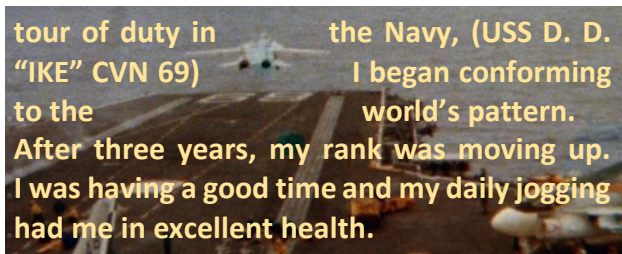


going to heaven or not until after you are dead, because you can never know for sure if you've been good enough or not." I was in shock! After his visit, I remember looking at four of my brothers and sister running around the house screaming and Mom scolding one and thinking "If you have to be good enough to get to heaven no one in this family is going to make it!" However, my religious upbringing taught that eternal life is something that you must work towards through the Church, with good deeds, the sacraments, and devotions.

I always hoped the priest or leader was wrong and God's word was true, but I had nowhere to turn. I was a good kid growing up but after high school, and then during my



(I had received a few witnesses about Jesus, and took them to heart, but I didn't really do anything about them, I felt my life was altogether.) I remember telling God jogging is what I wanted to do with my life. That very week I was given a desk job and began having pain in my leg. The pain continued and increased and three weeks later I found myself hospitalized with a blood clot in my lungs which had passed from my leg and through my heart.

With my life at age twenty-three coming so close to death I began to reconsider my life and its direction. So, after recovering from the clot and being placed on limited duty, I began to think about my sin and my accountability towards God, I wanted to know where I would have gone if I had died.

I started going over to the library to read God's word and God began to work on my heart. A friend asked if I were worried about my leg, and I said, "No, because I knew God could work things out for the best." He asked if I was a Christian, and I said, "I did not know," he then invited me to his church. I went and after the service I went forward to pray and seek God. Afterwards my friend encouraged me to read the Bible.

That week, as I was reading in first John, this verse hit me hard, "He That Committeth Sin is of The Devil" (1 John 3:8). I had always thought I was a rather good person, but suddenly I knew I deserved and was headed for hell. I was shattered. God had placed his finger on my sin, and I could not deny it. I went back to the library to read 1 John again the next two days, with the same results. I knew my life wasn't worth living if I was just going to die and end up in hell. I cried out to God about my struggle but did not communicate this to my friend.

That following Saturday my friend helped me pick out some Christian books. One of the books chosen was by Larry Tomczak,

**CLAP YOUR HANDS!  
A Young Catholic Encounters Christ.**

It shared the simple gospel message that I had always hoped was true back when I was seven. The scriptures shared showed that there is nothing of myself deserve the eternal punishment of a Holy God. But God's love reached out to me through Jesus Christ. Throughout the week I had acknowledged my sinfulness to God, I then read, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9) and realized that eternal life is given as a gift to all

who believe in Jesus. It was then that God's mercy, grace, and peace flooded my soul with understanding and forgiveness. I knew that what I was told at age seven, by the Priest or Church leader, was false. My joy returned as my eyes were opened to the truth of God's Word that salvation was through faith in Jesus and his atoning sacrifice on the cross. I had experienced Emmanuel "God with us" (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14).

Praise God: "Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13).

Larry Tomczak, in **CLAP YOUR HANDS!**

© 1973 shares with his Dad, some questions:

Q. "Why was the Bible written?"

A. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." (1 John 5:13, KJV)

Q. If asked by God: "Why should I let you into heaven?" What would you reply?"

Dad: "Well, I've tried to be a good Catholic—lead a decent life and obey the Ten Commandments. I've never intentionally missed Mass. I don't think I've been too bad—I've been an usher ... and helped out in a lot of parish projects. I've always given my Sunday offerings, too!"

Larry: "Dad, I've got some good news for you! Heaven is not something a person earns, or deserves, or works for. According to the Bible, heaven—eternal life—is an absolutely free gift."

Dad: "Oh, go on, nothing's free!"

