

# The Coming Home JOURNAL



Volume 2 Issue 1 • Salvation and Justification

## We Do Not Stand Alone

By Todd von Kampen

Well, this is going to be a great story, I thought.

I was in Denver's Mile High Stadium, and it was August 12, 1993. Ninety thousand young people from all across the globe erupted with thunderous cheers as they first spotted their hero: Pope John Paul II, just arrived to officially open World Youth Day.



My wife, Joan, was nearby with a group of Catholic young people from Scottsbluff and Gering, Nebraska, where we lived and worked at the daily newspaper. She was there as a participant, a cradle Catholic taking advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see her spiritual leader. I was plying my trade.

I jotted down impressions in my notebook as John Paul toured the sta-

dium, then began his greetings to the numerous nations represented in Denver. Nothing unexpected for a world leader, I thought as the pope began greeting the many Christians of other traditions in the audience.

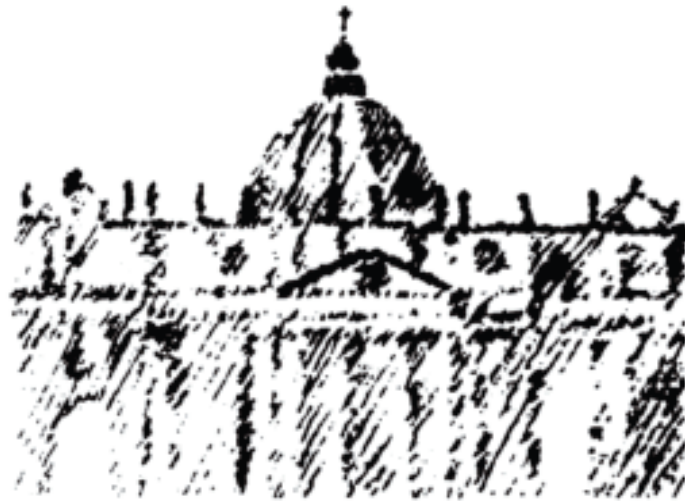
Most of you are members of the Catholic Church, but others are from other Christian Churches

and Communities, and I greet each one with sincere friendship," he said. "In spite of divisions among Christians, 'all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ ... brothers and sisters in the Lord.'

continued on page 4...

W  
H  
A  
T  
S  
I  
N  
S  
I  
D  
E

We Do Not Stand Alone by Todd von Kampen .....	continued on page 4
From the Editor - by Marcus Grodi .....	page 3
Returning Home - by Rick Ricciardi .....	page 10
One Saving Action - by Dwight Longenecker .....	page 15
A Voice from the Catholic Pulpit - Fr. Michael DeTemple, O.P. ....	page 20
But How ARE Catholics Saved? - The Catechism of the Catholic Church .....	page 22
The Early Church Fathers on Salvation - by Chris Erickson .....	page 25
Justification By Faith - by Dr. William Marshner .....	page 30
NOT By Faith Alone - by James Akin .....	page 38
Or Is There Something Else? - by Marcus C. Grodi .....	page 40
Before You Object - by Fr. Ray Ryland .....	page 43



## Welcome to the Fourth Edition of The Coming Home Journal.



One day as Jesus “was setting out on his journey, a man (in fact, a very rich man we learn later) ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good?...’” (Mark 11.17f)

This very familiar opening question and response between a sincere inquirer and our Lord illustrates one of the most important yet confusing and divisive issues in Christianity. What more important question is there in our faith and ministries than “What must I do to be saved?” Whether people ask this boldly and directly like this humbled rich young man, or whether they seek it subtly or even subliminally, is this not the core question of the Gospel: lost in sin, blindness and rebellion, how can one be made acceptable to God?

But what salvation actually means or is, or who needs it, or what one must do to get it, or whether one can lose it or not, are all highly debated issues amongst Christians of different traditions. As a result, often in today’s ecumenical discussions, where the emphasis is more often on “speaking in love” rather than “speaking the truth in love,” the answer to these questions can be as evasive as Jesus’ initial response.

But Jesus completed his response very concisely, first reminding this sincere young inquirer, whom Scripture says He loved, to keep “the commandments,” and then further to “go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me” (Mk. 10.18-21). Seems clear enough. But how have the many, divergent Christian traditions interpreted this and imple-

mented this into doctrine, dogma, mission and practice?

Probably the most poignant personal experience which brought this home to me was when, as a Senior Minister of a large Presbyterian congregation, I was seated beside the hospital bed of an elderly man who was certainly only days, maybe hours, from meeting his Maker. As I sat there wondering what words were appropriate, his soon-to-be-widow broke the silence and asked, “Pastor, is my husband going to heaven?”

Normally I might have merely grasped her hand and passed on the proverbial Presbyterian response, but becoming more concerned about the cacophony of conflicting Christian voices on this and other issues, I sat paralyzed in silence. I realized that if I were instead a Methodist or a Lutheran or an Assembly of God or a Baptist or a High-Church Episcopalian or a low-church Church of God minister, I would be giving different even conflicting reasons why this man might or might not be saved.

I can’t remember what my answer was, but I do know that it was the recognition of the confusion that exists over this centrally important issue that convinced me I could not remain a Protestant pastor.

This edition of the CHJournal addresses this theme from many angles—from the more personal telling of conversion stories, to summaries of the teachings of the Early Church Fathers and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, through articles dealing directly with the apologetic issues under debate. Some articles are more basic, others are fairly academic. I hope that in the mix at least one will

help clear up any doubts or myths as to what the Catholic Church truly teaches and has always taught on Salvation and Justification. I wish I had known this, not only when I was sitting beside the dying man and his wife, but when I had the great privilege and responsibility of preaching the Gospel week after week to my Protestant congregations.

As we’ve said from the beginning of our work, the goals of the Coming Home Network International and this journal are not to proselytize, but rather to explain in clear terms the truth about and the truths of the Catholic Church. Most of our authors for this edition of the CHJournal are converts to the Catholic Church, some having been Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian or Assembly of God ministers. It is our prayer that these articles and stories are an encouragement to your faith. If you have any questions or comments, please either contact us or the person who gave you this free journal. We want to do whatever we can to help those outside the Catholic Church, those who have left the Church, or those who are lifelong Catholics but have lost the “joy of their salvation,” to discover the great joys and truth of the Catholic Faith.

May the Father richly bless you as you seek to follow Jesus His Son, through the loving guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Sincerely In Christ,

von Kampen, continued from page

I doubt the Holy Father knows how much he shook up my life in that moment. And it may be difficult to understand why ... unless you've grown up Lutheran.

I had just heard a statement echoing the key battle cry of the Reformation, the one cited by Martin Luther and all Lutherans after him as the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9, NIV).

And it had come from the pope—the successor of the man who excommunicated Luther nearly 500 years before. Well-versed Catholics will recognize that John Paul merely quoted *Unitatis Reintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism from Vatican II. But I didn't know that. It was one of many things I didn't know—one of many things I wouldn't have believed only a few years before.

My mind raced back nearly six years to the day, back to the rectory at St. Agnes Catholic Church in Scottsbluff. I thought I wanted to marry Joan, but I had to be sure. I asked my most burning question point-blank to her pastor, Fr. Robert Karnish: "What is the way salvation is obtained?"

Without hesitation, Father Bob answered: "Faith in Jesus Christ, which is

its watershed events that set the course for all that follow them. I've got five of them, placed roughly at five-year intervals from my confirmation in my native denomination, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) on April 2, 1978, to my reconciliation with Rome on March 29, 1998.

They hardly seem enough to tell the story. My heart and mind are full of thoughts, my bookcase bulging with books and magazine articles that multiplied as the journey went on. I easily could fill a special newspaper section—if not a full-length book—with the things that seem absolutely essential to understanding how this born, bred and convicted conservative Lutheran ended up in the Catholic Church!

But throughout these five scenes, the issue of justification was there all the time. If you grow up in the LCMS and really believe what it teaches, it can't be otherwise. Of all the thousands of Protestant denominations, few are more dedicated than the Missouri Synod to preserving the original arguments with Rome—especially when it comes to justification, the article on which Luther said the church stands or falls.

To Catholics then and now, the key issue in the Reformation is authority—Luther's rejection of the doctrinal authority of the pope and the Magisterium of the

Church. And, indeed, the continuing rejection of that authority is very important to Lutherans. But it's not the first issue they talk about.

Justification comes first—for Luther and the Reformers couched every disagreement in terms of their conviction that the Catholic Church doesn't believe that salvation comes through Christ's free gift, but from performing this sacrament, that rite, this prayer to Mary, that indulgence.

Almost any spiritual journey from Wittenberg to Rome—especially if it

detours through Missouri—hinges totally on that conviction. Unless Lutherans perceive common ground with Catholics on justification, Catholics can't hope to get Lutherans to listen to the Church's views on authority, Mary and the saints, purgatory and indulgences and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Unless the cornerstone of Lutherans' mighty fortress against Rome is removed, the rest of the wall won't fall.

