

“New Age To Catholic” by Barbara Graver

For the mountains shall be moved, and the hills shall tremble; but my mercy shall not depart from thee, and the covenant of my peace shall not be moved... - Isaiah 54:10 (Douay Rheims)

Lost in the Dark

It was early 2017 and my life was humming.

My blog, The Mystic Review, was receiving hundreds of visits a day. My internet radio show featured interviews with internationally known metaphysical authors and teachers. I taught tarot part-time at our local holistic center. My home-based card reading business was growing and my readings were a hit at every psychic fair.

I had been studying the occult in earnest for seven years. During that time, I investigated the paranormal and trained with the Spiritualists. Joined and left a coven. Started a local metaphysical society and began my own Wiccan circle.

I had taken courses in energy medicine, astral projection, psychic development, astrology, angel card reading and more. I had also read 100s of books. Angels. Astrology. Numerology. Tarot. Mediumship. Ufology. Spiritualism. Witchcraft.

And, on a level, it had all paid off.

I had received verifiable psychic information, recorded clear unedited EVPs, seen beautiful visions and dreamed incredible dreams. And every experience, every seemingly meaningful revelation, had found its way into the Mystic Review and the hearts and minds of an ever-increasing readership.

But by the spring of 2017, I was starting to realize that something was off. It was a feeling I was able to trace back to a series of family problems that had taken up most of 2016.

Our Challenges

I left the Church in 2001 in the wake of a family tragedy. And now our family was facing more challenges. It began in the fall of 2015, when my youngest son accompanied me on a trip to New England.

I had been eager to make the trip ever since I discovered that my great, great, great, great aunt Rebecca Nurse had been hung in the witch trials at Salem. To me, this

wasn't just some interesting piece of family trivia. It was a connection between my family heritage and the life I was now embracing.

My belief system then was a hodge-podge of New Age beliefs about angels and guides, Spiritualist ideas about the "other side" and the so-called earth-based "religion" of Wicca. None of these beliefs were widely accepted in the still largely Catholic area in which I lived. But Salem was another story. In Salem witchcraft, and other forms of "alternate spirituality," were embraced, it seemed, by the entire community. And I loved being there.

I loved seeing witches walking the streets, cloaked and hooded and oh so secure in their identity. I felt a strong sense of camaraderie as I stood in the center of the large, boisterous group, taking photos of the Samantha Stevens statue in the center of town. I bought incense from a shop owned by a Wiccan author I admired. I embraced the high spirits and outright celebration of all things witchy.

And somehow, in the midst of all that excitement, I barely noticed that my son was struggling to keep up. When he finally sat down on a bench, unable to go on, I thought about how he needed to lose weight. I resolved to manifest good health. And then I dismissed it.

Less than two months later, he was in the hospital fighting for his life. He had contracted a virus, the doctor's guessed, which - undetected - had slowly attacked his heart, leading to some very serious complications. After a series of hospitalizations and a pacemaker, his condition stabilized. But the damage to his heart could not be reversed.

We fielded one medical emergency after another for most of 2016. But as the new year approached, I began to take stock. And one thing stood out. A single question I was unable to answer.

Why hadn't the spirit guides I relied on so heavily told me my son was sick?

These were the same guides who had given me targeted and specific information for medium readings and card readings - over and over again. But when it came to my son, they had been silent.

For the first time, I began to wonder just why that was.

Digging Deep

I realized that answering the question of why my guides hadn't warned me about my son was dependent on another more fundamental question, one that had been troubling me since the beginning of foray into the New Age and occult.

Who were these beings exactly?

Depending on which New Age or occult topic I was studying at a given time, I had called these spirits angels, spiritual guides, ascended masters, alien beings, or deities. But I had never been sure of any of those labels. Now, in the spring of 2017, I needed to overcome my uncertainty. So I decided to take a closer look at the sources that lead to my guides.

I began my research thinking I knew just about everything there was to know. But it wasn't long before I realized that some important pieces had been left out.

I began with the founders of Spiritualism and the New Age.

