

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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Protestant Pastors on the Road to Rome by Elizabeth Altham

Editor's note: In 1996, a Roman Catholic magazine, Sursum Corda ("Lift Up the Hearts") published a special issue in which it recounted the testimonies of several Protestant men, all graduates of Gordon-Conwell Seminary, who had converted to Roman Catholicism after graduation from the Seminary. One of the purposes Sursum Corda had in mind in publishing the testimonies was to show how Gordon-Conwell Seminary has been producing Roman Catholics. But the lesson to be learned from these testimonies is both broader and more profound than that, and it is a lesson that ought to be brought to the attention, not only of the alumni and patrons of Gordon Conwell, but to the general Christian public.

These testimonies illustrate how the ideas we have discussed in The Trinity Review for years have led men to Rome. In these testimonies we find these converts to Rome mentioning men such as Louis Bouyer, the twentieth century Roman Catholic Pentecostal who has had a profound effect on both Catholics and non-Catholics; John Henry Newman, the nineteenth century convert from the Church of England who cleverly devised a doctrine of justification that blurred the distinction between justification according to Rome and justification according to the Bible; Ignatius of Antioch, one of the early fulfillments of the Apostle John's warnings that Antichrist is already at work in the churches; Billy Graham, whose Arminian gospel is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and so on. This issue of The Trinity Review contains the first part of the essay; the essay is completed in the September issue.

In the past ten years at least fifty Protestant pastors, mostly evangelicals, have resigned their posts and found their ways to Rome. Every one has endured conflict of mind and heart; every one has sacrificed comfort and security. Many were predisposed by upbringing and training to fear and despise the Catholic Church; the rest simply thought it was the most erroneous of sects. Because one of the hardest parts of the journey is the loneliness, some of the former pastors have formed a fellowship called The Coming Home Network to help each other on the road. Of its 150 members, about one hundred are still on their ways in; and the list is growing.

Bill Bales

Bill Bales grew up in a progressive Presbyterian church in Bethesda, Maryland. I guess I had a sort of dormant faith in Christ, he recalls. I didn't have regular devotions or Bible study, or a regular prayer life. It was very haphazard.

Bales pursued a pre-medical course at American University, and played soccer. He incurred a lung injury, which led to major surgery. "I began to contemplate things like death. I was exposed to Christians who had a strong faith. I began to pray along the lines of, 'If there is a God, reveal Yourself.' If there was something there, I'd be happy to believe in it. I began to read the Bible, and some of it made sense to me."

He got involved in a more evangelical-style Presbyterian church, and was impressed by many of its members. Christ was real. You could have a

relationship with Him. It wasn't just a bunch of religious gobbledygook.

Bales put aside his plans for medical school. After graduating, he worked for two years in a youth ministry at a Presbyterian church, then as youth pastor at a non-denominational church. "But I needed to go to seminary if I was going to pursue ministry any further. I wanted more training—and also some time to think about ideas and issues. There were so many that kept cropping up."

Bales attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, a serious-minded, interdenominational establishment in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. It was a wonderful time for him. "They revered Scripture. Some of the professors I gravitated toward interpreted the Old Testament in ways more like the Church Fathers than a lot of people do out there in evangelicalism. Not that we did a lot of study in the Fathers, themselves; it was more a training ground for pastors than a graduate school."

Upon graduating in 1985, he accepted the post of associate pastor at Gainesville Presbyterian Church in Virginia. Bales was very happy there at first. "But around the spring of 1988, some of the questions that I had never really dealt with, or had dealt with superficially, began to surface. The most crucial was the issue of the canon of the Scriptures. Who had the authority to define what would be in the canon? It is a foundational question. I became more and more uncomfortable with the Calvinistic view I'd always held; the other views that were out there were filled with holes."

"It wasn't so much that I was attracted to Catholicism, although the thought that there might be an actual answer to some of these things was intriguing; and since Scott Hahn, my friend from seminary, had converted it had been in the back of my mind as a possible answer. What got me going, really, was that I felt I had to be completely honest about the weaknesses of my position on the canon."

One unsatisfactory possibility was a more liberal Protestantism. If God hadn't left an authority on Earth, somebody with the authority to decide these things, then it seemed to me that anything went. I couldn't get around that snag.

But if Catholicism was a possibility, Bales had a lot of reading to do, a lot of issues to confront. He found Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine*, Karl Adams' *The Spirit of Catholicism* and some of Louis Bouyer's books especially helpful. "I became more and more convinced from history that Catholic doctrines had been held anciently, maybe in a less developed form, but held way back. And I became convinced from the Scriptures, at most places where there was an issue, like the supremacy of Peter – where there were these discussions I thought the Catholic Church had the better argument, although I wouldn't decide my church affiliation based on any one passage. And then I thought through the reasonableness of the way the Catholic Church had grown and what God had done; it seemed much more reasonable to do it this way."

