

## A Beautiful Journey

By James P. Caputo

Charting the trajectory of my spiritual journey into the Catholic Church is somewhat of a daunting task. It's one that admits of many detours and rest stops. Although a sense of spiritual disorientation and malaise proved to be a constant traveling companion (one with which I contented myself to make friends), retrospectively, I clearly discern the providential hand of the good shepherd inexorably leading me to the one flock to which all men are enjoined to unite themselves. Like a Jew who grows ever more confident in the Messiahship of Jesus due to the insidious accumulation of prophetic pointers, my conversion to Catholicism owes itself to a myriad of tributaries that in time presented themselves as a great mosaic.

Reared as a second generation Jehovah's Witness, the theology that came to govern my worldview was fundamentally an uncritical adoption of my parents' beliefs. Thrice weekly meetings served to firmly fix the bold line of demarcation between "Jehovah's Organization" - believed to be God's people found solely within the parameters of the Watchtower Organization - and "Babylon the Great", an entity that allegedly comprised all other religions and their adherents. The Watchtower's controversial literature presented the religions of "Christendom" as a great whore whose most visible incarnation was the Catholic Church, she being most execrable and culpable due to her preeminence and antecedence. Watchtower iconography cemented this notion in my consciousness with depictions of a meretricious woman astride a fierce beast, imbibing blood from a chalice (presumably the blood of the holy ones), bedecked, bejeweled, lost in ecstatic reverie as she obediently writhes in concert with the wicked nations of the earth who corporately are identified by the bestial symbol found in the book of Revelation.

Advancing that end yet further was a wholesale censorship on all

literature of a religious nature excepting that published by the Watchtower Society. What little understanding I had of other faiths was refracted through Watchtower articles. The same applies in reference to my understanding of Christian history. This sectarian prismatic of historic data led to conclusions that logically followed, even necessarily followed. A tiny hermeneutic circle thus governed my research. In time I would come to learn the importance of premises in epistemology - But more on that later.

As a boy I recall with fondness the religious milieu in which I was reared, the sincere zeal for scripture on the part of my co-religionists as well as their equally sincere expectation of the well-nigh consummation of God's Kingdom on earth. The promise of a "new heavens" and a "new earth" was not a mere pie-in-the-sky eschatology. It was a palpable reality, the leitmotif of our daily conversations and activities. Many were the Saturday mornings wherein we would load the car trunk with apocalyptic literature as we set out to canvass surrounding territory in an effort to avert our neighbors of impending woe. One of the objectives of mid-week meetings was to train us in the art of dialectic and Christian apologetics. Mock-dialogues were run with the express purpose of preparing us to identify conversation-stoppers and artfully circumnavigate them, to upend objections, to simplify into byte-size format complex topics requiring great learning and nuance while facilely teasing out the conclusions. At the time I believed Jehovah's Witnesses to be invincible as far as biblical matters were concerned. And the ignorance and seeming indifference of each householder my parents encountered as I accompanied them in door-to-door ministry only served to cement this perception.

The sense of certitude, however, did not eradicate the cognitive dissonance I experienced. Between the image of Jehovah's Witnesses - the one for public consumption as portrayed in the sect's literature - and the reality of the dynamic of my congregation and the ones I regularly visited in my many travels, there was an unbridgeable chasm. Watchtower literature presents Jehovah's

Witnesses as a happy people, a united people who love their neighbors (i.e. Non-Jehovah's Witnesses) and their spiritual brethren with a love that knows no national boundaries or racial partiality. Yet even as a young boy I knew the reality of the Watchtower dynamic to be something wholly other. Gossip was normative within what can only be described as a pressure-cooker environment. Apart from incessantly judging "the world" as evil and worthy of God's wrath, Jehovah's Witnesses routinely judge each other - these judgments being meted out on the scale of one's ability to accomplish organizationally prescribed works. At the age of fifteen I became personally aware of this when I became the recipient of such judgment in virtue of my decision to pursue a career in the performing arts. It must be noted that given the Jehovah's witnesses' view of the perennial nearness of Armageddon, extraordinary secular ambitions this side of the veil are construed as a sign of a disordered hierarchy of values. My desire to attend conservatory in the hopes of emerging as a budding opera singer was enough then to render my congregation a hotbed of gossip and, in some instances, open slander as far as I was concerned. A "special needs" talk was given in which pursuit of "worldly goals" was maligned and roundly discouraged. Disconsolate, I discontinued attending meetings and lived my life in a way not dissimilar to most non-religious youths.

