

A one-time anti-Catholic, Kimberly Hahn embraces and spreads her faith

By MATT McDONALD
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CHESTNUT HILL — As a young wife and mother with a master's degree in theology, Kimberly Hahn thought she knew all she needed to know about God.

She had gotten a strong Christian upbringing from her father, a Presbyterian minister, and her



KIMBERLY HAHN

mother, who taught Religious Education. In 1979 she had married a man intent on becoming a Presbyterian minister, which he did.

Enthusiastic Protestants, she and her husband were also enthusiastically anti-Catholic, in an intellectual sense, seeing the Church of Rome as the Whore of Babylon described in the Book of Revelation.

So she had no interest when her husband in the early 1980s started asking unsettling questions about the foundations of their beliefs, like whether the Roman Catholic Church was right when it said there

marriage. Moreover, feeling settled in her faith, family and life path, and with a second baby on the way, she resented his questioning.

"I didn't want to have to rethink theology. And in the humiliation and the humility of having to realize that I had a lot of questions I couldn't answer," Hahn said in a recent interview. "God used that."

Her husband, Scott Hahn, read small forests' worth of books on points of Scripture and theology, finding over time that he couldn't refute any Catholic teaching and finding himself drawn to the Church.

Eventually, at Easter 1986, Scott was received into the Roman Catholic Church.

But Kimberly found herself in a no-man's-land, unable to argue her husband out of his movement toward Catholicism and unwilling to join him.

Paradoxically, her good Christian upbringing got in the way.

"It seemed like the genuine strength that I had received became a stumbling block, because I had to struggle with the humility that I could be wrong," Hahn said.

She describes those years as "high heels skiing in the mud," as she dug in against her husband's faith journey without feeling on solid ground herself.

"And yet I think God in his mercy kept pursuing me and trying to draw me back into a deep trust in him," she said.

Finally, at Easter 1990, she joined the Roman Catholic Church, too.

Hahn, now 50, co-authored a

Church called "Rome Sweet Home" in 1993.

She plans to speak at the Boston Catholic Women's Conference on April 18 at Boston College's Conte Forum in Chestnut Hill. (The one-night conference is scheduled to run from 5 to 9:30 p.m. that day.)

Her theme is "The Strength of the Humble."

For most Catholics, Mary the mother of Jesus is the most obvious example of humility.

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Hahn differentiates her acceptance of God's will when the Angel Gabriel tells her she is to give birth to God's son without the assistance of a man from Zechariah's doubts about whether his wife Elizabeth in her old age could possibly conceive a child.

"His response is not immediately submitting humbly to God's will, and Mary's is," Hahn said. "And I think in those moments in our lives when God is asking something of us, he will give us that strength of humility to do his will, in imitation of Mary."

As anyone familiar with the Hahn method will know, Kimberly and Scott Hahn quote Scripture with the specificity and ease of Protestant evangelists, which they once were.

In an interview, Hahn referred to a passage in St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians where Paul says he asked God three times to take away "a thorn in my flesh." Paul doesn't elaborate on what the problem was, but he does say what he got as a response from God: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Weakness isn't a popular goal but St. Paul says he delights in it since it allows the power of Christ to take over.

"And in the idea that in the very experience of weakness, in the midst of suffering, whether it's physical or emotional, whether it's feelings of heartache or inadequacy, it's in that place that Christ needs us ... because his power is made perfect in my weakness," Hahn said.

"The question isn't, 'Am I qualified to do what God is asking me to do?' The question is, 'Am I available?'" And if you're feeling weak you're qualified."