By the end of 1989 Bales was very uncomfortable about his leadership and his preaching. He resigned early in 1990. I was trying to make a low-profile exit from the presbytery, but the Presbyterians had had other defections—Scott Hahn, for instance, and Gerry Matatics. There were a few people who did not want to let me slide out.

Bales believes he could have avoided formal excommunication by transferring first to an Episcopal church; but by then he was fairly certain that the Catholic Church was his destination and he was unwilling to deny it. So the excommunication proceedings began. "I met three or four times with small committees. The first time they may have been trying to talk me out of it. They tried to understand, and they gathered information for the juridical process. There was never any meanness. A third of the presbytery voted not to excommunicate; it wasn't unanimous."

What are the consequences of Presbyterian excommunication? "There's a general interpretation, Bales explains, that this person needs to repent, that he's in some sort of sin. How you treat the person is determined parish by parish. This particular parish toed the line pretty tightly. It was kind of a shunning thing. Just leaving was hard. It was like I had died to all those people."

His voice is very soft. "I guess shunning would be too strong a word. But the leadership is not interested at all in having any of the congregation

stay friends with me.... It was a close-knit community. There were a lot of deep friendships, a lot of good people.”

Bill Bales was received into the Catholic Church on the Feast of the Guardian Angels, in 1990.

Marcus Grodi

Marcus Grodi grew up in a somewhat liberal Lutheran church near Toledo, Ohio. He was active in the youth group, catechized and confirmed. “I knew many things, he says, but they hadn’t gotten into my heart. The church summer camps were like being prepared to be involved with SDS, rather than spiritual.”

Grodi’s high school acquaintances included students from many denominations, but no Catholics – “other than across an athletic field. My view of Catholicism was not extremely negative, but we had lots of mythological understandings of the Catholic church on the other side of town. We figured it was full of superstition, and people being almost enslaved to the priests and nuns.”

He began to wonder, though, about the differences among the Protestant denominations.

Grodi studied engineering at Case Western Reserve. “I went three years without entering a church door, he recalls. I was involved in fraternity life and all that brings with it. Then in the summer before my senior year I had a deep renewal of my faith through the testimony of a friend – really a 180-degree turn in my life.”

Grodi went back to his Lutheran church and found that the words of the liturgy made sense for the first time. “But as I looked down the pew I saw high school students, like myself when I was that age, reciting the things without meaning. I decided that traditional liturgicalism was dead, that it produced nominal, almost mindless Christians. I figured God wanted to hear something different, not the same thing every Sunday.”

Upon graduating, Grodi began his first engineering job – and a youth ministry. He chose Congregationalism. Every Congregational church is autonomous and can decide what it wants to do. It can write its own creed. It’s amazing what some Congregational churches really believe.

In 1978, after four years of engineering and part-time ministry, Grodi entered Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He gained much from his years there. “I don’t bash my evangelical background. It brought me back to Jesus Christ. It put in my heart a sincere desire to give my life totally to Him; and I do believe that it was because of that conviction that I’m now a Catholic. Even Gordon-Conwell, with its commitment to Scripture, to the truth – because it’s interdenominational it avoids the denominational slants of the Baptist Church, or the Methodist or Presbyterian Church – I think that trajectory is what ended up bringing a lot of us into the Catholic Church.”

Grodi went out to his first church with enthusiasm and conviction. It was a Congregational church in Florida. “I hadn’t been there six months when I realized there was something wrong with Congregationalism. I couldn’t put my finger on it.”

He entered the Presbyterian Church as a pastor, but the doubts continued. “How could I be sure that our Presbyterian slant was the best slant, compared to my Methodist brothers, my Assembly of God, Church of Christ and Episcopalian brothers – even to the Catholics? How could I know that my interpretation of Scripture had any connection whatever with what Jesus really said? I wanted to be faithful. I knew I would one day stand before Jesus Christ, my Lord, and be accountable for the souls of the people I led. I knew I had to make sure that what I was teaching was true, and that what I was doing was true.”

Grodi couldn’t turn for help to the leadership of the Presbyterian Church. “I had almost universally rejected their perspectives. Most of them were very liberal. They were pro-choice. Nine out of ten things that came across my desk from the head office ended up in the wastebasket.”

“There were no rules; I was re-inventing the wheel. It didn’t make sense that Jesus would have planted a church and then left everything up for grabs.”

