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**Your Story:** ?Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ: Hold your nose and read the following. Then I will have commentary upon it. This was written shortly after I left Fundamentalism for the greener pastures of PCA Calvinist thought. As I thought upon the Fundamentalism which I had just left, I felt that I saw certain parallels between Catholicism and Fundamentalism, and began to write these things down.

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Both Catholic and Fundamentalist leaders fall prey to the obnoxious habit of "binding men's consciences" with rules and regulations that cannot be supported from the Scriptures. This is due to the fact that the dispensationalism practiced by both camps obliterates the Ten Commandments as the rule and practice of faith for the believer. To the Catholic, the Bible is separated into two different time periods: the age before the Church of Jesus Christ (the Catholic church) and the church age. For the Catholic, the Old Testament makes interesting reading, but it's laws have no binding upon the conscience of the Catholic because now we live in an entirely different age, the age of the Church. The Ten Commandment have been replaced by the Grace of God. The Grace of God thereby makes the law of God of no consequence.

How does this affect Catholic teaching? There is a strong emphasis on the love and mercy of God, defined as grace. Catholic dogma is filled with the idea that the premier exhibition of belief is to be as loving as possible to all. The wrath of God is rarely preached anymore, for that was the nature of the God of the Old Testament and His law. This is how Mother Theresa can, with the blessing of the Catholic church, justify the building of Buddhist temples and Islamic Mosques for her poor to worship and die in. This is a kindness, this is the loving thing to do for people. After all, what difference does it make how one worships if the law of God is superceded by the grace of God as administered by the Catholic church?

If the grace of God is present when last rites are administered and the dead are sprinkled with a little holy water to insure their entry into heaven, then of what need is that Law that says we are to worship none other God but the God of the Bible? The Vatican doesn't mind this as long as someone is there to administer these last rites to the soul. Under their skewed theology, this is all that is needed. After all, it is thru the Catholic church that Christ does His work of salvation. All that is needful is to be sure that you die within reach of the Catholic priest. Of course, if this is not done, then through the payments of money to intercessors the prayers of living relatives, the dead may be raised, post-mortem from the number of hours assigned to them in purgatory.

This is why in Haiti the majority of Catholic laity are also able to practice the devil worship of voodoo without any qualms of conscience. This is to be expected in a religious system that has thrown out the first of the Ten Commandments by using a theology that implies that they do not apply to today's church. Lest you think this last sentence to be an overblown exaggeration, allow me to quote from the book "EXPLANATION OF CATHOLIC MORALS": "TO ENABLE HER TO CARRY OUT THIS DIVINE PLAN, SHE MAKES LAWS PURELY ECCLESIASTICAL, BUT LAWS THAT HAVE THE SAME BINDING

FORCE AS THE DIVINE LAWS THEMSELVES. FOR CATHOLICS, THEREFORE, AS FAR AS OBLIGATIONS ARE CONCERNED, THERE IS NO PRACTICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOD'S LAW AND THE LAW OF THE CHURCH."

Do you understand what is being said here? This states that any law made by any whim of any pope of the Catholic church is equal in authority to the very law of God. No wonder they do not care to teach that the Old Testament law is still in force! Such teaching would cut off at the knees their authority over millions of deluded souls. With this mind set, it has been easy for popes throughout the ages to add to the Word of God all sorts of additional rules and regulations for the salvation of the soul. The prohibition of the eating of meat on Friday, the wearing of ashes, the various prayers and penances, the saying of the rosary, the many and varied denials of legitimate pleasures, kissings of the feet of Peter's statue, the seeing of the face of Christ in tortillas, and all manner of superstition and silliness in the name of Christ is given papal imprimatur as being legitimate religious practice supposedly pleasing to God.

These and numerous other activities are practiced with no regard to the fact that they have no basis in Scripture. This type of heresy is the result of not attending to the whole council of the Word of God, but instead, teaching only the words of Jesus from the New Testament. This is what Mother Theresa is fond of doing. Over and over again we hear her quoting the teachings of the Lord that pertain to the treatment of the poor and the sick, as if the Lord Jesus Christ is not also the pre-existent God of the Old Testament who said "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image..." (Exodus 20: 4).

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The above was written shortly after I left Fundamentalism for the greener pastures of PCA Calvinist thought. As I thought upon the Fundamentalism which I had just left, I felt that I saw certain parallels between Catholicism and Fundamentalism, and began to write these things down. After about 95 pages I quit.