- I already knew that the spiritualist movement had begun in 1848, when three young girls in Hydesville, New York began to receive messages from an unseen presence. I now found out, among other things, that the girl's called this entity Mr. Splitfoot, a known moniker for Satan.
- I researched the "mother of the New Age," occultist Helena Blavatsky, and the supernatural beings or "ascended masters" who spoke through her and her protégé Alice Bailey. In doing so, I learned that in addition to getting all her information from spirits, Blavatsky had called her 1875 magazine Lucifer and that Bailey went on to call her own publishing company Lucifer Press.
- I moved on to Kentucky born trance medium and father of the New Age Edgar Cayce who began to give psychic health readings in 1910 and soon branched out to share information that was very similar to Blavatsky's. Like Blavatski, Bailey and others, Cayce received his information from invisible beings.

Then I turned my attention to the occultists who had openly promoted divination and witchcraft.

- In 1904 Aleister Crowley, a member of the occult organization The Golden Dawn, published The Book of the Law, which he claimed to have written in an hour under the influence of an angel called Aiwass who had first come to him in the Great Pyramid in Egypt. According to Aiwass, humans were entering into a new stage of spiritual evolution. The guiding principle of this new age was the now familiar maxim, "Do what thou wilt."
- In the 1940s, nudist and Freemason Gerald Gardner used sources that included material from Freemasonry, the Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley's writings,

to create the “religion” of modern day witchcraft or Wicca. Crowley’s maxim of “do what thou wilt” became central to Gardner’s Wiccan Rede which is still the guiding principle of Wicca.

- In 1944, Crowley created his own tarot deck. But it was another fellow Golden Dawn member, Arthur Waite, who published the deck that took the occult world by storm. Easier to use than earlier decks, it became the deck of choice for the great majority of tarot readers (including me).

And now, as I concluded my research, I found that I had even more questions.

Where had the invisible beings I was communicating with come from? Why were they involved in my life? Did they really have my best interests - or those of my family - at heart?

I didn’t know, but in the weeks that followed, I began to feel a vague sense of unease about my guides and energy I sensed hovering behind my card readings. And it no longer felt friendly.

Going Toward the Light

Somehow, in the midst of all this, I started to feel drawn to Christianity and became interested in Gnosticism, which was as close as I could get to actual Christianity at the time.

But I was unsure. Unsure about Gnosticism and unsure about Christianity in general, and so, like a true newager I asked for a sign.

The next morning, I drove to the flea market through a slow steady kind of rain that promised to continue all day. I had eight dollars with me. This was a good twenty or thirty dollars less than I usually brought. But I didn’t think it would matter. I wasn’t sure if the flea market would be open at all and I knew that even if it was, vendors would be scarce.

When we pulled into the parking lot, I saw that I was right about the vendors. The large open area that was usually full of tables and tents was very near empty. The few sellers who had set up were spread out and the gravel lot was full of puddles. But we decided to put on our slickers and give it a shot.

One of the first things I spotted, as we made our way around the puddles, was a chalkware Blessed Mother. For some reason I couldn’t really explain, I’d been wanting one of those big old Mary statues for some time. Over the course of two

previous flea market seasons, I'd kept an eye out. But every statue I had seen was chipped or expensive or both.

The one in front of me that day was almost two feet tall and had virtually no damage. So I was surprised when the woman on the other side of the table said it was mine for five dollars. I'd never seen a statue quite like it. I liked the blue of Mary's cloak and the graceful curve of her neck and the look of humility on her face. I bought it without any negotiation.

A little further on, I saw a cold cast bronze St. Brigid's cross that was marked 'made in Ireland.' I asked the vendor the price, and he said a quarter. And then, when I couldn't find any change, he refused my dollar and insisted I take the cross for free. I was happy that I was able to tell him a bit about St. Brigid and what she had done so long ago in Ireland. And I started to get a good feeling about the day.

The next item that caught my eye was a bright silver crucifix shining brightly through the rain. When I got close, I could see that it had a glass holy water font and a place on either side of the crucifix for candles. I thought that the seller would probably want at least ten dollars for such a nice piece, but she didn't. She wanted three. So I got the crucifix too.

On the long damp ride home, it suddenly occurred to me that I had bought three items associated with the Christian faith and that I had gotten them on an unlikely day and for a surprisingly good price. But what struck me most was that I had bought them for the exact, to the penny, amount of money I had with me.

