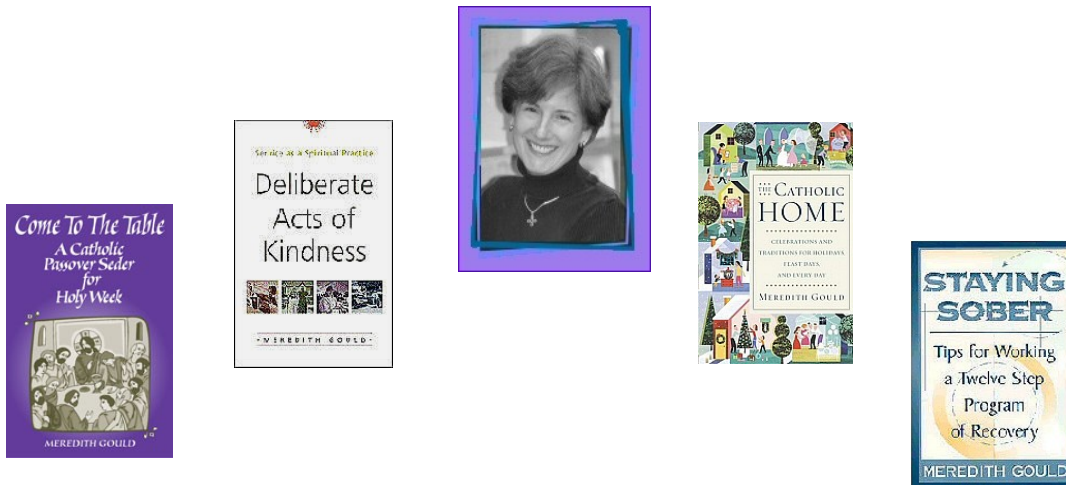


An Interview with Meredith Gould

By:

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1) Tell us about yourself

I was one of those nerdy kids who worked on school newspapers and wrote anguished poetry. I stopped with the poetry by age seventeen. My other writing developed. I took my time wandering through higher education and ended up with a doctorate in Sociology. I taught college for a decade, then worked in state government and at an ad agency, before going freelance in 1989. As a result, I've written for a wide range of audiences. My work became more Christian as my faith matured. Never in a zillion years did I imagine I'd become a book author, let alone one whose work may be characterized as Catholic, especially since I was raised Jewish.

2) When did you respond to Jesus' calling? Please share with us your story of spiritual awakening.

I was already in my 40s when the dissonance between my messy, painful interior life and my slick, successful exterior life became completely unmanageable. I was in the throes of what I call my "multiple spirituality disorder." I was Jewish and going through a neo-

Hindu phase while being vigorously evangelized by a Christian colleague at work.

Since I was curious and spiritually starved, I prayed that God would reveal himself in a very personal way. I spent more than a year praying for proof and was graced by experiences that challenged my over-educated mind. After being brought to my knees with emotional pain, I claimed Jesus as my Savior. Nearly a decade passed between being baptized (full immersion!) and seeking Confirmation in the Roman Catholic church, although I was most definitely baptized in the Holy Spirit long before “my” Easter rolled around.

3) How did your friends and family react to your decision to be baptized as Catholic?

My evangelizing friend, a lapsed Catholic, was horrified. Another evangelical Christian friend said it made sense because, “Catholics are just like Jews.” His comment would take root and grow in unexpected ways. I’ve had believers bluntly say, “What would possess an educated woman to become Catholic?” This sparks my mini-rant about how I think there’s no other option for a Jew who accepts Jesus as Christ. This is something I spell out in more detail when I speak at churches.

I spared my Jewish atheist father the Good News before he died in 1998. Ironically, my Jewish mother has been the most supportive. Looking back, I can see how strongly she influenced my attraction to Catholicism. I’ve written about this a bit and will continue to do so.

4) Do you believe that your upbringing as Jew and your new Christian faith enable you to enjoy the richness of both religions traditions? If you agree with my statement, which rituals and customs do you feel best enfold both faith and traditions, and why?

