

1.

My name is Jim.

I left the Catholic Church twenty years ago. I have since returned to the Church of my youth. The following are a few thoughts and experiences I had along the “fundamentalist trail”. I in no way am displaying this as the norm. They are simply MY experiences. This is not a biography, but a testimony of the many twists and turns in the road of my journey into the evangelical wilderness. The things written here are not intended to hurt or attack. But they will be an honest assessment of my experience. If some of the things written here anger anyone, understand that is NOT the stated intent. It is not intended to “evangelize”. It is intended to reveal, express, and hopefully make the reader THINK. Whatever the effects it is up to the Holy Spirit to decide where to take it.

This is the memoir of one man. A man who left the Catholic Church, and for a time became the greatest enemy of the Church when he became a preacher. But the love of God was patient, and called this wanderer back into His arms.

2.

My first memory of being in church was when I was about five years old.

I was too small to see over the heads of the people sitting in front of me. I remember a lot of kneeling, chants being sung, the Sign of the Cross. What I remember most was the loud booming voice of the priest saying ‘This is my body!’ echoing through the huge building. I had no clue what that meant, but I remember seeing my dad next to me kneeling and crossing himself. So I did the same.

That was my earliest memory of the church I was baptized in: the Roman Catholic Church. Sunday Mass and attending a Catholic school gave me a snapshot of Catholic Christianity. Going to church was something one DID, not just attended. There was kneeling, the Sign of the Cross, blessed water, statues, stained-glass windows. There was the smell of incense and the awe of watching the priest perform the Mass. Coming into church, one whispered or knelt in prayer. Things were done decently and in order. I learned the Apostle’s Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Hail Mary by the time I was in first grade. I went to Catholic school, and the property the school was on also held the Rectory, the Church, and the Convent. The Priest was a soft-spoken man. He wasn’t a great public speaker, but I remember him as a kind man who loved children and teaching. I was fascinated by the priesthood, and often wondered what it would be like to be a priest. It seemed so happy and blissful. I felt a tug on my heart to be a part of what seemed like Heaven on Earth.

The home I grew up in was not a happy one. And being a boy with no discipline, I was on a collision course with my parents and the School.

When I was a kid I honestly believed the nuns all went to the same Gestapo school! I thought the principal took a strange delight in paddling those rotten kids sent to her office (I spent a lot of time there). I was the problem kid in that school, always in trouble, never doing my assignments, always in fights. My parents had their own problems, so I was pretty much left to my own devices. Many times I wanted to run away from home. I must have been a handful for those nuns, I looked at them at the time as mean. I reasoned they always looked at me as ‘the problem kid’.

There was one nun however.

Sister Lenora was my math teacher and I hated her. We were always butting heads. I was a day-dreaming hyper-active kid, school and homework were a distraction for me. Often,

a whack upside the head or on the butt got my attention. Sister Leonora seemed to me to be especially mean. I always felt like she was singling me out. I mean, after all, there were worse kids in that class.

One day, when I really messed up a math assignment, she kept me after school (again) and made me come up to the convent (attached to the school). I figured my life was over and I would be sucked into whatever vortex was inside that building. I went in and she sat me down and tried desperately to teach me. But I wasn't trying at all. I expected the beatings to begin at any moment (nuns can VERY violent!).

But it didn't.

I looked at her, my arch-nemesis, and she was in tears. She told me I was bright child and I had enormous potential, and I shouldn't throw it away.

I had never heard those words before, not even from my family. We finished the lesson and she sent me home. Before I left she hugged me and said she would be praying for me. I saw her in a different light. The years have come and gone, but I have not forgotten Sister Lenora, nor her prayers for me. Those prayers would reach far into the future.

A bad kid was on the road to recovery.

3.

When I got into high school things did not improve for my family or for school. I began to be angry at the Church I grew up in.

My anger was taken out on a particular individual in the Church who represented to me all that was wrong in my life and in the Roman Catholic Church. I was caught and punished for it. But that incident was a wake-up call and a turning point in my life.

Though still a teen-ager, I was determined to turn my life around. But how was that to be done? I remember hearing about a hippie who strapped on a backpack and walked across the country. Oh, that sounded good, to walk away from everything and get a fresh start. To run away.

Despite their problems, my parents were very old world and conservative. They started attending a Catholic church that still said the Latin Mass. My parents suddenly became more church-going than they were before. I suppose they felt things might change between them. But it did nothing to change things. The problems still remained, only this time (to me), it was dressed in religious clothing. I wanted things to change, to get better. But that hope always seemed to be dashed. Things didn't get better, they seemed to get worse. I became more detached from both my family and certainly the Church. I didn't understand the reason why I would want to go to a church in which I didn't understand the language. The more religious my family became, the more I associated the Church with all that was wrong with my family and my life. For me, religious life was separated from reality. It was something we DID, like going to the grocery store, or paying the bills. I wanted MORE.

I graduated and found a very good job. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I considered college, but I didn't have any direction. I was struck by a co-worker of mine named Rick who underwent a dramatic change. When I met him he had a bad temper and quite a vocabulary of curse words. Suddenly one day, he was different, smiling, happy. He talked about being 'born again'. I would often watch televangelists talk about being 'born again'. Oh, to start over looked good to me. To leave behind my miserable childhood and begin anew appealed to me.

That hippie I mentioned earlier, Peter Jenkins, had written a book: "A Walk Across

America". After college and bad marriage he was ready to give up on America. But he was convinced otherwise. So he had backpacked across the country with his dog to see the "real America". At the end of his trip, he went to a evangelistic crusade and became "born again".

I was fascinated with that. For a time I considered doing the same thing, backpacking across America. In hindsight I can see the other word for that is homeless!! But considering my home, being "homeless" looked much better than where I was. Walk away and get a new start in life. Leave my miserable childhood and life behind and be a new person.

To run away.

4.

As I entered my twenties I found myself with a health situation.

Suddenly I was faced with death. I went into the hospital convinced I would never come out again. The family priest came, prayed and blessed me. But I wasn't paying attention. I associated the Catholic Church with everything wrong in my life. I need assurance, and I felt at the time the Catholic Church could not give me that assurance. I remembered what happened to Rick. I remembered the words of those televangelists. I wanted to be 'born again'. But how does that happen? I prayed that God would spare me, that He would make me 'born again'. I promised that if I survived that I would devote my life to Him and in serving Him. The next day I awoke and I felt closer to God than ever. But where would this lead me?

In the next two years my life would change dramatically. My father would die. I would get married and move out. But I never forgot that day in the hospital. I tried to return to the Catholic Church. But I still wanted more. I gave up the Catholic Church as hopeless. I would walk away since, to me, it didn't seem to have the answers I was searching for. When I was a child I thought about being a priest, but now that seemed to be the last thing I wanted. There seemed to be such an excitement in non-Catholic churches. They seemed to really know what they were about, at least that is the way it appeared when I turned on the TV preachers.

I walked away from the Catholic Church, not because of doctrine, which I knew nothing about, but because of personal reasons. I was angry and disgusted with them. It felt good to run away, to be free. I was not really anti-Catholic when I left the Church. Nor did I leave for any heavy doctrinal reason, I left for emotional ones. At the time of my departure, I was very pro-Catholic and longed for the Church to meet my spiritual needs, but was angry that it didn't.

In hindsight I can see that part of the problem (in my opinion) was Catholic education in the 1960s and 70s. To me and my classmates, religion class was a joke. We were not taught simple doctrine, the sacraments, or church history. Everything was centered on 'feelings' in those days.

In High School we were taught some Bible, but by then it was too little, too late. Many in my age group agree with me about the deficiency of Catholic religious education in that decade (primarily the 70s). Many of my classmates are now non-practicing Catholics, atheists, or have gone into Protestant churches. I've often wondered if I would have left the Church if I had been given some simple tools with which to give an answer when the fundamentalists came knocking (figuratively). Today, everything I know about doctrine, the sacraments, the Bible, and Church history, I learned outside the Catholic Church. By

the same token, everything I know today about the Bible, I learned outside of fundamentalism.

The first non-Catholic church I walked into was an “Assembly of God” church. The service was wild, people speaking in tongues, loud ‘amens’. It was sort of scary. I left early and never returned. I wanted something a little less extravagant. I was about to enter the world of Protestantism, and I had no clue what kind of Church I would choose within it.

My criteria was: anything but Catholic.

5.

Now, as a married adult, I had a decision to make.

What church to go to?

I liked Jerry Falwell. I wanted a church like that. A church to teach me the Bible. So I called the ministry and asked if there were any churches, like theirs, in the city I lived in. They gave me several, but one was within fifteen minutes of where I lived.

My first Sunday there was my introduction to Independent Fundamentalist Baptist. The first time I walked into the church, what struck me was nothing was required of me (which perhaps fed into my lazy nature). No order of service, just a few songs and listening to the preacher. People had their Bibles open with pens ready to take notes.

People were shouting “amen!” from the pews.

I had never heard preaching like that before. It was very emotional and I guess I got caught up in the emotional moment. He seemed to “tell it like it is”, and that appealed to me. As the weeks went on I was hearing about things I never heard of before: soul-winning, the supremacy of the King James Bible, an invitation to be ‘saved’, worship with entertaining music, something called ‘dispensationalism.’

I also learned that the Catholic Church was an evil institution sending people to Hell with their “works” salvation. To that I gave a hearty “amen”(although at the time I had no clue why)! Now I had an outlet for all that was wrong with my family and the world I grew up in: it was the monster of the Roman Catholic Church. The preacher went to a very famous Fundamentalist College (known for their racism). I attended the Wednesday night service which was prayer and Bible study. Tuesday was visitation and ‘soul-winning’.