Let's go back to the place where my fortress was built.

#### Scene 1, 1978: "We Knew What Was Right"

I was in a classroom in a Lutheran school in western Nebraska, not too long before my confirmation. My pastor drew a diagram on a chalkboard to outline the differing beliefs on what happens when the words of Institution are spoken in the celebration of Communion.

The Catholic section of the diagram said only "body" and "blood"; the Protestant section, "bread" and "wine." The Lutheran one linked "bread" to "body" and "wine" to "blood," showing Luther's belief in Christ's Real Presence "in, with and under" the bread and wine. Catholics believe in transubstantiation, Pastor said; Protestants believe the Eucharist is only a symbol. Both were wrong; Luther was right. This is where our Synod stands.

Missouri's big on taking stands. The Synod's founders were Saxon Germans who emigrated to America in 1839 rather than submit to the forced union of Germany's Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinist) state churches. Their spiritual leader, the Rev. C.F.W. Walther, firmly believed in the doctrines espoused by Luther and his fellow German Reformers, especially as expressed in the Lutheran Confessions—the doctrinal statements adopted by Lutherans in the 1580 Book of Concord.

Walther's beliefs have been enshrined in the Missouri Synod since its founding in 1847. Article II of the LCMS Constitution makes it crystal-clear what every member congregation must uphold: "the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice" and the Lutheran Confessions "as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God."

That constrains Missouri's members

totally unmerited by us."

His answer backed up what Joan had been telling me—that she believed basically what I did when it came to justification. Because he answered that way, I stood before him to marry Joan a few months later.

And because the Holy Father said what he said at that moment in Denver, God eventually led me into the Catholic Church.

Scenes From a Journey  
Every life's journey has its key scenes,

to stand firm against all who believe otherwise—even if they’re in another Lutheran church body, even if they’re part of the LCMS itself. During my childhood (though I knew nothing of this before college), most of the faculty and students of the Synod’s main seminary in St. Louis walked out after a majority of delegates to the LCMS convention declared they were drifting too far from that course and too close to liberal theology and its denial of Scriptural authority. (A number of congregations followed them out and eventually joined two larger church bodies in the 1988 formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.)

It also commits the LCMS to the historic litany of objections to the Catholic Church’s teachings: Catholics believe salvation depends on your works; they place the Pope above the Bible; they pray to Mary and the saints; they believe in purgatory; they accept seven sacraments, not two; and, of course, they insist on this “magic show” called transubstantiation.

I absorbed them all, along with the absolute emphasis on justification by grace through faith as the chief cornerstone of Christianity. Christ died on the cross to save us from our sins. We’re born sinful; there’s nothing we can do to earn salvation. We are saved only through God’s free gift of faith through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. And we need that free gift throughout our lives, for the Christian is both saint and sinner—always prone to fall into the trap of believing he or she can make it to heaven without God’s help.

There was no doubt whatsoever in my mind about it—indeed, no one in our family doubted it. My maternal grandmother summarized it best when recalling her own childhood a century ago: “We knew what was right, and it never occurred to us to do otherwise.”

Which only more strongly poses the question: given my background, how on earth could I end up Catholic?

On one level, the answer is easy: It was God’s grace. More to the point, I apparently missed something in my Lutheran education. For if you believe that the Lutheran Confessions are drawn from God’s Word, you also commit yourself to believing that “the Pope of Rome and his dominion” (to quote a 1932 LCMS document) are the Antichrist—Luther’s incendiary charge against those who threw him out of the Church.

That simply wasn’t part of my training. Young Lutherans aren’t taught the entire content of the Lutheran Confessions. They are expected to read and master Luther’s Small Catechism, which certainly includes the key elements of Lutheranism—the stress on justification, the views on the Real Presence. But you won’t find the word “Antichrist”—or any anti-Catholic polemics—anywhere in it.

Though my pastor taught the theological differences with Rome, he didn’t teach

the polemics, and he didn’t call the pope the Antichrist. And the standard LCMS confirmation vow requires a new member to confess belief in Lutheran teachings “as you have learned to know it in the Small Catechism”—not the Confessions as a whole.

So I didn’t carry all the anti-Catholic baggage into life as an adult Lutheran. But I believed the Missouri Synod’s take on Rome’s beliefs as firmly as Luther ever did. I called on them one day in high school when I told a Catholic friend I knew Rome believed this and that (I forgot the actual doctrinal issue in question long ago).

“It’s not what you think,” he said.

Scene 2, 1983: Once Saved, Always Saved?

Fast-forward a few years. I was in a hotel room in Germany on the Fourth of July, the last day of a five-week tour with my LCMS college choir in honor of Martin Luther’s 500<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was paging through my Bible, writing in my diary, looking for answers to reconcile what I believed about justification with what I’d witnessed among our group.

I had entered that school a year before with the intention of becoming a music teacher in LCMS high schools. The European tour changed my life. We sang in beautiful cathedrals, drank in the sights of our ancestral land and even sang a surreptitiously scheduled concert behind the

Iron Curtain in a tiny, embattled church in Leipzig.

Those were the high points. They weren’t why I was in that room.

Several of our members—people planning to be pastors, teachers, church musicians—largely abandoned the pretense of living their faith while they were so far from home. Some of them drank to excess—which, to be honest, is a German Lutheran trait traceable to Luther himself. But they also ridiculed those

who suggested they weren’t setting a good example.

And the leadership of the choir, all too often, sided with them.

It shattered my beliefs about who we were and what we were supposed to be doing. It wasn’t that I expected people not to sin—I learned my confirmation lessons too well for that. But these ministers-in-training not only were sinning ... they didn’t seem to care.

So there I was, trying to make sense of what had happened, asking myself: Was I wrong? I found myself in Paul’s letter to the Romans, the epistle Luther used more than any other in building his theology of justification.

“What shall we say, then?” Paul wrote in Romans 6:1-2 (NIV). “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” He emphasizes and expands on the point in Romans 8:9: “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”

Then, in Romans 8:12-14, Paul lays it on the table for Christians who are tempted not to live the life to which Christ has called them:

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the

sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

I wasn't wrong. Here was the proof in the Scriptures. We can't sin without consequences, even after we've been justified by grace through faith. God expects His people to shine their lights all the time, not just during the concert—to live their faith at all times, not put it away when it's time to have fun. To do otherwise—to sin and not care—is to throw away that undeserved gift of grace through faith in Christ.

At the time, that discovery saved me from total disillusionment in my faith. It also started me down the road toward the Catholic Church—though it would be years before I understood how important, both personally and theologically, that

I gave her a copy of Luther's Small Catechism, while she gave me a U.S. Catholic catechism she had studied from in her confirmation class. Naturally, as a good Missouri Synod Lutheran who knew Catholics were wrong, I figured I had the tools to wake Joan up. If we were to have a future as a couple, I had to.

moment would be.

I came home deeply conflicted about God's plan for me. I didn't think I could function in a ministry that appeared to tolerate such a gap between belief and practice. Then, quite unexpectedly, I got a call from the publisher of my hometown newspaper, for which I had written a column on high school activities. He wanted me to fill in for the rest of the summer for a sports editor who had suddenly quit.

I found my niche—I enjoyed it. And after I returned to college that fall, opportunities in journalism kept coming my way without my asking for them. After a month, I decided God was giving me a different mission. I transferred at semester's end to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, home to one of the nation's best journalism programs. I've been a journalist ever since.

Scene 3, 1988: That All May Be One

Less than five years later, on May 28,

1988, I stood before a Catholic altar on my wedding day. Not only had God yanked my professional life in a different direction – He had sent me my life's partner from the most unexpected of directions.

My three years at UNL had been everything I hoped for—in every area but one. I was fortunate to land at an LCMS campus ministry full of young people who lived their faith amid the admittedly more hostile atmosphere of a secular university. I wrote for and eventually edited the monthly newsletter when I wasn't studying or writing for the main UNL campus newspaper, the Daily Nebraskan.

But I had hoped for, tried for, frankly embarrassed myself in the quest to find a woman to share my life. Simply put, I crashed and burned. My last hope among the girls I met at UNL faded for good soon after I left for my first job in North Platte, Neb.

Or so I thought.

Quite unexpectedly, a friendship with my copy desk chief at the Daily Nebras-

kan—Joan Rezac—began to blossom. I nearly missed the signals when she started hinting she was interested in something more—but I came to my senses just in time. On April 5, 1987, I asked her on the phone: “Are we moving beyond a friendship?”

“I'm glad you called,” she said. “The thought had crossed my mind!”

Right then, I knew—absolutely knew—the search was over. I can't explain why, and I didn't tell Joan until much later. But the phone calls and trips back to Lincoln for dates proved it. Here was a fellow journalist who loved music and seemed to understand me better than anyone ever had.

I can't do justice in this short space to how perfectly Joan fit into my life—other than to say I've never doubted in the 12 years since that phone call that she was, and is, God's precious gift to me.

But she was Catholic. Catholic. Why, God—why did you send me a CATHO-

LIC? This surely can't work—can it?

