

CATHOLIC DEACON - POET - PROFESSOR



ESSAYIST - RETREAT LEADER

CHRIS ANDERSON

INTRODUCTION

Oregon author & Catholic deacon Chris Anderson explores the struggle, joy, and doubt of contemporary spirituality in his published work and online blog "[The Imperfect Catholic](#)." An engaging speaker, homilist, and retreat leader, Chris is available for appearances & retreat opportunities in the Pacific Northwest. He also very much welcomes opportunities for guest blogging.

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Chris Anderson just tells it straight, and lets the stories and the details do the work. He describes the situation, the scene, the specifics, then stands back and allows their juxtapositions to reveal more. There is such deep humanity in his work, yet it's plainspoken. ”

- Kirsten Rian
The Oregonian



PUBLICATIONS

Light When It Comes,

Eerdmans, Coming November
2016

The Next Thing Always

Belongs, Airlie Press, 2011

Teaching as Believing: Faith

in the University, Baylor
University Press, 2004

Open Questions: Critical

Thinking, Ethical Writing, St.

Martins Press, 2004

My Problem with the Truth,

Cloudbank Books, 2003

Edge Effects: Notes from an

Oregon Forest, University of
Iowa Press, 1993

Free/Style: A Direct Approach

to Writing, Houghton-Mifflin,

1992

AWARDS

2005 - Commencement Poet, Oregon State University

2000- Oregon Excellence Award for Teaching English
Language Arts, Oregon Council of Teachers of English

1994 - Finalist, Oregon Book Awards, Creative Nonfic-
tion, for Edge Effects

1991 - Burlington Resources Foundation Faculty
Achievement Award



Short Bio Less Than 50 Words

Chris Anderson is professor of English at Oregon State University, a retreat leader, an author, blogger, and a Catholic deacon. An award-winning writer and teacher, he explores the struggle, joy, and doubt of contemporary spirituality in his published work and online blog "[The Imperfect Catholic](#)."

Medium Bio Less Than 100 Words

Chris Anderson is professor of English at Oregon State University, a retreat leader, an author, blogger, and a Catholic deacon. An award-winning writer and teacher, he explores the struggle, joy, and doubt of contemporary spirituality through personal story & literary collage. He is the author of 14 previous books, including poetry and nonfiction, and was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award. When not behind the writing desk, teaching podium, or altar, Chris is walking in the woods of McDonald Forest in Corvallis, Oregon. Visit his blog "The Imperfect Catholic" at www.deaconchrisanderson.com.

Long Bio Less Than 500

Chris Anderson is professor of English at Oregon State University, a retreat leader, an author, blogger, and a Catholic deacon. An award-winning writer and teacher, he explores the struggle, joy, and doubt of contemporary spirituality through personal story & literary collage. He is the author of 14 previous books, including poetry and nonfiction, and was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award.

Born in 1955 in Colville, Washington, Chris is the son of a policeman and the oldest of three boys. As student body president, editor of the newspaper, and an Eagle scout, he was very active in high school. He met his wife, Barb, in the marching band and soon asked her to read some of his poems. They met on the steps of the girls' gym. "I find your imagery imprecise," Barb told him, and Chris realized: here was someone he really wanted to know.

Chris went to Gonzaga University in Spokane, where Barb's father, Franz Schneider, was a poet and English professor. Professor Schneider's freshman poetry class introduced Chris to a world in which people really cared about poetry and believed in the truths that only poetry can express. It was at Gonzaga, too, under the influence of the Jesuits, that he converted to Catholicism--falling in love with the deep tradition and mystery of the Catholic faith.

After he and Barb were married, Chris went on to graduate school at the University of Washington, receiving his Ph.D. in English in 1983. His first job as a professor was at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. He came to Oregon State University in 1986 and served for twenty years as the Composition Coordinator, writing a number of books.

In 1993, on a sabbatical at Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary, he heard again the call to ministry that he'd been hearing all his life. The pull was very strong. After receiving a master's degree in theology at Mount Angel and doing several years of additional training, he was ordained a Catholic deacon and began doing the work of a deacon--baptizing, marrying, burying and preaching--while continuing to teach at Oregon State.

