

Joyful Good News

for

Young and Old

Victor Galeone



Magnificat Institute Press
Houston
2014

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First Edition, 2014 by Magnificat Institute Press, P.O. Box 60591, Houston, TX 77205.

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Cover design by Sallie Saltzman at saltzmandesign.com

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN 978-0-9657125-7-6

Library of Congress Card Catalog Number: 2014946017

References are found in the Endnotes after the Epilogue.

To all those—young and old alike—
who feel a frustrating void deep in their hearts.

May that God-shaped void be filled
with the love of Jesus, the source of all our joy!

Acknowledgements

Gerard B. Tall, Jr.

Nancy Ellis

Joe Difato

Rev. Michael Morgan, J.D., J.C.L.

Thomas Umlauf

Brother Anthony Maria

Abbot Stanislaus Gumula, O.C.S.O.

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INTRODUCTION

The following reflection, *One Solitary Life*, may be familiar to you. If so, please read it again—but this time, slowly and thoughtfully:

Here is a young man, the child of a peasant woman.
He was born in an obscure village, and grew up in another village,
 where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty.
Then for three years he became a wandering preacher.
He never went to college. He never held an office.
He never had a family. He never led an army.
He never traveled two hundred miles from the place of his birth.
He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness.
He had no credentials but himself.
While still a young man,
 the tide of public opinion turned against him.
His friends ran away. One of them denied him.
Another turned him traitor. He went through the mockery of a trial.
He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.
While he was dying, his executioners gambled
 for the only thing he owned on this earth—his clothing.
When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave
 through the pity of a friend.
Twenty centuries wide have come and gone,
 and today he is the central figure of the human race
 and the leader of the column of progress.
I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever
marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments
that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned—put together—have
not affected the life of man upon this earth as much as that
 One Solitary Life.

—Anonymous, late 1800s

Many people consider the preceding tribute to Jesus to be a gross exaggeration. But those who do so should realize that every single human being who ever walked our earth is stamped with the birth year of a crucified Galilean Jew: BC or AD.

BC = Before Christ / **AD** = *Anno Domini* (Year of Our Lord). While some groups do have their own systems for dating events—e.g. Jews, from the creation of the world, and Muslims, from the call of Mohammad, etc—but for validity, all their official documents must also contain the actual “AD year” in parentheses.

No certified document is valid without referring to the year when Jesus was born. Contracts, passports, birth certificates, etc—must all contain the date of the year they were issued: 1935, 1967, 2014—that is, two thousand and fourteen years since the birth of Jesus.

Some years ago I made a modest donation to a charitable group via a personal check. In a few days, my check was returned with a note: “Fill in the date. Check is non-negotiable without a date.” In writing a check, a person acknowledges—unwittingly—that Jesus is the central figure of human history.

You are about to embark on a journey—a journey to look at Jesus in a new way. While he may be the central figure of human history, in reality, he wants to be the central figure of every human heart.

The human heart was made for joy, not for sadness. It withers when confronted with sorrow; it expands when bathed in joy. Jesus came to flood our hearts with that joy that we all crave. This is the message of Pope Francis’s Apostolic Letter, *The Joy of the Gospel*, as well.

In the mid-1980s Mother Teresa opened an AIDS hospice in Washington DC, staffed by her Sisters. At the hospice some years ago, a man dying of AIDS requested to be baptized. When the priest asked him for an expression of faith, the dying man whispered: “All I know is that I’m miserable, and these Sisters are always happy—even when I curse them. Yesterday, I asked one of them why she was so happy. She answered, ‘Jesus.’ Well I want this Jesus, so that I can be happy too.”

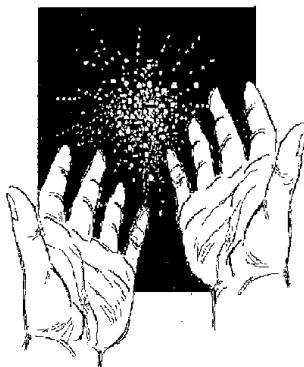
In closing, I will cite an anecdote concerning the late Cardinal Avery Dulles, the son of President Eisenhower’s Secretary of State. While studying law at Harvard, the young Dulles became an agnostic. But as he walked along the Charles River one afternoon, the beauty of the spring blossoms and the serenading birds so moved him that he realized that the beauty and purpose in nature was meaningless without an all-powerful God. He later became a Catholic, and then went on to be ordained a Jesuit priest.

While he was teaching theology at the Catholic University during the 1960s, one day a student asked him, “Father Dulles, what would you consider to be the most important event of your career?”

Without a pause, Dulles responded, “The most important thing about my career...is the discovery of the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in the field—the Lord Jesus himself.”

This book was written to help everyone, young and old—but especially Catholic youth and young adults who no longer practice their faith, to experience the joy of discovering that “treasure hidden in the field.”

1. Can I Be Sure That God Exists?



Al: Jo, why don't you believe in God?

