholic responses, because I have received an overwhelming response from them, even several discussions of official publication of my papers. But how many *non-Catholics* do you think have responded? Would you be surprised to know that you are the only one? One likes feedback, even if it is not all positive. I have always enjoyed the bantering of a good natured discussion, especially if views are contrasting and conflicting - there is much to be gained by such bantering, if of course it is done in love, gentleness, truth, and good will. (Endnote 2)

You liked the story portion of my *Crossing the Tiber* but only gave me one paragraph of biography on yourself in your letter. May I be bold enough to ask a few questions on a few points that intrigued me? You were a convert to Episcopalianism. Was this as a proselyte or as a convert, as a lateral shift from one denomination to another denomination, or from the darkness of paganism to the light of the Gospel? I have heard the "sister church" language used with Eastern Orthodoxy more than with Episcopalianism. I can understand the familiarity since the Episcopalian Church is, of all the Protestant denominations, the most liturgical. However, beyond that it seems the Orthodox have a truer claim to the sister analogy.

Protestant communities are not known for having monks. What community was this and what was the status or responsibilities of the monks? Was it a service community devoted to specific works of charity? Was it a communal type living arrangement? Was

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there vows of poverty or celibacy? How did you come to be a part of the community? Also, what compelled you to be an Episcopalian priest instead of an Orthodox, Catholic, or something else? I have been conversing with an Episcopalian turned Catholic who is the author of several books, but I will get to him later in the letter. Hopefully we can discuss all this in further detail if we can break away for the North Country again this autumn.

In the third paragraph you comment that “a lot of it seems directly or reworked from other sources, such as page 24 footnote 64 where Janet and you, Steve, are referred to as ‘His sons,’ I think that must be from a quote.” Not trying to be big headed or arrogant, but that did not come from a quote, it came right out of my shiny head. The truth is, they are my words, as is everything else in the book that is not specifically tied to a notated source. Commenting on the phrase ‘His sons’, the capitol “H” is keeping in line with customary capitalization of the pronouns referring to God, and the ‘sons’ is a generic reference to those adopted as God’s children. I suppose I could have been politically correct with the new inclusive language, but I must say there is much about inclusive language that bores me and smacks of arrogance with it’s attempts to rewrite history and literature in keeping with current fads. So, in reading the story, you *are* seeing “more of both of our thoughts”.

Now to the daunting task of responding to your inquiries and challenges. If I were to address each point in the detail I would prefer, my business and family would suffer, for such a task could take weeks. So, to strike a happy medium, I will address several of the specifics and try to get to the heart of the inquiries you have presented to me, and hopefully we can continue this dialog in word and in person over the coming months, if not years.

I am glad you enjoyed the “story” part of *Crossing the Tiber*, however there is really no dichotomy between the “experiences and feelings” and the “intellectual side” of the story. The former is just the outward expression of the inward convictions. One does not act, or maybe I should say, one should not act out of arbitrary impulses but from an intellectual base, that is if we believe in reason and Truth. Ideas have legs. They take shape and begin to walk about. Therefore, my experiences and actions are secondary to the intellect, and the acts secondary to the truth. It was not the emotion, but the objective truth that flipped the lever. When G. K. Chesterton was asked why he converted to Catholicism he stated it was for two reasons: because it is objectively true and for the forgiveness of sins.

You mention the importance and place of *feelings* and I have no argument with you that feelings are an integral and necessary part of being human for both male and female. They function as a wonderful adjunct to the other faculties we all possess.

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However, I might not emphasize them as much as some do in the enlightened '90s. It seems that in our century there has been the despair of anything being objectively true and as a consequence many have begun using their feelings as a substitute for rationality. (Endnote 3)

Feelings are great and tears have their place, but in the "faith journey" you mention, it is my opinion that reason and truth hold a higher place and feelings follow in their train. There is a wonderful trilogy of books on the loss of the concept of truth in the 20th century⁴. In previous centuries there was a concept that was universal and held that objective truth *existed* and answers could be found for the "big questions". When Man jettisoned the idea of a person and rational God, the concept of Truth with a capital "T" was jettisoned with it. If there is no universal, then all reality is simply made up of finite particulars. With no ultimate or infinite reference point to give them meaning the individual things become merely cogs in a machine and morals become relative. Therefore we have stopped looking for answers and as a global culture have begun to see the question *as* the answer. I have heard it many times: "To question is the answer!"