Grodi considered trying a more conservative denomination, but what he calls the poll-taking aspect of denominationalism still bothered him. He resigned his pastorate and returned to Case Western Reserve, intending to earn a Ph.D. in molecular biology and then to combine his science

and religion backgrounds into bioethics. "I figured I'd end up being a genetics professor or an ethicist somewhere."

He wasn't far into his doctoral work when one morning a newspaper advertisement caught his eye. Catholic theologian Scott Hahn to speak at local parish.

Catholic theologian Scott Hahn? "We hadn't seen each other for eight years. So I went to hear him speak, and listened to his tape, and read Karl Keating's book, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*. By the end of that, just those three things, I was a dead duck."

Grodi began to read the early Church Fathers, and Church history. He knew he could not remain a Protestant. "My problem was that I couldn't be a Catholic. There were too many weird things. When you've been a Protestant for forty years, face it: the Infant of Prague is really strange. And I had grown up with those prejudices. The Catholic Church and the Mafia were the same thing. Catholics drank and smoked."

"But I knew that if I could trust the authority of the Magisterium centered on the See of Peter, then everything else would fall into place. It was Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine* that convinced me of that. And then I was a Catholic."

Marcus Grodi was received into the Catholic Church in 1993.

Steve Wood

Steve Wood's road to Gordon-Conwell Seminary was quite different from Bill Bales' and Marcus Grodi's. He was raised by good, decent Presbyterian parents, but not a whole lot stuck, he says. "I gave them a whole case of Excedrin headaches. I was ungrateful, rebellious and stubborn." After a couple of very wild years in the very wildest fraternity at the University of Florida, he dropped out and joined the Navy.

He began to search for an alternative to hedonism. When his ship was in port in Virginia Beach, he spent his free time at the Edgar Cayce Institute, learning Eastern mysticism and meditation. His shipmates called him "Cosmic Man." But a guru

friend insisted that he explore his own religion before moving on to higher forms of consciousness.

"There's nothing to Christianity!" Wood protested. But his friend insisted, so Wood went to buy a Bible. "They sold Bibles at the Cayce Institute—all kinds of Bibles. My theology was rather weak, so I didn't know the difference between the ones with 'secret lost gospels' and the ones without them. Not having a really high ability to discern, I stood and did my Oms, my mantras, in front of the shelf of Bibles for a while. By God's grace I got a regular one."

Wood expected to find the Bible dry and dusty. He was astonished to find it compelling. Soon he was thoroughly persuaded both of Christ's divine nature and mission and of his own sinfulness. He underwent a deep, classical evangelical conversion.

Wood was attracted to the Calvary Chapel in California, a vibrant, Scripture-intensive non-denominational church that was drawing many young searchers. He learned to despise the baptism he had received as an infant, believing that infant baptism was an unfortunate vestige of Roman Catholicism. He studied Hebrew and Greek at an Assembly of God college and worked in a Calvary Chapel youth ministry.

Then he returned to Florida, hoping to ignite among young people there the lively faith he had experienced in California. In 1978 he was ordained by an interdenominational charismatic church. He re-baptized many Catholics and Protestants. During his ministry there he met and married his wife Karen. Soon after, he applied to Gordon-Conwell.

He was surprised to learn there that many leading Protestant theologians approved of infant baptism. The Woods were expecting their first child, which lent urgency to the question. "I was about to become the father of a child who was going to live forever, and I wanted to be sure to do the right thing. I came to believe in infant baptism – a very costly conclusion. Not only did it connect me more closely to more of Scripture, it connected me to Church history."

Wood became pastor of a new Protestant church in Venice, Florida, where he would serve for nearly

ten years. He continued to study, and to ask himself what Christ wanted His church to be. He led his congregation into affiliation with the Presbyterian Church in America, and read more and more in the early Fathers. "As a youth minister, I had had great treasure hunts. Well, here were the four clues if you wanted to find the Church. One, holy, catholic and apostolic: the Nicene Creed, 325 AD, by which we profess our faith. The Protestant Reformers had changed the identifying marks of the Church; and once you change the marks, you'll never find the Church. It's like having the wrong clues to a treasure hunt."

"The Church is one. But a diagram of just the Presbyterian Church over the past two hundred years looks like a schematic drawing for a computer chip."

Wood puzzled over and over Christ's priestly prayer at the Last Supper – His prayer for unity in the Church. He was persuaded that Christ intended not merely a spiritual unity of believers, but a visible unity--one so obvious that nonbelievers would see it, as He said, and believe.

