

Catholics Anonymous

I am a Catholic. For many years I thought I was lost, a pathetic over-indulger of self centered, holier-than-thou morality. But I finally hit bottom. One night I completely lost it. I spent a solid hour castigating the deceitful protestants, all of them blasphemous heretics, cursing the wicked Muslims for their immoral behavior and shrieking obscenities at my TV when a Buddhist monk began pontificating his slanderous beliefs and who refused to accept the Trinity, all three of them, as the only, one and indivisible, God.

Exhausted, I picked up my old Baltimore Catechism and began to read about sin, how a “mortal” sin was a grievous offense against God and how I would burn in Hell forever if I died and hadn’t repented. I read how masturbation, deliberately missing Mass on Sunday, using a rubber during sex and murder were equal offenses in the eyes of the Lord, all “Mortal” and punishable by eternal flame. I knew, finally, I had reached my limit.

In desperation I called my neighbor, Melvin, a recovering Catholic, who in former times had been a theologian. The first time he met me he sensed my desperation, my dogmatic illness and suggested I go to a CA meeting, but of course I refused. I thought I could lick my addiction by myself.

I let him in the front door. He took off his backpack, set it down and looked at me carefully. I could see he could sense my desperation. He grabbed me in a bear hug. “Don’t worry,” he said confidently. “We will get through this together.” I began to weep uncontrollably with relief.

We sat down while he described my condition perfectly. “First of all, I can share your desperation. I, too, believed in the most amazing things. But, as you know, in addition to being a renowned theologian, my most notable reputation is based on my amazing archeological findings. One day, in Ouagadougou, I discovered an ancient scroll. It was an original gospel by Bartholomew, one of the original Twelve Apostles. It proved authentic and was written just after Jesus died. That changed my life. Go ahead, tell me your story.”

I spent the next few hours telling him how I was an altar boy, how I confessed my sins every Saturday, how I accepted everything: the divinity of Jesus, the Immaculate Conception, the holy Trinity, what was and wasn’t a Mortal Sin...the whole nine yards.

“Look, my friend,” Melvin patted me on the shoulder. “You can’t recover by yourself.”

“I know, I know!” I shouted. “God knows I’ve tried. I stopped going to confession for a whole year, but eventually I broke down and went. I knew taking ‘that disastrous first sacrament’ would doom me, but I couldn’t resist.” I was sobbing now.

“Get hold of yourself,” he said with authority and shook me until my brain rattled. “Now you can get help. Let’s start with your first dogma about sin. For now all you have to do is admit you are powerless over Cathohol and that this has made your life unmanageable.”

“Oh, God,” I breathed. “You are right. No matter who I see or talk to, every time they say anything about their beliefs whether it is political or religious, I start reciting dogma to them. I can’t help it.”

“First, let’s talk about sin. Do you really think masturbation and murder are equally wrong? Listen to your conscience.”

“Welllllll, I guess not,” I stammered. “But the priest said...” He cut me off in mid-sentence.

“Forget the priest,” he shook me by the shoulders again. “Priests are like drug dealers. They hand out dogma like dope peddlers sell crack. Does it make sense that God would punish anyone for eternity for jerking off? Of course not.” I began to let my breath out slowly, finally beginning to relax.

“Well how about the Trinity?” I asked. “That is the most fundamental thing of all. I have to believe that, don’t I?”

He took out a book from his backpack. “This is my last theological publication based on the scrolls I found in Burkina Faso. Jesus, according to Bartholomew, was a charismatic leader of a sect in Galilee alright, but his message was strict adherence to the Torah. He was a super Pharisee, so to speak. He never said he was the son of God. That came in 325 AD when Constantine, the emperor of the time, needed a religion to help him manage the Empire. But a run-of-the-mill prophet wouldn’t do considering the emperors all proclaimed themselves gods. So he called the Council of Nicea. Bishops came from all over, the vote was close...maybe a few dinars under the

table, who knows?...but they voted to proclaim Jesus to be not only a great prophet, the Messiah, but also to be God.”

“Wow,” I said. “So Jesus wasn’t God until three hundred years after his death. Amazing.”

“The other faction, called ‘Arians’, believed Jesus was a great prophet but not divine, so he was declared a heretic. I define ‘heresy’ as the dogma that lost.”

I laughed. That was pretty clever.

“Not only that, now they had a bigger problem. There were two gods. And what in the world do you do with the Holy Spirit? Now you have three gods. It took a couple of hundred more years, but somehow the debates were settled in favor of ‘three persons in one God’.”

“How did that work?” I asked hesitantly. “What’s a person? Isn’t that just another way of saying ‘three gods?’”

“It sure complicated the monotheistic belief, that’s for sure,” he said. “I can’t be certain, but I think the theological scholars went to Egypt and found a really good mathematician, probably Ptolemy, and he worked out some Pythagorean algorithm for them. You know, like ‘the square of the Father is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two Persons.’ Something like that.”

“Okay,” I said, “but how about the virgin birth? We have to believe that, don’t we?”

“Well, Bartholomew doesn’t even mention virginity. He calls Mary a ‘young woman,’ which is what the Aramaic word means. The hocus-pocus involving the Archangel Gabriel was apparently all contrived because Mathew used the Greek word which translated to ‘virgin.’ You can imagine Mary would be bewildered if Mathew’s version was correct. Not to mention poor Joseph. Thus, the archangel Gabriel is called into action. Not only that, Mathew’s genealogy in the beginning of his gospel would be meaningless...that Jesus was descended from the House of David as the prophets foretold. Jesus wouldn’t be descended from anyone except God.”

“How about the slaughter of the Innocents?” I asked.

“Never happened,” he said. “There is no record that Herod slaughtered children. This was manufactured to fulfill an obscure prophecy by Isaiah where he says the Messiah comes out of Egypt.”

“I’m beginning to feel better already,” I sighed. “What do I need to do to be free from this terrible disease?”

“Don’t dogmatize, go to CA meetings and work the steps,” he said.

“What are ‘the steps’? I asked, whimpering pitifully.

“These are the spiritual backbone of our organization,” he said. “There are twelve of them and you have already completed the First Step...admitted you were powerless over Catholicism. The rest are a piece of cake by comparison. The Fourth Step is difficult, though,” he said seriously. “You have to make an inventory of all the dogmatic character defects you have and later you will have to make amends to all those people you have offended. But don’t worry. I’ll help you through the process.”

“You mean I have to quit cold turkey? How about if I just taper off,” I suggested. “Maybe not be so dogmatic all the time, you know, be like other people. Just pontificate a couple of times a day and never before 5 PM.”

He gave me a pitiful look. “We aren’t like other people,” he said finally. “We are addicts. If we get started being dogmatic we can’t stop. Now let’s say the CA prayer together.”

“God, give me the serenity to accept spirit of the gospels,
The courage to reject the dogmas that don’t make sense,
And the wisdom to know the difference.”

“That’s an amazing prayer,” I said. “Who made it up?”

Teilhard de Chardin,” he said. “He was a Jesuit priest and a scientist. That guy was a saint. He was the modern Galileo. He really tried to integrate science with Catholic dogma and he was punished for it. The Vatican hated him so they wouldn’t let him publish his beautiful insights. Every time you are tempted to yell at someone over some silly dogma, like ‘God will punish you if you whack your weenie.’ Just say the prayer and you will be alright.”

I'm sure glad I called Melvin. He makes all kinds of sense. I think I can do this. I thanked him for his help and vowed to go to 90 meetings in 90 days.

Now if I can only lick my pun addiction.