Jesse and I were canoeing down the Rifle River in July and we blew past a couple drunk and floundering in the branches and on his T shirt was clearly screenprinted the words, "Life is not about destination, it is about the chase." If so, the current situation put me much more in tune with "life" than he, since he was not chasing but beating the air. But seriously, I understand that life is lived everyday and the living part is crucial, but meaning does not come from the chase devoid of a destination, anymore than an airline pilot saying, "Ladies and gentleman, thank you for choosing our airline, today we have adopted the attitude of the 20th century, there is no real destination, nor is there any objective truth, we will be flying for the fun of it at an altitude of 20,000 feet and heading for who knows where. Does anyone have any feelings they can contribute to this journey, feeling we can use instead of a map or flight plan since we have no destination? Sit back and enjoy the journey, for this trip is all about journey and nothing about destination." Some people are good travelers with no destination; others are poor travelers with a clear destination. I will throw my lot in with the latter. In living as in driving, if you've gone in the wrong direction, the shortest route to the correct way is to go back to where you started. Does Man (here I go being politically incorrect and exclusively non-inclusive again) have a destination in your thinking? Do all roads lead to the same city; do all spokes lead to the same hub? How does one determine the destination? Do competing concepts all equal out in the end? Does the Tiber have shores, and if so, does it ultimately matter if we continue to splash and swim indefinitely, as opposed to finally getting on shore and making a commitment to something? Does it really matter in the end which shore one ends up on or are both shores really the same thing?

When writing a story or apologetic, one has to take into account the audience. It

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may help you understand *Crossing the Tiber* a little better if you realize that my target is the Fundamentalist or Evangelical Protestant. It is clear in Paul's writing to the Romans that he has his listener clearly defined and continually challenges his "imaginary" interlocutor. Even though I tried to write with everyone in mind (nonbelievers, Catholics, family, fellow workers, etc.) my main audience was clearly understood and explained in the Preface. You know, I never once thought about Episcopalians as I wrote, and for this I offer my apologies. If you understand my audience, you will better understand my themes.

You are an Episcopalian. Why that and not something else? Why aren't you a Lutheran, a Catholic, an Orthodox, or a Jew for that matter? What criteria did *you* use to join this particular denomination? What is the case for Anglicanism? If one is right, are the others wrong? If they are all right, then why be exclusive and join one, which necessarily makes a statement concerning the truth, accuracy, or niceness of all the others? Are we simply choosing denominations like we chose fast food restaurants, catering to our own individual taste and preferences? How do you see the Church? Is it a loose knit organization of friendly (and often not so friendly) folks? Is it an organic, visible society started by Jesus Himself? Should it have a teaching authority? Or is it just a smorgasbord of entrees, side dishes, and personal preferences?

You claim the primacy of Rome is based on Her generosity and sacrificial nature. With your points I heartily concur, however, to limit to that is to miss the real essence of the primacy of Rome. Jesus said some pretty strange things to Peter in Matthew 16. He changes Peter's name to Rock (Cephas) and says, pointing to Peter, "You are Peter (Rock) and upon this rock I will build (future, active, indicative) My Church (singular) and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Jesus then proceeds to give to Peter the keys of the kingdom, a declaration and transferal that conferred great authority and responsibility. One must ask what was the intent of these strange saying and how did the hearers understand it, and how was it understood by the first century Christians. It is especially strange to our ears, especially since everyone tries to pin their own egalitarianism unto Jesus. Jesus was not being very egalitarian. He was speaking to one man and stating that it was upon this man that He would build His Church and invest His authority⁵. How did the first Christians understand this declaration of their Lord?

Peter, after leaving Antioch eventually ended up as leader of the Church in Rome, along with St. Paul. Both were martyred there in about 64 AD. In reading the history of the first centuries it is clear that Rome held the place of preeminence primarily because it was the see of St. Peter, not because it was a *good* church. I will give a few of the examples, but a book could be written on this topic alone (and many have been).

Clement, the third bishop of Rome from Peter (Peter, Linus, Cletus, Clement . . .)

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had a clear understanding of the primacy of the Roman church as early as 96 AD when he wrote his “big-brotherly” epistle to the Corinthians. According to Irenaeus, Clement had known and conversed with the two great apostles and therefore would not have been unfamiliar with the post to which he was being assigned, Bishop of Rome. Clement writes to Corinth in 96 AD, “For you will give us joy and gladness, if you render obedience to the things written by us through the Holy Spirit.” He speaks as a superior speaks to a subject. The existence and tone of the letter make it clear that the Bishop of Rome, Clement, feels he is under obligation to care for and oversee the other churches. It is a little unusually considering the Apostle John was still alive and considered to be the shepherd or bishop over the Asian churches only 240 miles away, whereas Rome was over 600 miles away.