By the age of twenty-three, I reassessed my spiritual life. The "Law of Undulation" in my own moral constitution concerned me. Like St. Paul, I recognized that the very things I desired to do, I failed to do - whereas the things I did not wish to do were precisely what I did. Knowing God's law and perceiving this inherent moral anemia startled me from my spiritual slumber. The judgment awaiting me at the Kingdom Hall owing to my career choice led me to search for spiritual direction in the private study of scripture. Since on the Jehovah's Witness view only 144,000 enjoy the benefits of the Christian covenant presented in the New Testament, and given that I did not declare myself as a member of said class, I did not believe the message found there was my spiritual patrimony. Hence, for the

next two and a half years I immersed myself in the Old Testament, reading it through three times. When I finally did journey through the gospels and Pauline epistles I remember remarking that, on their face, the preachments of Jesus and the apostles would never lead me to conclude that the Watchtower had distilled the genuine Christian message. In point of fact, the entire literary experience of reading scripture led me to conclude, as did John Henry Newman when he wrote:

*"Surely then, if the revelations and lessons in Scripture are addressed to us personally and practically, the presence among us of a formal judge and standing expositor of its words is imperative. It is antecedently unreasonable to suppose that a book so complex, so unsystematic, in parts so obscure, the outcome of so many minds, times, and places, should be given us from above without the safeguard of some authority; as if it could possibly, from the nature of the case, interpret itself. Its inspiration does but guarantee its truth, not its interpretation. How are private readers satisfactorily to distinguish what is didactic and what is historical, what is fact and what is vision, what is allegorical and what is literal, what is idiomatic and what is grammatical, what is enunciated formally and what occurs "obiter", what is only of temporary and what is of lasting obligation? Such is our natural anticipation, and it is only too exactly justified in the events of the last three centuries, in the many countries where private judgment on the text of Scripture has prevailed. The gift of inspiration requires as its complement the gift of infallibility."*

Work with the San Francisco Opera Company occasioned my encountering a Jehovah's Witness "elder" who befriended me and who, in light of my passion for scripture and desire to live a Christian life, encouraged me to get baptized into the Watchtower faith . Up to this point I had largely remained a lone-ranger Christian. But at the behest and loving admonition of my "elder" friend, I established a "book study" with a Jehovah's Witness "elder" in Connecticut upon my return and was baptized six months later at

the age of twenty-five.

My well-rooted habit of daily scripture reading, however, would agitate the theological waters within a year's time leading to a "born-again" type experience and a conscientious objection to many Watchtower teachings. Now focusing primarily on the New Testament corpus, I came to realize the impossibility of a two-class Christian paradigm wherein the first class stands to inherit heaven (the one-hundred and forty-four thousand) and the second class ("the other sheep") stands to receive everlasting life on a paradise earth. That two classes of people are presented was irrefutable - those who are in Jesus Christ, set free from the law of sin - and those who live according to the sinful nature and have hostility with God. The message, as I read it, simply did not allow for a third category of faithful un-anointed Christians who were the putative "friends" of Jesus but not his spiritual sons. I simply could not bring myself to teach something which I did not believe. My heart could not rejoice over what my mind had rejected as false. And at the time, my heart was rejoicing in knowing Jesus. I decided to quietly discontinue attending meetings. Three years later, however, I would be summoned before a Watchtower judicial committee and excommunicated for apostasy. This resulted in the wholesale loss of my friends, associates and my good name. There was, though, a paradoxical beauty and sweetness in this dolorous period of my life. I knew in my heart that I stood up for what was true, that my intentions were pure. My heart was filled with love for the Lord as I united my suffering to his cross.

