

## Scott's Story

My reversion story isn't fantastic in any sense, but I think it will be interesting to the Fundamentalists because it involves the Apocalyptic, which is usually a big fascination with Fundamentalists. The first part of my story involves how I came to discover my dependence on God and my sense of worth and purpose that follows from that. It discusses my initial upbringing, a brief fear-of-Hell episode, a stint with the apocalyptic, my developing problem of finding self-worth, and after desperation finding it through my Heavenly Father. The second part of my story involves my re-infatuation with the apocalyptic, a short but terrifying lapse into Protestantism, and finally my return to the Catholic Church.

### **Part I**

As my first contact with organized religion, I was initiated into the Catholic Church at age 8 on Easter Vigil Mass. I believed everything that I had been taught by the nice young nun who privately catechized me in preparation for this event. But a short while afterwards, I acquired a fear that I was going to go to Hell, until, after several days of this, my parents "reassured" me that Hell is only for really, really bad people like Hitler or Stalin. Consequently, I would not worry too much about salvation issues until after college.

A few years later, when I was in seventh grade, my aunt loaned me a book entitled, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsay. After reading this book, I became utterly fascinated with the apocalyptic and with the books of Daniel and Revelation in particular. It was absolutely amazing to think that the Bible could foretell the rise of empires and the end-of-the-world events with such detail, hundreds of years before it would happen. This fascination lasted for quite some time until I was exposed to the Catholic approach to such matters. The Catholic Church took all the fun out of it. She insisted, contrary to the view of Mr. Lindsay, that the book of Revelation is not a prophetic forecast of events 2000 years later but is rather just a symbolic encouragement to the early Christians under the fierce persecution of the Roman Empire. I grudgingly accepted this and put the apocalyptic on the shelf, but some years later, it would reemerge.

Having put the apocalyptic away, and unconcerned about salvation issues, I went through high school not focused on God but on the two great loves of my life: studying (especially mathematics) and playing guitar. One of the key words that relates to this time in my life is the humorous but sometimes cruel word "nerd." I had discovered around midway through high school that it isn't cool to be just an intellectual and nothing more. Consequently, I began to become embarrassed of my intellectual gifts. I was kind of at a double standard: I was acing all the tests, setting all the curves, known all around as one of the smartest, but on the other hand, I would say deriding and obscene things about my teachers, I would join in the jeering of the drama crowd, and the like.

Also, I was focusing heavily on the guitar and had actually become quite good. Eddie Van Halen was my hero. I once jokingly told my uncle that I was going to be the world's first "nuclear physicist/heavy metal guitar hero." I figured that, as Fr. John Corapi would put it, if I someday became a great guitar player with tons of women, I'd finally "be somebody."

But the problem was, there was a growing sense in me that I wasn't somebody. From certain pressures, I was becoming worried that I wouldn't grow up to be a "real man." A sense that the people who had teased me in the past may really have been right: maybe I really was a loser. I would ultimately have to face these fears in college.

Studying mathematics at the great Michigan State University, I was incredibly successful: as a junior, I was awarded as the top student in mathematics for my entire MSU class. Nevertheless, at that time I was suicidal and depressed. During those school years, I was obliged to work at the warehouse my stepfather worked at to pay for school and the like. Well, having grown up playing guitar and studying, I had not worked out much. Hence, I was not well suited to the work. Through the slow progression of time at the warehouse, my back got worse and worse, and I became the object of ridicule at work (behind my back). It finally got to the point where I got hurt and had to admit I really couldn't handle the work. I had failed, in essence. I wasn't a "real man." Slowly through this process of decline, I had gone into despair of my worth as a person. I was not a "real man." I was a loser as the guys at the warehouse thought. Even despite the great mind that God had given me, I was a failure.

It finally got to the point where I actually tried to take my life, but I didn't come anywhere close to it since, funny enough, I was too much of a wimp to go through with it. But in that attempt, tears were just streaming down my face because of the worthlessness I felt about myself. But what stopped my attempt was the thought of what it would do to my mother, to my father, to my sisters and brothers, how it would hurt them. Even though I felt like a loser, I couldn't bring that on them.

In the time following this, I had to turn to the only Person left Who could resolve the issue, in fact, the only Person who ultimately matters to us in this whole universe: God. I had to just fall before the Lord and cry out for some purpose to relieve my emptiness. It didn't really occur in some instant "born-again" event as with a well-meaning Fundamentalist, but I slowly began to think about how Jesus had not only referred to God as His Father but also our Father. This made me think: if God is my Father, then I should turn to Him as any child would to his own biological father. A good father is someone who takes care of you, supports you, helps you, loves you. For the first time since my early childhood, I could see that God was just like that and that I needed to turn to Him in that way. In a wonderful way, this finally filled the void of emptiness that had been inside me for so long.

Subsequently, the Heavenly Father was also able to show me that my approach to self-worth had been all wrong. I was going at it from a subjective way: I'm worth something if I'm strong, or if I play guitar. Wrong! I'm worth something period! In fact, I'm not just something, I'm a someone. And I'm not just someone, but a creature with an eternal destiny! Everyone is infinitely precious! There are no losers. There are people with different gifts and talents, but no losers. When God made everything, He said it was good. No mention of losers (except of course for the devil and the people in Hell, those are the real losers).

So I was finally able to find my true worth as a human being and the unspeakable Love that is our God. I could see that although I wasn't cut out for working class life, I was not a loser. God had called me to use the wonderful mind He had given me and embrace it as His marvelous gift and not be ashamed of it, as the world would have it. This was a major turning point in my life. And it closes part I.