Wednesday nights were divided into two parts: the prayer service and the Bible study.

The prayer service divided people up into groups with requests that had been taken earlier for spontaneous prayer. Not all fundamentalist churches do this, and it was something to get used to. Many church members would avoid the prayer service.

The problem was (in hindsight) was that people seemed to spend more time in talking (and gossiping) than in prayer. Praying spontaneously, out loud, can be intimidating for a person not used to it. You pray while others become passive listeners to your private devotions. I also believe it was avoided by some because of the intimacy that prayer demands. Some deacons would never come to the prayer service, or show up when the Bible study began.

One Tuesday the preacher came over and talked to me and my wife. I told him I was ‘born again’ and was excited about learning more about the Bible. He asked me if I had been baptized. I told him I was baptized as a baby. He said: “That’s not Biblical baptism” and I needed to be Biblically baptized. My wife told him she had been baptized in the Disciples of Christ denomination. He said “They don’t believe in eternal security’ and are liberal.” I remember my wife getting slightly irritated and told him that her church was

not liberal. He said “well, you need to be baptized again (she was baptized at age 12)!!” My wife was still irritated and said: “I’ve been baptized”.

Despite an uncomfortable visit, we returned and started to become involved in the church. I prepared myself to be baptized a second time. My mother was shocked to hear I was going to be baptized again. She felt all the years spent on a Catholic education were wasted.

I was baptized on a Sunday morning one month later.

6.

My first year at the church was exciting.

I began to attend services on Sunday nights and Wednesday nights.

I saw very quickly that the center of the worship service was the “invitation”. The “invitation” was the most important aspect of the church service. The invitation, or “appeal” ceases upon the idea of a 'crisis' of salvation (when you 'accepted Christ') as the 'event'. Once the 'event' has occurred I am “saved.” Whenever doubts or a crisis of assurance happens, we are simply to remember we 'went forward on such a such a date and accepted Jesus into my heart'.

For the first time I heard the phrase “once saved, always saved”. You can heed the altar call at church, announce that you’ve accepted Jesus as your personal Savior, and, so long as you really believe it, you’re set. From that point on there is nothing you can do, no sin you can commit, no matter how heinous, that will forfeit your salvation. You can’t undo your salvation, even if you wanted to. We were told to ‘invite unsaved people in to hear the Gospel’ so they could ‘walk the aisle’ and have assurance of salvation.

This was unheard of in the early church, and Protestantism until about the 19th century. Methodists were the first to start a “prayer bench” to come to. But it wasn't until Charles Finney in the 19th century that a 'mourner's bench' was seen. Finney was the ancestor of the kind of evangelical appeal you see today. It was unheard of before him. Billy Graham is the spiritual successor to Finney.

When you focus on the 'crisis' and the 'experience' that accompanies the crisis, *that* becomes the focal point. And sincere Christians will return to it again and again hoping this time it will 'take'. Evangelistic invitations become appeals to re-commit, and re-commit your re-commitment.

I went out ‘soul-winning’ with the preacher. I remember we went to see the parents of a couple in the church. That couple I will call Roy and Maureen, I’ll get back to them later. Their parents were “unsaved” because they were “still Catholic”, and they were trying to “get to Heaven by their works”. I remember the preacher saying: “in order to get them saved, you have to convince them first that they are lost”. “Bring them down” he said, “and then raise them back up”

We visited with them, I said very little. I watched as the preacher veered the conversation in the direction of “getting saved”, and the works-salvation of the RCC was against what the Bible preached. They had to “pray a prayer” and salvation would be theirs. When the preacher was told that they were Christians already, he began an all-out attack against the Catholic Church. Mary, priests, statues, idolatry with the communion, the Pope. Needless to say, this older couple did not appreciate being told they were not Christians. Things became very heated and uncomfortable. We left with them never getting “saved”.

We took Roy and Maureen out for a snack afterward. It was a strange night. The preacher seemed somewhat giddy and his attention seemed to be on something else. There were

many 'visitation nights' we devoted to Roy and Maureen or their immediate family. I was learning more about the Bible. I purchased a Bible Commentary and began to read through it. I became my own teacher and taught myself the Bible. I threw away the Good News Bible I had because the preacher said it was 'corrupt' and bought a Schofield King James Bible. Schofield was a dispensationalist who opened up the Word for me. Or at least it appeared to.

7.

REVIVAL TIME CAME!!

I had no clue what that could be, but it sounded exciting. This was a controversial evangelist who had gone up against homosexuals and atheists. I was given some flyers and I passed them out everywhere. I even got in trouble at my job because I was distributing them in the work place. I didn't care. I was on fire!!

The evangelist came for a whole week of revival. The church that first night was packed. They had to get folding chairs in to accommodate the crowd. There was toe-tapping music and emotional preaching. The evangelist was a pretty funny guy, he cracked jokes, he told stories, he could also cry. Then came time for the invitation.

He said: "If you're not 100% sure that you are saved...if you are 99% sure, but have even 1% of doubt, then I want you to come forward this morning and repent. You need to rededicate your life to Christ."

The whole church went forward!! I remember the evangelist in tears praising God for the 'special move of God' that night. I was hoping someone could get saved at the next meeting. A lot of people did indeed answer the invitation that week, but no "salvations". The preacher reassured me the people coming forward were "getting right with God", and that was important too!!

In fact, I can honestly say there were very few "salvations" in the time I was with this church. People went forward for "assurance of salvation", or "getting right with God". Preachers using the public invitation are tempted to shape the entire sermon around the response of walking forward at the close of the sermon, so finding theological or practical reasons for that walk forward is a major concern.

The invitation is of such importance, if there is no response, the preacher's job is in jeopardy. Some preachers will go to extraordinary lengths to have people come forward. I remember, years later, seeing one preacher walk down to a lady visitor (Catholic) and said: "C'mon, its time to get saved" and pulled her out of the pew. The lady went into the prayer room, no clue why, and "prayed the sinners prayer".

The emotion of that week lasted a while. The music in the church seemed to get better, more entertaining. When I first joined the church I was introduced to something called "the special". The person would take the microphone and perform. I had never seen this before. Something inside me seemed to be repulsed by it, but I didn't know why at the time.

The preacher's sermons became more "fire and brimstone". He seemed changed. He preached on sin more, especially sexual sin. I remember him telling the husbands of the church in a sermon: "Love you wife, or somebody else will!!"

I began to learn more about "the rules". Women were to wear dresses at all times, never slacks. They certainly were never to work outside of the home. This was awkward for my wife, who worked as a social worker and therapist. Rock music was evil and television was worse. Listen to contemporary Christian music was wrong. Having modern Bible

versions was wrong. We were never to drink or go to movies. Being Baptist was the only way. Other churches were apostate. These were never written down as such, just things we were revealed along the way. Those who did not abide by the rules were treated as outsiders.

I learned the Lord's Supper was simply a memorial meal, to celebrated only once a quarter. The communion service was somber, long, and rather boring. In fact it seemed totally meaningless.

8.

I learned more, or thought I did.

I bought "Fox's Book of Martyrs", the "Two Babylons", and read the "Trail of Blood". I learned the Catholic Church murdered millions of people and the true church was the Baptist!! The Catholic Church was "the whore of Babylon" predicted in Revelation 17. The Papacy was the "seat of Antichrist" and was in fact the ancient Babylonian mystery religion!! I grew even angrier and proceeded to build a doctrinal 'case' against Rome. With each passing day, my grudge against the Catholic Church was edging toward genuine hatred as I read anti-Catholic writings.

I learned something called "separation". Other denominations were liberal and apostate. Only the fundamental Baptists were on the right path. In fact, the number of truly "regenerated" people were very small compared to the false religious denominations Satan set up.

My world became smaller.

As it became smaller, I became more angry and bitter toward those who did not have what I had. I took a secret glee in thinking about them burning in Hell. I tried many times to convince my mother that she needed to 'be saved'. Arguments ensued and I was left with the terrible thought that my mother would burn in Hell unless she left her Catholicism and "accepted Jesus". Even worse was the thought that my dad was burning in Hell because he was a Catholic. A wall was being put up between me and my family. I still went out on visitation. The preacher seemed to be less available than he used to be. I would often see Maureen (without Roy) at the church when I got there. "They're having marital problems" I was told by the preacher. He was counselling her privately. The preacher's wife was from the south and seemed unaccustomed to life in the north. She would often take trips back to her home because she 'was homesick'. I know it was like a different world for her. She was from a small town in the South. Her husband had brought her to large city that was predominately blue collar, Catholic, with high unemployment and crime. The type of people the preacher was ministering to, was simply not part of the world she was used to.

The preacher had a hard time adjusting as well. If we drove into downtown I would often hear him mutter "this place is full of queers". Since I worked every day in the city I never saw apparently what he saw.

One thing I encountered that was absent in my Catholic upbringing was the concept of "competition" between churches. Human beings become a kind of commodity in evangelical and fundamentalist churches, as they compete for attention and membership. The one with the highest attendance rate wins. A preacher's job could be in jeopardy if attendance drops or does not rise. So churches will compete with the best preacher or the best music used to entice people to attend.

I became involved in every ministry of the church. Sunday School, Awana (a mid-week

children's program), visitation, soul-winning. I was in church Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night Prayer and Bible study. I was excited and the future was bright. I made a decision: I would be a preacher.

9.

Things began to unravel.