He still has his notes from a sermon he preached on that text in 1986. He told his congregation that he did not know how it could be that Christ's prayer had gone unanswered. "The Catholic Church was still unthinkable as even a factor in the equation. You know how it sometimes takes the truth being embodied in a person for the unthinkable to become thinkable? Well, I heard through the grapevine that Scott Hahn was already a lost cause. But I thought it my Christian duty to call Gerry Matatics and talk him out of the Church."

He tried. He studied further in the early Fathers. He talked often with his wife. The question of church government got worse, not better. "The Apostles laid hands on these men and put them in office!"

Wood had been troubled for years by the Protestant position on the marriage bond. Now he was coming to the conclusion that Christ intended it to be indissoluble. Discouraged by many fruitless years of pro-life activism, he began to see that only the sanctity of marriage could provide a secure foundation for the sanctity of life.

He prepared a sermon on Hosea, the Old Testament prophet whose wife had gone off to be a prostitute. "God commanded Hosea to bring his wife back to his home. And He used her adultery to show the apostasy of His people. How was I going to present Christ's norm, which happened to be the Catholic Church's norm, in this Protestant setting? Worse, after I actually gave the sermon, I realized I could not administer communion to people who were divorced and remarried."

He apologized to the congregation, pronounced a benediction, and went to his study. The elders followed him in and accepted his resignation.

A few weeks later Wood went to serve a sixty-day jail sentence, the consequence of a rescue at an abortion clinic. In jail he read intensively, and prayed for God's direction to the true Church. He was hoping for an idea. He received a visit instead, from the Bishop of Venice.

Steve and Karen Wood were received into the Catholic Church in July 1990.

Gerald Matatics

Nobody could look like a less likely candidate for Protestant or Catholic apologetics than Matatics at fourteen. His father was in the Air Force, so he grew up all over the country in what he calls "a completely secularized upbringing."

"Although my parents were married in an Episcopal service, it was only to please my father's mother, who was not very observant, herself. She did give them a Bible. I remember seeing it buried in a closet, under a heap of dust. My parents never cracked the covers of it. We never prayed before meals, never went to church. The name of Jesus Christ was not even mentioned except in profanity, even at Easter or Christmas."

Now and then a well-meaning neighbor would bring young Gerald to church, but the visits made no lasting impression. "I turned on the TV one night when I was fourteen to watch 'Get Smart' or 'The Beverly Hillbillies' or something equally highbrow; and my program of choice was being preempted by a Billy Graham crusade. And for some reason I sat and watched this thing. This was completely uncharacteristic for me."

“At the end of the telecast, when he was asking people to get up out of their seats in the crusade stadium, and they streamed forward to register a decision for Christ, I wanted to do that and of course I wasn’t there. I said, ‘Well, gee, how do I make this decision also?’ And he answered that. He looked into the camera and said: ‘Those of you who are watching at home by television, you can make the same decision they’re making here tonight. Write to me, Billy Graham—’ and he gave the address. So I sent away for the stuff.”

Matatics is an excellent mimic; he perfectly reproduces Graham’s suavity and gravity. On the day the materials arrived, he went to help his mother with the grocery shopping, pushing the cart with one hand and holding Graham’s booklet with the other. “I was totally engrossed and enthralled. And when I got to the last page, it had a prayer. It said, ‘Pray this prayer and you’ll become a Christian.’ So I looked around and waited until the aisle was clear and I prayed that prayer.”

“I didn’t have any bells go off; no angels burst out of the frozen foods; but on my way home that day I found I’d acquired a full-blown appetite for the Bible. I thought, ‘Wow! I’ve been bereft of the Bible for fourteen years; I’ve really got to make up for lost time.’”

“So on the way home I had my mom stop at a book store. I ran in and bought my first Bible, a *King James*, I think. But then I poked around in my parents’ closet and dug out the Bible they were given at their wedding; it was the *Revised Standard Version*. And I wondered what other different translations there were out there. So in the weeks to come I horrified my parents by spending all my paper route money and coming home at least twice a week with yet another translation of the Bible tucked under my arm. I discovered there were dozens. I would buy these big four-column and eight-column parallel Bibles to compare the nuances by having them side by side. I wanted to capture every possible shade of meaning.”

“Soon I thought, Nuts on all this second-hand English rendering.’ I started to teach myself Hebrew and Greek by correspondence courses.”

Matatics had long intended to become a lawyer. He would have his younger brothers invent stories, and

then he would tear them apart, Perry Mason-like. But now he wanted to use his talent for reasoning and argument for Christ. He wanted to be a preacher. He was on scholarship at Philips Exeter Academy, a premier feeder school to the Ivy League; and he wanted to go from there to Moody Bible Institute. He was settling down as a fundamentalist Baptist. “My parents, who had been very comfortable with the idea of Our Son the Lawyer, were not as comfortable with the idea of Our Son the Roving Tent Evangelist; they said ‘Moody Bible Institute was just a glorified high school. At least promise us you’ll go to college, and then go to seminary after that if you want and get a real degree.’”