After listing off the Apostolic Succession of bishops from the Apostle Peter down to his time, Irenaeus said in the second century “For with this Church (the Roman church), because of its more efficient leadership, all Churches must agree, that is to say, the faithful of all places, because in it the apostolic tradition has been always preserved by the faithful of all places.” I bring these things up because it is clear within the New Testament and the early Church why Rome was preeminent and it was not primarily because of her goodness. It was primarily because of the view of succession held by the Apostles and those who were loyal to their Apostolic Tradition. She did demand and expect it. And as the Church grew numerically and geographically, the need for clear leadership grew with it, but the concept of a teaching authority was incipient from the very teaching of Christ. It was clearly understood within the Apostolic Tradition from the very inception of the Church. It was displayed as early as Acts 15 with the first Church Council. One cannot read Eusebius’ *History of the Church* (AD325) and the writings of the early Fathers without clearly confronting their adherence to the teaching authority of Rome and the bishops in communion with Rome. One sees from the beginning a clear and consistent understanding of Jesus’ words to Peter. Somewhere along the line this whole concept, so important to the Apostles and the early Church, seems to have been jettisoned by the many traditions that have cut themselves off what the early Christians thought was crucial, if not paramount.

Which brings me to another point. You seem to think that I am exclusive in my views, cutting others off, forcing them to see things my way or be excommunicated. Or to put it in other words, I have adhered to ideas or doctrines that have cut me off from many saints who hold to different views. There could be several ways of looking at this but one is to take a historical approach. Are all ways equally valid? For the first 16 centuries it was not held to be so. Even the founders of the Reformation did not believe all expressions of faith were equally valid. That is why they fought among themselves and slaughtered many within the Reformation movement (Luther with the peasants, Calvin with Servetus, Zwingli drowning Anabaptists, Luther condemning Calvin for his

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Eucharistic views, etc.). The Catholic Church has always taught, over the centuries, that She was the repository of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), the preserver of the Book, the one faithful to the Apostolic Tradition. I have the option of being cut off (theoretically) from many today by saying “this or that is the truth and contrary views are not the truth”, or I can cut myself off from many others, believers before me who held consistently to the teachings of the Church for the first 16 centuries. Must I take a relativistic position today and create a great discontinuity with the Church of the past, or must I part ways with those who defended and preserved the body of Christ through the centuries in order to comply with new inventions, schisms and confusion of modern day Christianity. I am forced by your ecumenical views to create a rupture somewhere. Why choose what Protestants or “liberals” say as the right way when there is no continuity with the past, but actually a great discontinuity is created? I will throw my lot with my predecessors if such a choice is forced upon me.

This does not mean I break with all believers today. Of course I do not. I am more than glad to embrace all those who name the Name of Christ. The eventual reuniting of the various brands of Christianity is my daily prayer. But, on the other hand, it does not mean that I give away the family treasures to have peace. One is not encouraged to sacrifice truth to acquire unity. Like you said, who broke away from whom? I see a great continuity within the Roman Catholic Church. Who is it that still holds to the teaching of the apostles on the Eucharist and the Real Presence, baptism, the visible unity of the Church, the succession of bishops, the high moral stand against abortion, homosexual practices, ordination of women, chastity, divorce and remarriage, the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures, the virgin birth, the physical/bodily resurrection of Christ, the concept of true Truth, etc.? Most have accepted a loosey-goosey attitude about these things. Must we as Christians conform to the relativistic methodology of the 20th century?

This relativistic, high-sounding trend is even prevalent in the Catholic Church (though it is not officially sanctioned, and is contrary to the official teaching of the Church). I went to Mass in Roscommon while canoeing with Jesse. The priest read from John 6, and described the 5 loaves and 2 fishes in a thoroughly “modern” way. He said, “For the last 30 years we have come to realize that Jesus doesn’t do magic, He just taught a little boy to share. And in sharing the boy created the real miracle. Everyone began to share and soon there were twelve baskets left over. The Eucharist is like that, no wizardry here, no priestly tricks. To say Jesus comes into this bread and wine is borderline heresy, it is just a meal to teach us to share.” He felt he was being ecumenical, open-minded; yet in actually he is forcing the very opposite. He cuts a deep rift, a gaping schism between the believers of today and those before his “thirty years” ago. He divides and forces us to be excluded from our brothers and sisters of the past. Besides where does the text take the miracle away from God and give it to humanity. The writer of St. John’s Gospel (John

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himself) is clearly attributing the supernatural event to the Son of God, but of course, that doesn't fit in with scientific, materialist, anti-supernatural, technically minded America and/or Europe. Like my son said to me afterwards, "Why, dad, does the priest think the God who created the world from nothing can't multiply the loaves?" "From the mouth of babes! Why indeed! We are currently writing to him as well as to his bishop.

