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One Man's Journey

Robert Hart
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A search for deeper spiritual meaning can take many forms. Formal scholastic pursuits, an informal group study of scripture, or a monastic retreat are just a few options. Robert Hart, who converted to Catholicism after a life-changing experience with heart disease, chose an in-depth, extended period of personal reflection. *One Man's Journey* documents his search for a deeper understanding of God by following the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, which consist of prayers, meditations, and mental exercises.

Hart had been active in several international business ventures, but after three major heart attacks, the pace of his life slowed down, and he began his journey of spiritual discovery. Forty years after being excommunicated from the Mormon church, having been wrongfully accused of violating his oath of celibacy, he began the process of converting to Catholicism, following much prayer with his wife and counseling with Catholic leaders. Although he had known a sense of spirituality even in his childhood, the Spiritual Exercises would prove to be the vehicle for deepening his relationship with God by serving as a disciplined, structured path interlaced with personalized spiritual guidance.

Hart's journal reveals the thoughts of a man struggling to grasp the deep aspects of his faith. He does not back away from the touchy, sensitive areas of his life: "The fact is that sin is part of my life today … At various times during most days I am thoughtless, lazy, selfish, envious, gluttonous, and simply not in harmony with God. Even when working through my prayer and meditation hour, I allow all manner of distractions to pull me away from the clear focus I so sincerely want to achieve."

While reading Bible stories, Hart frequently envisions himself as a participant, sometimes as a person in the crowd or perhaps having an encounter with Jesus. His entries concerning Jesus's crucifixion are particularly compelling, and Hart's spiritual growth as he works through the Spiritual Exercises becomes quite apparent. Hart's insights and wisdom as well as his honest questions and candid observations convey the sense of a believer who is not content with bland, simplistic answers and teachings.

Hart apparently published every word of his journal; careful editing would have eliminated unnecessary information such as: "It is Saturday morning, and I have just returned to the library after playing tennis." An editor might also have suggested that Hart include the full text of his daily scripture readings instead of just referencing the book, chapter, and verses; reading the Biblical passages along with Hart's reflections on them would have more fully engaged readers and allowed for the possibility of greater insight into his journey.

In *One Man's Journey*, Hart graciously shares the essence of his intimate quest to deepen his faith and shows just how humbling, refreshing, and worthwhile such a journey can be. Saint Ignatius would be proud.
JEFF FRIEND (November 6, 2012)

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