We started working on the answer only a few weeks into our relationship. I gave her a copy of Luther's Small Catechism, while she gave me a U.S. Catholic catechism she had studied from in her confirmation class. Naturally, as a good Missouri Synod Lutheran who knew Catholics were wrong, I figured I had the tools to wake Joan up. If we were to have a future as a couple, I had to.

And I tried hard and long during those first few months. There was only one problem: It made her a stronger Catholic. And I was the one who had to adjust.

I attended church with her occasionally, heard the Mass in the vernacular, saw Communion under both kinds. She told me how Vatican II had changed the Church's approach to other faiths. I read a passage in her catechism that said Catholics were finding that Luther's teachings weren't as un-Catholic as they had thought. And on justification? Joan said she believed that works, while they don't save you, let our faith shine through.

In other words, this Catholic Church was ... so to speak ... more Lutheran than I imagined. It was my first clue that I had been viewing Rome through a distorted mirror—the one held up by my confirmation instruction. Though Vatican II had happened a decade before that, the Rome I was taught as a young Lutheran was the Rome of 1517—at least in the way Rome presented itself at that time. Something was different.

I couldn't escape that fact as Joan and I debated the spiritual issues that summer of 1987. It wasn't an easy ride, to be sure. Sometimes it seemed that Joan and I were speaking different languages. I certainly didn't believe all that stuff about Mary, the saints, purgatory and the sacrifice of the Mass, though I was hearing things here and there that gave me pause.

But we came through that time closer than ever. And Fr. Karnish's straight answer to my straight question about justification helped convince me that Joan and I could function as a Christian couple. If the priest who helped form Joan's faith was saying the same thing she was, we could grow in faith together as husband and wife.

But finding some points of agreement with Catholics wasn't enough for me to become one—though we did get mar-

ried at St. Agnes. We resolved to attend each other's churches regularly, minister together where we could and let God tell us whether He wanted us to join one or the other or remain in both. I needed more proof that the Catholic Church I was hearing about from Joan and Fr. Karnish was the Church that really existed.

It took me 10 years to be convinced.

#### Scene 4, 1993: The Surprising Pope from Poland

The moment in Denver when I heard those astonishing words from the pope happened almost halfway in between. It came at a time when our marriage was full of spiritual blessings and professional challenges—but it seemed that we were destined to be a two-faith couple.

Joan had taken Lutheran confirmation classes in Des Moines, where we moved after our marriage. But she just wasn't inspired to join. Something would be missing, she said—something she couldn't put into words. So after we moved to Scottsbluff in 1991, I entered an RCIA class at St. Agnes, intending to stop before the point I would have to commit myself to join.

Again, I was surprised at the level of agreement I was finding between the two faiths. I remember thinking that I could be comfortable at St. Agnes—but something kept gnawing at me. You see, I had started RCIA instruction in Des Moines but left after two weeks. That priest seemed to doubt the essence of the Christian faith—Catholic, Lutheran or otherwise.

So I asked St. Agnes' new pastor, the Rev. Charles Torpey: Could he guarantee me that I would hear the same message about Catholicism in another parish or another diocese?

No, he said.

He was merely reflecting the variety of interpretations of Vatican II that have plagued the Church for most of the 35 years since the Council. But for me, at that time, Fr. Torpey's answer stopped me cold. I was comfortable with what Joan believed, her family believed and St. Agnes believed. But they must be aberrations, I thought. It doesn't mean the Catholic Church as a whole believes them.

A year later, John Paul II shook up that assumption in Denver.

He kept doing things after that

which I couldn't ignore. The year after World Youth Day, the Vatican released the English translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. While I didn't read it cover to cover until after I joined the Church, its release was a profound event—the beginning of order from the chaos of interpretation of Vatican II.

Then John Paul issued *Ut unum sint*, the great 1995 encyclical on ecumenism in which he urged Protestants and Orthodox alike to join Catholics in restoring the Church's unity. A year later, the Holy Father went to Paderborn, Germany, and directly urged Lutherans and Catholics to look at the complete picture of Luther and

Just over a month later, on Feb. 1, I stood over the dishes, looking out at the winter night. The tears kept coming. I knew I had run out of arguments. The walls of my mighty Lutheran fortress lay in ruins around my feet. I knew I had to become Catholic.

the Reformation and approach their 500-year feud in a different way. He stated:

Luther's thinking was characterized by considerable emphasis on the individual, which meant that the awareness of the requirements of society became weaker. Luther's original intention in his call for reform in the Church was a call to repentance and renewal to begin in the life of every individual.

There are many reasons why these beginnings nevertheless led to division. One is the failure of the Catholic Church ... and the intrusion of political and economic interest, as well as Luther's own passion, which drove him far beyond what he originally intended into radical criticism of the Catholic Church, of its way of teaching.

We all bear the guilt. That is why we are called upon to repent and must all allow the Lord to cleanse us over and over.

After nearly a decade of study and close observation of Catholicism, I could take the Pope's words and sentiment for what they were. The messages I first heard in 1987 had been confirmed week in and week out from Catholic pulpits. I had been

absorbed in the wonderful liturgical music coming from Catholic church musicians. I prayed for unity in God's Church more strongly than ever.

And yet ... I remained confirmed in my Lutheran thinking. When it came to Mary, the saints, purgatory and so on, I had searched in vain for a response to Luther's ancient challenge: prove it to me from Scripture!

In mid-1997, we moved to Omaha. As always, I started looking for an LCMS congregation to join. I found one I thought I liked—one that did contemporary music, one that had people I had known from other parts of Nebraska. But something

wasn't right. Something kept gnawing at me, preventing me from becoming an official member of the congregation. I didn't know what it was.

At Christmas, we got a gift from Sr. Mariette Melmer, a double cousin of Joan's mother and a Notre Dame Sister based not far from our new home. She told Joan she thought we would find it interesting. Joan read it, then passed it on to me. It's a familiar title to people in the Coming Home Network: *Rome Sweet Home*—Scott and Kimberly Hahn's story of their journeys from Presbyterianism into the Catholic Church.

It wasn't a perfect fit; I was a Lutheran reading an ex-Calvinist's conception of what Luther believed. And yet ... here were all these Scripture passages Scott Hahn was throwing out at me on the points of difference between Lutherans and Catholics. After all these years, a Catholic was meeting Luther's challenge. He was pointing to Scripture. And he was making sense—for instance, his connection of purgatory to passages in 1 Corinthians 3 that I never had paid attention to before!

As so many Protestants who then became Catholic have said ... I knew I was in trouble. It was time to answer the questions once and for all. I was driven by something the Pope had written in *Ut unum sint*:

In the first place, with regard to doctrinal formulations which differ from those normally in use in the community to which one belongs, it is certainly right to determine whether the words involved say the same thing....

In this regard, ecumenical dialogue, which prompts the parties involved to question each other, to understand each other and to

explain their positions to each other, makes surprising discoveries possible. Intolerant polemics and controversies have made incompatible assertions out of what was really the result of two different ways of looking at the same reality.

I couldn't pass up that challenge. It called on skills I use all the time as a journalist—the translation of the jargon of doctors, lawyers, school administrators, etc., into language common people can use. After 10 years of virtual dual membership in the Catholic Church and the LCMS, I believed I knew both sides' theological languages well enough to test it.

The 20-year journey was entering its final phase.

#### Scene 5, 1998 – Amid the Crumbled Fortress

Just over a month later, on Feb. 1, I stood over the dishes, looking out at the winter night. The tears kept coming. I knew I had run out of arguments. The walls of my mighty Lutheran fortress lay in ruins around my feet. I knew I had to become Catholic.

I was nearing the end of the second draft of what became a 40-page paper, a conversation with myself about my journey. I had pored through Internet pages, haunted the Omaha City and Creighton University libraries and raided bookstores

in my quest.

I was amazed at the insight I found in the writings of Pope John Paul II. And I was astounded to discover that it was less a matter of giving up Lutheran beliefs than coming to understand how Catholic so many of them really were.

Naturally, justification was the first issue. Of course, most of the work had been done years before. But as I sorted through a decade's worth of evidence, I found I had no doubts left: on this most

important issue, it seemed that Lutherans and Catholics were arguing mostly over style—not substance.

Once the cornerstone was removed, the other bricks in the wall began to collapse. I began to perceive other similarities between Catholics and Lutherans that hadn't occurred to me before—most notably on the two key ingredients of the Church's authority: the relationship between Scripture and Tradition and the question of infallibility.

Luther, of course, set the tone for Protestants everywhere with his emphasis on sola Scriptura—the Bible as the sole authority. But John Paul changed the tone of the debate in *Ut Unum Sint*, defining the question in dispute as “the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God.”

Compare that to Article II of the LCMS Constitution. It's the same order of primacy! Catholics indeed look first to the Scriptures—but they interpret those Scriptures in the light of the teaching they uphold as directly passed on from the apostles, the Church Fathers, the ecumenical councils. And in Missouri's universe, at any rate, the Lutheran Confessions have the same relationship to Scripture. They define how the LCMS reads and lives its faith.