So you see, I don't say the Catholic Church is perfect, the same relativistic, anti-supernatural mentality shows its head there as everywhere else. But you know what I like about the Church? Even though things like this are going on, the Church does not teach it is OK for things like this to be going on. Even though popes did grossly immoral things, they never taught it was OK to do grossly immoral things. Have you picked up a copy of the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*? There is a great continuity of teaching, which I admire. There are tares among the wheat; there are goats among the sheep. It is not my job to separate and judge, but it is my job to find the Church and to work to purify and encourage her.

One thing that surprised me as I read your letter. There were no appeals to Scripture. I found it especially puzzling since you know that it is a common ground between us. What is your view of Scripture? Is it different from any other book and if so, how? Is it the words of God or does it only become the word of God as it speaks to us? Is it a good book full of man's aspiring spirituality or is a revelation of propositional truth? I am very curious on this point. How does your view of Scripture fit in continuity with the brothers and sisters through the centuries who have gotten us up to this point in our Christian odyssey?

I think you misunderstood my discussions of *sola Scriptura*. If I am wrong, please correct me. I was not contesting the view that Catholics are encouraged to read the Bible nor that they recognize the Bible as the inspired and infallible word of God profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). I was arguing with the Fundamentalist who says the Church purposely kept Scriptures from the eyes of the laity. The point of the Reformers was that the Bible was the *only* source of authority and the *only* arbiter of Truth. The Reformation principle of "each man with a Bible, interpreting it for himself" is just a means of saying what the *Reformers* were promoting. They dismissed the Church as the Whore of Babylon (Revelation 17) and when they broke off from the Church they no longer accepted Her authority. Needing a final authority they formulated the battle cry of *sola Scriptura*. The Bible alone as the only authority. But can they find support for this view from Scripture alone? Is the Bible meant to be interpreted by each person independently of the Church that gave us the Book? The Reformation was fueled and propelled by desire to get the Bible into the vernacular so everyone could read and interpret it for themselves. However, without some focal point or teaching authority, the Book rapidly became the "source" for every

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conceivable justification for every conceivable doctrine. Does it seem unreasonable that a God, who could use fallible men to write an infallible Book, could use fallible men to give the Book an infallible interpretation?

I do not condemn Fundamentalist for their desire to find the final source and authority of God (which they believe is the Bible alone) and attempt to live it out consistently in their daily lives (and in government, in their churches, in their families, etc.). I only find their authority as inadequate for they have thrown over the two authorities that the Apostles and the early Church assumed would always work together: the Apostolic Tradition and the Scriptures (which are the written portion of the Apostolic Tradition). They have no grounds for teaching the Bible as the only source of authority and revelation, it was simply a choice they made out of desperation.

And since we have touched on Scripture and authority, you also mention that Rohr finds authority in the “authority in the heart of the internal life of the local community.” What is *that*? Is it an adequate and objective enough source when a real crisis arises, when a real doctrinal dispute surfaces? When you have a major problem within your denomination, or within you local parish, is it the authority in the heart of the internal life of the local community to which you appeal for final arbitration? Do you believe in objective authority, or is that arcane? When a doctrinal question comes into play, do you take a Gallup poll, like Clinton, to decide what you believe? Is Truth determined by a majority vote, by the authority of the heart of the inner life of the local community?

In your mention of Rohr you seem to distrust external authority. Most serious Christians don't think authority is merely external. Authority is to serve the purpose of growing us up into the fullness of Christ . . . Christ gave men with positions and titles to His Church (Eph. 4). The problem with Rohr's definition as you presented it is it sounds good but it is so abstract and non-incarnational, almost esoteric. The question becomes: Who defines the internal life of the local community, what cadre of especially committed and holy souls, what group of discerning spirits and prayer warriors decide when the altar guild faces off against the parish council? And why the “local community”? Does he mean the parish or the archdiocese of Detroit? Emphasis upon the local community leaves you with exactly the cacophony of competing ecclesiastical voices found in Pentecostalism, Fundamentalism, and even Evangelicalism. They claim to find it in a book, or in a Spirit, or in a consensus of the faithful, but experience tells us it ends up in fragmentation. Diversity is a beautiful thing—division is not.

Since the Church is the Body of Christ, and His visible presence on the earth before His return, it is understood by the Catholic Church that the Church is His presence in the world. It is to carry out His mission. When Jesus walked the face of the globe He made moral judgements, declared and defined doctrine and truth; in fact, He *was* the

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Truth (Jn. 14:6). It is then His Church that continues His mission speaking out on morals, doctrine, and practice. His Church should be able to say, “*Rome has spoken.*” But where do we hear “*Canterbury has spoken*”? Sadly enough, the reality is usually “*Canterbury has capitulated.*” Who speaks for God? Who speaks for the Church?

