

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Contact Information:**

William C. Mills

[bill@williamcmills.com](mailto:bill@williamcmills.com)

<http://www.williamcmills.com>

*Losing My Religion: A Memoir of Faith and Finding*

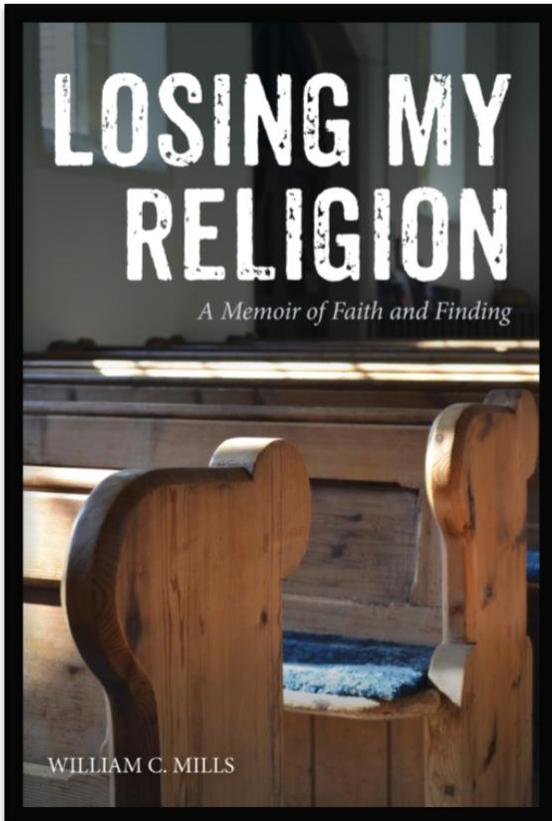
by William C. Mills

Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers

978-1-5326-6373-4 / paperback / \$20

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

**New Title from William C. Mills**  
*Losing My Religion: A Memoir of Faith and Finding*



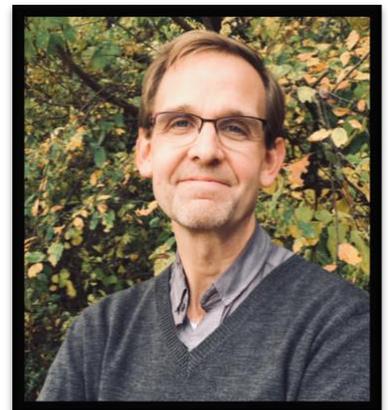
After four years of college and six years in seminary, William Mills was ready for a parish—or so he thought. He didn't realize much of his time would be endless discussions about bagels and coffee, digging ditches, and parking lot condom patrols.

For six years, community life was just humming along. Then disaster struck. Mills' life came crashing down when nearly a third of his congregation left in a public power play, causing him to question his faith in himself, in the Church, and in God.

Marva Dawn, a noted writer of spirituality and ministry, said that being a pastor is like being peppered with popcorn: after a while, you just get tired of it, pack your bags, and move on. However, as Mills himself says, "I was either too stubborn or stupid, so I stayed."

*Losing My Religion* is about the ups and downs, ins and outs, choices and challenges of being a pastor in the 21st Century Church. It's also about the redemptive power of community life and finding healing and wholeness in a broken world.

**William C. Mills** is the rector of the Nativity of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. He holds a Ph.D. in Pastoral Theology from the Union Institute and University in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is the author of *A 30 Day Retreat: A Personal Guide to Spiritual Renewal* (Paulist Press, 2010) and the author of numerous articles and books on the Bible, Christian Spirituality, and Ministry. For more information, visit his website at [www.williamcmills.com](http://www.williamcmills.com).



**1. What inspired you to write this book? Why now?**

I never set out to write a memoir. I'm a very private person and had no interest in sharing my life story with anyone, let alone the world. However, my therapist suggested that I keep a journal. He knew that I was a writer and said that one day I might want to share my story. I balked. Who wants to hear about a pastor who has doubts about God, the Church, and his vocation? I started and couldn't stop. Those early pages became the rough outline for the chapters and eventually a book was born. The process was painful and I had to stop for a year and a half due to constant nightmares and anxiety. I was never diagnosed, but I had all the classic symptoms of PTSD. Yet I kept going forward and nine years and many drafts later, my book arrived.