In other words: Sola Scriptura is nothing more than a phrase or slogan. It can't

be anything else as long as a group of Christians follows a particular set of teachings, whether it comes from Luther, John Calvin, John Knox or John Wesley.

In that case ... which side has the better case for its Tradition? Lutherans—who kept much of the Catholic Tradition, but based the rest of their teachings on the interpretations of a handful of 16<sup>th</sup>-century men? Or the Catholic Church, which can do what Luther could not—cite the Scriptures in defense of its authority to pass on and interpret the faith?

It isn't that the LCMS in practice denied the connection between Scripture and Tradition. It's a question of which Tradition they accept. The issue of infallibility is much the same. The LCMS believes the Holy Spirit guides its officers (its Magisterium, if you will) and its triennial conventions (its ecumenical councils) in deciding doctrinal issues. Again, which has the better Scriptural case for its authority?

There were other areas in which it appeared that Lutheran practice mimicked Catholic reality. Luther may have reduced seven sacraments to two by his own definition—and yet Lutherans hold confirmation, marriage, ordination, confession and absolution (in the corporate sense, anyway) and pastoral care of the sick (parallel to Anointing of the Sick) in high esteem. In each, they believe God blesses His people as the pastor proclaims God's Word. And isn't that the essence of the “means of grace” that explains the basic act of both Baptism and the Eucharist—the application of God's Word to visible elements to impart His grace?

I didn't expect the issues of Mary and the saints to fall as easily as they did. But both are linked to one question: Do Lutherans believe the “communion of saints” unites the saints in heaven and on earth in one body of Christ? If that's so, one cannot ignore Paul's observation that “the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you!’ ” (1 Corinthians 12:21a, NIV). We ask our fellow living Christians to pray for us in time of trouble. Why not then the Christians who have gone before?

As for Mary, I found the case for Catholic dogma bolstered by a most unexpected source: Luther himself. Evidence can be found in his writings that he believed Mary was Mother of God, was perpetually a virgin, even that she was immaculately conceived. (There



also is evidence that he believed in the Assumption, though it's more scanty.) Most astonishingly, the founder of this church that disdains praying to Mary invokes her intercession at the beginning and the end of his 1521 commentary on the Magnificat!

It's quite another thing to equate Mary or the saints with God or to expect them to accomplish specific things for you. Luther was adamant about that point—but so is the Catholic Church. Pope Paul VI clarified the point for Catholics who may have lost it when he cautioned that veneration of Mary and the saints must be done within the context of “a rightly ordered faith”—one that looks to Christ as the sole Source of salvation and grace.

Ultimately, it came down to the Eucharist. The dispute over the sacrifice of the Mass wasn't the obstacle I expected it to be. Catholics today don't speak of it as a necessary repetition of Christ's sacrifice—as Luther and the Reformers perceived their position—but as the one single sacrifice presented again to us, a representation of Calvary to the Father every time we “do this in remembrance of Me.” (I later found a quote from the late LCMS theology professor Arthur Carl Piepkorn that used virtually the same language!)

One obstacle remained—the transubstantiation issue, the fate of the bread and wine after the Words of Institution. I had come a long way by following the pope's advice. I had had to give up very little of my Lutheran way of thinking. But transubstantiation couldn't be resolved as two different approaches to a common belief. I was back to the diagram Pastor had put on the chalkboard 20 years before: Either the bread and wine are still there—or they aren't.

So I went to Luther's 1520 treatise *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, the work that defined his views on transubstantiation and redefined the sacraments. I had been struck by an oddity: Catholics and Lutherans appealed to the same Scripture passages and emphasized a plain, literal reading of the text. There must be something more to Luther's position.

There was. Luther wrote:

Does not Christ appear to have anticipated this curiosity admirably by saying of the wine, not *Hoc est sanguis meus*, but *Hic est sanguis meus*? ... That the pronoun “this,”

in both Greek and Latin, is referred to “body,” is due to the fact that in both of these languages the two words are of the same gender. In Hebrew, however, which has no neuter gender, “this” is referred to “bread,” so that it would be proper to say *Hic [bread] est corpus meum*.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, Luther bases his theology on the original Bible languages—Greek and Hebrew, not Latin. But not here. He's objecting to the Latin translation—the translation of the Church whose authority he was rejecting. He's dismissing the original translation, the Greek, because it agrees with the Latin. And he's appealing to a different language entirely—Hebrew, which he assumes Christ spoke at the Last Supper (modern scholars believe it more likely was Aramaic)—to undermine the transubstantiation doctrine which he associated with Rome's corruptions of the faith.

My hands shook as I read that passage for the first time. I thought: But that's wrong! He can't do that!

I was back in my professional realm. I don't know Greek ... but I'm a writer, and I can research. I spent the next day ransacking the library and the Internet, finding the exact Greek words and learning how the Greek language treats pronouns. When I was done, the evidence was overwhelming: In the language used by the New Testament's divinely inspired authors, Christ's “this” cannot refer to anything other than “body.” (A straight-across reading of the Greek in an interlinear New Testament reinforces the point: “This is the body of Me.”)

In other words ... Rome was right, and Luther was wrong. I no longer had a case against joining the Catholic Church.

Prayer for Unity

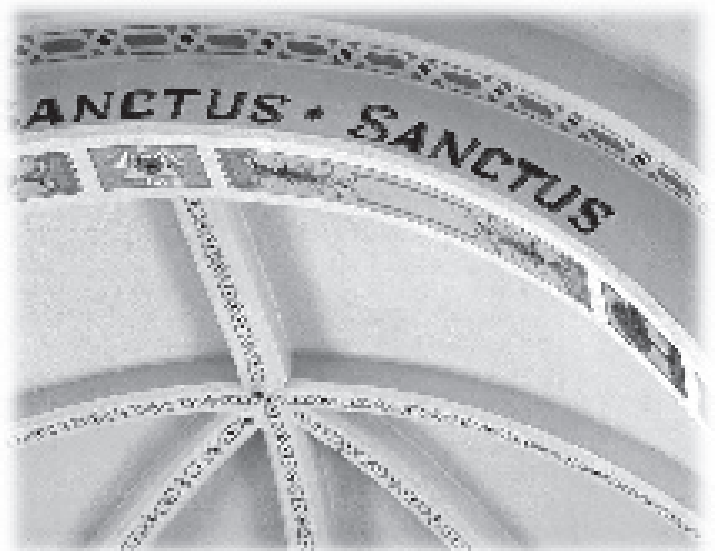
I was received into the Church and took

Communion with my wife for the first time less than two months later. Our 8-year-old son, Jonathan, made his first Communion last December. (Our other son, Joshua, is 5.) I can't begin to express the joy of being fully spiritually united with them – not to mention all the Catholics whose quiet witnesses and utter lack of pressure unquestionably were God's instruments on the way to Rome.

There has been pain, too, and that isn't an unfamiliar story to Christians who have reconciled with Rome. It's one thing for Catholics to ask forgiveness for the events of centuries ago. It's another for Orthodox and Protestants of all stripes to grant it – to put aside the pain and the polemics and humbly, sincerely, thoroughly explore how it all happened, how the other side thinks and what God is saying to His people in these increasingly faithless days.

The Holy Father has called on Catholics, especially as the millennium year approaches, to work for the unity of the Church – to join Christ's high-priestly prayer that we all may be one. I pray that Rome and Missouri in particular may be led to forgive each other, to look toward God and His Word with truly unbiased eyes and ask whether they're meant to remain divided. They share far, far more than they know.

After the pope spoke his astonishing words in Denver, I heard Dana sing World Youth Day's theme song for the first time. It quickly took root in my heart because of



# Returning Home

By Rick Ricciardi

It is strangely ironic that as I begin to reconsider the events that led me back to the Roman Catholic Church, the words “I was raised Roman Catholic” come to mind. I wonder how many times over the course of twenty years I have said those words, usually at the beginning of a personal testimony or even during an introduction. I also wonder how many times I have been on the receiving end of those words.

In many of the Evangelical or Fundamentalist churches of today, more than 20 - 30% of the members or regular worshipers can say the words “I was raised Roman Catholic.” At banquets or meetings, I recall many times sitting around a table, attempting to meet and learn about the other people sitting with me. Inevitably someone would say those words. Heads would start nodding seemingly everywhere, and the smiles would begin. Additional words weren't required, because each of us understood.

We had escaped from a church that taught works for salvation, tradition over Scripture, and which had never told us about a personal relationship with our Lord. Each of us would say, “We never heard the Gospel until we began to attend ...” such and such church.

Now after being away for over twenty years I understand what the Catholic Church truly teaches about works in relation to salvation. I understand not only the need for Tradition but also how it acts as the glue in the foundation of our faith. To my shame I am now aware how week after week for twenty-two years I had heard the Gospel read and preached at Mass, but I never listened to it... “They hear, but they do not understand.” Lord, forgive me.