The more I studied the Bible (in a dispensationalist sense) the less sense it seemed to make. I would read the Gospels, with its emphasis on works, yet the preacher never seemed to preach on this. I was told the Sermon on the Mount was for a Kingdom Age, not meant for today. The Lord's Prayer was never meant to be prayed today. It was a "model prayer" and to pray it was "vain repetition". Nothing in these texts indicated that. During a study on Daniel 9 the preacher was trying to prove a dispensational "truth" that was simply not there. When I questioned it, the preacher got visibly upset. I had obviously asked him a question he could not answer. Something was wrong, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

Then one day the preacher's wife up and left. She returned to her home state and refused to come back. Rumors began to fly. The preacher's wife accused her husband of having an affair. He in turn accused her of having an affair. Suddenly the church I loved and thought was Paradise on earth became an ugly place.

In a few short months I learned that the "visits" the preacher made to Maureen and Roy's home was something less than spiritual. He would spend hours at Maureen's house when Roy was away on business. The preacher's wife became involved with an old high school sweetheart in her home state. The two put up their defensive walls and the church became the battlefield. People chose sides. Some were for the preacher, others were behind his wife. Things were ugly. The emotional high of the revival was replaced with a tension one could slice with a knife. Tempers flared and things almost fell into fisticuffs a few times.

The preacher resigned and his wife moved out. Another church member and I made it our mission that we would get this couple back together. We visited our former pastor in a run-down apartment and talked for hours. "You guys don't understand", he would say, "I need the love of a woman". He said his wife refused sex and so he was "forced" to have an affair.

I remember one night, we went over to talk to him. He turned on the television while we were there. After several minutes it was obvious he was not listening, he was just staring at the TV. I said "did you hear what I said?" He looked up as if coming out of a trance and said: "I'm sorry guys, I watch Monday Night Football religiously". Eventually they were divorced. His former wife re-married quickly and our former preacher moved in with Maureen after Roy moved out.

I could not help thinking about the implications of this.

All the things he told us. All those sermons he preached about how to live Godly lives. All those sermons on sin and "modesty". Was it real? Was it genuine? Or was it all a lie? My faith remained strong. But what I saw rocked the illusions I had about fundamentalism.

"Love your wife" he would say, "or someone else will". Which he was obviously doing. I didn't know much, but I did know the church is not a place for one's sexual conquests.

Now I was angry.

The first brick in the shaky wall of fundamentalism was coming down.

10

It was if a great blanket had been thrown over my spiritual life.

Church was now a drudgery. I fell away from all the programs I had been in. I was no longer involved in Sunday School, Awana, visitation, nothing. I barely made it to Church on Sunday. I still wanted to be a preacher, but I missed the exciting days that had gone before. The church had gone from about 400 members to barely reaching 200. The new preacher gave boring sermons, he had no interest in evangelism. The Bible studies left me with more questions than answers.

Evangelism was always confrontational. Knocking on doors, passing out literature, arguing with Christians who were not part of our little movement. I always felt uncomfortable with this, but I didn't know why at the time.

A couple of single girls in the church had, what some jokingly called a "dating ministry". They would date "unsaved" guys and entice them to become Christians. This fed into the lowest form of human nature. Many guys would rush to "pray a sinner's prayer" for a pretty pair of legs.

Not getting what the spiritual nourishment at Church, I started looking elsewhere for it. I started listening to a radio preacher named Malcolm Smith. He was a charismatic, so at first I had no interest in hearing anything he had to say. But I listened anyway. He was talking about something called "covenant". He was able to expound scripture in a way I never heard before. I was beginning to realize that dispensationalism was not the way to interpret scripture, it was a book of COVENANT!!

My eyes were slowly being opened to the true meaning of scripture. I suddenly understood God's Word in a way I never did before. I didn't know it, but God was slowly leading me back home. He was 'mugging me' from behind in a way I didn't expect. One day I heard Malcolm had become a Charismatic Episcopal priest!! I was appalled. Episcopal? Wasn't that just like Catholic with all that pagan ritual? I purchased his series on the Sacraments and listened. I of course disagreed with all of it. But like Malcolm always did, he backed up what he said with scripture! This was disturbing and rocking my fundamentalist world.

But even more, something he said on the first teaching tape struck me like a two-by-four. He said: **"When you're seven years old and you run away from home, it's a lot of fun at 12 noon. But by 6pm it's not fun anymore, you want to return home."**

Something inside me was rocked by that statement.

Return home?

To the Catholic Church?

NEVER!! Insanity!!

I'm a born-again, saved, fundamentalist christian.

I would NEVER go back to the Great Harlot.

I renounced my Catholicism and discarded the 'baby sprinkling' I received.

Nevertheless, I could not get that statement out of my head, no matter how hard I tried.

The prayers of an old nun years before were being answered.

11.

I am a reader.

I suppose that is why I was never a good fundamentalist. I loved history and read constantly. Not just the books fundamentalists recommended (and they are few and far between). The more I read, the more disillusioned I became. At the same time, the Bible

was coming alive to me in a way I did not dream possible. But everything I was learning was coming from outside of fundamentalism (who were supposed to be the experts on the Bible).

There were things I simply knew nothing about, and I HAD to know. I never questioned the fundamentalist view of prophecy, yet the more I studied, the more confused I became. The Bible seemed to simply not agree with fundamentalists! Fundamentalists insist Revelation is to be taken literally, yet the first verse of the book declares it to be a book of signs. The Fundamentalist insists the King James Bible is superior, yet there were translation errors within that version.

Fundamentalists believe in “once saved always saved”. This is a major teaching among many evangelicals and fundamentalists. A person can show no fruit in his or her Christian life because of the 'event' of salvation when they got their lifeboat out of Hell and their ticket to Heaven. This 'event' is sealed and the Christian is “Once saved always saved”. What happens? I lose my fear of God. Why must I live a holy life? Why get upset over sin? The 'event' made me right. It creates a spiritual laziness. A presumption. A Christian who shows no love or mercy? “Once saved always saved”. A Christian filled with hate and bitterness? “Once saved always saved”. A Christian who shows no interest in the things of God? “Once saved always saved”. A Christian preacher who steals money from his congregation? “Once saved always saved”. A Christian pedophile? “Once saved always saved”. A Christian serial killer? “Once saved always saved”. It creates a dilemma that must be explained. So, in order to explain a “Christian” who falls into sin or has no spiritual fruit, they come up with another phrase: “never saved in the first place”. The 'event' really didn't happen and must be replaced with a genuine 'event'.

Historically many Christians, like Augustine, come to a point in which faith in Christ starts. But most grow up in the church and cannot point to a particular 'crisis point', faith in Christ was something they grew into. Historically, the Great Commission was “Baptize and teach”. It was never “force a crisis” on someone who already had faith in Christ. That's the problem with evangelistic appeals, they demand a crisis when one might not be needed. This was unheard of in the early church. When you focus on the 'crisis' and the 'experience' that accompanies the crisis, **that** becomes the focal point. And sincere Christians will return to it again and again hoping this time it will 'take'. Evangelistic invitations become appeals to re-commit, and re-commit your re-commitment.

12.

Fundamentalists love the designation “independent, fundamental Baptist”. The problem, first, is this:

They are not “independent (which to them means non-denominational)”.

The term "denomination" generally referred to Protestant churches for the sake of "denominating" themselves from other Protestant churches. “Independent, fundamental, Baptist” churches are a denomination because it is a name applied ("denominated") to these churches. It has nothing to do with the form of church government. Each church is connected by a “Bible college” or a “camp”.

“Fundamental” refers to the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith. The problem is that they are rather choosy about what those “fundamentals” are, taking away fundamentals they disagree with (Sacraments, Eucharist), and adding (Rapture, Premillennialism),

“fundamentals” that have never been a part of the Historic Christian faith. Fundamentalists are “anti-creedal”, they will not acknowledge the historic creeds of the Church claiming: “The Bible is our creed”, which becomes very subjective. To claim “sola scriptura” presents problems because each person interprets that phrase, and the Bible, differently. There simply is no authority. Without any authority, many fundamentalists fall into the heresies of the past. For example, many fundamentalists have begun to deny the doctrine of original sin, a heresy the Church dealt with centuries ago. Once you deny the doctrine of original sin, other doctrines follow like dominoes, the Virgin birth, the impeccability and (eventually) the Deity of Christ. Many take a modalistic view of the Trinity, another ancient heresy. Some deny the need for repentance in regard to salvation. Without any doctrinal authority, “fundamentalism” become very “non-fundamentalist”. Many fundamentalist churches have a “doctrinal statement”. The problem comes from the “doctrines” within it that were never part of Historic Christianity.

Baptist? Their claim to be Baptist is a problem as well. Baptists originated out of the Reformation. Fundamentalist claim never to have been part of the Reformation and state Baptists predate the Reformation, and in fact, finds its roots in the Early Church. This is accomplished through revisionist history with absolutely no historical foundation. The beginnings of this can be traced back to a 19th century in a book entitled: “A Concise History of Baptists” by G.H. Orchard.” In the 20th century, this was shortened in a booklet called “The Trail of Blood” by J M Carroll.

Many Baptists to this day believe this is a historically accurate portrayal of history. Though rejected by historians, many Baptists understand this largely fabricated historical account to be the story of how Christ established the Baptist church (beginning with John the Baptist) and how it remained the one true church loyal to Christ for the past 2000 years.

Dr. Carroll seeks to identify the Baptist church of today with nearly every medieval and early heretical group. Some of the ones he cites most often are the Donatists, Montanists, Paulicians, Albigensians, Waldenses, and Anabaptists. His claim is best refuted by simply examining who these heretics were and what they taught. In all cases it is a far cry from what modern Baptists believe.