In *The Catholic Home*, I write that I am a, “Jew in identity, a Christian in faith, and a Catholic in practice.” I view Christianity through the lens of Judaism. I experience Judaism through the heart of Christianity.

I see Judaism’s influence in everything, from ritual actions of the Mass (e.g., blessings/*berakot*) to the way Catholic churches are physically organized (e.g., an eternal light, a tabernacle, the presence of the Word). The Jewish tradition of starting holy days at sundown (*erev*) is reflected in the Catholic tradition of vigils. Judaism’s teaching about “repairing the world” (*tikkun olam*) is vibrantly alive in Catholicism’s emphasis on social justice. Judaism’s call for *teshuvah* (repentance) is present in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Catholics and Jews share a slew of home-based rituals.

5) Did your conversion and new faith inspire your book, *The Catholic Home: Celebrations and Traditions for Holidays, Feast Days, and Every Day*. (Doubleday, 2004). If not, then, what motivated you to write this book?

I hadn't yet been confirmed as a Catholic but had been attending Mass for years before writing *The Catholic Home*. Shocked amusement would best characterize my realization that contemporary Catholics do not know about — let alone practice — many of the spiritually enriching traditions available to them. In Judaism, home and family play a central role in transmitting faith and faith practices. Once upon a time, Catholics treasured the “domestic church.” I wanted to gather in one volume all the delightful, meaningful home-based traditions so that faith could be celebrated in every day life.

6) *Deliberate Acts of Kindness: Service as a Spiritual Practice*. (Doubleday, 2002). Kindness was one of Jesus' virtues. He was kind and gentle to those in need. Which scripture passage inspired this book?

Deliberate Acts of Kindness is about how serving others is a signifier of spiritual attainment in all Western and Eastern religious traditions. I review these traditions before suggesting ways for readers to discern what their call to service might be. I offer tips for proceeding with that knowledge. Quotes from sacred texts and teachers appear throughout this book, but when you ask about an inspiring scripture passage, I immediately think about this passage from Micah (6:8): “This is what the Lord asks of you; only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.”

7) You published two of your books with Doubleday. Do you recommend this publishing house to other authors seeking a publisher?

It's a great privilege and honor to be published by Doubleday — as well as Hazelden, Storey, and Morehouse. As one of the “majors,” Doubleday provides a particular type of publishing experience, one that's extremely market-driven. Gatekeepers abound!

It's near-impossible to get published by Doubleday without an agent and a strong proposal that makes a compelling case for the work's marketability. Prospective authors need to realize that it may three years before their accepted proposal goes to contract and then becomes a book that's shipped to stores. Also, mid-list authors are basically responsible for their own publicity. And so, I only recommend pursuing Doubleday to authors who have an agent; a strong, clean manuscript; the emotional strength to go through the book production and sales processes; and absolutely no expectations about making money.

8) In 1999 you published, *Staying Sober: Tips for Working a Twelve Step Program of Recovery* (Hazelden, 1999). Are you or someone closed to you attended the AA Program successfully? Share the insights of this book. What makes your book different or more efficient than the regular AA literature?

Pop icons might be blabbing about their recovery adventures but in the world of 12 Step recovery it's considered very bad form to break one's anonymity. What I say in the introduction to this book is that I'm sure any number of 12 Step programs would welcome me as a member! I do feel comfortable saying that by the grace of God, I have well over a decade of continuous recovery.

In *Staying Sober*, I include tips and examples that resonate with people in recovery from drug addiction, overeating, gambling, and other self-destructive, soul-killing activities. Still, the market does seem to be mostly folks in Alcoholics Anonymous who appreciate a recovery book that's edgy, quirky, and funny!

Conference-approved literature is rather grim in tone. It's also dated in content, especially given the increase in people with more than one active addiction and dual diagnoses (i.e., addiction and a mental health disorder). There are many more women and teens in recovery than there were when the Conference literature was initially written. I wanted to reach out to these audiences. This, I might add, is my only book that earns regular royalties which cover the cost of food for my three cats.