For most Protestant denominations, their specific or unique theological emphases have been formulated only over the past one hundred years, some more, many less. Usually each group was formed after splitting away from another group

over a particular theological, doctrinal, biblical or moral issue that was debated and then either implemented or rejected. So often, at least it seems to me, each newly formed denominational group leaves something behind in the process. I think the Reformers would be shocked to see how the denominations they founded have evolved in their ever widening theologies.

Catholic New Testament theology covers nearly two thousand years. The consistency and depth of teaching within the Church should be something marveled, not criticized. Unfortunately today even in the Catholic Church herself we find priests, religious, lay teachers, and organizations who do not follow the teaching of the Church, which only leads to more confusion among lay Catholics as well as non-Catholics. Can there be any

question as to why many lay Catholics don't know their faith?

To Christians of other traditions, the Catholic Church, especially the Mass, seems strange or antiquated. It's not until one takes the time to learn and begin to understand what the Church truly teaches that much of what is practiced, both in obedience to Sacred Tradition as well as in cultural Catholics' devotions and customs, is based on what was delivered,

taught and practiced in the first centuries of Apostolic Christianity. The Jewish roots of the early Christians can be clearly seen in these traditions.

On the other hand, most Protestant denominations have been established rather recently, with their own traditions being based on what their first generation Protestant leaders and members practiced.

The specific tradition that I recently left, the Assemblies of God, was formed in 1914. Most of the first generation have long since passed on, leaving the second generation to hold true to what was then established. The third and now fourth generations, many coming from other Christian traditions, are questioning why things are done the way they are. The second generation people are fighting to bring the denomination back to the roots

they inherited, while the third and fourth generations want to change in ways that seem important to them and their families.

All of this has happened in this century. When you contrast the changes made in less than one century in this one new Christian tradition to the consistency following twenty centuries in the Catholic Church, it should make one pause.

Who would have thought fifty years ago that some mainline Protestant traditions would be considering, and in many cases accepting, abortion, same-sex marriages, and homosexual clergy?

Once again, the Catholic Church, in spite of the attempts of dissident groups

whose motives are often suspect, has remained consistent in its call to all Christians to remain faithful to the faith and teaching that has been handed down, from generation to generation, for nearly two thousand years.

#### My Wandering Begins

At the age of 20-21, I began indulging in some heavy drinking, experimenting with drugs, and almost entered a marriage that would have proven disastrous. Why? I don't know. God, however, was faithful, even though I most certainly wasn't.

A string of circumstances led me to a Southern Baptist Church in Louisiana. Those circumstances became the bulk of my testimony whenever I would joyfully tell how I "became a Christian." Today as I look back, I am very grateful for how God worked in my life to open my heart to His love and grace, but now my conclusion is different: He saved me, but He saved me from me.

At this small Southern Baptist church I found people who cared for me, loved me, and shared their lives with me. Outside of my own family, I never realized people acted this way. Many nights I would be at one of their homes, sitting at the kitchen table asking questions about the Bible. They always had time for me.

There I discovered Jesus in a way that was totally different from what I had experienced as a Catholic, and I believe this is one reason why Catholics leave the Church. I don't mean to over simplify this, but I think what draws many away is hearing clear, directive, confrontational preaching for the first time. Not a short homily demanding little or no response, but a thirty, forty-five, even sixty minute sermon, which fully develops a Scriptural text into a practical application that leads to a climax requiring a "Yes!" or a "No!" This is why, I believe, so many "born again" ex-Catholics say they had never heard the Gospel before. What they are really saying is, "I was never put in a position to say 'yes' before." At least this was true for me.

But there is another aspect, found in most evangelical churches, that is also important: the feeling of involvement. In the Southern Baptist church I began to attend, there was Sunday school followed by the morning service. In the evening there was another time of teaching called Training Union, followed by the evening

service. On Wednesday there was mid-week service. On Thursday there was visitation to the people who had visited the church on Sunday or who recently had moved into the area. Throughout the week there were Bible studies and committee meetings. With all of this you begin to feel involved, to feel needed; that you are "somebody."

I have learned that the same opportunities for involvement have been there

all along in most Catholic parishes. There are many things going on, ministries to be involved in, and therefore ways to feel like you have something to offer. But I wonder how many former Catholics, now so heavily involved in their new Protestant churches, made the same efforts to be involved in their former parishes? More than weekly Mass I mean. How many taught CCD, worked with the teens, college students, singles, young married couples, widows, converts, those who are grieving, those who are in need, etc.?

In April 1974, I became a Baptist, joining the church I had been attending. I preached my first service at a Youth Revival in June of that year. I remember working for days on that sermon and being so nervous when the day finally came. I arrived at the church early and sat anxiously in the first row. With my back turned to the congregation, I had no idea how many people were entering behind me. When it came time for me to preach, I approached the pulpit and turned to see a church absolutely packed. I had never seen the church that full before.

In spite of my heart pounding and my knees shaking, I began a one hour sermon that probably included every piece of Bible knowledge I had accumulated since April. Anything and everything I had ever heard was in that message. At the end, I gave an altar call and a teenage girl came forward and gave her life

to Christ. It was one of the most exciting nights of my life and I knew I was where God wanted me.

While helping with the youth group, I met a young woman named Jeannie, and within months we knew God was calling us to be married. I discouraged any of my family from attending our December wedding. This of course was just another "hurt" in a long list of "hurts" that I would cause for my parents. The excuse I gave

was that the wedding was in Louisiana, a long way from my parents' home outside of Chicago. There were still six siblings living at home so it would have been very difficult and expensive for them to come.

But the real reason I persuaded them not to come was because I was embarrassed by them, not personally, but because they were Catholic. In my heart I truly wanted them to be there with me, especially my Mom and Dad, but I didn't want to introduce them to my new church family. My anti-Catholic feelings were starting to emerge. I was beginning to enjoy my new zealotry and I didn't want to be challenged by two Catholic Christians.

I enrolled in Bible College, and for the next few years, my anti-Catholic views, and at times hatred for the Catholic Church, were the dominant part of life. I had just enough knowledge of the Catholic Church to be considered an "expert" by many of my fellow Bible College students but not enough to be able to discern the errors that I was hearing about the Church.

From 1974 - 1985 I served in several Baptist Churches in Louisiana, Washington and California. I was always involved in lay ministry and church leadership. I served in pulpit ministry, preaching when the pastors were on vacation or ill. I also taught Sunday School classes as well as

adult Bible studies.

When we moved to Arizona in 1985, my wife and I took the opportunity to join an Assembly of God (Pentecostal) church. We remained there until April 1997 when I finally resigned my positions as deacon, and Secretary/Treasurer of the Board of Directors.

#### My Heart Starts to Turn for Home

I think the beginning of my rest-

lessness with the Protestant form of worship—basically prayer, a greeting, singing, announcements, an offering, more singing, more prayer, a special song either by the choir or an individual or group, followed by a message and finally some opportunity to respond to the message—was the idea of “going to get something.” If the songs weren’t the ones I liked it could ruin the whole service for me. Being a part of the leadership team, we always tried to make sure the emphasis was on worshipping God, regardless of how we felt. But so often it still came down to how we felt. I believe this is the source of the standard line, “I’m not being fed.”

Without really knowing it, I was beginning to think there had to be a better way. I remember talking to the pastor, shortly before I announced I was leaving, and he admitted that he felt under much pressure; that he was carrying the service on his shoulders. He didn’t want it that way, but he felt like he was performing.

Then in the spring of 1996 my family began preparing for our first visit in ten years back to my home near Chicago. I am the oldest of nine children—six boys and three girls. Most of my brothers and sisters were small children when I left home at the age of nineteen, so not being there when they grew up, I felt I didn’t know them very well. The thought of seeing

them again became an ever increasing problem. I felt so different in my new faith. I was the only one who had left home and I was the only one who wasn’t Catholic. My anxiety verged on paranoia, and over the years I always found excuses to avoid returning.

The reason for this particular trip home was for the wedding of my brother, Paul, to his fiancée, Katherine. I had missed many of my brothers’ and sisters’

weddings, mostly because of the paranoia, but this time my Dad insisted that all of his sons be in this wedding, so I agreed.

Paul and Katherine were graduates of Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, where Paul had received an M.A. in Theology. I remember thinking, “What a sap! He spent all that money and time earning a degree in Catholic theology. I’ll bet they didn’t open the Bible once during the whole two years he was there.” Paul mentioned this one professor he had who was a well-respected Scripture scholar named Dr. Scott Hahn, but it didn’t make any impression on me back then (though it certainly would later).

We arrived a few days before the wedding and of course everything was in chaos. I tried to have some time with Paul to discuss his education and to convince myself he was really a Christian. During our discussion the subject of Mary came up. We talked about the different doctrinal beliefs about Mary that Catholics must hold, and at first I thought he was kidding. This had to be a joke that he had been saving for months to spring on me. Then I realized he was serious. Thoughts flew through my mind. My brother isn’t a Christian! Two years at that school and he thinks Mary is equal to Jesus!