Still teaching full-time & and serving as a deacon, Chris lives with his wife, Barb, the Pastoral Associate at St. Mary's, and their cockapoo, Pip, on the edge of the university research forest north of Corvallis, Oregon. They have three grown children: John, a soldier and bridge builder; Maggie, an editor and filmmaker; and Tim, a preschool and elementary teacher. When not behind the writing desk, teaching podium, or altar, Chris is hiking the woods with Pip by his side. Read his regular updates on his blog "The Imperfect Catholic" at www.deaconchrisanderson.com.

FUN FACTS

When I was little, I wanted to be an astronaut.

I'm still deeply in love with my high school sweetheart.

The hardest thing about becoming an Eagle Scout was learning how to tie knots left-handed.

When I was a boy I used to lie on the shag carpet at four every afternoon and watch Star Trek reruns.

I have an unfortunate fondness for profanity.

I've only been to two live rock concerts in my life, both as an adult, and both Bruce Springsteen concerts.

I've led two pilgrimages to Rome & one to the Holy Land--of all the cities in the world, I love Rome the most.

I've never read Jane Austen. I've never finished Joyce's Ulysses.

I have the same name as the editor of Wired.

The first baby I ever baptized was named Chris Anderson.

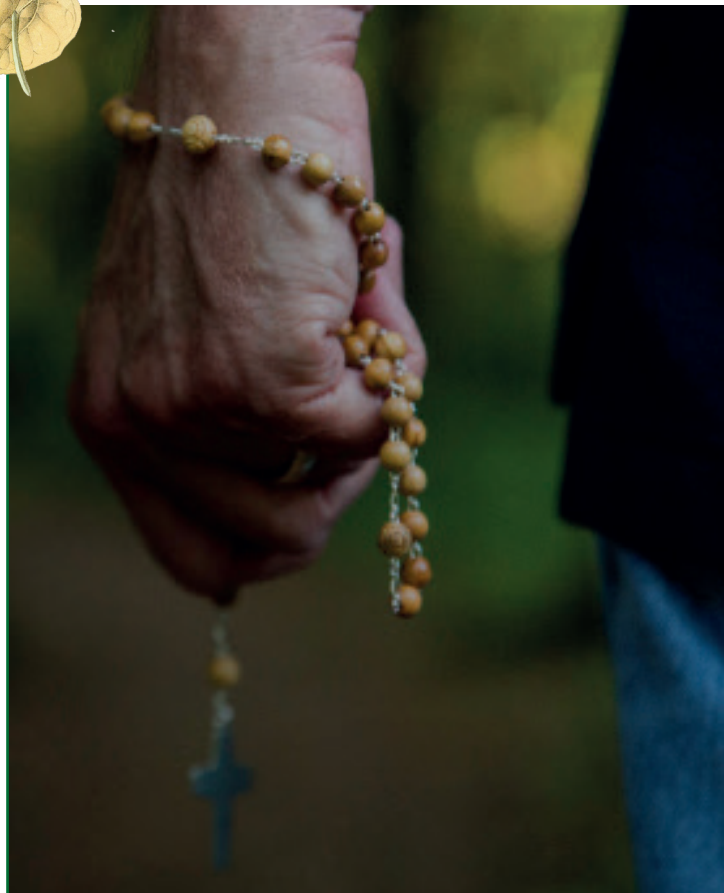


“ Chris Anderson’s poems open their arms in an embrace so wide they astonish and buoy us. ”

- Paulann Petersen
Poet Laureate of Oregon

“ Chris Anderson asks the big questions and answers them the way only poetry can: with the ineffable incense of confession and wild leaps of juxtaposition. ”

- Tim Green
Editor of Rattle



Sample Interview Questions

You grew up in a Lutheran household where religion wasn't necessarily practiced or encouraged, can you share what led you to Catholicism?