The next three years were spent reading scripture, Bible commentaries, listening to as many Christians voices as possible on television and radio, attending house Churches, Protestant Churches of every denominational stripe, frequenting their bible study groups, their prayer meetings as well as holding a Bible study in my home. The joy experienced during this period of my walk was palpable. Appropriating the New Testament message revolutionized how I worshipped God. The one hope in common shared among

Christians united me with the body of Christ in a way previously unknown. The skewed view I had of all Christian bodies outside the Watchtower Society was quickly discarded for the lie that it was. True Christians were to be found in all these communities, I came to learn. The 'in-the-flesh' experience with aggregates of people once believed to be doing the will of Satan and now discovered to be genuine and sincere taught me an invaluable lesson about the blinding power of misguided ideology, its ability to take a figural notion and reify it in the human mind.

The joy of knowing Christ as a member of the new covenant and relishing in the hope of ultimate reconciliation with God was dampened, though. My romp through Protestantism (while edifying and horizon-widening) presented me with a disconcerting reality that I could not square with scripture. The lack of concrete ecclesial authority and the interpretive free-for-all of the Bible resulted in a hodgepodge of doctrinal ideas and a fissiparous network of Churches - a state of affairs nowhere found in the New Testament. Some Christian groups emphasized the sovereignty of God to the point of contending he had eternally preordained some to hell and others to heaven before their respective births. Other Christians argued that we were to get out there and win as many souls to Christ as possible since the salvation of man was contingent upon his hearing the gospel. Many Evangelical Churches preached that praying the "Sinner's Prayer" was all that was needed to be saved, that any and all actions subsequent to said prayer did not weigh in against the ultimate outcome of one's particular judgment. Still others, however, argued that Christian works were indispensable, that intellectual assent to Christ as savior did not suffice. Should infants be baptized? What is baptism? Is it necessary? What does it do? Do supernatural gifts still exist? What of communion? What is the Church? How does one follow the scriptural exhortation to submit to those taking the lead if each person has the right to privately interpret scripture and determine its meaning? If it's on the basis of scripture that orthodoxy is established, and if the private interpretation of said scripture leads to an infinite

number of contradictory conclusions all attributed to the guiding power of the Holy Spirit, then of what benefit is scripture? Is it not then the source of the problem? If sin is the source of the problem, then is it the most holy who possess the truth of scripture? If so, where was this haloed community? If scriptural truths are found dispersed among various denominations with no concrete way of knowing which truth resides in which denomination, then where is “deposit of faith” for which Christians are exhorted to contend? Furthermore, if the task of truth-discernment falls to the individual, then what are the implications in terms of the principle of normativity? Put another way, if I could correctly deduce from scripture the deposit of faith both entirely and inviolately, of what benefit is it to the world field of mankind? Fundamentally, it would die with me and cease to be everlasting good news. Scripture, though, presents the truth as abiding in a great body of individuals within one corporate Church. St. Paul taught that “the Church” was the pillar and ground of truth, and Jesus promised that he would lead “the Church” into “all truth” and be with her till the end of age. What truth? Which Church?

The hundreds of extensive online dialogues I had with Protestant Christians revealed that self-styled theologians were legion. The lights of Protestant scholarship could not settle the matter either given that some of the most radiant minds remained at theological loggerheads, the most gifted exegetes at odds with each other on fundamentals of faith and morality, etc. If the truth cannot be known wholly as a system of thought with its respective parts correctly configured to the whole, then the alternative must be one of several things, I mused:

- 1) Theological truth is unknowable
- 2) Theological truth is knowable in part.
- 3) Theological truth is relative to the person.
- 4) Theological truth is unimportant.

In order for the first idea to be tenable, I thought, one would have

to impute imbecility or titanic corporate delusion to the entire Nation of Israel, the Christian Church born of her loins and the countless brilliant luminaries who expounded upon the revelation. One would have to cut oneself off from the common ground of the people of God and chalk the whole thing up to superstition. But on what grounds should I pit my word against theirs? To follow such a benighted course would not be objective, but dismissive. It would necessitate my rejecting all the data.

The second postulate posed a problem in that I didn't know with certainty which theological truths were knowable. Who is to say which parts are knowable and which aren't - and by what authority? To argue that the evidence determines the knowability of a thing is equally pointless since what counts as "evidence" is a thorny and endless dispute.

