

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius  
December 6, 2015  
Spiritual Ponderings  
Hunting for God's Church

I was sitting in an airport recently and I had just finished the book I was reading and still had an hour to kill before my flight would board. I therefore took out my iPad and began to browse the different books being offered. I came across a book that caught my attention it was called *Confessions of a Mega-Church Pastor: How I Discovered the Hidden Treasures of the Catholic Church*. I was intrigued because I am always hearing how Catholics are leaving the Catholic Church for Protestant mega-churches and so I thought it would be interesting to read about someone leaving a mega-church to become Catholic. I would like to share with you some of reflections and thoughts on the book.

Let us begin by sharing with you Dr. Hunt's biography from his Dynamic Catholic website pro-file:

**Dr. Allen Hunt is a nationally known speaker and best-selling author. His books include: *Confessions of a Mega-Church Pastor: How I Discovered the Hidden Treasures of the Catholic Church*; *Everybody Needs to Forgive Somebody*; and *Nine Words: A Bible Study to Help You Become the Best-Version-of-Yourself*.**

**Allen stepped aside July 1, 2007, as Senior Pastor at Mount Pisgah, a congregation serving more than 15,000 persons each week through all of its ministries in Alpharetta, Georgia, outside Atlanta. While at Mount Pisgah, Allen helped to develop comprehensive ministries with children and students as well as a Christian School with over 1200 students; a Beacon of Hope pregnancy resource center; and the Summit Counseling Center.**

**On January 6 2008, on the Feast of the Epiphany, Allen converted to Catholicism. This transition represented the culmination of a 15 year journey in which God began leading Allen home to the Church. In many ways, this transition was effected by the prayers of a group of Dominican sisters at Monastery of Our Lady of Grace in North Guilford, Connecticut, who have been praying for Allen since he shared lectures with them during the season of Lent in 1992. Prior to full-time ministry, Allen worked in management consulting with Kurt Salmon Associates, an international leader in the textile, apparel, and retail industries. Allen was educated at Mercer (B.B.A.) and Emory (M.Div.) Universities, before earning a Ph.D. in New Testament and Ancient Christian Origins from Yale University.**

**Allen and his wife, Anita, live in Atlanta. They have two grown daughters.**

Quotes from the book will be in bold and my thoughts will be in regular font. Let us look now at some interesting quotes from his book:

**How did my transition occur? Not in a single moment of great revelation, but slowly, through a series of experiences. More like a mosaic of God encounters.**

The image of one's life being a mosaic is a beautiful image for many reasons. First is the image of a mosaic reminds us that the true beauty of a mosaic is only seen when looking at the image of a whole. What might look like an out of place piece close up becomes the only piece that could connect the pieces around it in order to form the image. I know that God called me a little at a time toward the priesthood. I did not receive a voice from a burning bush, a lightning bolt, or a voice from heaven. I had a lot of little things that guided me toward God's will for me.

**Without my expecting and certainly without my invitation, God began to reveal to me irresistible treasures hidden in the walls of the old house known as the Catholic Church.**

When I read this line, from Allen Hunt's book, it made me think of the times I used to play video games like Super Mario Brothers and the Legend of Zelda. If you moved too quickly through the game you could end up missing special weapons and even special levels. The Catholic Church is close to 2,000 years old and has benefited from having as a part of it men and women from many different cultures and these men and women have often shared with the Church in some way their unique point of view and this has helped the Church grow and refine its thinking. Often we act like the karate kid (in the original movie) not realizing that we are learning valuable lessons as we practice the rituals our teacher (the Church) has us doing. Sadly this leads to many people leaving the Church without really knowing what they have given up.

**At times, God uses friendships in remarkable ways. We listen to real friends. To strangers, we often turn a deaf ear or a cold shoulder. But to real friends, we will listen, even when listening stretches us in new ways. I do not think Fr. Steven intended to lead me home. Rather, he loved me and my family with an abundance in a time when we desperately needed it. That friendship and love led to the conversations about things of faith.**

If you read Allen's story you realize that Fr. Steven simply offers Allen the gift of friendship and does not try to convert him. It is Fr. Steven's life that inspires Allen to start asking questions and Fr. Steven's willingness to answer the questions that help Allen in his conversion. Can you explain to others why you are Catholic?

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius  
December 13, 2015  
Spiritual Ponderings  
Hunting for God's Church**

What would cause a successful pastor of a Christian mega-church to give up everything and become Catholic? In the book: *Confessions of a Mega-Church Pastor: How I Discovered the Hidden Treasures of the Catholic Church*, Allen Hunt explains why he left his successful mega-Church to become Catholic. He also invites Catholics to reflect and learn more about their Catholic heritage so that they may come to understand the sometimes hidden (or at least sometimes taken for granted) of the Catholic Church. Quotes from the book will be in bold and my thoughts will be in regular font.