If the “true Church” was an “underground” Church until the Reformation (which they claim not be a part of anyway), there is a problem with the very words of Christ. He said “the gates of hell shall not prevail against” the Church. Trail of Blood history turns Jesus into a liar.

In this, only one conclusion can be reached.

“Independent Fundamental Baptists” are neither independent, fundamental, nor Baptist.

13.

One of the culture shocks I received when walking with the fundamentalists was in terms of worship.

There is no sense of respect and awe of being in the house of God. I didn't realize it at the time but this fed into my lazy nature in terms of worship. Many such churches are crippled with a laziness when it comes to worship. Churches are filled with spectators, worship is by gawking, not participating. The purpose of singing hymns is to 'warm ourselves up for the preacher', to put us 'in the mood'. WE decide how God is to be

worshipped. People sit and stare at what was going on at the platform. People barge in loudly. I have seen children given coloring books and toys to play with under the pew while the service is on. Many of the sermons in the more extreme fundamentalist churches are not appropriate to the occasion. Sermons can become skill tirades with inappropriate words used like 'heifers' and 'queer'. Words are not chosen wisely.

Sermons become the main event of worship in fundamentalist churches. This can easily lead to abuse by men with charismatic personalities who have no business in a pulpit. Congregations who are directed to think worship is to be focused on the preacher, become easy prey for these sorts of men.

The reason for this is that Evangelical and fundamentalist churches are pastor and preacher driven. The foundation of many churches revolve around a man. It affects how they worship, how they minister to each other and even evangelism. When this is taken to it's logical extreme, you wind up with a cult.

Since the preacher is at the center, he can use that position to direct emotionally weak people into following him. When this "Position" is challenged, they will say "Touch not mine anointed", quoting Scripture out of context. There have been tragic situations in which physical and sexual abuse result from this sort of cultic philosophy.

The other novelty is the "Altar Call". You can search 1800 years of church history and you will never find anything close to an 'altar call'. The Methodists had a 'mourner's bench' but it was nothing even close to what came later. It took Charles Finney to create the 'altar call' using sales techniques to get people to 'make decisions' for Christ in the early 19th century.

In the less extreme evangelical churches, the term 'seeker-friendly' worship has become popular. The seeker churches desire make worship appealing to those who are not Christians. Music becomes a major issue in these churches. They are usually split between two groups:

1st group: *We need to attract the younger crowd with contemporary music.*

2nd group: *We need the old fashioned hymns!* (which are actually no more than 100 years old).

What neither group seems to realize is that they are dictating to God how He should be worshipped. The focus is not on God, it's on me. Is it the kind of music I like, I enjoy. Does it make my toe tap? Are they the kind of hymns I grew up singing? Worship is reduced to gawking at a singer on stage who looks more like he/she is on "American Idol" than in a church. Thus many people can easily say "I worship God at home, on the TV".

If indeed you believe worship is music/preacher driven, and your participation in it is just passive listening. Then I can see how many can reach that conclusion.

The problem is, that is not what the Bible says is worship.

14.

I finished my studies and was ready for my first pastorate.

My first church was a small rural congregation. I enjoyed getting up to preach on Sundays. There is a sense of power that comes from standing in the pulpit. All attention is on you. You can mold the people to what you want them to be, or so it would seem.

I would always feel, as I ended my sermon, that there was something missing, something

I had to do. It would be years before I finally figured out the reason for that. In my pastorate I was always being challenged with different interpretations of a Bible passage. There never seemed to be any authority, a place that could declare “the buck stops here”. With every sermon it seemed I was challenged with “That’s your interpretation, this is MY interpretation”. Fundamentalists always speak of ‘scripture alone’, but each one had his opinion of what ‘scripture alone’ meant. Each person had their own interpretation, there was no foundation. Each church has its own “Pope with a Bible”.

The individualism of Western Culture that is part of the make-up of the country we live in. The 'John Wayne' approach to Christianity. There is no central authority, creedal foundation, or historical tradition. That is why many evangelicals do not 'feel connected' to whatever church they attend. As long as that church matches up with what I BELIEVE, I'm fine, walk away from that, and I'll go to the church down the road. Malcolm Smith used to call them 'spiritually homeless', they travel from spiritual soup kitchen to spiritual soup kitchen trying to find a place to be fed.

Each person had their own ‘personal relationship’ with Jesus, which is modern terminology. Our relationship with Jesus is intensely personal. That is true, but it is not exclusive. Paul said ‘Christ in you, the hope of Glory’. In the Greek that Paul used it is plural, not singular. It should read ‘Christ in YOU ALL, the hope of Glory.’ The Church is not made up of isolated individuals, but members of the mystical body of Christ Himself. Paul said we are “members one to another”.

When I left the Catholic Church it put a wedge in between me and my mother and sisters. I spent a few years trying to get them to pray a 'sinner's prayer' so they would be 'saved'. But I never took notice of the division this created in an already divided household. I noticed in many fundamentalist homes they talk about poor mom and dad, or sis who 'still goes to the Catholic Church' and therefore cannot possibly be a Christian. I have heard of children who no longer speak to parents or siblings because they are 'still unsaved'. Or sometimes it's the Catholic family who cuts off relations with one of their own because they have left the Catholic Church.

For years, after my parents died, I pretty much imagined they were in Hell because they never left the Catholic Church. How does one tell a child grandma and grandpa are burning in Hell because she was Catholic and never 'prayed the sinner's prayer'?

I look at fundamentalist families I see endless division. The children rarely follow in their parents footsteps and wind up either in atheism or a cult. Sometimes they will go to a church, but not the church their parents went to.

What kind of legacy are they leaving behind? They hand their children a puff of wind and say, 'there's your inheritance'.

I could not put it into words at the time.

But there was a hunger within me, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

15.

If were to put a finger on the basic problem with fundamentalist churches in my years in the ministry, it come down to one word: authority.

Many congregations insist they do not “want a dictator” in the pulpit. The problem is, that is exactly what they are looking for.

“Everything rises or falls on leadership” a fundamentalist preacher said once. The problem is, a man was never meant to be the center of the church. If the church

encounters a person (like myself) who refuses to be the center of attention, they view that as weakness. The preacher is to “start programs”. What is the purpose of the “programs”? To draw new people into the church. If people drop off, or new people are not flocking to the building, the pastor’s job is in jeopardy. I might add, in a small town this is most difficult.

The preacher is to be the “evangelist”. Not to have “won someone to Christ” in a year’s time is a red mark on any man’s ministry. Even worse, the pastor is responsible for the spiritual growth of the church’s members. I remember one lady telling me: “I need you to make my husband grow spiritually.” A task no man can perform. He walks a fine line. If he offends the wrong person, his career as a preacher could be over.

The preacher is to be an expert on the Bible, theology, church history, he is to have an angelic Christian walk, endlessly in prayer. And he must win a soul to Christ AT LEAST once a week. His sermons must be compelling. Woe to the preacher to whom it is said “I got nothing out of your sermon”. In fact it becomes almost a requirement that the next sermon top the last one. But not just one sermon per week. The average preacher prepares at least four messages a week on average. On top of this the preachers wife must be the perfect example of Christian womanhood, and his children must resemble little drones. In short, the preacher is to be a little god.

Not surprising that many of these churches end up with a cultic dictator in their midst. Many don’t realize they are actually asking for what they say they do not want. The pastor cannot give to the people what only God can give them. He cannot make them grow spiritually, he cannot turn people into Christians.

He cannot take a 2000 year institution and turn into a Wall Street company. I remember a deacon telling me once “The church is to be run like a business.” Well, in terms of how the church keeps it’s financial house in order, there is a sense in which that is true. But the Church was NEVER meant to be “run like a business”. That is a 20th century concept totally out of touch with historic Christianity.

The problem is, in fundamentalism, the “authority” they are looking for is found in the reflection of the mirror.

The preacher and congregation battle constantly over who is “in charge”. Is it the preacher? Is it the people? Who decides how the Bible is to be interpreted? Who decides how to worship? Who decides what the preacher can or cannot say? Who decides what we can or cannot believe? Who “runs the church”? Who “calls the shots”? Without authority, they are left to their own devices. Churches become their own version of what THEY think Christianity should be.

Each fundamentalist church is a little island unto themselves with their own “doctrinal positions” and “philosophies”. They are like medieval castles with walls to keep out imagined enemies. The drawbridge can open to those who don’t mind the walls. But woe to the traveller who accidentally falls into the crocodile-filled moat!

In order for God to work in me, he had to first show me the basic flaw in the foundation of fundamentalism: authority. Authority is what they needed?

But where would that authority come from?

16.

Fundamentalism is built upon schism and as such is a breeding ground for one of the deepest of human sins: hate.

This was a hard fact that I did not see at first, looking at it in hindsight, now I can see it.

It just wasn't hate towards Catholics, it was a hate directed toward anyone who was not like them.

My first shock came in my first pastorate, when I encountered Christians who were sympathetic to the Ku Klux Klan. They reasoned (a few preachers I talked to were also were of this opinion), the KKK was a "Christian organization". Later, I would discover many of the Fundamentalist heroes of the past were VERY sympathetic to the Klan. William Bell Reilly, Bob Jones Sr. (one of the buildings on his campus is named after a Klan grand dragon), Bob Schuler, Frank Norris and others.

This was very disturbing to me because I knew it was wrong to support hate.

To even suggest starting a church in a black neighborhood drew blank stares. "Why?", would often be the answer, "They have their own churches!! A black fundamentalist needs to be in a black neighborhood." When a black family tried to join the church, they were told "you're going to take over this church!!" We never saw them again.