## **Part II**

One night, some time after college, I was watching EWTN, and a priest came on who was interpreting Daniel like a Fundamentalist. This was puzzling to me, so I got out my NAB; the footnote explanations in it did not agree with what the priest was saying. This made me think then that perhaps a Catholic might be able to interpret the apocalyptic in a more fundamental fashion than I had previously thought. This resurrected my earlier infatuation with the apocalyptic, which I had left behind several years ago. So I began to become obsessed with the apocalyptic and started researching various viewpoints about it, even the Protestant views. Well, to make a long story short, I became so engrossed in it--and with the Protestant influences--I went way too far and ended up distrusting the Catholic Church entirely.

It wasn't long after this that my earlier fear of going to Hell reemerged, or more specifically, I thought, "Forget about the apocalyptic. What must I do to be saved?" Distrusting the Church, I could only use the Bible to find out. This was very scary because the Bible does not spell things out ABC... like a catechism. And also, "How do I interpret it?" (also very scary). I had acquired a very scrupulous conscience to the point that I was beginning to think like a Waldense. Considering what Jesus said to the rich young man, and to the apostles, I was thinking that in order to be saved, I might have to sell everything I own (literally) and become a wandering homeless preacher. I respect my Protestant brothers and sisters very much, and I mean no disrespect to them here, but I am sure that many a Protestant would say to me something like, "Why, you were being ridiculous! All you have to do is accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior."

The problem for me then was that Scripture was too big and scary for me to just accept such a simple solution to the terror of having the whole of my destiny on my shoulders, having

ultimately to decide for myself what Scripture means and what I must do for salvation. For how could I know for sure that there was a quick fix until I had read all of Scripture? This was quite a frightening experience, but it would end up indirectly leading me home to Rome...

While reading the Bible to figure out, "What must I do to be saved?", I was still investigating the Apocalyptic. I was researching the book of Daniel, which is the cause of a battle between Fundamentalists and rationalists. Rationalists do not believe in miracles, so since Daniel contains prophecy of future events, they must argue that it is late dated, i.e. written after the events it supposedly prophecies about. I acquired a book by an Anglican scholar by the name of Edward Pusey, who wrote a defense against the attacks of the rationalists. One of the arguments he used regarded the canon of Scripture. The canon refers to the official list of the contents of the Bible. Pusey tried to argue when the canon of the Old Testament was settled.

When I stumbled across the subject of the canon, after a little study, it through me for a loop. I thought, "Wait a minute! I've been just assuming all along that I can take the Bible as a rule of faith. But I've never even stopped to think about where it came from and how I can know it's contents to be true." I suddenly realized that the Bible did not just fall from the sky, whole and intact. It wasn't like there was this wise old man praying on a mountaintop, and suddenly a hand reached down from Heaven handing him a Book, and a thunderous Voice saying, "HERE IS THE BIBLE. TAKE IT, READ IT, AND DISTRIBUTE IT TO THE WHOLE WORLD!" No, I discovered that it was actually men who decided which books go into the Bible and which one's don't. Regarding this, an immediate question came to my mind: what sort of man or group of men could make such decisions? After careful thought, I concluded that any logical answer would be that these men would in some sense have to be guided by the Holy Spirit in an infallible manner because by their very decision, they are determining what books are infallible. And if they are determining which of the writings inerrantly communicate God's truth, would they not in some sense have to know and understand what that truth is?

Pusey's suggestion of the Old Testament seemed reasonable, at least in theory, for he maintained that it was the Old Testament prophets themselves who canonized the Old Testament. This seemed to make sense, for certainly the prophets were enlightened about the truths of God, in as much as they preached the Word of God themselves, doing so under the active guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, whether or not this was the case with the Old Testament, I still had to ask, who canonized the New Testament?

The Protestant maintains that the only men who were infallible in the New Covenant were Jesus and the apostles, but what I discovered is that neither Jesus nor any of the apostles settled the canon. Who did? The bishops of the Catholic Church! (and not until the fourth and fifth centuries, and later dogmatically in the fifteenth century). And they not only established the New Testament canon but also the Old. In fact, during the New Testament times, I have since learned that there was not a consensus amongst the Jews as to the canon of the Old Testament. One sect believed only in the Torah. Another sect believed not only in the Torah, but also the psalms and

prophets, but only such books in Hebrew, and still another accepted the additional books found in the Septuagint (the Greek translation used by the Alexandrian Jews). And at the time the New Testament canon was being decided, there were disputes as well.

The implications for me were that since men have disagreed as to what is Scripture, and since Scripture doesn't canonize itself (nothing close to an internal canon), there must be an authority outside of Sacred Scripture, and if that authority is able to discern what Scripture is, it must necessarily understand it as well. And from history, we see that, at least for Christians, the most qualified candidate for that is the Catholic Church, since it was that very Church's tradition that was used to settle the very same canon.

And so, I was able to return to where I had started, although when I came back, I had much more than when I had left. And what more indeed! I really can't express the beautiful feeling of really knowing the truth and having such a marvelous purpose in life and an incredible Church - with her majestic Sacraments, great and beautiful rigorous theology, incredible examples of holiness in the saints - to feed me for that journey.

Conclusion Now I thank the Lord Jesus with all my heart for the sense of purpose I have, knowing that God loves me and helps me with His grace, and at the same time that I have the One Sacred and Holy Church to guide me to understand that life of grace that I desire to live for now and, hopefully, all eternity.