However, as you see, in the PCA I continued in my distinct dislike for anything Catholic. To me, ALL Catholics, ESPECIALLY the popes, were going to hell and that was that! My mother was a Latin Rite Catholic who left the Church in a tiff over marriage. Wanting to remain as close as she could to the Church while having the right to disobey its canon laws, she opted for the Episcopalian denomination in which to raise her children. Very similar in many aspects, this is the denomination I grew up in for the first 18 years of my life. I loved going on Sunday mornings. I hardly ever had to be coaxed to go.

Until I was 18, I served in the choir and as an acolyte. But at 18, having had no real catechesis either at home or in the assemblies I went to, I declared myself an atheist and set out to investigate the "hippie life" which was going full bore by the time I left high school. Sufficient to say that I left no stone of sin unturned in giving into my disordered passions. Four years later I was "burned out" from too much drugs, and too many wild parties. I found myself in Virginia Beach, VA, and through a sequence of events (called the mercy of God) I wound up at a Fundamentalist "Bible Study" where I "got saved" (or as we better know it, repented and returned to my baptismal vows).

The mercy of God made a great impact upon my life, changing my desires and setting me on the path of God's righteousness which I had left years before. I spent the next 13 years in Fundamentalism. Unfortunately, this association meant reading Chick tracts (those poisonous little packets of lies), watching TV "evangelists" spew forth their nonsense, and studying books of "theology" which proved that after the so-called "rapture", that filthy Catholic Church, the "whore of the Revelation" would be used by the Anti-Christ to rule the world. (Don't take the mark -- DON'T take that MARK!!!)

In the mid 80's, a number of people in our Fundamentalist assembly left and joined the local PCA assembly. One of them was a friend of mine. Over the next three years, through many late evening discussions, he proved to me the "truth" of the Calvinist position and I, too, left Fundamentalism for good. Now I was sure that I had found the truth and the true faith. I continued to study and read everything I could get my hands on. Again, this involved a number of highly anti-Catholic publications, such as Lorraine Boettner's indecent book ROMAN CATHOLICISM, which became my Bible. I even bought copies of this book to give to Catholic friends, convinced that I was doing them a great favor and God a great service.

One day I noticed a magazine in the basement of the PCA assembly which I was attending. It was the latest copy of MODERN REFORMATION magazine and the cover and title intrigued me to no end. On the cover was a picture of one of these mass rally/circus events where people are badgered to "make a decision for Jesus". The crowd filled the whole cover. The top of the cover read "How do we receive Jesus? Our way or His way?" and in the lower right hand corner, the artist had drawn the page so that it looked like the cover was folded back -- and there sat the chalice and the bread!! Now THAT got my attention. It was an article by Dr. Michael Horton (who if he ever finds out that he is partially responsible for my conversion to Catholicism will probably lose all his hair!!) which defended Presbyterian sacramentalism from the accusations of the "bare memorialism" of Evangelicalism. It was a really good article and after I read it, I began to refer to the Lord's Supper as the "Body and Blood" of the Lord (hey, I had no idea of "valid orders" or such things!!). I had become Eucharistic in my thinking.

During this time, I had been surfing the Internet one night and stumbled across a hot link which, when pressed, sent me right into a Catholic forum called Une Fides (One Faith). Having found that there were "heretics" on the Internet, I charged in, breathing the standard Calvinist fire and brimstone. I would help them see the error of their ways!! They were TOTALLY unimpressed. In fact, not only were they unimpressed, but unlike every other Catholic layperson I had ever talked with, these people KNEW APOLOGETICS!! Man, did they know apologetics!! I kindly but firmly got my head handed to me, especially by the converts on the board.

One night a discussion arose concerning the disposal of the elements of the Lord's Supper. Remember, I am now thinking Eucharistically (He IS really there), so this was of interest to me. I went to our pastor, a young man who had left the Latin Church, and after Church one day, asked him what was done with "the Body and Blood of our Lord" after church. You could hear his jaw hit the floor! He stood there without saying anything for quite a while and then asked, "What do you mean?" "John," I said, "The Body and Blood of our Lord. What do you do with them afterwards?" "ED!! Look at that table. That is bread and wine !!!" "No, John." I replied. "YOU consecrated them. They are the Body and Blood of the Lord." After much sputtering and stammering, he admitted that the wine was poured back into

the bottle and the loaf of bread was given out for Sunday lunch. I was SCANDALIZED! And was GONE two months later.