You commented that by dismissing 23,000 denominations I am losing a lot of gifts. I do not dismiss 23,000 denominations. I only lament the denominational divorces that have replicated themselves over and over. The Church in pagan Rome was one, unified in a visible, organizational, and organic unity. They stood with a united front. The kingdom of God against the kingdom of this world. Their lines never broke, they held and the Roman Empire shuddered. This is the reason for the persecutions. How could the Caesars allow a kingdom to exist within *their* kingdom? The Church clearly stated, “*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ . . .*”. The same word Lord (*Kurios*) that the Emperors claimed for themselves.

So do I condemn the 23,000 denominations? No. But I do say they are outside the true church. They are what the Scriptures and the Fathers would refer to as schisms. They are the cut off branches of the tree (Mt. 13); they are outside the fullness of the Church, the fullness of grace. If we believe what the Church and Scripture teach, I would be a hypocrite to say otherwise. I believe in antithesis: if one thing is the fullness, the other thing is not; if two plus two is four, it is not five.

It cannot be denied, especially historically that the Protestant wing of Christianity has “defined themselves with a negative emphasis to define their own position.” The very term Protest-ant makes that clear. As a Protestant, I of course had positive criteria by which I defined myself and my “group” but ultimately our Protestant faith was a revolt against Rome and in many ways continues to be. How familiar are you with Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism? (These were the anticipated readers of *Crossing the Tiber.*) Every possible step is taken to distance themselves from the papists and the Whore of Babylon⁶. Am I defining myself as a Catholic by stating my differences from Protestantism? Yes, and unabashedly so. I have lived under the banner of *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia* and *divide ad infinitum* for 39 years. I am not defining myself as anti-Protestant. I am in my story explaining to those who have wondered why we made this unthinkable move, why we have made this unthinkable move. To define it solely by expounding the wonders of Catholicism alone would not tell the story. You see, I did not initially begin this pilgrimage because of the positive elements of the Catholic Church. We began the pilgrimage because we saw the weaknesses of Protestantism. We knew what we *weren't* but didn't know what we *were*. So in the initial period of our Catholicism, I *will* explain to inquirers why we left and why we arrived.

However, this is very different from Protestants defining themselves by their

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protest against Rome four hundred years after the event. The Church was the Church for 16 centuries. If the Fundamentalists consider *themselves* the true Church today, then have them obey their Lord, and get on with it. But if those beliefs cannot be lived out and defined, then I would expect them to continue looking over their shoulder at Rome. Reinhold Niebuhr decried the undesirable state of fragmentation and said, "A good deal of Protestantism is little more than anti-Catholicism." They continue to understand who they *are*, by defining what they are *not*. I do not think I will emphasize my past and my Protestantism for long. Certainly not forever. I will get on with the tasks at hand . . .

. . . which by the way touches on your question of what will I do for the Church not that I am in it. I have already written several "books" that I have distributed at no cost to encourage and instruct. I just signed up to teach the teenage catechism for a six-month course on Church history. I have volunteered to teach RCIA classes (but I think they want me to settle in a bit first), volunteer for prolife activity and many other things. On top of this we have taken several single folks under our wing to encourage their faith and give them a "family." I have also accelerated my studies so I will be ready when and where the need arises. I am not the type to sit in the stands cheering.

You mention that I challenged you. You challenged me as well and I appreciate it. How did I challenge you? Let me take a guess and if I am wrong, let me know. Did I challenge you with a propositional truth approach instead of solely an experiential approach? Maybe that is too abstract. You wanted more personal reflection rather than apologetics . . . but it was the argument that flipped the lever for us. Why should I care what Ignatius believed, what St. Paul believed, what Clement of Rome believed? If experiential is all that underpins my faith, these men have no real authority, only happy or sad stories, meaningful and meaningless stories, and it means that I have been misled along with 2,000 years of believers about the defining characteristics of my spiritual family.

I also like stories and experiences and am curious about the manner of challenge. This whole matter of conversion has been a challenge for us. You mention that families have fears. Wow, we do too! Do you have any idea how we worried about our family's reaction? Was our fear unfounded? Did our conversion bring about the prejudices that festered to the surface or were they already there lying dormant? We were dumbfounded by relative's reactions. You say families do not want to be "*left out of our lives and want to continue being a part of ours.*" Have I tried to force family and friends to be Catholic? Did I try to coerce you? If our move to the Catholic Church has awakened a dormant faith in others who have been lukewarm, I will praise God and consider it joyful. I understand that family stories of buried Bibles can elicit strong familial feelings, but there is more to life than feelings, there is Truth. If I were raised Mormon, tied to a familial tradition of a century, would you, or others, consider it wise to stay associated in the

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morass of Mormonism because of long standing a deep family feelings alone?