There was also class hatred. A preacher told me once not to pursue those who were in a lower income bracket because "Birds of a feather flock together", and would not "fit" into the church.

They can be most hateful toward each other. Churches split and then the splits split into even smaller groups. The splits, most of the time, have to do with personality conflicts within the congregation.

If the preacher has a particularly charismatic personality, he can easily lead followers away from the offending church to start a new church. The bitterness toward the splitting churches can become almost violent in its passion. For fundamentalism was birthed from division, and its offspring continue to divide.

Worst of all is the irrational, vitriolic, bordering on insane HATE of the Catholic Church. This I did not see, or apparently mind much. I truly hated the Church that "sent my father to Hell". I would stand in the pulpit and proudly proclaim the "Roman Catholic Church is the whore of Babylon!! The Pope is the anti-Christ!!" Never mind that neither of these views can be proved from scripture.

I am NOT saying ALL fundamentalists hate. I AM saying the culture that surrounds it tends to feed it.

Generally you find people, of any group, are haters because they cannot intellectually or spiritually overcome an emotional response. They are satisfied not questioning the status quo. Once one starts questioning, the claws and fangs come out and they act, quite frankly, unchristian. It's easy to throw out meaningless and uneducated statements like: 'the Pope is the antichrist!! The RCC is the great whore!!'. It arouses the emotions of the crowd and they scream AMEN!! without ever questioning the statement. Sadder still is finding Bible verses to 'justify' the hate. Claiming we are 'commanded' to hate.

I'm not using the word "hate" as a liberal would. Disagreement does not equal hate. Hate is spawned out of fear. You hate and fear what you know or **think** you know. The scary thing is, many cannot see it, deny it's there, or use a different word for it ("we're 'fighting' fundamentalists"). Hate, if left unchecked and not repented of, will do physical as well as mental and spiritual damage.

It's easy to say 'well God hates'. What God 'hates' are things that oppose His holiness. His 'hate' is not stained with sin. Human hate, *is* stained with sin because we are fallen creatures. To invoke God in our hatred is to find a 'holy' excuse for our sinful expression. God's 'hate' works toward redemption, not destruction. Human hate only wishes to divide,

ridicule and destroy in an attempt to prove Genesis 3 correct: we can be as God. Perhaps the underlying problems fundamentalists find themselves in have their roots in the hate that is produced.

If that is so, can it be called truly Christian?

17.

This next issue I tread as lightly as I can, at the same time I want to be clear about what I have encountered in fundamentalism.

I have met many a man who stands in the pulpit of a church when he should be sitting on a psychiatrist's couch.

For every genuine man of God who serves faithfully, I have met men who suffer from depression, personality disorders, and even a few sociopaths. The worst of them take great delight in deception, railing against sinners (instead of offering love toward them in Jesus Christ), ridicule, and name calling. They have no self, nor Spirit control. They are the masters of projection. They take their problem, and project it on others.

Other more tender hearted men, dive into the river of depression and brand themselves failures.

Since I have not done a scientific study, I can only speak from my own experience and I have spoken to others who have reached the same conclusions. My experience has been in the world or "independent, fundamental, Baptists. **I AM NOT saying all fundamentalists have mental health problems.** I AM saying however that the culture and philosophy that surrounds the movement can create an enabling of the problem.

What I have seen is a real problem that exists and cannot be dodged. My ordaining pastor has suffered from depression. I have seen others who have bi-polar and other disorders. These are people I have met, interacted with and whose ministries I have sat under. That they are not Spirit-controlled is obvious. Their behavior reflects a deeper problem than just plain "meanness". Many are fighting a deep mental disorder. It is interesting that in many of these types of churches, preachers discourage members of their congregation with mental disorders from taking any type of medication (this I have observed personally).

In fairness mental health issues are present with people in any denomination or group. However many people with mental health issues will flock to **wherever their problem is enabled**. If one is suffering from paranoia, the fundamentalist world is more than happy to indulge your fantasy (us four, no more). If one is suffering from severe depression, the negative drumbeat of the fundamentalist world view feeds that.

On the other hand I have met people who have hallucinations and hear voices who are quite comfortable in a more extreme charismatic church. People with mental health issues will be **attracted** to more extremist groups which **feeds** into whatever the issues are.

Painting with a broad brush however is not the answer. Mental health issues do exist and pastors and churches need to address them. Too often the response in fundamentalist churches is: 'throw away your meds', or 'there must be sin in your life.'

The brain is like any organ of your body, if it is not working properly, it must be treated, not ignored or enabled.

18.

Because of a lack of authority and accountability, fundamentalism has been beset with scandals.

In my own experience I have encountered sex scandals, abuse scandals, and financial

scandals. No one branch of fundamentalism has had more public scandals than that branch associated with a particular Bible College which will remain nameless. The founder himself, was beset with accusations of a sexual affair. He ran his College very much like a cult with himself at the center. His son, a pastor, was removed from the pastorate for committing adultery. Countless numbers of graduates have been charged with child molestation.

Offshoots of this branch (identifiable as “King James Only”) have had men charged with an assortment of rape, child molestation, sodomy, and assault.

These are tragic situations that leave scars on peoples lives that are not easily healed. I have spoken to many of the victims of these crimes. Despite their victimization, they have not given up their faith in God and are committed Christians. To their dismay, it is often THEY, the victims who are attacked by other fundamentalists for “bringing down” their flesh and blood god.

Other ministries fall under the stain of adultery (which I have witnessed) or financial improprieties. I knew of one preacher who bragged that he was able to deceive the IRS, and had no problem receiving money from illegal activities.

I have personally encountered physical and mental abuse among the wives and children of fundamentalist preachers. Many of the children of fundamentalist preachers often stray far from the fold. Many will not enter the same branch of Christianity their parents were a part of. Others give up on the faith completely.

I am not saying ALL fundamentalist ministries are like this.

I WILL say, in my 20 year walk among fundamentalist preachers, I can literally count on one hand how many I would personally trust. That is tragic. I find no glee in stating this. I wish it were not true. I wish I could tell people that fundamentalism is the moral watchdog of America. The keeper of the doctrinal and moral flame. But I cannot.

What is this caused by? The quick answer is the human sin nature, and that is certainly true. But I do believe that the structure and philosophy of fundamentalism gives that nature more opportunity to reveal itself.

The Fundamentalist mindset claims that it believes in absolutes, yet the culture around it practices situational ethics.

While they are conservative and “morally strict”, they evaluate each situation for their moral decision, not absolutes. In short they will always find excuses for their bad behavior. Thus, fundamentalists, and this is my observation, **tend to be the most emotionally and spiritually immature of all Christians.**

But before the reader believe I am broad brushing, let me state this.

In Israel at the time of Jesus, the Sadducees, who hated the Pharisees, divided the Pharisees into groups. They gave them nicknames that summed up their character. They divided the Pharisees into seven categories. The first six were cruel characteratures. But the last group they had respect for. There were among them, Pharisees who honestly loved God and were operating within this idiotic system out of sincerity. Most were hypocrites, but here and there, you found Pharisees that had an open and sincere heart and really wanted truth. The same holds true of fundamentalists, who are the modern Pharisees.

But the fact remains the sincere ones are in a distinct minority.

19.

In describing my journey from the one extreme of Protestantism (fundamentalism) to the

other (Calvinism), I must go beyond personalities and methods to the underlying foundation.

Simply put, fundamentalism attracts, and thrives, on ignorance. “Bible Colleges” are not places of higher learning, but places in which fundamentalist philosophy is disseminated. Many come away from these “Colleges” just as ignorant as they went in. They are mainly places for men who want a “degree” to be preachers.

I have no clue why a woman would want to attend these schools, since the only thing offered to them is “secretarial studies”, home economics, or teaching. In many respects it appears to be a place to find a husband. I know a couple of girls who have gone away to a particular Bible College. They informed me and my wife that two thirds of the graduation class are already engaged to be married.

Some of the guys do enter the ministry, some go back to low-paying jobs. Either way they (husband and wife) have huge loan payments to make for the rest of their lives. One of the girls has told me that to many at this school, it is just a very expensive dating service.

I find it disturbing when a young man or lady goes away to four years of College, and is forced to work at Wal-Mart to pay off a loan payment when the only thing they received at the college was a spouse. In effect they receive a “useless degree”.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that our society is fast becoming illiterate. Reading comprehension is at an all time low. The problem is very noticeable in the church at large. Without basic reading skills, churches can be lead in any direction the powers that be so wish. Fundamentalist Christians are the most Biblically illiterate in the evangelical world.

I am not saying all fundamentalists are unintelligent. I AM saying the prevailing culture that surrounds it seems to celebrate ignorance.

Many simply have reading comprehension problems, for whatever reason. Many times it can be blamed on a bad education, too much time watching the TV or computer games. I can honestly say the folks that scream the loudest about the KJV, never seem to **read** their KJVs. They rely on what someone says is in the Bible. They allow someone else to think for them.

Fundamentalism claims belief and dependency on the Scriptures. But it appears to be more influenced by a kind of “Oral Tradition”.

Strange as it may seem, fundamentalists use exactly what they condemn Catholics for. Sermons are shared, sometimes word for word. Some are published in a newspaper called “The Sword of the Lord”, or they pass around (and sell) tapes and pamphlets. Many graduates of a particular Bible College memorize the sermons of its founder word for word. They attend conferences where they hear the leaders set an agenda for them. Bible study is selective, to serve the purpose of a sermon. Memorization replaces scholarly inquiry. Verses and texts are simply used to apply to a situation or a sermon.