**Not only does Paul describe the Eucharist, he does so in language just like that of the first three Gospel writers. That Eucharist language must have been really important in the early Church. Everyone was speaking the same language.**

**Moreover, John in a world unto himself. His Gospel is totally unlike the other Gospels. Yet again he uses the same language they do on one key topic; the Eucharist? How can this be? Very simple. The early believers all spoke the same language when it came to the focal point of their faith, the Eucharist**

**Virtually no other words of Jesus in the gospel are replicated, almost verbatim, word for word, in the letters of Paul. Yet Paul's phrasing matches that of the gospel writers too. Sometimes I had also missed that important fact in all my studies and in all my preparations.**

**In other words, there is more uniformity of language in the key New Testament writers regarding the Eucharist and Jesus' word about His Body and blood than on any other topic.**

Historians often point out that laws are not made unless there are problems and things that everyone agree upon are not debated. The early Church argued, debated, and discerned many things: the nature of the Trinity, Jesus' divinity, Mary's role in salvation, and much more; but the early Church never argued or debated about the Eucharist. The Eucharist was the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Fulton Sheen in the *Life of Christ*, I think summarize the Church's feelings about the Eucharist when he comments on Jesus declaring Himself the Bread of Life in John 6 and allowing people to leave: "Our Blessed Lord would certainly never have permitted them to leave if they had not understood what He had said, namely, that He would give us His very life as our life. It could only be that understanding it correctly, they could not swallow it. And He permitted them to leave."

**After all, early martyrs had been willing to die so as not to compromise their convictions about the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.**

It is sad that so many people do not realize what a gift they have in the Eucharist since so many people have died throughout history protecting it.

**By going to a Catholic church, I knew exactly what I would be getting. The worship would not be focused on the sermon, the preacher, or the music; it would be focused on the altar and on the Eucharist. If the message was good that would be great. If the music was rich, that would be just fine too. But that really was not the point. The point is the Eucharist.**

There are sometimes in which I give great homilies that are torn apart by someone because I have challenged them where they did not want to be challenged. There are times in which I have given horrible homilies which have been applauded because they did not challenge the people who needed to be challenge. No matter the quality, I know Jesus is present and I know He is teaching me, loving me, and challenging me by His presence in the Eucharist.

**I felt simultaneously completely at home and completely out of place.**

Sometimes it is good to realize that contradictory feelings can exist together. We should feel at home in God's presence to a certain extent but we must be careful that we do not domesticate God and forget about His awesomeness.

**It became obvious why Catholics had build such beautiful cathedrals and church throughout the world. Not as gathering or meeting places for Christians. But as a home for Jesus Himself in the Blessed Sacrament.**

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius  
December 20, 2015  
Spiritual Ponderings  
Hunting for God's Church**

I hope you have realized by now that the title for this month's spiritual ponderings, "Hunting for God's Church", was a play on Allen Hunt's last name. He of course is the former leader of a Protestant mega-church who converted to Catholicism. He shares his stories with his readers in his book: *Confessions of a Mega-Church Pastor: How I Discovered the Hidden Treasures of the Catholic Church*. Let us look at a few more quotes from the book. They will be in bold and my thoughts will be in regular font.

**We are on a venture, a journey of holiness, and this life is not a dress rehearsal. We are preparing for God by becoming holy and blameless.**

The Catholic Church believes in the Universal Call to Holiness. It is the belief that each individual is called to be holy. Holiness is not something reserved for priests and nuns but rather for everyone. The word "holiness" derives its meaning from a word meaning "totally other" or "set apart." For example a chalice is holy because it has been set apart from other drinking ware to hold the Precious Blood of Jesus. Catholics believe that each individual is set aside by God to become holy. We are "set apart" in order to become the dwelling place of God and to be His messengers to the world.

**There is no holiness apart from love.**

Holiness is not prayer. Holiness in Catholic terms means to love like God loves. In other words to live out the law of love about loving God with your whole being, loving your neighbor, and loving yourself. Everything our Catholic faith works to help us with these three goals: love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self.

**You begin to pray, you make time for worship, and eventually you develop a habit that leads you closer and closer to holiness. In doing so, slowly, almost imperceptibly, over time, you become holy. Holiness is your destiny if only you will cooperate with God. Best of all, He will make you into what He intended for you to be in the first place. The best version of yourself.**

Fr. Henri Nouwen in his book *Reaching Out: Three Movements in the Spiritual Life*, talks about how people need to move from loneliness to solitude (self-acceptance and love), hostility to hospitality (love of others), and finally illusion to prayer (loving God for who He is and not who we think He is). As we progress in one movement we advance in the others. For example coming to see God as the loving Father that Jesus reveals Him to be in the Prodigal Son story, helps me to realize that God loves me in spite of my sins and this allows me to see others as brothers and sisters in Christ and not competition for the Father's love. St. Irenaeus of Lyon said the "Glory of God is a person fully alive" which means the "glory of God is not someone groveling before God out of fear.