We have not excluded anyone from our life in this regard; we have not cut ourselves off. We *like* open and frank discussion - our dialog with you is a clear example. I would like to discuss and “fellowship” with others on the topic. Why do people clam up? Become silent? Am I closing them off? If there is exclusion, anger and ostracizing it has not come from us. We have written a story telling of our conversion, it is strong to be sure, but we do not expect everyone else to “jump on the wagon” with us, nor do we judge any who don’t. However, we have received numerous challenges (letters, books, tapes, etc.) from families on both sides, but with no willingness to discuss them afterwards. “Here read this, but don’t tell us what you think of it.” I hope those who feel we have excluded them may realize that the shoe may actually fit on the other foot. We cannot remain in a religious tradition on family loyalty or tradition alone. There is much more at stake. Everyone has his strong views on matters. We do not want to exclude anyone, especially our beloved families, but on the other hand, the question may be asked, who is really being intolerant and expecting others to only accept their religion?

Remember when we went to Europe for a year in 1982-83? We were so excited to share things with our families that we wrote lengthy letters every few days, filling them in on all our discoveries. I have them compiled in a large notebook in my office. We felt that words alone could not convey our enthusiasm and excitement so we ended up taking my parents back two years later to show them everything we had tried so desperately to tell them. Do you see the parallels here? In our excitement we try to share, but obviously joining the Roman Catholic Church is off the radar screen and not something people want to hear our excitement about. We are very open people and always share with others. So, who is shutting out whom?

Do you feel I am “hounding, hunting and bagging for trophies to hang in my den?” Where did you get that perception? Inactive Catholics, in fact, inactive Christians *ought* to be pursued by any who love their fellow human beings. Even a dogmatic Catholic would admit a good Protestant is better than a bad Catholic. Matthew 18 shows how important it is to correct those who are in sin or error. Many other Scriptures could be employed here. If one of my children is in the wrong, heading in a harmful direction, it is incumbent upon me as a father to correct them. Should a “father” in the faith not do the same without the constant fear of being considered a proselytizer? You say you evangelize. Does this mean that you go after pagans and disrupt their long held customs and beliefs to impose your view of truth on them? How is an evangelist and a proselytizer different? Proselyte is not always a naughty word (Acts 2:10, 6:5, 13:43). Paul himself was a proselyte and Jesus Himself did the proselytizing.

The discussion of the liturgy being in continuity from the first centuries is accurate

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on my part. I have explained much of that in my study on the Eucharist. Also, to read Justin Martyr and Hippolytus from the second century reveal how closely the Catholic Church has followed the early Tradition of the Apostles. Certainly there are changes, adaptations, language change and styles, but, it is undeniable that the essence of the mass remains unchanged, the creeds, the consecration, the liturgy of the word, the greetings, etc. How strange our Protestant churches would seem to the first century Christians, and yet they *would* be familiar with the modern Mass. It would be recognizable to them even 2,000 years later.

As to the shortage of priests, I am not concerned. It seems God always raises up his shepherds and ministers when He needs them. Elijah felt the same despair in 1 Kings 19:18, but God basically told him to leave the worries to Him, since He was God. On top of that there already seems to be a renewal and many I know see things turning around. I met a new priest today who celebrated his first Mass at our parish. They will continue to rise to the call. From what I understand the Catholic Church gained untold numbers of new priests (and whole parishes) with the advent of female priests in the Anglican Church.

And as a sidelight concerning Protestants who don't want Catholic communion (Eucharist) out of fear of receiving AIDS from the cup, this is rather silly. The Church does not demand the drinking of the cup; in fact, in most masses only the bread is given to participants. Even last Sunday Charlotte only partook of the bread, because the cup is distasteful to her, she dislikes the taste of wine. For most of the history of the Church, the bread was the only species distributed. Either one has the full body and divinity of Christ according to the Church's teaching. You said you wondered why communion is a "hotter" topic for Catholics than for Protestants. The answer to that is simple: the Catholic Church has remained true and loyal to the commands of Christ and the Apostolic Tradition!

Pedophilia? Wow, you started scraping the bottom of the barrel as you went along. Seems like something got under your skin. Is this exclusively a Catholic problem, or is it a human problem? In a recent book *Priests and Pedophilia* the author, a non-Catholic proves that there are twice as many sexual indiscretions among Protestant pastors than among Catholic priests. Did you know that? If marriage is the answer to sexual problems among a very, very few priests, why does the problem double among married Protestant clergy? Does the Episcopalian feel this is solely a result of celibacy? At twelve years old, my older brother was sexually accosted twice by two separate married deacons in the Baptist Church he was attending, *way back in the '50s!* These two were not celibate; in fact, my brother was presented with pictures of the deacon and his wife having sexual relations! Jesus speaks of "eunuchs for the kingdom of God" and Paul as a single man says, "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift

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of God, one after this manner, and another after that.” Here he speaks of the advantages one has when single, their time is not divided and they can commit their whole existence to the Gospel and the Church. Noble aspirations? Yes. Do some fall through the cracks? Yes? Does it nullify the high ideals? No. The Church has variously handled it in different ways through history. Recently a higher-up (Cardinal Bernadin who you mentioned) was accused by a young man based on “dreams” the young man had had. The priest supposedly had molested the boy. Did he? Should the Church have immediately capitulated and admitted to all charges? Heavens no. And how did it turn out? The young man admitted the fallacy of the charges and rescinded the complaint. The Church does well to defend her shepherds, but if she defends the guilty, she is wrong. What does your church do when these things happen, or have they never happened? Maybe they do but are just not discussed? How does it handle unfortunate situations with clergy misusing their office and authority?

But what is the worst kind of child abuse. Is it not the ripping of an unborn child from the womb of its mother? I recently purchased a CD by Toni Childs who has become a pop star and had excellent reviews for her music because it is thoughtful and well done. It is the story of her life and it starts out with her in her mother’s womb. *“I’m breathing in life, I’m breathing in her, I’m breathing in the darkness, and what it means to live. It’s beautiful here . . . breathing in life and holy joy. There is safety in my ears. I’m feeling safe inside you. And I’m feeling like life would inside you. Mother can you tell me please - am I safe? I decide for the world, I decide to be born . . .”* All the time she sings there is a deep base heartbeat throbbing in the lower scales. The labor is descriptively portrayed with African singing and loud raucous strings, the clinking of metal instruments and the cry of the newborn. She was safe, but what of all her brothers and sisters of the human race who are extinguished while subconsciously asking the same questions Toni asked in her mother’s womb? What about those born alive and left to gasp their last breaths in the tissue disposal container? Is this not the ultimate child abuse? How schizophrenic our society is (and most churches). On one side of the hall we burn with saline and rip an unborn child from its mother’s womb, while on the other side of the hall they go to extraordinary measures to save one much younger. Is one baby more valuable than another is? Is the one any less an eternal being with a soul and human dignity than the other?

What does your church teach on abortion? Do you actively defend the unborn and imperfect? Do they have souls and human dignity? I see Catholics defending unborn children, I don’t know that the Episcopalians have been known for such action.

Mother Theresa is a wonderful example to the world. She can look Clinton in the eye and chastise him for his pro-choice policies.⁷ She is a prick of conscience for the people, she lives out the spirit of Christ’s commands. You say if she were pope you

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would consider becoming a Catholic. Ah, it is the Catholic Church that produces saints like Mother Theresa, Maximillian Kolbe, and untold others. The pope himself is a magnificent example. He does not claim to be perfect, in fact he goes to confession every week. Why not join the Church that produces such people?

As a Catholic I am supposed to be accountable for all the shortcomings of the Catholic Church and those who shoot the darts stand on the side wagging their heads, unwilling to bear the shortcomings of their *own* traditions. I have joined a Church that traces in continuity (esp. through the Apostolic Succession) for 2,000 years. I accept the history with all it's good and ill, knowing the Church was never going to be perfect, having tares with the wheat, and goats with the sheep. It is not my job to take pot shots or feel guilty. It is my job to give Her all the energy, love, instruction and example I can—and that is what we are doing. What did I leave behind to become a Catholic? Nothing. I bring my Evangelical fervor with me, only now it is multiplied by the riches I find within the Church.

I look down at the bottom bar on my computer screen and it tells me I am on page 17! Yikes! You may get bored reading this tome. So, out of deference to you, I will now cease from my ramblings. I am sorry I do not have an Episcopalian joke that can come close to your Catholic joke. But if you like Baptist jokes let me know. My parents and I have agreed to keep this whole thing light hearted by finding good Catholic and Baptist jokes to add a bit of mirth to our disagreement. Maybe we can do the same with the other side of the family.

Again thanks for your time and your letter. I have enclosed a copy of my recently finished *Baptism*. It, like the others, was written mainly to those in my past and to argue with my own prior convictions. I have also included a section of a book my good friend is writing called *Swapping Stories*, the chapter here being entitled *Why Be Invisible?* I also photocopied a postcard I received from Thomas Howard, the professor of English at Boston College. He is also on the Board of Directors for the Franciscan University in Steubenville Ohio. He is also a well-read author and a convert to the Catholic Church from Episcopalianism.

Well, where do we go from here? You are my family and my friend, moreso now that you have bared your heart. I appreciate that and love you for it. Ah, that everyone could be so accepting. We hope to see you later this summer or fall if we can head for the woods. You are a nice family and we love you all. You have my permission to share this letter with others if you feel it appropriate.