Exploring Christianity

For a while I toggled back and forth between Gnosticism and Christianity (which are not the same thing at all) but I realized pretty quickly that none of my flea market items had anything to do with Gnosticism. They were, however, obviously Christian. So I decided to give Christianity a chance.

Not long after, I had a dream that felt like a vision.

I was lying in bed that morning after the alarm went off, when the words, "this is the true church" drifted through my mind. Looking up, I saw that I was in an enormous, vaulted cathedral and that every inch of it was filled up with shimmering, golden light.

I felt a deep sense of peace and when I got up I heard a choir singing as if from very far away and that choir sang softly at the edge of my awareness all day long.

All that summer and into autumn I reacquainted myself with the Christian faith. As I did, I tried to fit Christianity into my existing belief system. While I no longer spoke to spirits, I continued to study astrology, perform card readings and teach card reading to others - though, at times, my discomfort was obvious.

Then one day, in the same room where I saw my card reading clients, I knew.

It was a moment of absolute clarity and in that moment, the occult lies I had based the last seven years of my life on just fell away. Somehow, the trance was broken. And the world felt raw, and the light seemed harsh.

But there was no going back.

Over the next few weeks, I left the metaphysical society, closed my card reading business, and canceled my upcoming card reading classes. I stopped attending New Age and occult events. I let those who didn't accept my new life go. I donated, sold and finally disposed of hundreds of metaphysical books and occult items.

Finally, in November of 2017, I wrote my very last entry in the Mystic Review.

Over the next few weeks, I did a church tour of several local churches and ended up at a Protestant church that was not a good fit and then found another that was.

I didn't spend any real time thinking about the Catholic church I had visited in the early days of the church tour or the fact that each of the items I bought that day at the flea market were Catholic in origin. And over two years would pass before I did.

My Return to the Faith

My return to Catholicism began in the beautiful old cathedrals of Israel.

I was not a cradle Catholic, though I did have early and positive experiences of the Catholic Church. Combined with other events, these experiences had lead me to convert to Catholicism as an adult. A few years later, my oldest son was profoundly disabled in motor vehicle accident. The Church was blameless in that but I blamed her, anyway.

I broke with the Church and was drawn into the occult.

I had never looked back. But now in Israel, I remembered how beautiful Catholicism could be.

I found myself genuflecting and crossing myself and praying half-forgotten Catholic prayers. And I had spiritual and practical experiences that moved me. But I returned to Pennsylvania fully intending to go back to the Protestant church I had been attending for the last several months.

That's when my car began to break down. Over and over again. Getting to the Protestant church in a nearby town proved impossible. Finally, after several weeks, I started to think about the two churches that I could walk to.

Both were Catholic. But after Israel I found that no longer bothered me.

So I walked down the street and went to Mass for the first time in what seemed like forever. And the next week I went back. And then, because I wanted to receive communion, I went to confession. And that was huge.

On that Saturday in March 2020, I was blessed to make my confession to an elderly priest who took my involvement in the occult very seriously.

I gave the patient, wheelchair bound priest an accounting of the last twenty years of my life and he led me in a full renunciation of the occult. And when I received absolution, I felt something lift off me that I hadn't even realized I had been carrying.

When I stepped into the sanctuary after confession, everything seemed strange. The lights were bright and the daylight streaming through the windows was even brighter. I felt off-kilter, but happy. No, not happy. Joyous. I felt like the new creature God promises that we can be.

Receiving communion that day was a blessing, and it continues to be a blessing to me still. And I was, and remain, grateful to have been called back to what is for me the one true Church.

In the days and weeks that followed, I read Catholic books and watched the Catholic station EWTN and listened to Catholic priests on YouTube. And everything I read and heard made sense.

One day, when I was watching Mother Angelica say the Rosary on EWTN, I was struck by the golden light that filled her Alabama sanctuary. To me, it looked just like the vision I'd had following that rainy day at the flea market.

I felt like I was finally where I belonged.

Over the next few months, I thought about the spiritual journey I'd made and the enormous circle that had brought me back to a place that is, and always was, just around the corner.

The items I bought on that rainy day at the flea market are gone and it occurs to me that there is some kind of a lesson in that. I'm not sure, just what that lesson is, but I think that maybe God doesn't want me to be the kind of Catholic I used to be. Or the kind of person I used to be.

I think that maybe He wants me to be something new.