Little did I know that this discussion, which then led to anger, caused me to begin thinking again about the Catholic

Church. At first the thoughts weren’t things I cared to share with anyone, but slowly over the days before the wedding, God began softening my heart.

As far as I was concerned, the wedding rehearsal was a disaster. I wouldn’t cooperate by bowing before the altar as I came down the aisle. I goofed off the whole time making jokes about everything the deacon was saying or trying to do. I was a total distraction to those around me. That was the first time I had been in a Catholic church for a long time and I thought it was all a joke.

The morning of the wedding was an exciting, beautiful day. I had gotten over all the fears and apprehension of seeing my brothers and sisters, not to mention relatives that I hadn’t seen in twenty years. I was even looking forward to seeing everyone and meeting with them at the reception afterwards.

We arrived at the Church and I began seeing people whom I never thought I’d see again. We laughed and told stories, amazed at how years could vanish in moments. We gathered in the church and waited for the bride to arrive.

I noticed that my brother, Don, was acting as if he wasn’t feeling well. He started to get anxious, for fear of disrupting the wedding, which made him feel worse. We tried to calm him down but he kept getting worse. I put my hands on his shoulders and prayed for a healing touch and calmness to come over him. It was the first time I was able to do “my thing” around all these Catholics.

Praying for my brother helped me to focus on the wedding, to think about God, and to make a commitment to Him that I would take the upcoming ceremony seriously. When Katherine arrived, the wedding began, and in a few minutes I would begin a journey that I never thought I would take. A journey back to the Roman Catholic Church.

#### My Journey Home

I was enjoying the wedding Mass, looking around and making eye contact with cousins who arrived late, who appeared just as excited to see me as I was to see them. I was feeling at home, very comfortable in a very strange place. When it came time for Communion, I had no intention of going forward to receive, but yet I sure wanted to. Being in the wedding party, I was sitting in the front row. To my

surprise, after the Priest gave Communion to Paul and Katherine, he came straight to the wedding party in the front row. I was second, and was caught off guard. When the Priest came to me, obviously assuming that I was Catholic, he said, “The Body of Christ,” and I instinctively said “Amen,” and received the Host.

I knew (and know) that I should not have done that, but the moment I received the Host something happened in my heart—I instantly believed in the Real Presence of Jesus. It seemed so ‘right.’ Why did I ever doubt this? A hunger was birthed inside of me and a need to rediscover the Catholic Church began.

Without making a big announcement—“I am rethinking the Catholic position”—I began to read books and magazines, listen to tapes, anything I could find at my parent’s home. Eventually I found a copy of *Pierced By A Sword*, a novel by Bud Macfarlane, Jr., Director and Founder of the Mary Foundation in Ohio. The title was intriguing and the book cover surprised me. Here was a Catholic novel dealing with the end of this age, something I had become quite “informed” about as an Assembly of God Christian.

As I read it I thought, “But where’s the anti-Christ?” There was no mention of a temple being rebuilt or any talk about the rapture. There was a lot of talk about Mary, but what did she have to do with end times?

I also struggled with the novel’s main characters. How was I going to accept or believe that God might use characters who drank and smoked? Not just a little—a lot! Even the priest in the story drank and smoked and yet he was portrayed as a good priest. This was too much for my Assembly of God scruples to handle. “Christians don’t drink or smoke, and if they do, they sure don’t do it where they can be seen.”

In *Pierced By A Sword*, the author intersperses information and statements from the many reported visitations or apparitions of Mary. He also slips in a lot of Catholic theology and philosophy. I kept saying, “Where is this guy coming up with this stuff?” I probably threw the novel down six times, each time saying something like, “I’ve got better things to do than read this.”

But I finally became totally absorbed in the book. I couldn’t stop reading it. I

was getting up early, staying up late, trying to have some quiet time or find a quiet place to finish this book. Nothing else mattered; I had to finish this book.

In the end it was a story of hope. It particularly helped me understand the Catholic teaching on the communion of saints, which in just a few months, would prove to be an unexpected comfort. I probably could have picked up any number of other books lying around, which also could have impacted my life. But God, who understands me better than I do myself, knew which one I needed to pick up and read.

#### Returning Home

If I had just read that book and left it at that, I would have returned to Arizona and never thought about becoming Catholic again. But my heart was driven to take another step. After our vacation I wrote to Bud Macfarlane Jr. to tell him about the impact of his novel on my life. In addition to an autographed copy of *Pierced By A Sword*, Bud sent me a copy of *Surprised By Truth* by Patrick Madrid, a book of testimonies of Protestants who had come home to the Catholic Church. This I devoured. I had no idea there were other Protestants who not only were thinking about becoming Catholic, but who actually had become Catholic.

One of the wonderful ways that God

encouraged me during this difficult time was in the way people would make contact with me. I was reading *Surprised By Truth*, and happened to finish the chapter written by Marcus Grodi, the founder and president of the Coming Home Network International. The very next day when I returned from lunch and listened to my messages on my answering machine, there was a message from Marcus saying how Bud had given him my name. Even more than a great story, God used *Pierced By A Sword* to bring people like these Catholic brothers into my life. It started a chain of events that in many ways was

miraculous.

Beginning in the Fall of 1996, Bud and Marcus became my support team by telephone, mail, or e-mail. Their wisdom, along with a ton of tapes by Scott Hahn and other great teachers, which I had purchased or borrowed and listened to multiple times, along with a great deal of research and prayer, eventually brought me to a crisis point. I had to announce my resignation and my return to the Catholic Church. If I did not, I was being disobedient.

One thought, I believe, really helped to speed up my return home. When I heard Jeff Cavins—a former Protestant pastor, and now host of the *Life on the Rock* program on the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN)—speak about living a life of rebellion during his years away from the church of his youth, I knew exactly what he meant. Our stories were different but this mindset of rebellion, I believe, is true, not only for me, but for a whole generation of former Catholics.

I had been limited in my ministry, my relationships, my joy, because I was in rebellion. Once I understood this, accepted it, and began to experience true repentance, my joy began to return and my days away from the Catholic Church were numbered.

Jeannie and I began the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) classes at

our local Catholic parish in June 1997. On Saturday afternoon, August 9, I made a general confession—my first confession in at least twenty-five years. Then on Sunday, August 10, I received the Eucharist, legitimately.

On Saturday, November 22, 1997 I had the privilege of watching my wife and her RCIA class make a Profession of Faith, receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, and then First Holy Communion. We were now able to receive the sacraments together as husband and wife.

So much has happened in such a short time. There were many times during this

process that I became discouraged and wanted to forget about it. “Do I really want to walk away from ministry which I have devoted years preparing for?” But each time I doubted, God would send someone, usually someone I didn’t know, often over the Internet, who just felt led to write me a letter sharing their story or to offer encouragement. For all of you who made contact with me, thank you. God has truly continued to bless my wife and me as we stepped out, leaving many years of ministry and friends behind, but filling our lives to overflowing with new friends,

brothers and sisters in Christ.

I had the privilege of serving under some godly men during my years away from the Church. These men provided friendship, wisdom, and many wonderful memories. These were close friendships with men that I loved and still do. And each time I had to say good-bye, I felt as if my heart was being torn out of my chest.

Today I have fallen in love with the Catholic Church. When I think back to the words, “I was raised Roman Catholic,” I can only say, “Thanks Mom and Dad—I love you.”

#### Some Thoughts on Salvation

As a Protestant I always knew exactly what I would say if I were asked, “Are you saved?” Since becoming a Roman Catholic, I have been anxiously awaiting the time a Protestant challenges me with that question. My plan was that I would recite the same old classic answer and challenge them to find something wrong with it. I would expect to see a confused look on their face followed by the question, “But aren’t you Catholic?” I would then go on to explain the whole truth about salvation.

But then I began to wonder if this was really the correct response. There is no doubt that salvation is a gift from God through the death and resurrection of His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As a result of sin our relationship with Him

was severed. We, as sinful people are not capable of renewing that relationship. But God, who loves us so much, sent His Son, to die for our sin.

Our salvation begins at the cross and is made possible by the resurrection. Catholic and non-Catholic Christians alike believe this truth and only the foolish will debate it.

But as a Catholic, should I miss the opportunity to include why I am Catholic when I answer the question, “Are you saved?” Can I separate the two?

When I was a Protestant, salvation

was a term that meant different things to different people. Contrary to what many Catholics think, not all Protestants believe in “once saved always saved.” It is true that many believe that after praying some kind of prayer—which involves admitting being a sinner in need of a Savior, accepting Jesus as the one who died on the cross, rose again three days later, and by his blood washed away your sin—you are now saved, once and for all.

But many believe that as a result of sin, you can and do lose your salvation. The process of returning to a state of being saved can be as simple as praying a prayer of forgiveness, to getting saved all over again.

The point being, even in the Protestant world, there is disagreement on what it means to be saved, what it takes to be saved and how one stays saved. This also leads to the reason there are thousands of distinct Protestant denominations, each using the same scripture verses, coming to different conclusions, but each claiming to be the ones who are most correct.