Many seem proud of a lack education. Others seem to think they are Bible scholars because they attended a “College” which simply spoon-fed a philosophy. Either way it is very sad to encounter preachers who only know theology, doctrine, and Church history from a narrow and limited point of view.

As a result, there is many a preacher who stands in the pulpit of his church who has a modalistic view of the Trinity, denies Original Sin, repentance, or does not even understand the hypostatic union of Christ. Yet they are looked at as “Bible experts”.

Even worse, they many times display a fear of any knowledge that goes beyond, or offers an alternative to, what they have learned.

20.

My years in the ministry seem almost surreal to me now.

It seemed as if every church I pastored (there were three) could almost be interchangeable. It was like being on an endless merry-go-round.

Much of my time was spent studying. But no matter how hard I studied, it seemed to make little difference in the lives of the congregation. Many were indifferent. I often felt I could recite the Gettysburg Address on Sunday morning and folks would still tell me it was either a 'wonderful sermon' or how they totally disagreed with it.

Others wanted to argue over every little thing. They literally made lists of things they didn't like about me or what I said. They were ready to do battle over the tiniest of issues. One fellow challenged an opinion I held and called a deacon meeting to deal with it. I gave him a two page collection of scripture verses (with no comments) that brought me to the conclusion I came to. He literally threw it back at me and proceeded to quote "experts" who obviously knew more than me because "they were on TV."

I enjoyed visiting, but it was never enough. I was told "so and so was offended" because I wasn't giving them any attention. Many times, as all human being are guilty of, we offend without meaning to. A careless word or a thought that wasn't reasoned out. Once offended, they would never approach me, they would always go to someone else and by the time it got back to me, it had made it's way around the church twice.

Even after I apologized for the imagined offence, it was never enough. There was always a cold-ness, an underlying anger that was difficult to avoid. Some would talk openly of their displeasure within earshot of my wife and daughter.

Anger and bitterness become commodities in fundamentalist churches.

Worse still was being compared with other churches or ministries. Many in the church liked the "fire and brimstone" type sermon. They liked their preacher to jump up and down and scream and holler. I am not a screamer, nor am I a performing chimp. The 'sermons' of screamers tend to be shallow and empty. Lots of emotion, but no substance. They expected me to manipulate their emotions to "get them" to be more spiritual. Not all in the congregations were like this, but I'll return to them later.

This is hard for Catholics to understand this, but in fundamentalist and evangelical circles, there is "competition" with other churches. Human beings become the commodity, and many times the weapons of this philosophy.

Churches compete to see who has the most, or the best. The common comments are "That church has a bigger building, a larger Sunday School. They get more kids on Wednesday night than we do. They have more people, a better music program, a better preacher."

Many churches cater to this in the name of "evangelism." They steal members. Some want a bigger congregation than anyone else, so they are quite willing to pull down another church to that. I literally witnessed churches sending "spies" into other churches to cause strife or to fish for members. The preachers were quite capable of coming up with a reason to do this.

In modern evangelical and fundamentalist circles, church growth is through the transfer of members from one church to another.

21.

What I loved to do, as a preacher, was to teach the Word. But I was met with indifference. What many congregations want is subjective emotion. They are looking for that “word” or “phrase” that will “speak to their heart”. If they do not receive that, they assume it is the preacher who is to blame, not themselves. Thus the phrase “I get nothing out of... (sermon or church)” is very common. It is beyond the capabilities of any preacher to control private subjective emotions. The preacher preaches, the Holy Spirit carries it to a person who either receives it or rejects it.

For many, “Christian” is a title they carry with them, but it doesn’t impact them, it doesn’t change them. They are complacent and lukewarm.

They are truly the “children of yesterday’s revival”.

Lukewarm Christianity is like Columbus standing on the shore of the New World and saying “This beach is all there is, ho hum, let’s go home.” They are bored with the Bible, prayer, the Gospel and worship. They have no interest in going to new horizons in Christianity. The question begs an answer: Have I been rescued from the fires to Hell to be bored? Have I been called to a joyless existence? Have I been “saved” so I can hang out on Earth until the Rapture? Even worse, have I been “saved” to fight, argue, and divide?

Salvation becomes a monument to be looked back on.

When in truth, salvation is past, present and future. I was saved, I am being saved, I will be saved. When I finally understood that concept, Christianity for me became a rich, bottomless well, like landing on another planet where every day is a new discovery.

But, most fundamentalist churches do not want that.

The truth is, for many of these congregations, there will never be preacher that will satisfy them. The average stay for a Pastor of a fundamentalist church rarely goes beyond five years.

The churches I had were small, but they had visions of grandeur that came from the mentality of the movement. They expected to grow beyond the measure of the area they were in. They expected to see hundreds “won to Christ”. The church bulging at the seams with people.

They expected me to start “programs”, but yet never bothered to attend the programs we did have.

They never seemed to be interested in going beyond the four walls of fundamentalism. To even suggest there are alternatives to the fundamentalist mindset was beyond what they were willing to bear. Not all in the congregations were like this, but I’ll return to them later.

There was a song by Fleetwood Mac that sums up my experience and what many people want out of a fundamentalist pastor:

"Tell me lies, tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies"

22.

Lest my recollections and assessment of my time in fundamentalism come off as overly negative and pessimistic, I want to relate a few positives.

I have met over the course of 20 years in fundamentalism and in the pastorate, many sincere Christians who desperately want to serve God and the Kingdom. The only word I can use to describe them is “different”. How they got into a fundamentalist church is a mystery. They are often treated as “outsiders” because they do not “fit in”.

They have a desire for the things of God. They are always ready to repent or forgive.

They never seem to hold grudges. They are usually the first person to come forward in the invitation. They rarely get angry, and if they do, they channel that anger into something positive or apologize quickly. They are excited about the love of God and always anxious to hear about it. They are truly “in love” with their Creator.

Christ has planted a seed in their hearts that produces a fruit that is truly supernatural. It produces enthusiasm. “Enthusiasm” is a Greek word which literally means “God inside you”. It is the very opposite of complacency. Their testimony is not just something that happened in the past, it is what God is doing in their life right now! These folks tend to be the tireless workers of the church, sometimes the only workers. But they never ask for praise or a pat on the back, they work out of the love of the Lord and love for His people. These Christians are always ready to sing His praises. This goes beyond an emotional high. They desire and want intimacy with the Creator. The joy of the Lord has touched their hearts, and it can be seen wherever they go. Christian theology is not based on emotion, but it can produce emotion.

The ancient song goes: “They shall know we are Christians by our love”. Love is the common denominator of every true Christian. They are not afraid of the love of God, they are excited by it.

They are always ready to learn. They come to every service Bible open, ready and excited about Jesus. They are the first in prayer, and they pray with a humility that leaves one silent. They are not phonies, they have a genuineness about them that cannot be denied. If in pain, they fall back upon a Father who loves them. If in suffering they go to the Christ who carries them through it. They are slow to believe the negatives and quick to believe the positives. Their lives are lived from the Holy Spirit within them.

I have met them.

Young and old, middle-aged and teen-ager.

I wish I could pack an entire church with all of these, for they are in a minority.

But they have been the greatest blessing of my years in ministry. I have no doubt I will see them again someday, standing next to Mother Theresa and others who let their lives speak the Gospel.

You folks made it all worthwhile.

23.

One day I discovered Calvinism.

What is a Calvinist? I would term it as ‘an educated fundamentalist’, or a more insulting description would be ‘a fundamentalist who has learned how to read.’ Fundamentalists are not known for their great reading skills. This is an observation of personal experience after 20 years in the movement. Many who clutch their King James Bibles cannot read them, or read them with great difficulty.

This is because fundamentalism is not an intellectual movement, but an emotional movement. Billy Sunday himself boasted the fact that he knew very little doctrine. I am not saying all fundamentalists are not intelligent. But they are certainly anti-intellectual. They don’t quite know what to do with a person who is intelligent, especially if that person is a woman (like my wife).

Historically, fundamentalism was a reactionary movement against the growing apostasy and liberalism within Protestant America in the late 19th, and early 20th century. But it goes much deeper than that. The fundamentalist movement is a direct ancestor of the ‘revivalism’ of Early America, which in turn was an ancestor to Romanticism.

Romanticism was an artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that originated around the middle of the 18th century in Western Europe. It was partly a revolt against the social, and political norms of the Enlightenment, and a reaction against scientific rationalization of nature in art and literature. In the 17th century the shift was toward the subjective and the inner “experience” of being “born again”.

The Enlightenment was an eighteenth-century movement in Europe and America, also called the “Age of Reason, which advocated human reason as the primary basis of authority. The Protestant Reformation has always swung uncomfortably between both poles.

If fundamentalism finds its roots in Romanticism, Calvinism finds its best expression (but not its roots) in the Enlightenment. The emphasis is on the individual and his or her mind. While the fundamentalist focuses on an expressive “experience”, the Reformed or Calvinistic tradition is focused on educating the people of God. A strong emphasis is placed on the mind, and cognitive understanding.

Simply put, fundamentalism focuses on the emotions (a clue as to why they love the term “fighting fundamentalists”), while the Reformed focuses on the intellect or the mind.

I believed at the time I had finally found what I wanted. I was a reader, so were the Reformed. I believed in learning and the intellect, so did the Reformed. They believed the more knowledge one had of theology and the Bible, the more the Christian would grow. This was certainly a relief from what I encountered in fundamentalism. I ate up everything I could on the history of the Reformation and Church history. I had a hunger for knowledge, and I believed I found it among the Reformed.

I was soon to discover how wrong I was.

24.