**As a Protestant, I found the saints to be just like these old photos in the basement. I knew that the saints existed. After all, names like Francis, Thomas, and Catherine occasionally showed up in the literature. But I certainly did not consider them as my own family.**

Saints care about what God cares about. What does God care about? Answer is us. He created us out of love. Why therefore would the saints not want us to succeed? Heaven is about being "fully alive" and part of being fully alive is about carrying for others. The following is illustration regarding the role of saints in our lives.

Many of the alumni who have attended the university before you fill the seats. The fans, the band, and your teammates are Wolverines. You are family alongside them. The Wolverine family. They want you to win. They consider themselves part of your team even though their time at the university has already come and gone. You are a part of a team who is encouraged by a huge team of fans not only in the stadium but also watching on televisions in bars and homes and listening on radios in cars and trucks all over the country. Wolverines everywhere are watching you and cheering you on.

In the same way, you are a member of the family of God, the Church. Each time you walk into church for Mass, the saints surround you. Your family stands and urges you onward toward the altar and the real presence of Jesus... Of course, we do not worship the saints. Then again, neither do we ignore them. They are our brothers and sisters. They sit in the arena and cheer for us, and they are on our team. They have done what we hope to do.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius  
December 27, 2015  
Spiritual Ponderings  
Hunting for God's Church

Today will be our last reflection on Allen Hunt's book: *Confessions of a Mega-Church Pastor: How I Discovered the Hidden Treasures of the Catholic Church*. Please know that there are many more great insights in his book that I am choosing not to cover because of space. So for one last time let us look at a few more quotes from the book. They will be in bold and my thoughts will be in regular font.

**I could find no justifiable reason to be separated from the Church. I remember a quote from Fr. Richard John Neuhaus: "The only alternative to obedience is the cacophony of human beings making it up as they go." Neuhaus had converted from Lutheranism once he became convinced that Protestants were simply making it up as they go.** In most of the parishes that I have served at that had schools; there was always a yearly game of volley ball between the 8<sup>th</sup> graders and the faculty. I would often play on the faculty team. The eighth graders should have been able to beat the faculty every year that I played but they never did. Instead of following the rules, proper technique for serving/spiking/setting/etc. and staying in their position they would do whatever they wanted and eventually they would hit the ball way out, let it drop between them, or have other players give up. In other words they descended into Chaos. The teachers on the other hand would follow the rules, help each other with proper technique and eventually win.

**When I did so, I experienced the same readings, the same liturgy, the same faith, and the same creed. I shared in the same Eucharist in every setting, whether in America or Europe, or Asia. The Mass expresses and demonstrates the oneness of the Church. It is not every congregation making it up for itself. It is the one Church, standing on the foundation of the twelve apostles, sharing the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.**

Jesus' major prayer at the Last Supper is that we would all be one. There is no more unified Church than the Catholic Church. We all rally around the pope. We can trace our spiritual heritage all the way back to Christ through the bishops.

**Once the focus is moved from that altar, and once the real presence of Christ is removed, there is and can be no unity. His presence is real. The real presence binds the Church together. There is no substitute. By that real presence, His body, the Church, coheres.**

Fr. Robert Barron in his book simply called: *Eucharist* has this to say about the unity we find in the Catholic Church around God's altar. "There is a famous saying in the writing of the great church Father, Saint Augustine. Whenever he would give communion to someone for the first time, instead of holding up the host and saying, "The Body of Christ," he would hold it up and say, "Receive what you are." We become the Body of Christ.

Fr. Ronald Rolheiser in his book about the Eucharist called: *Our One Great Act of Fidelity: Waiting for Christ in the Eucharist* puts it this way: "How separate and divided is our world! We look around us, watch the world news, watch the local news, look at our places of work, our social circles, and even our churches, and we tension and division everywhere. We are far from being one body and one spirit. So many things, it seems, work to divide us: history, circumstance, background, temperament, ideology, geography, creed, color, and gender. And then there are our

personal wounds, jealousies, self-interest, and sin. The world, like a lonely adolescent, aches, too, in its separateness. We live in a world deeply deeply divided.”

One last quote from Allen Hunt: **“Protesting” reflected my own pride, my own desires, and my own spirit of dissension more than anything else. The answer was the Church. It already existed, and I merely needed to come to it.**

Sometimes I did not agree with my parents rules when I was younger and now that I am older I see the wisdom behind most of them. God though is the perfect parent and therefore He has the perfect reason for everything even if we do not understand it. Remember we are time bound and limited and God is infinite and wiser than we can ever imagine.