

## Chapter 11 - Loose Ends Finally Tied

During my Junior year of college the charismatic prayer group at the Newman Center saw a growth spurt. Four new regulars joined us. One of them, Todd, had just transferred in to pursue a Masters in counseling. It became clear, early on, that we did not see eye-to-eye on some issues. He stuck me as “legalistic,” a stickler for Church discipline: any rule that the Church laid down, well, that’s just the way it was. His manner wasn’t what you would call subtle either.<sup>180</sup> When he began talking up the book *Catholicism & Fundamentalism*, offering to lend out his copy, I was too biased to take him up on it. As you will see though, God had another plan.

When I returned to St. Louis for spring break I helped my old youth minister, Paul, give a retreat to eighth graders preparing for Confirmation. I remember one of the more thoughtful retreatants coming up at the end of the day to ask a few pointed questions. One of them must have been about the papacy because I can distinctly recall Paul saying, “Starting with John Paul II we can follow an unbroken trail of successors straight back to the Apostle Peter. I’ve got some literature on it if you’d like to check it out.” I had heard that claim before, but never from Paul’s lips; and while the existence of the papacy in the Middle Ages was common knowledge, I had never actually *seen* the historical proof for it from the earliest days of the Church

As Paul and I drove home together he told me about some exciting audiocassettes by a Presbyterian minister who had converted to Catholicism, Scott Hahn. Paul described him as brilliant: at the age of twenty-six he had been offered a position as dean of a seminary. He turned it down, however, because his intense study of Scripture was pointing him toward the Catholic Church. Since his conversion, in debates with evangelical theologians, he had reportedly been dazzling his opponents with the biblical basis for the Catholic faith. Because of my love for Scripture, and my conviction that it contained Catholic doctrine, you can understand why I was anxious to hear this guy for myself. Paul offered to loan me Hahn’s conversion story as well as a tape on the papacy entitled, *The Pope: Holy Father*.

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<sup>180</sup> Please don’t think me uncharitable. Todd and I are good friends today; and I know he would say the same about himself during that period.

Hahn did not disappoint. He was sincere, passionate, and more knowledgeable than any speaker I had heard. At the beginning of Hahn's story he had held strong anti-Catholic convictions: the Catholic Church had introduced corruptions, piling purely human traditions onto the teachings of Scripture. His conversion was a detective story; the Holy Spirit led him, through Scripture, to recognize one Catholic belief after another. His teaching on the relationship of Scripture, Tradition, and the teaching authority of the Church was amazing.

In retrospect I can see that the Holy Spirit had been leading me down this path for some time. Up until that point my justification for believing that God speaks through Tradition, as well as Scripture, was dismissed by evangelical brothers and sisters I discussed these things with: "The Bible doesn't *clearly* say that;" "Traditions might be helpful, but they're *never* binding or authoritative in the way the Bible is." And yet, there were verses like *1 Timothy 3:15*, "the church of the living God [is] the pillar and bulwark of the truth," demonstrating exactly what my evangelical friends had asked for. (We will explore this more in depth in the next chapter.)

And the tape on the papacy – what a God-send! The very first thing he addressed was *Matthew 16:17-19's* usage of *Petros* and *petra*. Hahn demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus did designate Simon-Peter as the Rock on which His Church would be built, and here was the real beauty - Hahn used *Protestant* biblical scholars to do it.<sup>181</sup>

In both of the tapes I listened to, Hahn recommend books for further study. The first was *Catholicism & Fundamentalism* by Karl Keating, the same book Todd had recommended. It turned out that Karl Keating was the head of a Catholic apologetics organization, Catholic Answers (I had never heard of someone doing *Catholic* apologetics). When I spoke to Todd he was more than happy to loan me the book. He was already familiar with Hahn and expressed surprise that I would agree with Hahn's strong views on papal authority. I clarified that I had no difficulty believing that the Pope spoke authoritatively on matters of doctrine and morality, but that the jury

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<sup>181</sup> Not that these scholars would have followed the Catholic Church in its convictions about the papacy. They did, however, agree with the Catholic Church's traditional interpretation that Peter was the Rock on which Christ built His Church.