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## Conversion of Doctor David A. White

A True Story



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The Catholic Faith at the US Naval Academy

## The Conversion of Dr. David A. White

Professor of literature at the U.S. Naval Academy

**Dr. White converted to the Catholic Faith in 1979. He has won some 35 converts at the U.S. Naval Academy to the Catholic Faith. Here is his story:**

Since I am a professor of Literature, I'll tell a story.

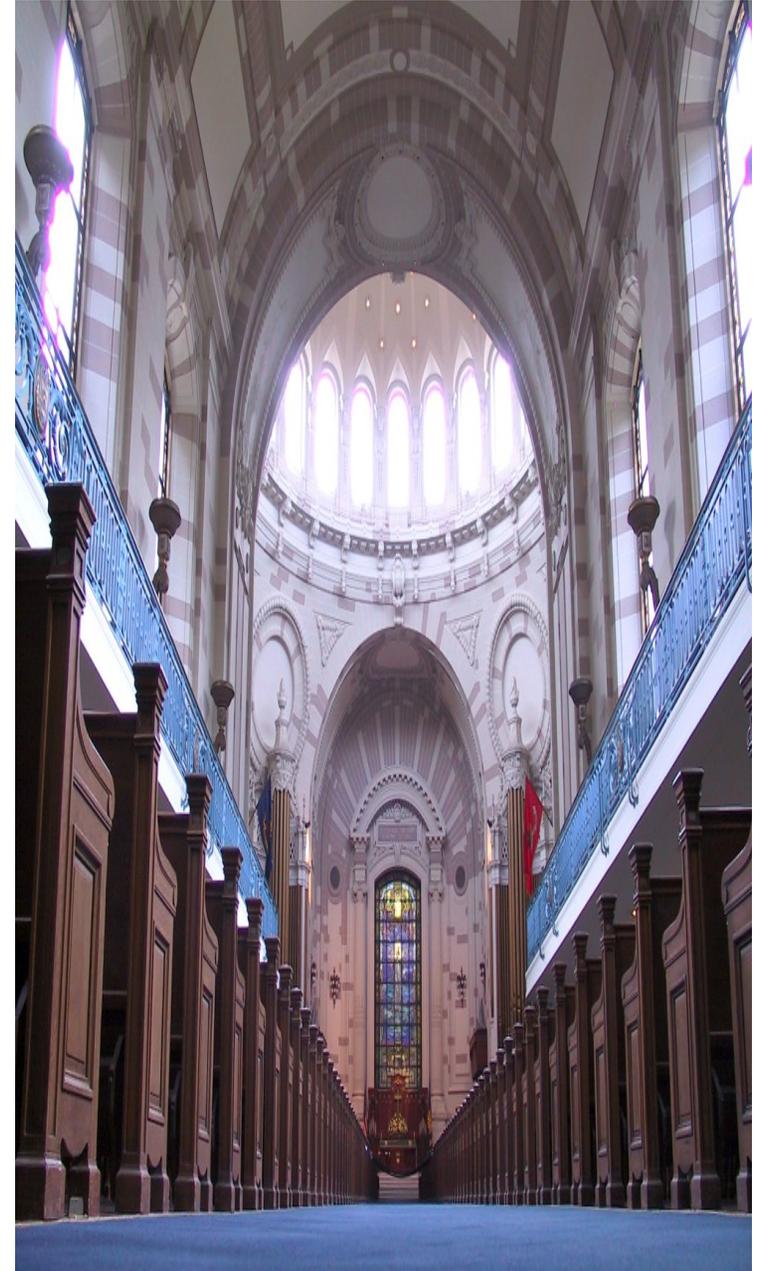
I converted to the Catholic Church at the age of thirty-one, some years ago. I was raised liberal Protestant. That adjective is extremely important because there are Protestants who know their Bible, who know something of Christian doctrine. They're the fundamentalists-hard-core conservative ones.

I was raised liberal Protestant which means I had an upbringing in terms of church-going, of church suppers, and there were some lovely people. I was lucky to be raised in a very good home with good parents but I never received any real religious training. I memorized a few scripture verses. Occasionally I would go and sit through a Sunday morning worship ceremony in the bare church, not pay attention to the sermon, sing a few hymns and then go home. That was about it. This means that when I was seventeen and was free and went off to university, I just gave the whole thing up.