An Anglican friend of mine convinced me that the Anglican form of worship was truly the Early Church and that this was what I was looking for. I hadn't read much on Anglicanism, but I believed what he told me and after attending that assembly for a year, joined them. Now at this point, you might think that I was home. After all, I was back in the liturgical form I had grown up with. I was really happy and really comfortable. But, darn it, I just couldn't stop reading and talking with my friends on the Internet, and the next thing you know, I realized that the Anglican orders simply are not valid, which means that there is no Real Presence in their assemblies. And THAT was not what I was looking for. Of all the things I did NOT want to do, I did not wish to become a "papist".

I had been visiting a local Orthodox church, and I just LOVED the services, but my studies had convinced me that the Church on earth must have but one head, just as it does in Heaven. I had read Robert Sungenis' books NOT BY BREAD ALONE and NOT BY FAITH ALONE and found them compelling. I had read A FATHER WHO KEEPS HIS PROMISE and listened to the tape series THE COVEANANTAL KINGDOM by Scott Hahn and found him even more compelling because he talked about my favorite subject -- the covenant of God. And the more I read, the more I saw that only the eclessiological form of the Catholic Church was properly covenantal. Using the covenant as a study key, EVERYTHING in Catholicism fit neatly.

The covenant explains the Blessed Virgin as our Mother. The covenant explains why there can and must be one head on earth over the Church. The covenant explains why the Real Presence in the Eucharist is true. Man, the covenant explains EVERYTHING of the Catholic Faith. Oh boy!! I was STUCK!! No going Orthodox for me, and that broke my heart, because I really LOVED the Orthodox rubrics and churches. And then, someone asked me one day if I had considered St. Ann's Byzantine Catholic Church in Harrisburg. Whazzat?

The Byzantine Rite of the Catholic Church is probably the best kept secret in America. We call ourselves "Orthodox in communion with Rome" [and believe me, the Orthodox HATE hearing that!! -- with a passion!!] Because I am Western and the Byzantine Church is distinctly Eastern, it took me about 5 Sundays, but I just FELL IN LOVE with everything at St. Ann's. All THIS? And I get the Holy Father also? WHAT A DEAL!!! And dat was dat. Since my conversion, I have written a manuscript for Calvinists, trying to help them see the beauty of the Faith Catholic. I quote from it now: \_\_\_\_\_

After the Great Paschal celebration was over, I wrote to all my Internet friends who had been cheering me on and praying for me. Here is my description of Holy Saturday: Beloved in Christ!! CHRIST IS RISEN!! CHRISTOS VOSKRESE!! >From Great Saturday Stichera: Today Hades tearfully sighs: "Would that I had not received Him who was born of Mary, for He came to me and destroyed my power. He broke my bronze gates and, being God, delivered those I had been holding captive" Glory to your cross and resurrection, O Lord!" Warm greetings of joy on this day of our Lord's glorious Resurrection!! I have been asked for a "blow by blow" account of my conversion weekend, and gladly and with great joy comply. On Friday evening we had Solemn Vespers in which the tomb of Christ was brought forward before the Iconostasis. After the opening hymns and prayers, the priest led a the congregation

around the church three times, holding aloft with two other priests, the icon sheet of the Crucified Christ. This was brought back in and placed atop the tomb. Around the tomb were massive amounts of lilies and flowers with three candles on large brass stands on both sides.

Upon dismissal, each member of the congregation came forward on our knees and venerated the icon of His Crucifixion. After dismissal and until Saturday Vespers, people took turns "guarding the tomb" for one hour shifts. My turn came on Saturday at 4 PM. I spent the day, as much as possible within the confines of family responsibilities, reading and meditating upon the Crucifixion and my sins which sent our beloved Savior to the Cross. At 5 PM, the catechumens gathered for final instructions.

The service began in the nave with the recitation of vows to follow Christ, renunciation of the devil and all his works, and a vow of fidelity to the Holy Mother Church as represented by the Holy Father and the ordinary Magisterium. Then we were led into the sanctuary. There were three catechumens who were baptized, in this case, by the threefold pouring of water over their heads in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Then we put on white robes and we were all chrismated with the Oil of Joy. I cannot begin to describe the beauty of the fragrance of this oil. It is rose oil and the scent is lovely. The three catechumens who were baptized were then marched three times around the table where the baptismal water and the oil of joy lay while we sang "All who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ".