When I first encountered Calvinism, it was in a fundamental Baptist church. The youth pastor was a Calvinist and was criticizing the use of the public invitation. He objected to the use of the evangelical appeal to “decide” or “choose” in any way. To the Calvinist, the words “decide” and/or “choose” are dishonoring to the sovereignty of God is a misrepresentation or the depravity of man. “We do not have the ability “decide” or ‘choose,’” he would say, “and it is wrong to a human being to “make a decision” or to “choose” the gospel.

Calvinism is founded upon the acrostic “TULIP”. Total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. Certain aspects of the TULIP do indeed line up with Scripture. The problem is that the Great Commission and the Gospel are so universal, one must do some scriptural gymnastics to make the TULIP fit.

Calvinism, like it’s less-mannered younger sister fundamentalism, becomes isolationist and confrontational in attitude. In short, it can easily become an intellectual cult.

The unravelling of my brief journey up the Calvinist river came from simply viewing the Bible passages they often quote. Calvinists believe in “Limited atonement”. Calvinists believe the atonement is limited for some men but not for all. They claim Christ died only for the elect. To prove this they cite verses which seem to indicate that.

But for me, it seemed they were doing what the dispensationalists were doing. Making the Scripture fit their view instead of the other way around. The Bible states that Christ died for all men. John 4:42 describes Christ as "the Savior of the world," and 1 John 2:2 states that Christ "is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the

whole world." 1 Timothy 4:10 describes God as "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." To split hairs and say "world" doesn't really mean "world" is simply intellectual dishonesty.

In going to the cross, Christ intended to make salvation possible for all men, but he did not intend to make salvation actual for all men, otherwise we would have to say that Christ went to the cross intending that all men would end up in heaven. This is clearly not the case. God does desire the salvation of all men. 1 Timothy 2:4 states God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Some Calvinists teach the doctrine of "double-predestination." This teaching claims that in addition to electing some people to salvation God also elects others to damnation.

They tend to take certain scripture verses out of context to prove their ideas. This is simply not the God of the Bible, nor the God that I know.

God's omniscience is one of His attributes. It is indeed true that God knows who will go to heaven and who will not. God's omniscience does not interfere with human free will to choose. God knows what our ultimate choice for heaven or hell will be but he does not determine that choice. Our choices are our own.

There are many things about the TULIP I agree with, but overall, much of Calvinism simply makes little Biblical sense.

25.

In some ways I preferred the emotional immaturity of fundamentalists to the sanctimonious arrogance of Calvinists strutting around like so many peacocks showing off their "theological knowledge".

Many in the Reformed camp are very proud of their intellect and education. Nothing wrong with that. But I have observed personally Pastors use it to intimidate others. I saw a great knowledge of theology, head knowledge of cold facts, that didn't appear to translate into changed behavior or love for God. Jesus said 'they shall know you by our love', not our theology.

Some Calvinists feel the need to argue and convince others of their theology. Many times (and I personally observed this) they would use "stealth" to do accomplish this.

Calvinistic Baptist preachers would take a church, and begin the process of 'reforming' the church without telling the congregation that was their stated intent.

Usually the result is a disaster. I confronted one preacher on this who was ambiguous about the ethics of such a situation. I would hear 'We're in the process of reforming this church'. I know of several churches split down the middle because of this kind of 'stealth' ministry.

The tragedy of Calvinism, and to a lesser extent fundamentalism, is their rejection of a God of love. The God of many Calvinists HATES. He is a cold God who delights in sending people to Hell and punishing sinners. To many of the Calvinists I encountered, God is the unapproachable Deity who has a cold "relationship" with His creatures. I met many a Reformed preacher who feared calling God "Abba" as Paul did. They delight in talking about the "God of hate". One Calvinist said to me once: "I wish I could learn to hate as God hates". **I am not saying ALL Calvinists are like this.**

The reason I did not spend a long time among the Calvinists is because I clung to the God of love. This was the God I knew from my youth. The God the Catholic Church taught me to know. I suppose I still retained more things the nuns taught me than I realized.

When confronted with the cold religion of Calvinism, I retreated into the arms of the God

I knew from my youth.

God's love is not human love. Human love is based on feelings and rooted in emotions. God's is a love that operates apart from emotions. His love does not waver day by day. It is the total commitment of His Being to seek our highest and best, and to bring us to our fullest potential as humans.

He is Love, and He loves us because of who He is, not because of who we are. He does not love what we do, but He is committed to us, pursuing us down every blind alley and path of foolishness. He will not let us go. His is a love that is not looking for what it can get out of us, but a committed love that searches for opportunities to give to us.

I am grateful however for one thing. While I walked with the Calvinists I began reading books I never would have picked up before. Books on the Reformation and the Early Church.

I originally thought the dissatisfaction I felt was with fundamentalism. But I began to realize the entire foundation of Protestantism was about to be uprooted. I left the Catholic Church for emotional reasons, but I would return for doctrinal reasons.

I would return home to the Catholic Church from the back door of the Reformation.

26.

Lest my recollections and analysis of my time among the Reformed come off as overly negative and pessimistic, I want to relate a few positives.

Since the Reformed tend to be readers, their knowledge of Church history is far superior than that of the fundamentalists. They do not create revisionist history based on presumption (i.e. "Trail of Blood"). Many of the more honest among them acknowledge the failures and sins that were a part of Reformation history. The Reformed do not ignore the contribution the ancient church made toward formation of doctrine.

They are not loaded down with the made-up theology of dispensationalism. As a result, their interpretation of Scripture is in line with what the Church has taught historically.

This is very important, because without the historic Church interpretation, Christians are left to every wind of doctrine. The emphasis on the Covenants of Scripture make the Bible and salvation history easier to understand (as opposed to dispensationalists).

Jesus Christ is the final covenant God made with man. When God makes a covenant, He makes it with Himself, and He promises to fulfil it as He is the author and the finisher of that covenant. Every promise Jesus made when He was here on earth was part of that covenant. As a result, those on the Reformed wing of the Church are far more Biblically literate (in understanding) than fundamentalists. I thank Malcolm Smith for opening my eyes to the Covenants of Scripture (although he is not a Calvinist). Since they are not loaded down by dispensational "theology", the end-times fairy tale of fundamentalism (Rapture) is avoided.

Unlike the fundamentalists, the Reformed believe in Creeds, and they recognize them for the statements of faith that they are. They avoid the heresies of fundamentalism by staying within the walls of the historic Christian Creeds. The "confessions" of the various Reformed churches are the foundation for each church and are not ignored or buried.

Education and reading are emphasized.

Their rejection of the "decisionist" nature of fundamentalist and evangelical salvation puts them closer to the historic nature of the Church. Their understanding that faith is not a "crisis" experience, but rather, something they grow into is heavily emphasized. This is far closer to Historic Christianity than fundamentalism is.

Worship and preaching is more formal and respectful in Reformed churches than in fundamentalist churches. Many are more liturgical and the preaching is respectful in nature.

I might add this. Although the Reformed are anti-Catholic, it is rare to find the kind of irrational anti-Catholic hatred that exists in Fundamentalism.

27.

When did it begin?

It began with the acknowledgement within me that I was hungry for more. But what was I hungry for? When I read the Reformers and the history of the Reformation, I expected to hear stories of great Christians standing for truth against the evil Catholic Church. Instead I realized that many of the Reformers were cold theologians. They were guilty of many persecutions against those they disagreed with. They fought amongst themselves almost as violently as they did with the Catholics. They all believed in “Sola Scriptura”, but they could not agree as to what that looked like. What was meant to unite Christians, divided them.

I began to read the writings of the Early Church. I was especially interested in the first three centuries of the Church. I was still hanging on to the idea that the Church began to be infected with paganism after 312 AD. I wanted to “prove” (for my own benefit at least) that the church of the first few centuries was not Catholic.

I bought a book, edited by an Episcopal priest, that gave thousands of quotes from the early Church on various issues and topics. I read early Church documents I bought at a bookstore or online (Eusibius, Augustine and others).

I ate up as much as I could about what the Church of the first three centuries believed. I was in shock. They were VERY Catholic.

The two earliest writers after the New Testament to bear witness to the Apostolic succession of the ministry were St. Clement of Rome (95AD) and St. Ignatius(105AD). They regard it as God’s permanent provision for His Church and as the bond of Church unity.

We first find the term “the Catholic Church” used by St. Ignatius. Tertullian (late 2nd century) challenged the heretical sects of his time to prove their being in possession of the truth, by producing a succession of Bishops. The word “Apostolic” in the Nicene Creed refers to a continuous Apostolic governance.

The existence of a human priesthood within the Catholic Church is foretold in the prophecies of Isaiah (Is. 66:21) and Jeremiah (Jer. 33: 15-22) . To deny that would leave these prophecies unexplained and unfulfilled.

I purchased two books at a bookstore: “The Imitation of Christ” by Thomas a’Kempis, and the writings of St. Bonaventure. I was blown away. How could this be? I read the life of St. Francis of Assisi and was confronted with the same truth.

These men wrote in the “Dark Ages” when Rome supposedly had the Christian world in it’s grip. The light would not penetrate the darkness until the Reformation. But THESE men....they loved the Lord. They were filled with the Holy Spirit.

AND THEY WERE “CATHOLIC”!!

28.

I moved on to a study of worship. I was VERY unhappy with evangelical/fundamentalist “worship.” When I heard the word “liturgy” I had visions of “dead Catholic worship.” What I learned about worship (and what I overlooked in the Bible) rocked my world.