I say in sorrow, by the way, that this is what I now see my Catholic students doing. Very often, when the young people leave home, as soon as they get away, they stop going to Church. I know that. That's what I did. It is a mark of Protestantism, because there is nothing there to hold on to and they know it. As a result they leave.

So I went into the university, a modern university, where they taught me the three things that I think you get at a modern university: hate your family, hate your country, hate God (Who "doesn't exist," but hate Him anyway). That's what my head was filled with. So that when I graduated and went on to graduate school, my head was filled with absolute nonsense. I still knew nothing about religion, although I would talk about it at length, mainly to try to debunk it. As far as I was concerned, there was only nature. Nature was all we needed. Everything was material. There was really only one "Commandment", that was, "We should be nice to each other even though life has no meaning" – which is a very peculiar thought.

When I began teaching, that's the sort of nonsense I was teaching. Absolute nonsense, because I knew nothing. I had no business being in front of a class teaching anything because I didn't know anything. But I was a modern teacher with a head full of feathers and sawdust that I spewed out around the room. Then one day, when I was teaching at Temple University in Philadelphia, I had a student in the back of the class, who raised his hand and challenged me. He began debating me in the classroom. In no time at all, I became aware of a situation that most teachers live in



There you have the one cultural fruit of the Novus Ordo Mass. If you expect anything other than that from that ceremony, I would say, you're not going to get it. The best you can hope for is the kind of barrenness that Protestant worship has given to the world. Protestant worship has not produced great art, great music. It's given us a few good hymns, but it has produced very little and now it's fading away. There is nothing more to produce. The same will be true with the new Mass.

It's time for those in the Church to come home to the true Mass. The Mass is our heritage, even for those of us who were not born into it. It is our heritage. I thank God every day that I found it. When I get up on Sunday mornings and make the hour drive to the Tridentine Mass, it's nothing compared to the great glory and beauty of the majestic Sacrifice that awaits me there on the altar when I arrive.

terror of: I had a student in my class who knew a hundred times more than what I knew. I was an absolute ignoramus and this student was really smart.

Now the only thing I can say to my credit is that I began coming into class – I am not making this up, this is not an exaggeration – I would come into class with a note book, stand at the podium, ask the young man a question and then take notes of the answers he gave.

This is one of many illustrations that the modern world, in every detail, is a place of inversion. The symbol of the devil is a man turned upside down. If you look at anything in the modern world, it's inverted. My classroom was inverted. I was being paid to teach and I was standing at the podium taking notes from a student who knew something. Now fortunately, I was lucky enough to get a quick education. The rest of the students really didn't care. Most of them slept through it, which is what they'd been doing during most of my lectures anyway. Well the long and the short of it was, we debated, we talked for hours, for days, for weeks. And he won every debate, every single debate. God be praised that I had a logical head so that I could follow an argument and know when I'd lost one. I lost every debate we had.

Now if you pursue questions of truth; that is, is there truth, how can we know it? If there is truth, what do we do about it? Where do we find it? You're going to end up at Christ. It's going to happen. So at that point, I realized that Christ and His message is not only important and serious, but it is true. Having realized this, it was clear that I had to get involved with some church.

There were two choices: the fundamentalist Protestants, because they seem to know their Bible, and they do believe in something; or the Catholic Church.

As a student of literature and as a professor of literature, I knew something about the past. Now, the great writer Evelyn Waugh, who converted to Catholicism, said of the Catholic Church that "in considering it, any man has to know that it is true because it presents a coherent philosophical system that makes intransigent historical claims." If you look at the philosophy of the Catholic Church, it is air tight, it is reasonable and complete. If you look at the history of the Church over two thousand years, it has given us everything that is good. Hence, how could it not be true? Therefore when the time came I chose the Catholic Church.