Matatics had been offered a scholarship by Harvard, but he horrified his classmates by choosing the University of New Hampshire. “A fundamentalist is an evangelical with a far stronger antipathy to secular culture, to higher education in general. He’s a bit more in retreat from the world, a bit more militant about the faith. And I was definitely a self-styled fundamentalist. I thought, ‘Harvard! Oh, no. That’s where all those evolution-spouting liberals hang out.’ It would have been a hankering after the world’s credentials.”

Furthermore, Matatics was eager to get on into seminary, and Harvard required a minimum of three years. The University of New Hampshire had no such requirement. He took a double load, self-designing a major in New Testament and patristic Greek. He was coached by the chairman of the classics department, who was Orthodox. “He [Matatics’ Orthodox teacher at the University of New Hampshire] was delighted that someone showed so much interest in Greek. From my perspective at that time, I would have thought, ‘Orthodox, Roman Catholic, they’re all going to Hell.’ I probably would not have even considered him a bona fide Christian. He would have been too caught up in dead works and formalistic ritual.”

But under that man Matatics read Homer, other Greek authors and the New Testament. By the time he went off to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary he had a very good grounding in Greek. Gordon-Conwell was profoundly formative. Matatics discovered John Calvin: the deep organ voice of the sovereignty of God and the sinfulness of man. “Calvin denied free will; he exaggerated our

depravity; but still, the average American Catholic today is a Pelagian. He thinks that we are basically good, and it's no sweat to be a good Catholic. Every heresy is a truth that's run amuck; in these caricatures of Catholic truth, the Calvinist heresy or the Lutheran heresy, there was some truth that the average American Catholic has perhaps not grasped."

Matatics affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America. The PCA stood for the inerrancy of Scripture and opposed the ordination of women and the World Council of Churches. When Matatics graduated from Gordon-Conwell he would be ordained in the PCA; first, however, he had a firestorm to launch.

Matatics was concerned that some of Gordon-Conwell's teachers were flirting with the idea that the Bible might not be inerrant in its historical or scientific statements. He started a little campus journal called *The Handwriting on the Wall*, calling upon the seminary president, faculty, and students to repent of this incipient liberalism. "My roommate and I co-published it and had it made up down at Kinko's Copies, and we put it in everyone's mailbox. There were two issues before the school killed it. I'll never forget the day the first one came out. I was standing outside my adviser's office; and one of the professors, who was particularly stung by my lead article, 'Selling Truth for Thirty Pieces of Silver,' began screaming at me."

"After a while my roommate and I weren't even going to classes or meals. We were hiding out in our room and eating peanut butter on celery stalks. We were getting hostile calls all the time."

One night Matatics answered the phone.

Strange voice: "I'd like to speak to Gerry Matatics."

Matatics (cagily): "Who's calling?"

Voice: "Well, I'd like to talk to him about this publication."

Matatics: "Well, he's not too interested in talking to people about it any more because there's so much screaming going on about it. What did you think of it?"

Voice (cagily): "Well, what do *you* think of it?"

Matatics (coily): "Well, what do *you* think of it?"

(Pause.)

Voice (gathering nerve): "Didn't you think it was pretty much on the money?"

Matatics: "Yeah, I think it was."

Voice: "Actually, I thought it was great!"

Matatics: "Well, I stand by it. I'm Gerry Matatics."

Voice: "My name is Scott Hahn. I really admire you for having spoken out this way."

They met for lunch the next day, and in the months to come spent a lot of time together. Both were strongly anti-Catholic.

"The stalwart champions of Protestant orthodoxy," Matatics explains, "Luther, Calvin and so on, all taught that the Pope was the Antichrist; that the Catholic Church was not a branch of the Christian Church but the great Whore of Babylon; that Catholics did not believe the Christian faith but a clever counterfeit of it, a Satanic substitute that would send them straight to Hell for all eternity for trusting in Baptism and their own works, thinking they couldn't be justified by faith alone and adding Tradition to Scripture."

Matatics was very upset that Gordon-Conwell belonged to a consortium of seminary students and faculty in the greater Boston area that included Catholics. This was an act of betrayal of the first order, he said. "We should be anathematizing those people as we had four hundred years before, not making common cause with them."

"I hope that you will maintain this anti-Catholic edge throughout your ministry," said Hahn.

"Don't worry. I have no intention of compromising on this one iota."

"Good."