The third thesis was solipsistic and cancelled out the notion of truth altogether. If theological truths are not true in themselves as realities existing outside the human mind, then neither are metaphysical truths real or knowable. The statement "theological truth is relative to the person" is a metaphysical statement. It's abstract. It's not like a piece of furniture against which one stubs one's toe. Hence, its credibility is called into question on the very same grounds. It too can be "relative" to the person and thus not a veridical reflection of reality. With this argument I'd be sawing the branch off underneath myself.

The fourth notion eviscerated Christianity of its inherent strength, reducing it to a platitudinous and amorphous moral code of sorts. This view, I thought, really reflected the Zeitgeist of the day. It led to a Humpty Dumpty use of language wherein the individual infused words with personal meaning, creating - as it were - his own lexicon. That is to say, men could agree on a string of words formulated into statements, say, "Jesus is head of the Church" while allowing the meaning and application of those words to differ from one group/individual to the next. Men are thus united in the

vacuous assent to slogans while being deprived the cognitive-reflex of his species - that is, the dignity to explain what he means by his words. This laissez-faire doctrinal ethos greatly undermined Protestant history wherein one finds men pitted in sincere battle over doctrinal issues considered to be of great consequence. To argue that it is unimportant would be tantamount to saying that our Christian forebears were all engaged in a theological cavil.

What I've discussed thus far remains within the pale of "Bible-believing" Christianity. But what of the soi-disant "progressive Christians" who viewed the gospels as men making sense of the world from their limited sociological perspective? These Christians asserted that miracles, a virgin birth, resurrection, etc., were the product of a mythologized message, a narrativization of theological insights, that the real message is found by purging the mythological and theological detritus superimposed upon the "Jesus of History." An honest consideration of the smorgasbord of views evidenced that each one in its own right was perfectly plausible and logically cohesive. One need only establish an interpretive template with a set of given presuppositions and then systematically argue to the logical conclusions thereof. But is truth coherentism, I asked? It was high time to choose a paradigm, to chart my course. But against what does one measure the orthodoxy of a paradigm if the genuine message of Christianity is the very matter under question?

## Studying History

Since studying the history of the Watchtower Society greatly helped me in understanding the movement within its historical context, I set out to do the same in re: of Christianity. I purchased Philip Schaff's eight-volume magnum opus on the history of the Christian Church, a dozen or so other history books, Jarislav Pelikan's volumes on the history of theology, books on the formation of the Bible canon, and delved into any and all extant extra-biblical writings by systematically plodding my way through the Patristic corpus. What I encountered shocked me. The modern-day doctrinal

chaos with which I was contending was not reflected in the early Church. Writing in the latter part of the second century Irenaeus speaks of the unity of the Church as follows:

*"The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points [of doctrine] just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. For the Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world. ... Nor will any one of the rulers in the Churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these (for no Reflections on Book 1, Chap 10)*

And:

*"True knowledge is [that which consists of] the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops [episkopos], by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither receiving addition nor [suffering] curtailment [in the truths which she believes]; and [it consists in] reading [the word of God] without falsification, and a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures, both without danger and without blasphemy; and [above all, it consists in] the pre-eminent gift of love, which is more precious than knowledge, more glorious than*

*prophecy, and which excels all the other gifts [of God]."* -Book 4, Chap 33, Para 8

I then fell upon a line in reading Tertullian that totally won me over for its sheer trenchant logic:

*"Grant, then, that all have erred; that the apostle was mistaken in giving his testimony; that the Holy Ghost had no such respect to any one (church) as to lead it into truth, although sent with this view by Christ, and for this asked of the Father that He might be the teacher of truth; grant, also, that He, the Steward of God, the Vicar of Christ, neglected His office, permitting the churches for a time to understand differently, (and) to believe differently, what He Himself was preaching by the apostles,--is it likely that so many churches, and they so great, should have gone astray into one and the same faith? No casualty distributed among many men issues in one and the same result. Error of doctrine in the churches must necessarily have produced various issues. When, however, that which is deposited among many is found to be one and the same, it is not the result of error, but of tradition. Can any one, then, be reckless enough to say that they were in error who handed on the tradition?" (The Perscription Against Heretics CHAP. XXVIII)*

Tradition? This was a largely connotative term for me as a Protestant Christian. After all, Jesus admonished his followers to steer clear of the traditions of men that nullified the word of God. But I also noted that St. Paul himself commended the Corinthians for having remembered him by maintaining the Traditions he delivered to them (1 Cor. 11:2) and that he even exhorted the Thessalonians to stand firm and to hold to said traditions whether they be by word of mouth or by letter. (2 Thess. 2:15). On this score, and many others, Philip Schaff played a catalytic role in my conversion to Catholicism. His treatment of the ante-Nicene Church did not align with his presentation of the first century ecclesia. His arguments for the catholic nature of the ante-Nicene Church - both in constitution and belief - seemed porous and explanatorily

strained.

