

Teaching Catholics a lesson

Fr. Michael Tracey

I was having a cup of tea and some chocolate chip cookies this morning when a parishioner arrived and handed me an 8" X 4" tan colored pamphlet. "I was at the hospital and picked this up. I thought you my like to see it." A cursory glance through it affirmed my hunches. Even the title – "Biblical Christianity for Catholics," gave away the secret.

The author begins by saying "I was baptized in Sacred Heart Church a week after I was born. As a young boy I went to catechism classes every Saturday morning. I made my first communion and was confirmed there. I went to Confraternity of Christian Doctrine classes throughout high school. I was even in the church's Boy Scout troop. I can remember going to communion every Sunday for at least five years in a row while I was a teenager. I was a devout Catholic.

Then the author got enlightened. It took him twenty years to debunk all those Catholic assumptions and rules. The rules didn't make sense so he decided not to accept them. Of course, God gave him "the privilege of being able to examine my previous assumptions, church history and theology through the lens of His Word... the Holy Bible."

The first question he addresses is Biblical Christianity in relation to the Catholic approach of both Bible and tradition.

The second question he addresses is differences in interpretation between Biblical Christianity's understand of man and sin and the Catholic approach. Obviously, St. Augustine and Pelagianism gets top billing. He throws in a sprinkling of St. Anselm, Abelard, even Thomas Aquinas and the Council of Trent to bolster his selective case.

The third question he addresses is that of salvation. Of course, he expounds of the argument between faith and good works from his perspective.

He concludes by saying "that at the end, the priest or the ritual will not save them. Faith in a church, any church, does not save. Faith in the Bible does not save. Faith, belief, trust is only as good as what you have chosen to rely on. There are many sincere Buddhists and Moslems, and even sincere moon worshippers in the world. There are sincere people who think their good deeds or obedience to church rules will get them to heaven. Your faith must be resting on the right object...the cornerstone...the Son of God...the Christ who died on the cross and was resurrected so you could live."

A few days before I received this pamphlet, one of our Catechumens in the R.C.I.A. class – a young military gentleman – said, "One of the things I admire about the Catholic Church is that Catholics don't go around shooting down other people's faith or churches in order to bolster their own."

The pamphlet raises some interesting questions; most especially about the lack of education in the Catholic faith by Catholics as well as some selective choices on how some non-Catholics understand or chose to present their interpretation of Catholic issues from their own selective biases.

I often wonder when I see some parents present their children for First Communion, how much they are willing to journey with them through further growth in their faith. For some, it seems that First Communion often becomes a last Communion. To some extent, the same may be said as far as Confirmation is concerned. I wonder, too, why at funeral Masses, that Catholics who know the responses at Mass, suddenly fall silent and don't even know when to do the simple gestures like sitting, standing and kneeling. Finally, I wonder how many Catholics understand the significance of the sign of cross being traced on forehead, lips and chest before the reading of the gospel means and what words should accompany such a gesture.

Maybe, just maybe, there is a good reason why someone published a book called "Catholicism for Dummies."