

N.K., EX-CATHOLIC, USA (PART 1 OF 5)

Rating: 4.4

Description: A Catholic who rejects his faith and takes to Philosophy, and then later accepts Islam due to many unanswered questions. Part 1: Doubting in the faith.

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Born in 1954 in the farm country of the northwestern United States, I was raised in a religious family as a Roman Catholic. The Church provided a spiritual world that was unquestionable in my childhood, if anything more real than the physical world around me, but as I grew older, and especially after I entered a Catholic university and read more, my relation to the religion became increasingly called into question, in belief and practice.

One reason was the frequent changes in Catholic liturgy and ritual that occurred in the wake of the Second Vatican Council of 1963, suggesting to laymen that the Church had no firm standards. To one another, the clergy spoke about flexibility and liturgical relevance, but to ordinary Catholics, they seemed to be groping in the dark. God does not change revelation, nor the needs of the human soul, and there was no new revelation from heaven. Yet we rang in the changes, week after week, year after year; adding, subtracting, changing the language from Latin to English, finally bringing in guitars and folk music. Priests explained and explained as laymen shook their heads. The search for relevance left large numbers convinced that there had not been much in the first place.

A second reason was a number of doctrinal difficulties, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, which no one in the history of the world, neither priest nor layman, had been able to explain in a convincing way, and which resolved itself, to the common mind at least, in a sort of godhead-by-committee, shared between God the Father, who ruled the world from heaven; His son Jesus Christ, who saved humanity on earth; and the Holy Ghost, who was pictured as a white dove and appeared to have a considerably minor role. I remember wanting to make special friends with just one of them so he could handle my business with the others, and to this end, would sometimes pray earnestly to this one and sometimes to that; but the other two were always stubbornly there. I finally decided that God the Father must be in charge of the other two, and this put the most formidable obstacle in the way of my Catholicism, the divinity of Christ. Moreover, reflection made it plain that the nature of man contradicted the nature of God in every particular, the limitary and finite on the one hand, the absolute and infinite on the other. That Jesus was God was something I cannot remember having ever really

believed, in childhood or later.

Another point of incredulity was the trading of the Church in stocks and bonds in the hereafter it called indulgences, the “Do such and such and so-and-so many years will be remitted from your sentence in purgatory” that had seemed so false to Martin Luther at the outset of the Reformation.

I also remember a desire for a sacred scripture, something on the order of a book that could furnish guidance. A Bible was given to me one Christmas, a handsome edition, but on attempting to read it, I found it so rambling and devoid of a coherent thread that it was difficult to think of a way to base one’s life upon it. Only later did I learn how Christians solve the difficulty in practice, Protestants by creating sectarian theologies, each emphasizing the texts of their sect and downplaying the rest; Catholics by downplaying it all, except the snippets mentioned in their liturgy. Something seemed lacking in a sacred book that could not be read as an integral whole.

Moreover, when I went to the university, I found that the authenticity of the book, especially the New Testament, had come into considerable doubt as a result of modern hermeneutical studies by Christians themselves. In a course on contemporary theology, I read the Norman Perrin translation of *The Problem of the Historical Jesus* by Joachim Jeremias, one of the principal New Testament scholars of this century. A textual critic who was a master of the original languages and had spent long years with the texts, he had finally agreed with the German theologian Rudolph Bultmann, that without a doubt, it is true to say that the dream of ever writing a biography of Jesus is over, meaning that the life of Christ as he actually lived it could not be reconstructed from the New Testament with any degree of confidence. If this were accepted from a friend of Christianity and one of its foremost textual experts, I reasoned, what was left for its enemies to say? And what then remained of the Bible except to acknowledge that it was a record of truths mixed with fictions, conjectures projected onto Christ by later followers, themselves at odds with each other as to who the master had been and what he had taught. And if theologians like Jeremias could reassure themselves that somewhere under the layers of later accretions to the New Testament there was something called the historical Jesus and his message, how could the ordinary person hope to find it, or know it, should it be found?

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