The word 'liturgy' comes from two Greek words meaning 'people' and 'work'. In its root meaning, liturgy means an act performed for the good of a community. In its restricted meaning, it refers to the public rites and ceremonies officially authorized by the Church. It is literally the 'work of the people' in their common life of prayer and worship. It is used in several places in the New Testament, particularly in Acts 13:1. It is a word "transliterated" into the English language.

A liturgy disciplines our prayers, making them fit for expression, unselfish in content, and comprehensive in scope. It instructs us in the totality of the Christian faith and in the whole range of worship: confession, praise, intercession and self-offering.

The order of a liturgy in its structural framework must be unaltered. Without a fixed order, a liturgy is like a body without a skeleton, a game without rules. A fixed order is necessary if worship is to be corporate. A fixed order keeps the fact of redemption before men's thoughts continually with fixed words, expressions and symbolism.

The Jewish synagogues passed on to Christianity the forms of corporate worship. The reading of scripture, a confession of faith, prayers and the singing of Psalms all have its roots in Jewish worship.

From the Temple and Synagogue worship, the Apostles already knew the rites and the ceremonies that God ordained to worship Him. Only now those rites and ceremonies took on new meaning in Christ and were transferred to the worship rites of primitive Church. The early Church had a high view of God. Things were not done in a haphazard way. They were done with precision. Worshippers knew something important was happening here. They just did not stumble in and sit for an hour.

They came to worship God. So there are certain things they will do that they have done before. One of the chief values of a liturgy is that it teaches us both how to pray and what things we should pray for.

There is a certain ceremony and process that the worshipper is bound to, external actions, gestures, movements that are part of the public exercise of divine worship. Worshippers come to worship with their whole bodies, using all the senses. Seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling are all involved in the worship experience.

Worship involves the WHOLE BODY, not just the brain or emotions.

29.

The next stage was a study of the Sacraments.

A Sacrament is an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. In the Bible it is often translated as "mystery" or "mysteries". "Sacrament" is merely the Latin translation of that word. In fact, the Orthodox still refer to them as "mysteries".

There are many examples from the Scriptures of material things used as signs. The Rainbow was a sign and pledge to Noah that the world would never again be destroyed by a flood (Gen. 9:12-17). Circumcision was a sign and pledge to Abraham of the Covenant between himself and God. (Gen. 17:9-14. Rom. 4:11).

There are many examples from the Scriptures of material things used as supernatural means. The serpent of brass used to cure the Israelites (Num. 21:6-9). Christ using clay to heal the blind man at the pool of Siloam (Jn. 9:1-7). The entirety of Temple worship was Sacramental and supernatural in nature.

The visible sign in Holy Baptism is water. The Sacrament of Baptism is initiated by God, not man. Man's behaviour cannot invalidate it. Baptism is the ultimate expression of His

Grace.

Under the Old Covenant God commanded every male child to be circumcised the eighth day after birth (Lev. 12:3). Under New Covenant Baptism, which takes the place of the Old Covenant circumcision, God is willing to receive children into His new and better Covenant..

Christ Himself showed his special care and love to children (Mk. 10:16). He took notice of those mothers who had brought their children to Him and said “Suffer little children and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 19:14). There are many other Scriptures I will get into later.

The outward sign of the Lord’s Supper is the bread and the wine. The inward part of the Lord’s Supper is the Body and the Blood of Christ which are received by the Christian in the Sacrament.

The Paschal Feast of the Passover was celebrated by the Jews as a continual reminder of the story of their deliverance. A deliverance effected not by them, but for them, by the Hand of God to free them from bondage to a state of exaltation in the Promised Land. So also the Lord’s Supper is a continual Memorial of the deliverance of the whole world from the bondage of sin. A deliverance effected not by us, but for us by God who gave His Son to be our Paschal Lamb. In fact the word “remember” in Greek literally means to “do it again”.

When I finally understood this, the words of Jesus in John 6 finally made sense. Written in the last half of the 1st century, John knew as he recorded Christ’s words that the Church would know to what he is referring. Documents from the 1st and 2nd century show that the Church understood John 6 as referring to Communion.

Receiving His Body and Blood is the ultimate expression of our love for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And the early Church agreed with that.

30.

The more I learned, the more devastated I was at what I was missing. When the Catholic Church proclaims to Protestants that they do not have the fullness of the faith, it is the Sacraments they are referring to. It is not out of hate or “triumphalism” that they speak, but out of love and concern.

I purchased Malcolm Smith’s series of tapes on Liturgy again. This time I had a Bible and copies of Church history next to me. By the time I was finished, I realized what Sacraments were, why the Church believed in them for 2000 years, and why it was foolish to toss them aside.

For 2000 years the Church held on to the Sacraments instituted by Christ without question. Even the heretics of the early centuries has their own “sacraments”. The early Reformers did not discard them. Zwingli and Puritans began that process, and today the modern evangelical and fundamentalist is a direct successor to their error.

An honest fundamentalist can also see that the “invitation” is nothing more than a sacrament. Since we are physical creatures, we can never flee far from it. We must worship and be initiated in a physical way, that is how human beings are. The “altar call” is a fundamentalist sacrament.

I listened to the first tape by Malcolm Smith on my car stereo. Once again I heard those words I heard so many years before:

“When you’re seven years old and you run away from home, it’s a lot of fun at 12

noon. But by 6pm it's not fun anymore, you want to return home."

I began to weep.

I missed home.

I missed the beauty and the spiritual food of the Eucharist. I now realized what that hunger was. I now knew why, after I finished a sermon, I felt as if I wasn't finished.

I WASN'T.

What was missing was the Eucharist!!

When I got home that night, I went into my bedroom alone and closed the door. That night I did something that I hadn't done in two decades. I prayed the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary.

After I was done, the Holy Spirit filled me with a joy I cannot describe.

A weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I felt at peace for the first time in many years. That weekend, on vacation I attended a Catholic Mass for the first time in many a year and received the Body and Blood of Christ.

I left the Catholic Church for emotional, not doctrinal reasons.

I would now return for doctrinal reasons.

But that wonderful doctrine was producing an emotion.

God does have a sense of humor.

But this was just the beginning.

31.

Why Roman Catholic?

I was considering Anglican for a while. The main branch of the Anglican church has gone so far into liberalism, it is no longer Catholic or Protestant. The conservative Communion is hanging on to the historicity of the past. They look at themselves as a bridge between Roman Catholic and Protestant. But the Episcopal branch has been so fractured by schism, it looks not much different than any other Protestant denomination. I have nothing against my Episcopal brethren, But I was being drawn elsewhere.

I can honestly say I never considered Eastern Orthodox. The relationship between East and West has been tumultuous at best. But there is a goodwill that exists between the branches that makes for an easy bridge to cross. The real issue with Eastern Orthodox is the Papacy. I have nothing against my Eastern brethren, But I was being drawn elsewhere.

The early Church believed in Real Presence, that Baptism washed away original sin, they Baptised infants, they had the threefold government of Bishops, priests, and deacons, Apostolic Succession. The Bishop of Rome ("Pope" is merely the Italian word for "Father") was held in high esteem and authority.

They were Catholic.

And the Church remained that way throughout the Middle Ages. It never changed. To argue that is to argue with history. That does not mean that it was perfect. The Church on earth is still made up of men and will continue to be filled with saints and sinners.

What many evangelicals do not understand is that it is the Sacraments, the Liturgy, and Institution one is drawn to, not to men or leaders.

Through my study of the Sacraments and of the Early Church, I was forced to face how I felt about the church I grew up in. But the most glaring point God put in front of me was FORGIVENESS. That was not easy. I wasn't abused in the RCC. Not that that is an excuse, but I had an easier road than others toward forgiveness.

Do I think the RCC is without blemish? That would be foolish. Even the Catholic knows their church is imperfect. But forgiveness is the foundation of the Gospel and the foundation of the Christian's life.

I believe many individual Protestants and evangelicals need to forgive the church they were once a part of. I believe that is the first and best step in reconciliation.

In turn the Roman Catholic Church must receive this forgiveness and reconciliation. In that way, Christians on both sides of the Tiber will truly be an imitation of Christ.

I forgave the Church of my youth. After I did that, the joy of the Lord filled me in a way I cannot describe.

I truly fell in love with the Catholic Church.

Some are born into the Catholic Church and thus have no "choice". There was a beauty in this. I was born Catholic, never really had a choice. **Now as an adult Christian, I was making the CHOICE to be Catholic.**

The more I read and prayed, the more I was drawn like a magnet to it.

When the resistance ceases, you are drawn to it.

32.

Final thoughts.

I soon realized I should not be partaking of the Eucharist until I went to Confession. As I sat with the priest, I was almost in tears as I recounted the horrible things I used to say about the Catholic Church. The priest is a soft-spoken man with a gentle voice. He smiled and welcomed me back in the fellowship of the Church. I received Absolution. I knew God had already forgiven me, but to officially acknowledge it in a ceremony was something I had to do. The sin is gone. The guilt is gone.

None of this was happening in a vacuum. My wife and (now adult) daughter were going down the same road at different speeds. At times my wife, daughter or I lagged behind the other. But the destination was the same. Maybe someday, I will let them tell their own story. Both are attending RCIA classes. It was a joyful experience for my wife and daughter to buy their first Rosaries.

I am sure I returned to the Catholic Church today because of the prayers of many of God's people, on earth and in Heaven. Now Sister Lenora knows her prayers were answered. I thank you all for never giving up on this wide-eyed wanderer.

I am a Christian who chooses to be Catholic.

I ran away looking for something that was in my own backyard. Looking for adventure, I discovered "there's no place like home".

Now the real adventure begins.

Thank you.