Matatics and Hahn were both ordained in the PCA, and went out to serve as pastors while pursuing their Ph.D.s. They kept in touch by phone. "We would talk about the books we had been reading and the ideas we were having. We would have these marathon phone conversations for two and three hours, much to our delight but to the horror of our wives, who would see the phone bills every month. So out of deference to them we would wait

until 11:00 when the rates went down, and we would talk then until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning.”

“So the phone rang late one night and it was Scott. He said, ‘Gerry, I want you to listen to something.’ And he began to read from a book that he said had given him more insight into the whole doctrine of salvation than anything he’d ever read before. And it sounded quite different from what I had heard, but it was quoting the Bible copiously and it was very cogent and very compelling. It made sense.

Matatics: “Scott, this is a very interesting book. I can’t quite figure out where the guy’s coming from, but he’s certainly presenting some new information that I’ve not assimilated in any of my Lutheran and Calvinist and Baptist books. Who is this author?”

Hahn: “You’ve never heard of this guy.”

Matatics: “Well, try me. I’m not completely unread.”

Hahn: “No. You’ve never heard of him. His name is Louis Bouyer.”

Matatics: “You’re right. I’ve never heard of him.”

Hahn: (sigh of relief)

Matatics: “Well, what is he? A Calvinist like us, right?”

Hahn: “Well, not exactly.”

Matatics: “Well, then he’s a Lutheran.”

Hahn: “Well, he used to be a Lutheran.”

Matatics: “Look, I’ve loosened up, living in the real world. So if this guy’s a Baptist, that’s OK.”

Hahn: “No, he’s not a Baptist, either.”

Matatics: “What is he?”

Hahn (choking sound): “He’s a—a Cthc.”

Matatics: “Would you repeat that?”

Hahn: “He’s a Catholic.”

Matatics (utter disbelief): “Did you say he was a Catholic?”

Hahn: “Yeah, he’s a Catholic, and, Gerry, I’ve been reading lots of Catholic books throughout the last several months and as a matter of fact, Gerry, they have some pretty good things to say and as a matter of fact, Gerry, sometimes I think they’re better than Protestant books at least on some issues and as a matter of fact, Gerry, oh, Gerry, I think I’m going to become a Catholic.”

Matatics was horrified. “My hair stood on end. Here was this guy who I thought was going to be the great champion of Reformed thought in the 20th century. Here he was defecting to the enemy. This was a loss that we could not afford to suffer.”

I said, “Scott, please, send me the list of these books. You’ve got to run the gauntlet of every objection I can throw up. You’re going to regret this the rest of your life, not to mention all eternity. Send me the list of books and I’ll tear them to pieces.”

The list arrived. Matatics’ wife was fully on board for the project. “Oh, great! Save Scott!” she exclaimed.

He found some of the books at the St. Jude Shop in Philadelphia, “which was a good thing because I was the most impossible case that ever walked through its door.” For the rest he went to the library at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. “While this twinkly-eyed Mother-Angelica-look-alike nun was giving me a library card and stamping my books I thought, ‘I’ve got to witness to this poor lost soul. She’s probably never seen a real Christian in her life.’ So I said, ‘Look, uh, Sister, I don’t mean any offense, but I’m not reading these books because I think there’s a scrap of Scriptural truth in them. I’m reading them for one reason only: to save my best friend from becoming a Catholic.’”

“And she said, ‘That’s nice, dear.’ And she went on stamping my books. ‘What’s your friend’s name?’ I didn’t want to give his whole name because I didn’t want him put on some Papist mailing list and getting junk mail from the Vatican. So I just said, ‘His name is Scott.’ She said, ‘I’ll pray for Scott and I’ll pray for you.’”

Matatics believes she must have prayed, indeed. “I had the most horrible spiritual nausea as I read those books. Here I thought I was going to be crowing with delight as I pounced upon their logical fallacies, their Bible misquoting. On the contrary, I was discovering the richest and most fascinating treatment of Scripture that I had ever read. I got a queasy feeling that it was making an awful lot of sense. I was beginning to see that Protestantism had some real logical flaws to it.”

Matatics began to ask the questions Bill Bales would ask a few years later about the establishment of the New Testament canon. As a

Protestant, he relied upon post-Apostolic decisions about what would be Scripture and what would not. "But if the Church was competent to discern what came from the Apostles and what didn't, then I had no right to restrict its competence to simply evaluating the apostolicity of written documents; the Church would also know whether certain ways of praying or certain liturgies or certain ways of celebrating the Sacraments were truly Apostolic or not. There's nothing in the Bible that says the Church will be guided only when it comes to fixing the canon of Scripture. St. Paul says the Church is the pillar and foundation of the truth, in *1 Timothy* 3:15. Our Lord says in *Matthew* 18:18 that we should heed the Church. All of the statements about the authority of the Church were not restricted to the Church's Bible-collecting."

