

# ***Why I Left...***

## ***The catholic church***

***By Greg Litmer***

The church of my youth was the Roman Catholic Church. As an infant I was baptized, sprinkled with water, and in the fifth grade I received the sacrament of Confirmation. I attended a parochial elementary school and high school. My classmates were Catholic, my friends were Catholic, and my teammates were Catholic. It was a comforting and insulated environment in which to grow.

I was taught that there was no salvation outside of the Roman Catholic Church and if anyone was saved without being a member of the Roman Catholic Church, it was due to Catholic truths that they believed. I was also taught, as are all Catholics, that the things we did and believed as Roman Catholics were the same things that had always been done and believed by all true Christians from the time that Jesus established the church to the present.

### **1. Changes in Catholic Teaching**

The recognition of a need to change came gradually to me as the result of an event that took place in the years 1962-1965. That event was the Second Vatican Council. In the years following it, the face of Roman Catholicism was radically altered due to the teaching and direction that was adopted by that Council. The church of my youth; that timeless, comforting, guiding pillar of my life socially, intellectually, and religiously, was no longer the same. I found myself asking which Roman Catholic Church was the right Roman Catholic Church, the one before Vatican II, led by an infallible pope and teaching Magisterium; or the one after Vatican II? It was also supposed to be led by an infallible pope and teaching Magisterium. They were definitely not the same.

I will mention a few of the major changes that forced me to seek a single source of authority that had not, and would not, change.

### **2. Changing Rules about Communion and Fasting**

One of the changes that can be associated with the direction of Vatican II involved the time of fasting required of a Roman Catholic before they can receive Holy Communion. As a child, pre-Vatican II, I was taught the following rules from the Baltimore Catechism. To receive Holy Communion one was required to fast from midnight to the time of reception.

The Fast was defined in this way, "To fast from midnight means to take nothing by way of food or drink or medicine after midnight." The seriousness of this requirement can be seen in the book, *Eucharist Law and Practice*, by Durieux, page 179.

He writes, "It (the fast before Communion, gl) consists in this, that the communicant has not taken, since midnight, any food or drink or medicine, even the least possible quantity. It would be a mortal sin to receive Communion after having intentionally taken a few drops of water after midnight; even an error of good faith (for example, the taking of a drink of water at two o'clock in the morning because the clock had stopped at a quarter before twelve) does not dispense from the law."

The only time a person could receive Holy Communion without the midnight fast was if they were in danger of death or if the Eucharist itself was in danger of injury or insult. Failure to abide by this fast was a mortal sin, the most serious of the two categories of sin in Roman Catholicism, according to the infallible teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

During and after Vatican II changes came concerning this fast. The time went from midnight to three hours. Then it went from three hours to one hour by the decree of Paul VI. The latest regulation is found in the Code of Canon Law which came into effect in 1983. Canon 919 says, "One who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain from any food or drink, with the exception only of water and medicine, for at least the period of one hour before Holy Communion."

How could that be? How could that which was a mortal sin cease to be a mortal sin simply because a group of men said so? What about those who had died with the mortal sin of not fasting from midnight before receiving Holy Communion still held against them? Were they to perish eternally in Hell for something that is no longer even a sin, much less a mortal sin?

### **3. Changing Rules about Church Attendance**

Let me mention another change which was simply not reconcilable with what I was taught growing up as a Catholic. Prior to Vatican II, Catholics were required, under pain of mortal sin, to attend Mass on Sunday. Again from the Baltimore Catechism, #282, "A Catholic who through his own fault misses Mass on a Sunday or holyday of obligation commits a mortal sin."

Now Roman Catholic Churches throughout the United States have Saturday evening masses that serve as substitutes for Sunday attendance. Such a thing was unheard of before Vatican II. I remember very well the first time I heard of this new regulation. I was still a youngster and had attended a Saturday evening wedding that took place in a nuptial mass. At the end of the mass the priest told us that our attendance there took care of our Sunday obligation. As a young boy I was tickled by that news. It meant I didn't have to get up and go to church the next day.

But in the years after, I came to wonder how that could be. How could it have been a mortal sin to miss Sunday mass, even if you had attended a nuptial mass on Saturday, one week; and not a sin at all the next?

These are just two examples of numerous changes that forced me to ask myself if there really was anything that didn't change. Was there anything I could believe and be sure that it would be just as true on the day I died as it was on the day I first believed? From the gentle persuasion and sincere love of faithful Christians, I came to understand that there was.

### **4. The All-Sufficiency of Scripture**

There were four passages of scripture that had a profound effect upon me, for I knew that I had found the answer. The first was Matthew 21:23-25a. "And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, and said, By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority? And Jesus answered and said to them, "I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?"

What a question! All of those things that I had been taught growing up, where did they come from? Were they the product of heaven, or merely the product of uninspired men? But I had to know how to make that determination. Passages such as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:3 supplied me with the answer. All scripture was "God-breathed," and completely furnished us to every good work (2

Tim 3:16-17). We had been given all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). The true source of unchanging authority for what we believe and practice in religion was found in the scriptures, for so the scriptures said!

In fact, I found in Revelation 22:18-19, that no one had authority to take away from or add to the words of scripture. Once the realization of the biblical concept of authority was reached, it took very little time to discover that the Roman Catholic Church, both the one before Vatican II and the one after it, bore very little resemblance to the church of the Lord revealed in the New Testament. Every session of Bible reading made it clearer and clearer that much of what I had been taught as a Roman Catholic had only men as its source of origin, and I knew that that was not good enough.

### **5. Reliance on God's Unchanging Truth**

There was family to deal with when I left Catholicism. When I rendered my obedience to the gospel of Christ and was immersed in water for the remission of my sins, my father, whom I owe so much and loved so deeply, told me that I made him feel like a failure.

Time softened that opinion, and for that I am thankful, but I knew what the Lord had said. In Matthew 10:34-37, he said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

I know that what I believe today will be true tomorrow. I know that no man can change the words of scripture. I know that the words of Jesus "are spirit and are life" (John 6:63).