Jo: Because I don't believe in the Bible.

Al: You don't need the Bible to show that God exists. You just have to use your head.

Jo: Nonsense!

Al: Let's say that we're walking along the seashore with not a soul in sight. Scrawled in the sand we see the words, "John loves Sally." I remark, "Hey, look what a seagull did!" Would you buy that?

Jo: Of course not!

Al: Then maybe it was the wind or the waves.

Jo: Impossible!

Al: Well, who put it there? No one's around.

Jo: Maybe someone who was there earlier—perhaps a jogger.

Al: Right on! An intelligible message requires an intelligent source.

Jo: Absolutely!

Al: Let's apply that to the human cell. There's more information in a single human cell than in all 30 volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Well, how did all that information get there?

Jo: It just accumulated over eons of time.

Al: Blind chance cannot produce an intelligible message. What if you saw these letters on a Scrabble board, NDZKAWJXDE?

Jo: I'd say that someone drew those letters at random.

- Al:** Is that true of TOBEORNOTTOBETHATISTHEQUESTION?
- Jo:** No. They were deliberately arranged.
- Al:** True! So if inanimate forces like the wind and the waves cannot form three simple words in the sand, how much less can blind chance encode all the DNA information in every single living cell!
- Jo:** Just a minute! Snowflakes are produced by chance, and no two snowflakes are ever alike.
- Al:** That's true! Snowflakes are what scientists classify as patterns, which occur naturally with no help from a designer. But codes do not occur without an intelligent designer. Examples of codes include music and languages—like English—computer programs, and yes, DNA. Our minds will not rest until we admit that an Intelligent Designer is responsible for all that DNA information.
- Jo:** Well, if there is a God, how can he tolerate so much evil and suffering in the world?
- Al:** We'll get to that. But first, I want to ask some questions from general science. The moon is 240,000 miles distant from earth. What would happen if it were 50,000 miles closer?
- Jo:** There would be daily tsunamis and tidal waves everywhere.
- Al:** And what would the earth be like if there was considerably more oxygen in the atmosphere?
- Jo:** We'd have countless forest fires throughout the globe.
- Al:** And if the oxygen were a great deal less?
- Jo:** The advanced animals—like human beings—could not survive.
- Al:** Have you ever wondered why water is practically the only exception to the rule of the expansion and contraction of matter?
- Jo:** I don't follow you.
- Al:** In nature, most substances expand when heated and *contract* when cooled, except for water. From 100° to 4° Celsius, water—like all other substances—contracts. But from 4° to 0° water reverses itself and starts to expand again, causing the ice to float. But if water kept on contracting as it approached 0°, ice would form on the bottom, due to its heavier density. How would that affect the lakes, ponds, and rivers up North during the winter?
- Jo:** They'd freeze solid from the bottom up—since there would be no insulating icecap on top to keep the water below from freezing.

- Al:** Exactly—destroying all the marine life in the process! Jo, do you think that all these examples I've been citing happened by mere chance?
- Jo:** I see where you're going, but I don't buy it. It's a scientific fact that all species evolved on their own through natural selection.
- Al:** Evolution—that is, macro-evolution—is not a fact but a theory, and a *weak* one at that! For a species to evolve from lower forms, there should be countless intermediate stages. But the fossil record is blank. No missing links have ever been found.
- Jo:** What about the Piltdown man?
- Al:** After being duped for 40 years, the British Museum of Natural History reported that the Piltdown man was the biggest hoax in the history of paleontology (the study of fossils).
- Jo:** Well, you still haven't explained why God allows so much evil in the world.
- Al:** In saying there's evil in the world, aren't you assuming that there's such a thing as good?
- Jo:** Yes, of course.
- Al:** How do you tell the difference between the two?
- Jo:** The same way I distinguish between red and green.
- Al:** Just a moment! You tell the difference between red and green by seeing, don't you?
- Jo:** Of course.
- Al:** But you can't see good and evil, can you? So again, how do you tell them apart?
- Jo:** On the basis of feeling; how else?
- Al:** In some cultures, they love their neighbors; in others, they eat them—both on the basis of feeling. Do you have a preference?
- Jo:** Hmm. I get your point.
- Al:** So by admitting there's evil in the world, don't you have to admit there's also good? And in admitting that there's good, don't you have to admit a moral law to distinguish good from evil?¹
- Jo:** I suppose so.
- Al:** And by acknowledging a moral law, don't you also have to admit a Moral Lawgiver?

Jo: Why would a Moral Lawgiver permit evil?

AI: Because he gave us free will—the power to choose. In so doing, he took the risk that we might reject him by choosing what's evil.

Jo: Why would he have done that?

AI: Because God doesn't want robots or slaves. He wants us to freely choose to love him. That's the tragedy of our first parents

Jo: So you want me to buy all that nonsense about Adam and Eve and original sin, do you?

AI: You don't need the Bible to prove original sin, Jo. You only have to check the daily newspaper!

