

## **The Ship and the Rafts**

A Catholic Convert Looks Back

By Steve Ray

Imagine a king who establishes a new country on the other side of the ocean. In order to populate his new land, he chooses the people that he wants to make citizens. Next, he builds a ship and prepares his chosen people for the long journey across the ocean.

The ship he provides is a large, beautiful ocean liner well-equipped with everything needed for the journey: food and water, showers with hot water, navigation charts, a crew and captain, and power to move the ship. The king puts everyone he has chosen aboard this ship and sends them on their way to their new home. Everything needed to reach the new country can be found aboard that ship.

Of course, the founder of this new country is God, the new country is heaven, and you and I are the ones he has chosen to journey there. The ship that He built is the Catholic Church, the captain is the pope, and the crew is the bishops, priests and deacons. The navigation charts are Scripture and Tradition. The showers are the sacraments of baptism and reconciliation, and the food and water for the journey is the Eucharist. The power that moves the ship is the Holy Spirit. Everything we need to reach heaven can be found within the Catholic Church.

The journey goes smoothly until the ship is halfway across the ocean. Then, some of the passengers start to argue and protest. Like the Israelites who grumbled about the manna in the desert, they begin to complain about eating the same food all the time. They ask, “Who is this captain, and why should he be in charge? Who gave these crew members the right to tell us what to do?”

The protesters go down into the bottom of the ship where they find wood and rope, and they build rafts for themselves. They collect food and water, clothing and anything else they can find, and throw themselves

and their rafts over the side of the ship. Now, they don't have to listen to the captain and crew, or eat that same old food or even take those hot showers which made them uncomfortable. They are free!

The scene is amazing. Instead of a single ship sailing for its home port, there are now 33,000 or more small rafts in the water around the ship! (The Oxford University Encyclopedia of Christianity says there are 33,000 Protestant denominations today with more being added to this number each year.) Now this beautiful ship is surrounded by 33,000 rafts bobbing around it—each with its own captain giving conflicting and contradictory orders.

As the ship continues toward heaven, some of the rafts remain close by, but others drift off into the distance, and some are moving in the opposite direction and have lost their way completely. Those rafts that are close to the ship are sheltered from some of the wind and waves; those farther away are tossed about during the storms. The farther away they are, the less chance they have to make it to the other side.

Everything good on board the rafts came from the ship, but now they are cut off. Eventually, the food runs out, and the people begin to eat something other than what the king provided. There are no showers available for the people to get clean again.

When I was a Protestant, I never realized that everything good that I had came from the Catholic Church. For example, the Bible was put together by Catholic bishops and copied and preserved by Catholic monks. Martin Luther even admitted that we wouldn't have a Bible if it were not for "the papists." My Protestant fellowship only had two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, while the Catholic Church has seven. Those who are still out on the rafts need to be reminded that everything they have, they got from the Mother ship.

One interesting point is that I did not jump off the ship; I was born on a raft. For a long time, I didn't even know there was ship—it was nowhere in sight! I was born on a Baptist raft, and I could yell over to the

Methodist raft, and they could yell over to the Episcopalian raft, and they could yell over to the Anglican raft, and so forth. We called that fellowship.

Then one day, I caught a glimpse of something large on the horizon, and I said, “Hey, what is that?” They answered, “We don’t want to talk about it.” “Why not,” I asked. “Because it’s bad.” “What is it?” “It’s the ship.” Out of ignorance, I accepted the idea that the ship was bad.

One day, however, it dawned on me that that the founder of the country I was trying to reach had created the ship to carry me home safely. “Of course,” I thought. “Why would God create 33,000 rafts competing to ferry His people home?” After reading and researching and praying, I got back on board the ship. I became a Catholic, and I’m amazed at what I have found onboard.

Cradle Catholics may take these things for granted, but we converts are in awe. You have seven sacraments, and they work! You have navigation charts: the Scriptures and the Tradition that helps you make sense of the maps. You have a crew that understands how to read the maps and charts without error, how to prepare the food, the Eucharist, properly, and how to operate the showers so that we can get cleaned up from all the foul-smelling sins we commit. You also have a captain, the Pope, who actually knows where he’s going!