Larry: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 6:23 KJV)

[www.thekeysofheaven.com/resources/tracts/](http://www.thekeysofheaven.com/resources/tracts/)

**Dad:** “I never knew that!”

**Larry:** “Enter ye in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction—many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:13–14 KJV)

**Q.** “Well, if only a few find this gift of eternal life, wouldn’t you like to be one of them?”

**Dad:** “Of course!”

**Larry:** “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23 KJV)

**Dad:** “I know that everyone is a sinner.”

**Larry:** “Well, because man is a sinner, and a sinner can-do no-good thing of himself anyway, it is impossible for him to earn his way into heaven, even if it weren’t free.”

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8–9 KJV).

**Dad:** “I want to receive this gift of eternal life. What do I do?”

**Larry:** “Faith is the key that opens the door to eternal life.”

**Q.** “Do you fully understand what the Bible means here by ‘faith’?”

**Larry:** “Thou believest that there is one God; Thou doest well: The devils also believe, and tremble.” (Jas. 2:19 KJV)

“We’re talking about ‘saving faith’ and not just an intellectual assent to certain historical facts’ . . . ‘When you trust the Lord to take care of our family—that we might call family-faith. When you trust Him to help you pay the bills—that might be called financial-faith . . . these things are temporary—they’ll all pass away some day.’ . . . ‘But what is saving faith?’

[www.thekeysofheaven.com](http://www.thekeysofheaven.com)

“Saving faith is trusting Jesus Christ to save you forever, eternally, no matter what else may happen—I tried to be a faithful church member. I tried to live a decent life. I tried to obey the Ten Commandments. I, I, I, I, I was really trying to be my own savior.’

“I transferred my trust from myself—from what I could do—to Jesus Christ and what He had done already. I accepted His gift of eternal life.” (pgs. 134–137)

### My Final Step in Catholicism

I struggled quite intensely when trying to decide whether to stay in or leave the Catholic faith; Did I need to pray to Mary plus be a born-again Christian? Et Cetera. After around six weeks, surprisingly, I decided to stay—I went to Mass the next Sunday and the first thing the Priest said was “Don’t worry about reading the book of Revelation because no one can understand it anyway!”—Well, I will tell you what, upon hearing that, unsurprisingly, the Holy Spirit told me, “Gary, now you can leave the Catholic Church.”—I had already read the book of Revelation and verse 1:3 says blessed is he who reads the words of this book. I needed that one last step—the confirmation from the Holy Spirit and I have never looked back.

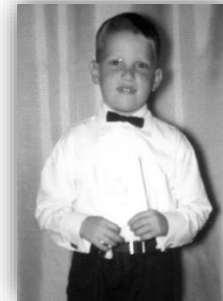
Gary’s book, *We Agree! The Tomb Is Open, CHRISTIANITY Vs. CATHOLICISM* is available at the publisher **Xulon Press**, Walmart, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Christian Book and more, in hard copies, and eBook. View, read, and share, the “linked” online book, with Topical Index, for free at:

[www.thekeysofheaven.com/online-book/](http://www.thekeysofheaven.com/online-book/)

< Gary is a member of the >

**Celina Baptist Temple, 7505 Celina  
Mendon Rd, Celina, OH 45822**

[www.celinabaptisttemple.org](http://www.celinabaptisttemple.org)



## Gary Westgerdes *raised Catholic but Scripturally Born Again!*

**At the age of seven I** was being taught about heaven and hell in my Catholic Catechism class. I was being convicted of my sinfulness and I feared God and the possibility of going to hell. After thinking upon this for a few days or weeks our teacher shared with the class, the bible verse:

**John 3:16** “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”

**With childlike faith I took the verse to heart**, I believed Jesus died for my forgiveness of sin and to give me eternal life. The moment I believed, God’s assurance of salvation and the joy of the Holy Spirit filled my heart. I wanted to obey Jesus, be like him and be nice to others.

**Next, maybe several months, during the summer**, the day before my eighth birthday, my parents were having our home dedicated to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. On that day, a church leader or Priest asked me why I was so happy I told him “because I’m going to heaven when I die” he stood up, stepped back chuckling and laughed saying, “Oh No! You can never know for sure if you’re