I was led to Catholicism first by the example of my wife--then my girlfriend--Barb and of her family, and then through the rich intellectual and personal experience of my time as a student at Gonzaga. More and more I felt drawn to the liturgy and to the intellectual heritage of Catholicism, and I was inspired by the openness and character of the Jesuits and the other Catholics I came to know. Faith answered a deep lack in me. It was what I hungered for.

What is an Imperfect Catholic? Why does that phrase hold meaning for you?

It means that grace is free, that the love of God is infinite, and that there's nothing we have to do to earn it. And it's a good thing, because we can't. We're finite. We're limited. We keep making mistakes and the same mistakes and getting caught up in our smallness and our addictions, and until we admit that, until we accept who we really are--ordinary people--we can't turn ourselves towards God.

How has your role as a deacon impacted your work as a professor?

It's changed the subjects I teach a little: I now teach the Bible as Literature, and have for years, as well as Dante and Augustine. But more than that, it's changed the way I teach, making me more interested in the kinds of "faiths" or assumptions we bring to literary texts and how situated we all are as readers and writers. I'm not interested anymore in writing for its own sake. What matters to me is what the writing comes out of and what it leads to.

Has technology or modern society changed/influenced your relationship with God or Catholicism? In what way?

Like all writers and teachers and ministers today I'm discovering the great advantages, and the great dangers, of social media. Social media can give us a much broader reach in our efforts to minister to others and to create community. It can also be--and usually is--not just a way of broadcasting the shoddy and the trivial but a deep, addictive distraction.

You've been open about your struggles with depression, how has that struggle impacted your experience of Catholicism?

What I've discovered again and again in the scriptures and in the liturgy is a deep realism about suffering. Christ is telling us that we have to suffer. We have to face the world the way it really is, with all its complexities, giving up our need for order and control. In that sense, Christianity is deeply realistic. And it gives meaning and shape and purpose to the darkness. It says darkness leads somewhere: to light. Christianity affirms the way life really is and at the same time assures us that there is hope, and life, and love, beyond all that burdens us.

Why do you believe that while many are open to faith, many are moving away from the church or organized religion? What do you see as the difference between faith and religion?

I think this is partly the result of the great sins of organized religion--we've in part earned our bad reputation--but I think it's even more the result of the commercialization of our culture, its promise that we can do whatever we want and get whatever we want without real cost, without real consequences. To put this another way, there's a deep anti-institutional bias in our culture. It's a meme. But it's also false. We're never without culture, in the sense of never able to do things on our own and in our minds, without community and without the material world. Or still another way of saying this: we can't have faith without religion, just as we can't have love without expressing our love, materially, in the flesh, and so in the real world.

Or still another way: we don't want to face complexity. We don't want to face ordinariness. We don't want to endure boredom.

How does the Oregon landscape and woods influence your writing & faith?

Deeply. In the forest, too, we move from the head to the heart. In the forest, too, we learn humility. In the forest, too, we confront complexity. In the forest, too, we experience something tender and loving and yet also beyond us, here and not here, beautiful and yet sad.

You write often of your experience during retreats, why is that experience worthwhile? As a retreat leader, how do you bring that to attendees?

We need other people. We can't do this on our own. It's not "my Father," it's "Our Father." So the presence of other people with us in a room heightens our awareness, focuses our attention--as does the coming to a different place, into a different and temporary culture, a place of silence and dignity and removal, where we can hear ourselves think. In a way I think what a retreat does is "create a space," to quote Parker Palmer, and what the retreatants do is bring who they are into that space.

What message would you like to give to those Catholics that have fallen away from the church due to feeling lost, frustrated, or forgotten?

Remember you are loved. Remember there is joy. Be not afraid.

Your work is riddled with references to historical events and pop culture figures, from the moon landing to Louie CK. How do real life events & pop culture impact your faith and writing?

There's a lot of junk in our junk culture, but there's also a lot that's good, and even the junk we have to keep track of and look at and use. It's the culture that most influences us and so we have to read it and think about it and look underneath it--because Christ is present here, too, as he is present in all things. It's not just in Churchy language that God speaks, not just through stained glass windows. He's also on YouTube.