Having completed two years “back home” as a practicing Catholic, I find great relief not feeling the pressure to get people “saved.” The responsibility of telling someone they are saved, just because they repeated a simple prayer that you had them say, is too great. I don’t mean to judge people, but I often wonder how many thousands, even millions of people are confident they are going to heaven

because someone stopped them in a shopping mall, put a tract in their hand, and asked them if they would like to receive Jesus as their Savior. That five minute exchange is now the event in their life that “ensures” their eternity.

I can remember talking with people who came forward for salvation at the end of a worship service. I would always ask, “What do you want?” So often, their answer would be, “I want to be sure.” I would ask, “Are you saved?” and usually, they would indicate they had prayed a salvation prayer at one time in their life. They had been told they were saved and going to heaven, but they didn’t “feel” it.

The usual comeback would be, “Well, that’s Satan trying to put doubt into your mind.” Sometimes I think we give Satan too much credit, especially when it comes to areas we’re sloppy in.

Personally, I always believed that if a person didn’t feel saved, they weren’t. So I would always approach my time with them from that point of view. But, when I was through, I did what everyone else did. I led them in a sinner’s prayer, shook their hand, called them a brother or a sister, and then told them they were going to heaven.

At least if this occurred in the church, there would be follow-up by one of the pastors. I know many of the crusades try to have follow-up. That’s why they have the people who come forward to fill out cards—so that a church in the area can contact them and try to help them. I read once that after a Billy Graham crusade, 10% of the cards had false addresses on them. What kind of salvation is that? Your first act as a Christian is to lie about where you live? Yet, I’m sure these people left thinking they were saved and on the way to heaven.

When I was “saved” in the Baptist church in 1974, I wrote in my brand new King James Bible, “March 17.” I could always look back on that day and say, “That was when I became a Christian.”

But now that I am, once again, a Catholic, I realize that salvation is a whole lot more. I understand the words of Jesus, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Salvation is not, can not be, a one time experience. It is every day, day-by-day, the good times and the bad times.

I am thankful that I have a Church that

# One Saving Action

By Dwight Longenecker

One of the biggest areas of confusion and misunderstanding between Catholics and Evangelicals is in the area of salvation. How is a person saved? How does a person get to heaven?

A classic view of Evangelicalism is that a person is saved by faith alone. In the sixteenth century, reformers like Martin Luther felt their Catholic faith was legalistic and meaningless. To them it had become just a set of rules and routine, formal prayers which meant nothing and which could never save a person. With great excitement they “rediscovered” the Biblical doctrine that a person is saved by grace through faith—and not by any works they have done. This was exciting and liberating news. No longer did they have to be good enough to please God by reciting endless liturgies and enduring grueling good works. God had saved them through the work of Jesus Christ and all they had to do was trust in him through faith to be saved.

Some of them took the extreme position that a person is saved through faith alone. This doctrine is called *sola fide*—only faith. In their enthusiasm to embrace salvation by faith alone, they couldn’t help drawing the conclusion that the Catholic Church taught that a person was saved by good works.

It must have seemed like that was the teaching of the Catholic Church at the time, and probably for a lot of ordinary people it felt like their salvation was won by endless prayers and good works, but in fact the Catholic Church had never taught this. The idea that we can work our way into heaven is a heresy called Pelagianism after the fourth century teacher called Pelagius. From that time, and down through the ages the Catholic Church has repudiated such teaching. The Catholic

Church has never taught that salvation is accomplished through our good works. But what does the Catholic Church teach on this important issue and why? In fact, the difference between Catholics and Evangelicals on this issue is far smaller than many people think.

One of the problems in this debate between the need for faith or works is that both sides have tended to pull out certain verses from the New Testament to use as proof texts. The Evangelicals use some verses from St. Paul’s teaching that “a man is saved by faith, and not by any works of the law lest any man should boast.” Catholics respond with verses from the epistle of James which say clearly that “faith without works is dead.” But this is a

bit like two cowboys in a shoot out—both of them pull out their six guns and shoot from the hip. But there’s not much listening going on and the only person they convince is themselves.

I think the best way to confront this whole issue is to avoid simple proof texts on their own, to avoid also the strong language and emotional experiences of the Reformation times, and to turn back to the Bible as a whole. This is an immense issue to which shelves of theological libraries devote yards of space. I can only hope that a simple overview will help make the

Catholic position clearer to both Catholics and Evangelicals alike.

The place to begin is the Old Testament, but in the Old Testament we don’t actually hear too much about faith as such. When the word faith is used it usually means the keeping of one’s word, keeping a solemn agreement between two parties. Where it is used in a religious context faith for the Jewish person means keeping his part of the solemn covenant between God and his people, and of course the Jewish person’s part of keeping the covenant was obeying the law. So the basic meaning of keeping faith in the Old Testament means keeping the law, or obeying God’s commandments.

But there are one or two other hints in the Old Testament that having faith could mean something more. In 2 Chronicles 20.20 the good king of Israel called Jehosaphat calls on the people to “Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld. Have faith in his prophets and you will have suc-

cess.” Then the prophet Habakkuk looks forward to the day when the Lord’s messenger will come and bring the revelation of God. In that day, says the prophet, “the righteous will live by faith.” But in the context the word faith also means faithfulness so Habakkuk is saying that the one who is loyal, or faithful, or who keeps his word or his part of the bargain will be considered righteous.

So all through the Old Testament the person who has faith is also faithful, or loyal. The person who has faith keeps his side of the bargain. But what does this

mean in action? Are there any illustrations of faith in the Old Testament? What does the person of faith look like? What does he believe and what does he do to keep his side of the bargain with God?

The New Testament book of Hebrews helps us see the Old Testament through Christian eyes. In chapter eleven it speaks at great length about the faith of the Old Testament characters. Hebrews looks back at the Old Testament characters and sees that they were faithful because they had faith in God. In other words, they were able to be faithful, loyal and obedient because they trusted in God's faithfulness. They were able to keep their end of the bargain because they knew God would keep His part.

Hebrews eleven in fact reads like an Old Testament Hall of Fame. First is Adam and Eve's son Abel. He makes a better sacrifice than Cain because he has faith in God. By faith Noah believed God and built an ark to save himself and his family from destruction. By faith Abraham left the city of his fathers and set out to a country which God promised to him. By faith Abraham was able to become a father even though he was past the age because he considered God to be faithful. By faith Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice—believing that God could even raise the dead.

Now the interesting thing to note in this list from Hebrews is that each one of

Exodus from Egypt. By faith Moses' parents hid him in the river. By faith Moses led the people of Israel and instituted the Passover meal. By faith he led them through the Red Sea, conquered Jericho and entered the promised land.

The writer to the Hebrews goes on to list the heroes from the book of Judges and beyond. By faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, became powerful in battle, and went through terrible persecutions.

The list recounting the Old Testament heroes is dynamic, full of action and excitement. Faith enabled all these heroes to perform actions which were courageous and faithful to God's commands. But those actions were not mindless and arbitrary acts of obedience. The actions themselves were meaningful. They taught the faithful ones lessons about themselves and God. They performed God's will in the world and they helped bring the faithful ones to a higher perfection. Faith and faith-full actions together helped bring the faithful one into deeper relationship with God.

So in the Old Testament the righteous person lives by faith, and his faith or trust in God is always shown through his obedience to God—through his faith-full actions. The Old Testament therefore doesn't say too much about faith as such, but when Jesus comes on the scene the Scriptures suddenly explode with refer-

ences to faith.

Over and over again Jesus scolds His disciples because they do not have enough faith. He says if they have only a little faith they could move mountains. It is by faith that people are healed, and it is through faith that His disciples will do great signs and wonders. In the Old Testament faith was linked with faithful obedience to God's law, but now faith becomes a dynamic power source in the person's life. Suddenly Jesus' disciples will be able to do great things through faith.

But Jesus doesn't say who or what they are to have faith in. As Jews, his dis-

ciples would have put their faith in God alone—the ultimate faithful one; and for them having faith meant obeying God's commands. But in John 2.11 we read that the disciples put their faith in Jesus, and throughout the gospel we're told that people put their faith in Jesus Himself. In other words they transferred their faith in the law-giving God to Jesus Himself.

When you think about it, this is an amazing transition. In doing so they were recognizing Jesus to be the faithful one. In other words, they were recognizing that their solemn agreement to be in a covenant relationship with God was fulfilled by being in a relationship of trust and faith with Jesus.

Then in John 14.12 Jesus says something even more stupendous. Just before He promises the Holy Spirit He says,

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.

We must remember that all through the gospels Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. So it is that here He fulfills the incomplete Old Testament idea of faith. In the Old Testament, faith was the obedient response to believing in a God who was trustworthy and good. But now faith is linked to a real person in place and time—Jesus. Furthermore, faith now includes a personal relationship and it empowers the disciples to do what Jesus does.