Then the moment came which I have longed for. We closed the service with the Eucharist and I received Christ in this very special Sacrament. I would love to say to you that I saw angels and heard the heavenly choir, (you wouldn't believe how I had this event built up in my mind!!!) but it was a quite regular reception. As I told my godfather, Ray Gruber, later, "It is not the feelings that matter regarding this. It is the faith that I truly believe that this is the Son of God made present on the altar" We then received small crosses to wear and each one of us was given a lovely icon of Christ. I shall be having mine blessed on the altar next weekend for the required 40 days. My oldest daughter attended the ceremony, for which I was very thankful. Afterwards, my godfather, who is quickly becoming my best friend, had a chance to answer her questions regarding the altar the iconostasis, and the icons. I drove her home and got back just in time for the Resurrection Matins, which began at nine o'clock.

Having been initiated into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of our Lord, I joined the choir for the evening service. After the opening hymns, we processed the church carrying candles and the priest, stopping at the doors of the darkened church, proclaimed "Christ is risen". Every light in the church came on and the bells rung and we processed in with joy. The icon of the crucifixion was removed from the tomb and the Paschal loaf was placed upon it. From there we sang the special hymns of the resurrection and celebrated the Eucharist. When the service was over, we all went into the church recreation hall for the blessing of the Paschal baskets.

Each basket has the traditional meal in it consisting of: Pascha -- ("Paska") A sweet yeast bread rich in eggs, butter, etc. Symbolic of Christ Himself. Braid encircles the top, giving it a crown effect. Ham -- (Sunka --- "shoon-ka") Main dish because of its richness and symbolic of great joy and abundance of Easter. Sausage -- ("kolbasi") A spicy, garlicky sausage of pork products, indicative of God's favor and generosity.

Butter -- (maslo -- "ma-slo") Shaped into a figure of a lamb or small cross. This reminds us of the goodness of Christ that we should have toward all things. Eggs -- (Pisanki -- "pi-sun-ki") Hard boiled eggs brightly decorated with symbols and markings made with beeswax. Indicative of new life and resurrection. Cheese -- (hrudku -- "hrood-ka") A custard type cheese shaped into a ball having a rather bland but sweet taste indicative of the moderation that Christians should have in all things. Also creamed cheese is placed in a small dish and both are decorated with symbols made out of cloves. Horseradish -- (Chrin -- "Khrin") Symbolic of the passion of Christ still in our midst by sweetened with some sugar because of the resurrection. Salt -- ("sol") A condiment necessary for flavor reminding the Christian of this duty to others. Today, after Resurrection Liturgy, I went to Ray and Marie Gruber's house for dinner.

The food is every bit as wonderful as the description. The fellowship was warm and wonderful too. We had a room full of converts. I must say that this has been the most meaningful Lenten and Paschal celebration I have ever had. It all came together for me when I sat down to dinner and looked upon all the food. For 40 days we have fasted, reflecting upon our sins and how barren our lives were without Christ. And before me, was this FEAST, which is so very symbolic of the feast which Christ makes our life by His resurrection. I have heard of converts having a couple of months after their conversion waking up in the morning and thinking to themselves "Omigosh. What have I done?" Honestly, I didn't think or feel that at all. In fact, at Liturgy this morning, I felt quite at home. So that is my wonderful weekend. It was kind of tiring, kind of exhilarating, and kind of ordinary. But it will never be lived again. This is not an end point.

Today is the beginning. Now I face the rest of my life to grow more in Christ, to deepen my faith, to walk with the Lord in love and charity for my fellow man. As St. Paul urges us: Heb 12:1 "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." INDEED HE IS RISEN!!! VOISTINU VOSKRESE In Joy, Brother Ed And the joyous journey continues to this day. So that's my conversion story.

And now I have a postscript which I hope you will find as funny as I do. *Back when I was first in the PCA*, I came across a copy of CATHOLIC DIGEST in the local Catholic hospital's waiting room. Disagreeing with an article in the magazine, I wrote to the author. For several months, we conversed back and forth until finally I think she realized that this was an exercise in futility. The last letter I got closed by telling me of a recent convert to the Catholic Faith who might be able to help me. She told me that he had just come out of the PCA and was doing a lot of great work in explaining the Catholic Faith. His name -- Scott Hahn. And so help me, this is what I did. I tossed the letter on my bed in disgust and said "Well, HE can sell his soul to the devil. Not me."

God DOES have a sense of humor, does He not!?!?

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Brother Ed