On Tradition Schaff writes:

*“Besides appealing to the Scriptures, the fathers, particularly Irenaeus and Tertullian, refer with equal confidence to the “rule of faith;” that is, the common faith of the church, as orally handed down in the unbroken succession of bishops from Christ and his apostles to their day, and above all as still living in the original apostolic churches, like those of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome. Tradition is thus intimately connected with the primitive episcopate. The latter was the vehicle of the former, and both were looked upon as bulwarks against heresy.”*

*“Irenaeus confronts the secret tradition of the Gnostics with the open and unadulterated tradition of the catholic church, and points to all churches, but particularly to Rome, as the visible centre of the unity of doctrine. All who would know the truth, says he, can see in the whole church the tradition of the apostles; and we can count the bishops ordained by the apostles, and their successors down to our time, who neither taught nor knew any such heresies. Then, by way of example, he cites the first twelve bishops of the Roman church from Linus to Eleutherus, as witnesses of the pure apostolic doctrine. He might conceive of a Christianity without scripture, but he could not imagine a Christianity without living tradition”;*

In speaking, for example, of the three-tiered ministry of the Church he writes:

*“The idea and institution of a special priesthood, distinct from the body of the people, with the accompanying notion of sacrifice and altar, passed imperceptibly from Jewish and heathen reminiscences and analogies into the Christian church. The majority of Jewish converts adhered tenaciously to the Mosaic institutions and rites, and a considerable part never fully attained to the height of*

*spiritual freedom proclaimed by Paul, or soon fell away from it. He opposed legalistic and ceremonial tendencies in Galatia and Corinth; and although sacerdotalism does not appear among the errors of his Judaizing opponents, the Levitical priesthood, with its three ranks of high-priest, priest, and Levite, naturally furnished an analogy for the threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon, and came to be regarded as typical of it. Still less could the Gentile Christians, as a body, at once emancipate themselves from their traditional notions of priesthood, altar, and sacrifice, on which their former religion was based. Whether we regard the change as an apostasy from a higher position attained, or as a reaction of old ideas never fully abandoned, the change is undeniable, and can be traced to the second century. The church could not long occupy the ideal height of the apostolic age, and as the Pentecostal illumination passed away with the of the apostles, the old reminiscences began to reassert themselves.” (HISTORY of the CHRISTIAN CHURCH\* CHAPTER IV)*

Here Mr. Schaff attributes the imperceptible development of a threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon to “old reminiscences” of both the Jewish and pagan system of worship. So potent were they that this is the universal constitution of the Church by the middle of the second century. But if such pagan and illicit Jewish notions could so easily impress themselves on the Church, I thought, who is to gainsay the Jesus Seminar when it contends that the Gospel stories are on par with the fanciful mythologies of Mithras? Why not, by logical extension, view Israel's sacrificial system as a borrowed Canaanite superstition?

In regard to justification we read:

*“The doctrine of the subjective appropriation of salvation, including faith, justification, and sanctification, was as yet far less perfectly formed than the objective dogmas; and in the nature of the case, must follow the latter. If any one expects to find in this period, or in any of the church fathers, Augustin himself not*

*excepted, the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone, as the "articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae" be will be greatly disappointed. The incarnation of the Logos, his true divinity and true humanity, stand almost unmistakably in the foreground, as the fundamental truths. Paul's doctrine of justification, except perhaps in Clement of Rome, who joins it with the doctrine of James, is left very much out of view, and awaits the age of the Reformation to be more thoroughly established and understood. The fathers lay chief stress on sanctification and good works, and show the already existing germs of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the meritoriousness and even the supererogatory meritoriousness of Christian virtue." (HISTORY of the CHRISTIAN CHURCH\* CHAPTER XII)*