"I thought, 'Hey! If the Church knew what it was doing, then everything else that the Church was teaching at that time, what the early Church Fathers are unanimous on, that's got to be all Apostolic, too.' And clearly—I was reading the Apostolic Fathers at this time—and clearly therefore if they say we should be praying for the dead, I had to listen to that. If they say we should be honoring Mary in a special way, and infant baptism is necessary, then I had to accept the whole package deal. I couldn't accept their Bible but reject their whole way of worship. I saw that the authority of the Church and the authority of Scripture were Siamese twins and that what God had joined together I could not separate. In fact, if I attacked the authority of the Church, the infallibility of the Church, then I was biting the hand that fed me."

Matatics resigned his pastorate and went to work more intensively on his doctorate, supporting his family by teaching French at a fundamentalist high school and Greek at Westminster Seminary. He hoped with further study to resolve the questions that had been troubling him. But the crisis deepened.

His drive between the two schools took him past St. Joseph's University. One day, on impulse, he turned in, parked, and asked directions to the theology department. St. Ignatius of Antioch (died AD 107) was much on his mind, with his unambiguous assertions of the Apostolic Succession and the Real Presence.

Matatics walked past the protesting secretary and into the chairman's office. For twenty minutes he described his past year's reading the early Fathers – and his terrible dilemma. Finally the chairman interrupted him. "Mr. Matatics, he said, You have a problem. I also have a problem. Several of my teachers are on leave and I have been sitting here praying that someone would turn up who could teach a patristics course this term."

Matatics accepted the position for the fall term of 1985. For a short while the joke on the campus was that Matatics was more Catholic than the Catholics. Gerald Matatics was received into the Catholic Church at Easter, 1986.

The Secret of the Seminary

An occasional Protestant pastor has converted to the Catholic Church since the Reformation, but there are 150 of them in Marcus Grodi's Network – fifty or more already received into the Church – and the list is growing. Why? Why now?

"Without sounding super-spiritual," says Steve Wood, "I think it's a sovereign move of God. I think I can tell you why it happened at my seminary. Our seminary was bought by J. Howard Pew of Sun Oil, a very wealthy evangelical, and Billy Graham."

"Now, when I walked into the diocese down here, the Bishop appointed a priest to work with my family on our way in. The first time I went to see him, I went by myself. In case I had to get out fast I didn't want my wife and children to slow me down. I walked in very nervously to see this wonderful priest, Fr. Schevers. He asked, 'Where did you do your theological studies?' I said, 'Oh, it's a place you'd never have heard of, Gordon-Conwell.' He looked at me and smiled. 'I taught there,' he said. 'You see, it had been a Carmelite boys' school with the purpose of producing vocations for the Church. They were praying and praying, but there weren't vocations coming and in great agony they put the property up for sale. To add double insult to injury, here came Billy Graham and bought the campus.'"

"Now, I was not the warm ecumenical type when I was at seminary, and Scott Hahn was going around there telling people the Pope was the Antichrist. The Catholic Church was not [even] a latent desire for us. I'm convinced that for us it was the prayers of those Carmelites."

The Gospel Is the Power of God

Edited by John Robbins

If asked whether they believe Paul's statement that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation for every one who believes (*Romans* 1:16), Neo-evangelicals will quickly answer, Yes. In fact, they are likely to be indignant that anyone asked them such a question, for it seems to suggest that they somehow might not believe the Gospel. But is their answer believable? Is it merely lip service, or is it a credible profession of faith in the Gospel? Are evangelical churches noted for their solid, sound, accurate, and clear expositions of the Gospel? To ask the question is to answer it.

Contemporary society is being starved of the exposition and preaching of God's Word, especially the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not being starved of sermons or of entertainment; it is starved of the preaching of the Gospel. Most sermons heard today in evangelical churches and seminaries are characterized by the following:

1. "The Lord says" has been replaced by "In my opinion," or "Psychology says," or "Biblical scholars agree," or "The church fathers say," or "It has been scientifically proven." The Word of God has been displaced, and in its place we find all sorts of substitutes, both religious and secular. The truth of God has been replaced by the opinions of men. The good news of the Gospel is replaced by the pronouncements of science and religion. The problem, of course, did not begin in the pulpits, but in the colleges and seminaries that train the men who fill the pulpits. The seminaries have abandoned the faith, and they graduate men who do not know or do not believe the doctrines of the Bible.

