

## Introduction

I was raised Catholic (some would call me a “cradle Catholic”) by a genuinely saintly mother. Beneficiary of Catholic education all the way—even through law school. The odds of my gliding through life without any major, long-term deviations from God’s Will were highly favorable. So, what happened? Chalk it up to our secularized society in which the role of religion has become sorely diminished. If someone like me is susceptible to *falling away*, then pretty near everyone is; since it could even happen to you, preventive measures are called for.

Let’s begin by considering what occurs when one falls away: what are the hallmarks of “leaving”? Having fallen (though since recovered), I can report that it’s not very likely you would even notice a fall from grace was ever happening. I never did, and therefore made no effort to keep it from progressing. There is no *fall*, really, more like an imperceptibly slow *slide*. The process can be seen as devilishly deceitful when considered in hindsight: it sets off no attention-grabbing alarms as your soul grows increasingly somnolent. Eventually, after becoming *aware*—should you be so fortunate as to gain that realization—it’s quite difficult to get back.

While my soul slept, God stopped being a part of my life: no prayers, no Sunday Mass . . . . While always believing in God, I somehow lost my Catholic faith and stopped practicing my religion. At no point during my “away” years did I suspect there was no God. The problem was that God did not occur to me at all—never crossed my mind. My entire being gradually became absorbed with *this world* and *this life*: the temporal. This gradual transition was well beyond my conscious awareness. I am quite certain, however, that *God was aware* of my departure and prolonged absence.

While “fallen away,” I never doubted God’s existence:  
worse, God never crossed my mind.

Perhaps you think there’s no way that even a “superior being” could keep track of the 7.5 billion human beings currently on earth (including insignificant me). Guess again! Fifty years ago, the United States first landed a manned module on the moon. Today, your *car* harbors greater computing power than guided our Apollo astronauts to their destination! As the speed and capacity of cutting-edge computers advance, we should find

ever more plausible the notion of a God capable of keeping tabs on everyone—and naturally disposed to do so.



Ironically, as science has advanced, belief in God has declined. That statistic ought to be trending in the opposite direction. But then again, the Catholic Church did not always deal well with scientific breakthroughs—as when Copernicus and Galileo espoused heliocentricity and Charles Darwin theorized about evolution—yet what was challenging for a while certainly shouldn't be any longer. God's role as creator is neither diminished nor disproved by a creature like the coelacanth; there never was any conflict or contradiction between origin of the species, or evolution, and existence of God as the “uncaused cause” of our universe.

We continue to unearth scientific discoveries every day, solving riddles to which the answers were always there, waiting to be uncovered. It's generally observable that the *complexity* of each of these new discoveries is greater than those made in the past. Bear in mind that St. Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian, proffered complexity and order (or design) in the universe among his proofs—grounds for believing in God!

What if scientific advancements eventually included an ability to synthesize life forms from exclusively inanimate components? Were this to occur tomorrow, my faith in the existence of God would hardly be shaken. Even so, my religious beliefs are far from “blind faith.” Beyond being attributable to parental influence (not by indoctrination, but rather from their good example), my beliefs are soundly supported by personal inclination—which is to say human reason.

The gravitational forces on earth and the rest of our universe (whose vastness we have yet fully to comprehend), our sun-centric solar system's evolving life forms, their RNA/DNA building blocks, quantum mechanics, and all the rest—seem to suggest a higher power, rather than evidencing there to be no God. More simply put: science is not at war with belief in God.



When I ultimately awakened to the fact of my “fall,” Easter was approaching—the most solemn time during the liturgical year. But why did that matter to me, after having been away for so many years? Because I remained, at least nominally, “Catholic.” My religion had not changed—either to “none” or to one different from the original. This integral part of my identity ever since childhood never died completely, despite that for the longest

time there were absolutely no signs of life. Fortunately, the Good Shepherd never forgets about the lamb that's gone missing.

Upon first opening my eyes, what I saw came as a shock: *massa pescati*, a sinful mess. I wondered how I got so lost as to end up wandering about aimlessly in an evermore secularized world. A nagging feeling began to develop, that this recent period of my life was marked by inattention to the direction in which I headed or the destination sought, and it ultimately became dissatisfying, even disappointing. Some higher purpose was clearly being called for.

*Hurry after Christ to catch elegant solutions for challenges we face—  
This life's travails on the course we run—in our human race.*

"Maybe I should turn around and go back up that path . . . rediscover God, learn from Christ's Resurrection," I thought. And thus began my long, slow, all-too-hesitant trek of "returning." I continue on, eager to see where this leads. The scenery is getting better by the day. Will you join me?



Try to be again like the wide-eyed child that you once were by allowing yourself to experience wonderment with daily observations. Look up at each morning's sky:

*Praise with elation,  
Praise every morning,  
God's re-creation  
Of the new day!"<sup>2</sup>*

Gaze at the stars shining through a dark night. Let your everyday discoveries and experiences of living remind you that God is with us. The whole idea is for us to be with God. Remember that.

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<sup>2</sup> Hymn, "Morning has Broken," text by Eleanor Farjeon, verse 3, from *The Children's Bells*, in *Worship*, #847. See also text of the hymn "Lord of All Helpfulness," by Jan Struther (1901–1953), © Oxford University Press: "Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day," in *Worship*, #686, with subsequent verses calling for strength at noon, love at the eve of the day, and peace at day's end.