Love,

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Steve, Janet, Cindy, Jesse, Charlotte and Emily Ray

1. You commented that your hesitancy to speak with us about your church was because “the language would have sounded foreign (i.e. the word liturgy)” How so? In Acts 13:2 Paul, Barnabas and others were “ministering” onto the Lord. The word for *ministering* in the original Greek is *leitourgeo*, which is the etymological source of our English word *liturgy*. These terms and concepts may be foreign to some. Now, I admit that I didn’t agree with liturgical practices but I soon came to realize that *everyone* has a liturgy even those that deny it or call it by a different name. Baptists stand, sit, and sing on cue, even Pentecostals know when to roll around and when to be silent. They all have a form to their worship. Liturgy is just a service of worship performed by clergy and laity to the God of Creation and His Son Jesus Christ.

2. This footnote is an update. Saturday evening a man came over under the guise of wanting to ask us a few questions after reading *Crossing the Tiber*. We agreed and said we would be glad to meet with him and he could share dinner with us if he desired. He started the conversation with questions that he had a little sheet of paper, which he kept carefully covered. About an hour into the discussion his intent was becoming obvious—I had been ambushed, sucker punched! He was a professional anti-Catholic that is trained for these encounters and ambushes Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Muslims and especially Catholics. He fought like crazy to keep his anonymity and remain a “Christian” with no affiliations. However, a bit of probing embarrassed him when I discovered he went to the Baptist Church I had been raised in. Once I found out what was going on, the discussion changed and we carried on for another two hours. He jumped from one topic to another, making the leap anytime he failed to gain headway or discredit Janet and I. I told him he reminded me of a Jehovah’s Witness since that is *their* tactic. I then asked if we could pray together and he left. We plan to meet again soon.

3. I do not mean *rationalism* which states that all truth is known from our reason alone, which would reject the concept of revelation. I am referring to *rationality* in the sense that our mind can come to rational conclusions such as $1+1=2$. Feelings don’t give me this sum, for that is out of their realm. It is rationality that tells me this. After I *know* this fact with my reason, I may *feel* very happy about it, but it was not the feelings that enlightened me to the fact.

4. *The God Who Is There, Escape From Reason and He is There and He Is Not Silent*. They are written by a hero of mine named Francis Schaeffer. It was he we went to study with in Switzerland. The name of the community was not God’s Barn but L’Abri which is the French word for “shelter”. It was a shelter for many who wanted to be Christians but struggled to understand and apply the truth claims of Christ and the gospel in the face of the relativistic age in which we live, fueled with the rationalistic,

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materialistic and secular culture. The questioner's parents were simply saying, "Just have faith", but that was not good enough, for the faith one places in something is only as good as the object in which it is placed. I can *believe* all I want, but if something is not *true*, all my sincerity and faith will not make it true. Sincerity is good if wisely directed, but one can be sincerely wrong.

5. There is much discussion on this passage, especially by Fundamentalists and Evangelicals who have much to gain by discrediting the place of Peter in the Church. Many say that *Peter* (Petros) and *rock* (petra) are two different things, therefore making a distinction between Peter and the Rock on which the Church is to be built. Jesus spoke Aramaic and in Aramaic the two words were exactly the same "You are *Kepha* (rock) and upon this *kepha* (rock) I will build My Church." We could get into much more detail here, but modern Protestant scholars have long ago conceded this point. The tradition I came from taught that the *rock* was Peter's confession, but that does great injustice to the structure of the sentences and makes no sense. For a good exposition see *John I - XII* in the *Anchor Bible* series and written by Raymond Brown.

6. Guess how many sermons I heard on Mary during my 39 years as an Evangelical? Zero, zip. Why, especially since she is the Mother of our Lord and one who the angel said would be called blessed by all future generations? Because to speak of Mary, even today, four hundred years after the "Reformation", is to get *too close* and someone might think they are still contaminated by the idolatry of Rome. You are the only one that challenged me about the "ecumenical" element of my conversion. Everyone else views it as a revert to the enemy—Rome! I am a traitor in *my* family due to doctrine, and in Janet's family we have become strangers, more deeply than we could have ever imagined, though happily the tensions have eased but the topic is never broached.

7. This is a euphemism if I've ever heard one. The choice is being made by someone who has already made her choice 99% of the time to have sex without considering the consequences. The other human in the equation, the baby, has no choice. Selfishness prevails. Using the word *choice* is a blasted joke. Do we all claim to be able to make unlimited choices simply because someone found an undefined right of privacy in the penumbra of the Constitution? Do I have the right to chose drugs, suicide, child abuse, wife beating, murder or even cruelty to animals as long as I make the choice in the privacy of my own head and practice it in private? How stupid and inconsistent we have become as a society. How selfish and self centered.