What an odd entity, I thought to myself. On the one hand the Church is presented as putatively fickle and feeble, capable of losing fundamentals of the true message, possessing assimilative powers that corrupt its ecclesiological constitution in all of a few years. Yet, on the other hand, she very obviously had a retentive potency given that these alleged 'false beliefs and practices' remain with the Church to this day. How odd, I mused, that one entity should prove so pathetically chameleonic and inflexibly immutable at the same time, that the very body of the Lord who defined himself as the way, the truth and the light should jettison truth and enshrine error. As Chesterton wittily noted about the disparate accusations leveled against the Church, it's as if the entity in question is guilty of being too tall and too short, too fat and too thin.

Unlike the doctrinal chaos and indifferentism I encountered among Protestant bodies, the early Church enjoyed a doctrinal homogeneity. It was not attributed to the strong-arming of clerics, either. Early Christians viewed it as a genuine sign of the Holy Spirit's presence in the Church. In sum, doctrinal unity was the divine symphonic harmony that acted as a foil to the theological cacophony of the Gnostic heresies.

## Singing In the Catholic Church

An opportunity to sing in the Catholic Church providentially coincided with my systematic study of Christian history as mentioned above. Little did I know, I was about to step into the historical Church of Christ for the first time in my life. Justin Martyr's depiction of a primitive Eucharistic celebration perfectly dovetailed with what I encountered as a Catholic cantor. Week after week I found myself falling in love with the liturgy, mouthing the words in tandem with the priest, responding with the congregation, longing to receive the Holy Eucharist, the medicine of immortality. The reverence, the beauty, the symmetry of the message, this - and a myriad of other aspects of the church's life and worship - drew me up into a spiritual reverie as heaven and earth met before the altar of the Lord.

It now became apparent to me how it was that the Church remained one, whereas all other bodies could not but divide. The sacred liturgy acted as a divine template uniting man to his forebears and ensuring the inviolate perpetuation of the faith to his successors. Holy Mass was not a place wherein to polemicize against other Christian bodies, to defend her doctrines against gainsayers, to argue against dissenting voices. She, as Mater Ecclesia, is there to feed her children in the sacraments, coddling both sinner and saint to her breast. With orthodoxy established and historical precedent precluding the potential reversal of centuries-old debates, the church gets on with the simple proclamation of the word.

In time, the mere thought of returning to the Protestant mode of worship became unthinkable. I found the physicality of Catholic worship to be perfectly tailored to the human soul, harmonizing the posture of the body with the inner spirit of man, lifting the mind up to God via the senses. Often times emotions would fill me to the point of tears. As a cantor, this was especially true after the Memorial Acclamation. To watch from the altar as three generations

of Christians genuflect in adoration of the Lord as he becomes present in bread and wine is a sight to behold for those with eyes of faith!

The sanctity of the mass, the predictability of the liturgy, the role of the priest as an alter christus echoing the words of the Lord during the Last Supper, the reflection of heaven in every word and gesture as the Church perpetually lives out the life of Christ throughout the liturgical year placing before the faithful the heroes of the faith, the reality of worshipping God in the company of all those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith - these and many other beauties - enriched my spiritual journey more than any praise song or scripture memorization could. The sacraments of penance and the Holy Eucharist - the source and summit of our faith! - gave me the power to shuck off sinful shackles that had enslaved me for years. They filled me with love for mankind regardless of creed. In short, the Catholic Church made me universal. Entering her was like stepping out into the bright light of the firmament.

Today I live with a fresh and clean soul, one that is absolved of its sins and feeds regularly on the bread from heaven in the very Church Christ founded as his instrument of salvation. The Catholic Church has given me a holistic worldview that fits reality and gives meaning to all that is. Before me is a treasure trove spilling over with the integrated wisdom of her doctors of divinity, the holy insights and disciplines of her celebrated saints, the existential profundity of her astute philosophers, and the unmatched universal perspective that only she can possess as a living organism continuously riding the wave of humanity for twenty-centuries and counting.

The journey has been long, arduous, and at times lonely. But I wouldn't trade it for the world. It's been a beautiful journey.