Now my student who had challenged me in class had converted about six months before I did. He had not been a Catholic either; he was simply an honest mind seeking the truth. He had walked into a Catholic Church and said to the priest, "I want to become a Catholic." It wasn't long before this young man was battling with the priest who was supposed to be giving instruction, because the priest was presenting a whole series of new ideas in a new way. This brilliant young man was rightly challenging these new ideas, saying to the priest, "No, Father, the Church teaches this...".

So you now had a convert instructing the priest in the Faith. My friend did not want me to go through that experience. He went all around the Philadelphia area until he found an elderly Irish Monsignor, out in one of the suburbs, who had the Faith. So once a week, I would take the train to go out there and receive real instruction from a priest who had the Catholic Faith. It was a great blessing. I would also go out to his Mass, the Novus Ordo, which he said very reverently.

So at the beginning of my conversion, I wasn't quite aware of what had happened regarding the liturgy. But after I was received into the Church, I decided to attend Mass in center city Philadelphia, where I was living at the time. Suddenly, I walked into something that looked just like the empty Protestant service I had left when I was seventeen. I'd been there, I'd seen it, I knew it. I thought, what is this? This can't be what I've joined, this can't be what it's about. Two thousand years can't have come to this! I've already rejected this. Nonetheless, I still went to this new Mass for a while. Then I began doing the same thing again; I would sleep in on Sunday mornings because there didn't seem to be a reason to go.

Then one summer I was home visiting in Wisconsin where I am originally from. I decided to fulfill my duty and go to Mass. I got in the car to drive to Church "A". It was my intention to drive to Church "A", St. Patrick's. I knew where it was. I backed out of the driveway, I headed for St. Patrick's and somehow, I arrived at Church "B", on the other side of town. It was one of those oddities. I was thinking about other things, I was not paying attention. I wound up not just at the wrong church, but at a church miles away from the one I intended to go to. I was at Sacred Heart Parish and I didn't know how I got there.

I looked in. They had a Mass starting. I was just baffled. What am I doing here? But I thought, I don't have time to get over to St. Patrick's. I'll go to Mass here. I walked inside and heard "Introibo ad altare Dei", and my goodness, there it was. I heard this strange language. There was the priest with his back to us. I had no idea what was happening. I then realized that this was that "Old Mass" I'd heard about. About half way through it, I said to myself, this is Catholic! And I was home at a place that I had never known before.

The old Mass, for me, at that moment, was entirely new. It was not "old". It was home! At that instant I knew that this is what the Catholic Faith is all about. I knew that this is how I would worship God in the future. I mentioned earlier that all good things have come out of that Old Latin Mass, the Mass of all time. I'll give you examples.

I teach literature; I have a special love for music and for art. It is the Mass that gave us western music. The oldest western music we have written is Gregorian Chant. If you take a music history course, you'll begin with Chant, continue through Church music, and you won't find music secularized until much later. But even when music becomes secularized, you're still going to have Mozart writing Masses and Haydn writing Masses. You'll even have someone like Beethoven who wrestled with God his whole life, still writing the great "Missa solennis" and seeing the priest on his death bed. That is the traditional music.

If you go to Western art, it is Catholic. It grows out of the Church. That's where it comes from. Western art as we know it comes from the Church. Go to an art gallery. Go back to the beginning of art and, (aside from Greece and Rome – still the beginning of art as we know it) the great Renaissance works – their subject matter is Catholic.

Go to literature, and you have Dante, you have Shakespeare. The writers have been Catholic. All of that came out of the Mass.

The Novus Ordo Mass, in the thirty years its been around, has given us lousy music, lousy literature, putrid liturgical dancing. In fact, it has only given us one thing that has actually caught on and become culturally significant. And when I heard this, I nearly fell off my chair, but it's true. The New Mass gave us one thing that the culture knows, and that is Beavis and Butthead – that ghastly, ghastly cartoon series that all your children know from MTV. I heard the creator of it speaking on television. He was asked how he came up with the idea. He answered, "Well I was sitting at Mass in my Catholic high school, and I wasn't really paying attention, and the priest said 'this is the body of Christ' and this guy behind me went 'heh heh heh heh heh heh heh,' and suddenly I got the whole thing in my mind and started drawing Beavis and Butthead."