Jo: You mean about wars, murders and other gruesome crimes?

AI: Exactly! And that forces us to conclude: Something is radically wrong in human nature. We trace that radical evil back to our first parents. In order to have them prove their love, God put them to a test—a test they failed. *They wanted to decide what was right or wrong.* As a result, we all inherited their rebellion.

Jo: That seems so unfair.

AI: Not any more unfair than if you had a grandfather, who greedily squandered the family inheritance on risky, senseless gambling. What did he have to pass on to you, his descendant?

Jo: Not a penny.

AI: You're right. He blew it all through greed. And that's just about what original sin is like: It's the loss of God's friendship in our lives—something we had no right to. But God did not leave us orphans. He promised to send us a Savior—someone to make amends for all the evil in the world.

And that's what we'll be examining in our future discussions.

From Atheist to Catholic

Jennifer Fulwiler “always thought it was obvious that God did not exist.” She grew up a content atheist. Having a profound respect for knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge, she was convinced that religion and reason were incompatible. Not surprisingly, she was also emphatically anti-Christian and, especially, anti-Catholic. “Catholic beliefs seemed bizarre and weird,” she says.

Fulwiler would have been astonished to know that she and Joe Fulwiler, her husband, would come to embrace those “bizarre,”

"weird" beliefs. On Easter 2007, they entered the Catholic Church with deep joy and a sense of coming home!

Nona Aguilar, a correspondent for the *National Catholic Register*, interviewed Jennifer Fulwiler about her unexpected journey:

There is always a first step that leads to belief in God. What was yours?

Thanks to meeting and knowing my husband, I learned that belief in God is not fundamentally unreasonable. We met at the high-tech company where we both worked. Joe believed in God—something that, fortunately, I didn't know for a while.

Why was that fortunate?

To me, belief in God was so unreasonable that, by definition, no reasonable person could believe in such a thing! Had I known that Joe believed in God, I would never have dated him.

What was your reaction when you found out?

It gave me pause. Joe is too smart—brilliant, really, with degrees from Yale, Columbia and Stanford—to believe in something nonsensical. I also met many of his friends. They, too, are highly intelligent—some with MDs and PhDs from schools like Harvard and Princeton—and believed.

What caused you to consider the question more seriously?

I have always been a truth-seeker, which is why I was an atheist. But I had a prideful, arrogant way of approaching questions about life and meaning. I now realize that pride is the most effective way to block out God so that one doesn't see him at all. Certainly, I didn't.

The birth of our first child motivated me to seek the truth with humility. I can't emphasize this point enough: Humility, true humility is crucial to the conversion process.

Was your husband a help in this process?

Eventually, but not at first. Religion wasn't something we talked about. Joe was a non-churchgoing Baptist, which was fine by me. In fact, since I was an atheist, I considered not talking about God to be a good compromise. Our lives were completely secular—just like our wedding.

Was there ever an Aha! moment that finally made you abandon atheism?

Several, but one in particular actually shocked me. I asked myself two questions: What is information? And: Can information ever come from a non-intelligent source?

It was a shocking moment for me because I had to confront the fact that DNA is information. If I remained an atheist, I would have to believe that all the intricate, detailed, complex information contained in DNA comes out of nowhere and nothing.

But I also knew that idea did not make sense. After all, I don't look at billboards—which contain much simpler information than DNA—and think that wind and erosion created them. That wouldn't be rational. Suddenly, I found that I was a very discomfited atheist.

Is that the point at which you began to believe in God?

No. But now I was a reluctant atheist. I had lots of questions but knew no one who might have answers. So, coming from the high-tech world, where did I go for answers? I put up a blog, of course! I started posting tough questions on my blog.

One matter stood out from the beginning: The best, most thoughtful responses came from Catholics. Incidentally, their answers were consistently better than the ones from atheists. It intrigued me that Catholics could handle anything I threw at them. Also, their responses reflected such an eminently reasonable worldview that I kept asking myself: How is it that Catholics have so much of this all figured out?

Was your husband helpful to you at this point?

As I started telling Joe some of the answers that I was getting, especially from Catholics, his own interest in religion—and Catholicism—was piqued. We have always been a great team, so it was wonderful that we were exploring the issues and questions together, especially since we were so anti-Catholic.

Both of you?

Yes. I thought the Church's views on most things, but especially marriage, contraception and abortion (since I was then ardently pro-choice), were simply crazy. Joe's anti-Catholicism, while different, was stronger and more settled. He didn't understand any Catholic doctrine or apologetics, so he fell into a stereotyped view of Catholics, thinking that they made idols of the pope and Mary, etc.²

There seems to be an uncanny similarity between Judeo-Christian theology and the new information theory, like DNA:

And God **said**, "Let there be light...." (Gn 1 & ff.)

"The heavens were made by the **word** of the Lord...

The Lord **spoke**, and the world came to be..." (Ps 33:6, 9)

"In the beginning was the **Word**...

through him all things were made." (Jn 1:1-3)