**2. Speaking of trauma, you are very candid about the split in your congregation and your bouts with depression and despondency over the years. Can you elaborate further?**

Before entering the Davidson Clergy Center I kept my feelings to myself, which is not that unusual for introverts. After a while I couldn't function anymore. Call it a meltdown, burnout, brownout or a nervous breakdown, but whatever it was I couldn't continue. Therapy saved me. Previously I had thought that pastors were supposed to be strong and keep it all together. That was a big lie. Unfortunately, there's social stigma regarding counseling, especially among clergy. We are the preachers and teachers in the congregation and people look to us for advice and pastoral care. But the problem is that we're not equipped to do everything, yet we still try. We often fail and we hide our faults and failures. I chose to deal with my life head-on and make sense of my family and what happened to me in the parish. It was a painful journey but one that was life-giving.

**3. In the past few years there has been an increase in the publication of memoirs in general and clergy memoirs in particular, were there any that were helpful to you while writing your book?**

I read a lot of books during the writing process, mostly short stories, poetry, and memoirs. Short stories helped craft the narrative arc of my book, memoirs provided insight into other people's lives, and poetry helped me write with emotion and energy. Regarding memoirs, I enjoyed Richard Lischer's *Open Secrets*, Darcey Steinke's *Easter Everywhere*, Barbara Brown Taylor's *Leaving Church*, and John Pritchard's *The Inner City of God*. I recently came across an older but excellent memoir by John Harper called *Sunday: A Minister's Story*. I caught myself laughing out loud. He's brutally honest about ministry and congregational life, which I found refreshing. We need more open and honest books about parish life. There are other clergy memoirs, but many present a one-sided view of the Church. I want to read the whole story, not just the good parts.

**4. Who is the main audience for your book? What do you want them to learn about you or ministers in general?**

I hope that my memoir resonates with a wide audience. Some of my closest friends who aren't Church-goers said that my story spoke to them. At some time in your life you may be betrayed by a friend or co-worker, or have bouts of anxiety or depression, or maybe you have to deal with bullies in the workplace. You wake up one morning and realize that your job, and sometimes your life, hasn't turned out the way you planned. My story is a story about growing up and leaving behind who you thought you were and accepting who you are now. It's also a story of losing and finding, of doubt and of faith, and eventually finding healing and wholeness.

I also hope that clergy and seminarians will read my book. There are few resources that deal with the realities of congregational life. Pastors are the first to talk about how much money there is in the collection plate and how many new members they have, but ask about their personal fears or anxieties and you'll get a blank face. I hope that my book will shed some light in the dark corners of the Church.

**5. If a pastor is experiencing trauma what would you suggest that they do?**

Go get help. Clergy are trained to be caregivers, not care receivers. Sometimes all they need is a good friend to listen to them. In more acute cases they may need to see a pastoral counselor or attend a more intensive program like the Davidson Clergy Center which I describe in detail. My hope is that my story will open peoples' hearts and minds, and in the end, I hope they'll be more sensitive to the strains and struggles of leading a congregation. It's lonely at the top and clergy need all the help that they can get.

**6. In your book you mention self-care, can you elaborate further? It sounds a little selfish, no?**

Well, that's what I first thought when I entered ministry. Why should I take care of myself, I'm supposed to take of other people? Over the years I realized that we need to take care of our physical, mental, and spiritual life. This means that we need to keep good boundaries, allowing time for family and friends, time for rest and relaxation, and time for study; namely the Bible and other types of reading. If we're always on the go we will not be good for anybody.

Self-care is for everyone, especially those in caregiving roles: moms, dads, social workers, teachers, doctors, nurses, and police officers. When you find yourself giving all day, you'll eventually wind up feeling empty. You need to take time for yourself; maybe take a long walk or a nap, take a long bike ride or spend a few hours fishing at the lake, or maybe go visit a local art museum. We all need time for ourselves. You'll be a better person for it.