9) On your website you commented that your new book, *Our Words Made Fresh: Communicating Church and Faith Today*, (Morehouse- Fall, 2008) is not a handbook. In 30 seconds or less, how would you pitch this book to a potential buyer?

Our Words Made Fresh is for ministers, both lay and ordained, who want to communicate more effectively what Christians believe and what we mean by "church." I explain why and how church and faith get confused in our written and verbal communications, to the detriment of fulfilling The Great Commission. Every chapter includes questions designed for individual and group discernment about church communications.

10) 2006 was a year of awards for you. Share the emotions and anticipations before and after your award notifications.

Come to the Table: A Catholic Passover Seder – won in 2006 an IPPY Award for excellence in independent publishing.

Realizing that *Come to the Table* was too much of a niche title and making Catholic publishers nervous, I set up Plowshares Publishing (<http://www.plowsharespublishing.com>). This allowed me to have complete creative control over content, design, and marketing. I felt thrilled and somewhat vindicated when

my book was named as a finalist, especially since it was chosen over a well-known Catholic scholar's work published by a fairly well-known independent Catholic publisher. Sin of pride? I guess so! Mea culpa.

***"Our Eucharistic Heritage"* won first place in the prayer/spirituality (magazine) division for the 2006 Catholic Press Association awards.**

A colleague called me late at night from the CPA convention screaming, "You won! You won first place!" I hadn't a clue what she was talking about, made her repeat the news several times, and asked if she had been drinking. *Magnificat* is a beautiful monthly missal and I still can't believe I was privileged to be published in it. I especially treasure this award because the winning essay was about the Jewish roots of the Eucharist. This just reinforced my strong sense that Christians want to learn more about Judaism.

11) How long were you a guest editor for Faith & Family Magazine? What did you enjoy the most about that experience?

Have I been fired?!? I believe that I'm still a columnist for *Faith & Faith Magazine*. Have been since 2004. *F&F* is a Catholic magazine that delivers on the promise of its title. I answer questions about etiquette and customs relative to Catholic faith practice. I love that I've been invited to write in my own conversational style and am allowed to poke gentle good fun at some of the quirkiest aspects of Catholicism. The discipline and delight of writing the column gave me the strength to wander into the blogosphere.

12) Tell us about [Veritas Literary Agency](#). How can our readers benefit from your services.

I'm a freelance associate for this Bay Area (California) literary agency and focus primarily on religion and spirituality titles. The lead agent, Katherine Boyle, tends to focus on literary nonfiction but will consider other genres. Like other literary agencies, we take on authors who are willing and able to do the hard work of crafting a great proposal to support a strong manuscript.

Quite frankly, I do more freelance editing than agenting because it makes sense for some authors to go the self-publishing route these days. I love working with writers who want to become authors and authors who need help with their writing.

13) Are you working on new projects?

Always! I'm currently smitten with blogging (<http://meredithgould.blogspot.com>), finding that it's a great medium for my writing style and allows me to connect with readers more quickly than conventional publishing.

My big project is a book about Judaism's influence on the sacraments. I've given public talks on this topic over the past four years, done lots of research, have a book proposal

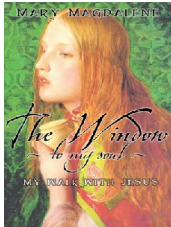
completed, and need to finish a sample chapter. Even after six books, I still need to provide sample material if I want a new publisher to consider taking me on. I shouldn't complain. I was able to talk my way around submitting a sample chapter for two of my books. I want everyone to know that while it made getting to contract faster, it did *not* speed up the writing process.

14) How can our readers contact you?

Via email: meredith@meredithgould.com or via comments left at my blog, "More Meredith Gould," <http://meredithgould.blogspot.com>

15) An encouraging word for readers searching for the "truth" which leads to salvation.

It might seem hackneyed, but I have to say, "don't ever give up." Keep praying to know the truth. Don't be afraid to demand proof. Go ahead and argue with God, if you must. God knows, I have. I'm living proof of God's mercy, good humor, and perfect timing. I keep on my screensaver the reminder that, "God's will is what's happening right now!" My challenge is the human problem of remembering this salvific truth.



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