2. The solid exposition of the Gospel has been replaced by devotional or inspirational homilies in the "evangelical" churches. This type of preaching is theatrical, melodramatic, entertaining, and emotional. Its focus is personal experience. The congregation is regaled with story after story from the speaker's life, or the life of someone he knows, or the life of someone he once read about. Friedrich Schleiermacher, the nineteenth century German theologian, father of theological modernism and liberalism, gave this advice: "[P]reaching must always take the form of testimony...to one's own experience." "Evangelical churches" are now liberal, and they do not even know it. Instead of speaking of the life and death of Jesus, the experiences of the preacher are the material of "evangelical" sermons. The puny, sinful, and often proud experiences of men have replaced the pure, sinless, and humble deeds of the Lord. People may be impressed by the experiences of the preacher, but they cannot save; only the preaching of the Gospel can save. Unlike Paul, "evangelical" preachers preach themselves, not Christ crucified.

3. Because "evangelical" churches believe men have free wills and are capable of making decisions for Christ, "evangelistic" sermons and services are designed to manipulate the hearers into making such decisions. Though the "evangelicals" say they believe the Gospel is the power of salvation, they use every trick in the book (and some of them have written new books) to manipulate the hearer into "closing with Christ," as a salesman manipulates a potential customer into closing the sale. Because men have free wills, because they can make decisions for Christ, because faith is not a gift of God but within the ability of every man, "evangelical" preachers manipulate the emotions of their hearers so as to reach such decisions. So we have soft music, dimmed lights, and a tear-jerking story. Or endless choruses of "Just as I Am," a beautiful hymn. Or endless choruses of "I have decided to follow Jesus," not a

beautiful hymn. Or a moving song by a soprano.

The power of the Gospel to salvation is implicitly denied and the Gospel itself dishonored by such ministerial machinations. Psychologically manipulating men is the substitute for the power of the Gospel.

“Evangelical” churches do this sort of thing because they do not believe that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes. “Evangelical” seminaries and “Christian” colleges have substituted other things for the education of young people in the doctrines of the Bible. As they have striven to become academically respectable, they have actually become spiritually reprehensible. Their graduates do everything and anything except make Scripture their constant and diligent study. Their schooling has taught them that the Bible is to be judged by another standard: science, psychology, tradition, church councils, human conscience, or the church fathers. They have learned that there are many sources of truth, that “all truth is God’s truth,” no matter where it is found. They have learned that “faith must be integrated with learning,” as though faith were not learning, and learning were non-Christian. They have been indoctrinated in the dogmas of hyphenated Christianity, for the Bible is not the only source of truth, and the Gospel is not the only source of salvation.

In their education, we see the source of the errors of “evangelical” preachers. They do not understand or they do not believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Do they want to preach on the Old Testament? Then they ought to see the Gospel there and make it plain. Do they want to explain the fruit of the Spirit? Then they ought to see the Gospel as its root. Do they want to preach about Heaven? Then they ought to preach that in Heaven the saints will be forever singing the praises of the Lamb who was slain, as the Apostle John makes clear in the *Revelation*. The Gospel is not merely a gate to Christianity; it is the narrow road as well. It is the focus and center of Christian doctrine and worship. Paul’s determination in preaching must be ours: To know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Biblical preaching is preaching that declares the whole counsel of God and not just snippets from that counsel. Most “evangelical” congregations are

starving, living hand to mouth from the crumbs that fall from the pulpits. Neither the preachers nor the congregations suspect that there is a system of doctrine in Scripture, a system so rich and satisfying that no one need starve or go hungry, a system built upon the revelation of Jesus Christ alone, a system that answers all questions, and supplies all needs. “Evangelical” preachers have rejected the idea that the Bible is sufficient, and its corollary, the sufficiency of Christ. They deny that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation. They are careless shepherds, betraying the trust of their Lord and their sheep. Many of them are false shepherds, preaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

It is not only Gordon-Conwell Seminary that is to blame for the defection of men to Rome. There are few if any Christian colleges or seminaries in the United States that deliver in the classroom what they promise in their catalogues. None of those that have any fame ought to be trusted, whether the name is Asbury, Beeson, Calvin, Covenant, Dallas, Denver, Fuller, Gordon-Conwell, Princeton, Reformed, Wesley, Westminster, or Wheaton. Institutions such as these annually train thousands of men in error; these men in turn compound and teach the errors they have learned in college and seminary. We ought not to be surprised by the defection of men to Rome in the twentieth century; it is a greater surprise that the defectors have so far been so few, for there is no substantial theological difference between what is taught by Rome and what is taught in most “Protestant” churches and seminaries in America. In principle they are already Roman Catholic. They have apostatized from the Gospel; in time, barring the sovereign intervention of God in saving them, they will find their own roads to Rome.