**7. You have a funny titled chapter, "Saving Souls, Losing Mine" can you explain?**

In the early years I bought into the professional model of ministry. I thought that if I work really hard and did all the right things, we'd have a booming congregation with new members every year, a big budget, and a new building, what I call the 4 B's: butts, bucks, buildings, and budgets. I tell the story of trying really hard to persuade a family on the periphery of the parish to get more involved in parish life. My plan backfired. I went about it in the wrong way. It took a while, but I eventually learned that we are to be faithful, not necessarily successful, at least success as defined by the world.

**8. While reading I noticed that you are very open and honest about the dark side of the Church, you shed light on places some people may know is there but no one wants to talk about. Can you tell us more about that?**

There's a lot of denial going on regarding clergy wellness. On the surface everything seems wonderful, but when in reality things are not okay. Numerous national and international studies have shown that as a cohort, clergy are very unhealthy and suffer from higher rates of obesity, alcoholism, stress, depression, and high blood pressure than the general population. Then there are the added stresses and strains of weekly schedules, services, and meetings. The parish is a wonderful place, a place of healing and wholeness, but it can also be very toxic. Clergy families often suffer. Over the years I have heard countless stories of divorce and children who left the Church because daddy was off helping one of his parishioners, rather than being home with his family. I've tried to be very honest about the dark side of parish life so perhaps we can have a wider conversation about these important issues rather than keep concealing and covering up.

**9. Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest and author, famously spoke of clergy and others leaders as being “wounded healers.” But few clergy or other caregivers have wanted to take that seriously and talk about what it means in their lives. What led you to open up about these things?**

If you take therapy seriously, you’ll wind up looking at every nook and cranny in your life. Sometimes it’s a bit scary what you’ll find. At one point or another you tear down those emotional, mental, and spiritual walls that we all build for ourselves. The “real me” and the “real you” are hidden deep down under layer upon layer of false selves that we create over time; our reputation, degrees, awards, titles, positions, and so forth. Through counseling you become radically honest about yourself, your family, and the world around you. There’s no turning back. Hopefully, you become more empathetic and humane. Imagine how wonderful the world would be if all of us were a little more humane?

**10. Are there any parting words that you want to share with your readers?**

Always be generous. We live in a world where people, companies, and institutions, including the Church, tend to be self-absorbed. In the end it’s all about self-preservation. Over the years I tried to be more intentional about gratitude and generosity. There were a host of people who helped me, especially the three people to whom I dedicate my book: George and Gordon Jacobs and Tom O’Neal. Then there are my immediate family and friends who listened to my struggles and who encouraged me to keep putting one foot in front of another. Finally, there are the countless authors whose writings continue to inspire me all of these years. I consider all of this to be one big gift and in turn, I try to pass this goodness along wherever I can. We only have one go around at this project called life, so make it worthwhile. Be generous. Be grateful. Be kind. Repeat.

An Excerpt from *Losing My Religion: A Memoir of Faith and Finding*

I'm a priest. Not just any priest, but an Eastern Orthodox priest. I'm in charge of a congregation, which is also called a parish. People in the parish are called parishioners, and they call me Father. No, I'm not their biological Father, I'm their spiritual Father, but I don't feel very spiritual, at least most of the time. I have plenty of doubts about ministry, about God, and about the Church. To make life simple, I usually introduce myself as a pastor rather than a priest, since priest sounds Catholic and a lot of people don't like Catholics, at least not here in the South. If I say priest they immediately follow up with, "Then why do you wear a ring?" I tell them I wear a ring because I'm married and have two kids. That confuses them even more. This is annoying because then I need to explain that even though both Catholics and Orthodox use the term priest, Orthodox priests are permitted to get married and have children, but Catholic priests cannot. Well, at least in theory. I don't have, the energy or the interest to go through this rigmarole every time, so I usually say I'm a pastor and leave it at that.

Throughout my working life I have been called a lot of things: parson, pastor, preacher, minister, vicar, chaplain, reverend, cleric, man of the cloth, and just plain "Bill" by an evangelical conservative Christian who didn't like titles. When I put out my hand he barely wanted to shake it. Why can he call his churchy friends brother and sister but he can't call me Father? What's up with that?

My other title is rector. A rector is a fancy name for a priest who is in charge of a parish. So theoretically I'm a priest who is also a father and a rector. Now to make matters even more complicated I also have a doctorate in theology, and sometimes I use the title Doctor before my name. So some people call me Reverend Doctor Father or Reverend Father Doctor, and some just don't know what to call me. Clergy have way too many fancy titles, if you ask me. So maybe the hardcore evangelical conservative Christian guy was right just calling me "Bill." That's fine by me.

My friends ask me what I do all day and I tell them that I wear a lot of black and drink lots of coffee. They don't believe me but it's true. I spend more time in Starbucks than the store manager. Most of the time I meet parishioners and we talk. Actually they talk and I listen. So I sit and listen to pains and problems, trials and tribulations; and sometimes stories so horrific that I want to go home and throw up. I don't feel like I'm doing much, but they tell me they feel better after talking with me. I hear more confessions over coffee than I do in church. Over the years I've learned that people don't like meeting in church. It reminds them too much of God. People open up when they don't have all that religion shoved in their face. Anyway, the chairs in church are hard and the coffee isn't great. Maybe we should buy comfy chairs and brew better coffee?

Praise for *Losing My Religion: A Memoir of Faith and Finding*

“William Mills has given us a true story told truthfully, a story of a faith lost and found, a story of the church at its best and worst, a story of a priest who persisted in his vocation in spite of everything. Service to the Body of Christ, the church, is not for the faint of heart and yet, in the end, there are blessings.”

—Will Willimon, United Methodist Bishop, retired, and Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry,  
Duke Divinity School; author, *Who Lynched Willie Earle? Preaching to Confront Racism*.

“William Mills has gone honest and intimate with us in telling his story of the travail of ministry. His drama of mean-spirited betrayal in the congregation and the late unexpected reassurance of support replicates our best story of crucifixion and resurrection.”

—Walter Brueggemann, Columbia Theological Seminary

“William Mills’ memoir is a beautifully crafted, honest, wise, and insightful book. It stands in the very best tradition of spirituality—a writer and text that can speak to the real condition of the soul, and the day-to-day struggle that many have with belief. . . Honest and wise books on religious resilience are often hard to find. But this is one of those rare gems, and I commend it for anyone who knows how long our spiritual journey can be.”

—Martyn Percy, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford

“The Church speaks a lot about truth but isn’t so good at honesty. Here is a priest who has learned the cost of this and who, with courage and imagination, encourages us to join him and to say it as it is. We clergy often know the words of religion but miss the music. William Mills calls us back to the vocation of trying to tune our lives to the harmonies of the eternal but only by recognizing emotional and factual truth and in pursuit of justice. Enjoy it and feel yourself defrost.”

—Mark Oakley, Dean, St. John’s College, Cambridge

“*Losing My Religion* is the brave, tender, furious account of how William Mills is lifted, brought low, broken, healed, and made whole. As books about religious life go, it is among the wisest and most honest I’ve ever read. This book should keep company on your shelf with the better works of J.F. Powers, Larry Woiwode, and Thomas Merton.”

—Kyle Minor, author of *Praying Drunk: Stories*

“This book should be required reading for every seminarian of every confessional tradition, not as a warning, but as an invitation to assume with loving faithfulness the awesome task of ministry.”

—**John Breck, Retired Professor of New Testament and Ethics,  
Saint Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary**

“Mills’ honest journey from disorientation back to hope will inspire all who read this wonderfully rendered memoir.”

—**Scott Hoezee, director, the Center for Excellence in Preaching, Calvin Theological Seminary**

“For the clergy as well as the congregation, William Mills’ memoir of parish ministry chronicles with refreshing honesty and insight the three-part journey from childhood to ordination to the perils of pastoral life.”

—**Robert Winstead, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology, Candler School of Theology**

“This is a work of substance and clarity. It is moving, poignant, funny, and inspiring. The memoir is entitled *Losing My Religion*, but it is a testament to all that can be gained by remaining true to one's moral compass, staying honest and authentic, seeking to learn lessons in each of life's challenges. In these pages, Mills inspires us to take what we are given and be transformed. This is a passionate, compelling book, full of meaning.”

—**Judy Goldman, author, *Together: A Memoir of a Marriage and a Medical Mishap***