In the next passage in John chapter fourteen, Jesus speaks further about the person who has faith in Him. He will receive the Holy Spirit, and he will also have a certain new responsibility. In verse fifteen He says, "If you love me you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father and He will send another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of Truth." Jesus promises that He will live in them and they will live in Him. The evidence of this is that they will obey His teachings and do what He has done.

In verse twenty He says, "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me."

So in John's gospel it becomes clear that having faith in Jesus is to enter into union with Him. If a person is in union

the Old Testament characters is considered to have faith, but as a result of this faith they perform faith-full actions—actions that are full of faith. Abel offers a sacrifice, Noah builds an ark, Abraham sets out on pilgrimage, fathers a son and then offers him as a sacrifice. Hebrews says by faith they performed these obedient and faith-full actions.

The list in Hebrews eleven goes on, and in each case the Old Testament hero is able to perform acts of faith because he believes in God. Isaac blessed Jacob because he had faith. By faith Jacob blessed his sons, by faith Joseph prophesied the



with Him this will be evidenced in the person's obedience to Jesus' commandments. If you like, faith makes the person a part of Jesus—a member of His body. They think His thoughts and do His actions in the world.

The fact that this passage is intertwined with His promise of the Holy Spirit shows us that the faith and the good works which flow from faith both have their ultimate origin from God the Holy Spirit. In other words, both faith in Jesus and the actions of Jesus which we do are initiated and carried out by the working of God within us. God gives us a little bit of His power in order to trust in Jesus Christ and to do His works in the world. This gift of God's goodness, power and light is called Grace. Both Catholics and Evangelicals agree on this point—that we can neither have faith or do faith-full good works without the gift of God's grace which empowers us.

But what does this person of faith have to do? Must they still obey the Old Testament law? Well, in one passage Jesus tells the disciples that they must actually be more righteous than the Scribes and Pharisees—those respectable religious people who obeyed every detail of the law. But what He meant by this was not so much that they had to obey the Old Testament law, but that their new kind of righteousness was to outstrip the Old Testament obedience. It was to be a fresh kind of goodness—as different to the old legalistic way as a color photo is to a black and white picture.

Obedying His commands actually becomes not merely an action of pure obedience as it was in the Old Testament. Now obeying Christ's commands is the way to enter more fully into unity with Him. Obeying His commands in faith now becomes the way His disciples will become like Him, and be made perfect.

Here is the important crunch between some Evangelicals and Catholics. The more extreme Evangelicals proclaim that our good works are not worth anything, and that we do not need any good works at all to enter heaven. We are saved purely and only by an act of faith in Jesus Christ and nothing else matters. But can this be so? How can faith take root in our lives unless it is acted on? A good parallel is Jesus himself. He was the Word of God made flesh. Just as the Word had to take flesh in Jesus, so our faith has to take flesh

in our physical actions.

The book of Hebrews always shows that the heroes of faith in the Old Testament did certain actions by faith. Likewise in the gospels, Jesus the man of Faith, is always acting out that faith with His life, His teachings, His death and His resurrection. So faith which is not acted out in the world is not faith at all. Faith which is just a personal inner religious experience is incomplete.

In Matthew 7.21 Jesus says, "Not ev-

eryone who says Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my father in heaven." Later in Matthew 25 Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and the goats, in which those who act out their faith through charitable works are welcomed into heaven while those who only gave lip service to their faith are rejected. In the stories of the wise and foolish builders, the Good Samaritan, and the different talents, the faithful ones always perform positive faith-full actions while the unfaithful do nothing—even though with their lips they say they believe.

We should also stop for a moment and ask what happens when we do a good work? Let's say we pay a visit to a person in prison. The visit helps that person, but it also helps us. It is not a meaningless act of obedience to God, the action itself is worth something—it has done some good in the world. As such it has changed us for the better, and therefore been a small step towards our becoming more Christ-like. Hebrews says "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." And when we do a faith-full good action we do just that—we give substance to the thing hoped for and evidence for the unseen belief. Therefore, the actions of faith which we complete through God's grace are a vital dimension to faith itself, and without them there is no faith at all.

But how does this keep from becoming a religion in which we rely on good works to get us to heaven? The early Church struggled with the relationship between faith and the Old Testament law. The earliest Christians were Jews, many of whom thought they had to continue obeying all the Old Testament rules and regulations. But St. Paul tried to make it clear that it was not by obeying the rules of the Old Testament law that we are saved. In a famous passage from Ephesians two

St. Paul says, "For it is by grace that you are saved through faith. It is the gift of God—not of works, lest any man should boast." Paul reminds the early Church that they are saved not by obeying the Jewish law, but through faith. He states in Romans 4.9-15, and then summarizes it in Romans 3.28 when he writes, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law..."

In these passages St. Paul is not saying that faithful good works are unnecessary for salvation. He is saying that salvation does not come by obeying the Jewish law. Paul, in fact, like the rest of the New Testament writers, says clearly that we are destined to accomplish good works if we are people of faith. So right after the famous passage in Ephesians where he says that we have been saved by grace through faith and not of works, he goes on to say, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." In other words—just as the gospel taught—through faith we become one with Christ in order that we may speak his words and do his works in the world.

It is the epistle of James which ties together all the strands from the gospels, St. Paul's letters and from the Old Testament. In chapter two, James writes,

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith, but has no works?...Faith by itself, if

it is not accompanied by action, is dead. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his works were working together...You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

this way help to contribute to our final eternal life.

This is a little bit complicated, but it is vital to think it through. Catholics fully accept that our salvation was won for us by Christ's work on the cross and by His mighty resurrection. We accept His saving work through faith in Him, and can only take the step of faith through God's Grace which empowers us. But our good works are worth something because it is through

of worship, prayer and Christian action are the means by which Christ comes alive in us and by which we become fit for heaven. Through good works practice makes the perfect Christian.

For this reason, Catholics believe that good works are necessary. They are not necessary to earn our way into heaven, they are necessary to equip us for heaven. They are not necessary to please God, but to make us more like God. When we do something good it actually accomplishes a real benefit in the world and in ourselves, and so it is through our good works that we work with God to become more like His Son whose Spirit dwells within us. The good works are therefore necessary because this process cannot be done in any other way.

Good works are also necessary because by doing the good works we engage our will. We get involved. God has given us free will and through our good works we use it to keep our side of the bargain. Good works are also vital because as human beings we have physical bodies. We are not angels or purely spiritual beings. Because we have physical bodies we have to work out our salvation with our physical bodies. This truth takes us to the heart of the Incarnation because it was in a physical body that Jesus Christ, God's son, worked out salvation for all mankind through his death and resurrection.

All through the Scriptures the heroes of faith are refined and purified by their actions of obedience. Through their obedience, pain and sacrifice they are brought to the perfection that God wills for them. Remembering that Jesus says in Mt. 5:48 that we are to be perfect as our father in heaven is perfect, it is the life of faith which brings us to this perfection. The theological term for this is sanctification. In other words, in Christ God not only saves us, but brings us to wholeness or perfection. This purification can only be done through God's power at work in us, but His power is enacted through the circumstances of life. We have to co-operate with his power at work in us. So through our choices, our good works, and especially through our suffering we work with God to grow towards wholeness.

Now when you think about this it's easy to understand another point which Catholics believe in. If our good works and the tough circumstances of life toughen and purify us, then these same disciplines help to

them that our faith is worked out in our lives and in our world. Our faith is vital because through our works our faith lives, so St. Paul put it this way—"work out your salvation with fear and trembling." On our own we can do nothing to merit our salvation, but through our good works we can co-operate with God's saving work in our lives.

You can think of it like this. Let's say a child is extremely gifted musically. She has perfect pitch, she has an instinctive ear for melody and understands music with an amazing God-given talent. It is extraordinary and wonderful and will take her to the very top of her profession as a world class musician. But the little girl still needs to practice. The practice isn't the talent, the practice cannot take the place of the talent, but without the practice the talent lies dormant. It is the practice that makes the talent live. It is the practice which gets rid of the imperfections, the mistakes and the human failures. It is the practice which makes perfect, as the old saying goes.

Catholics believe about the relationship between faith and works. Grace gives us the power to both have faith and put the faith into action. But if the faith is never put into action it remains like that undeveloped musical talent. The good works that we do are the way that the faith comes alive in us. It is the way that our imperfections are worked through. The good works

In fact there are not many Evangelicals who say that faith completely on its own can save a person. Evangelicals also recognize the need for good works to be present. They usually take the view that if the person is truly united with Christ then good works will be the fruit of that faith. The famous reformer John Calvin put it this way: "Salvation is by faith alone, but true faith is never alone."

Evangelicals admit that a person of faith will have to show it through the fruit of their lives, but they will still say that the good works themselves are not worth anything—that they have nothing to do with the person's entrance into heaven.

This is not quite what Catholics believe, and it is important to emphasize the differences—not to cause division and controversy, but because until the differences are brought out into the light and understood they can never be resolved.

Catholics and Evangelicals both affirm that our faith and our good works are initiated and empowered by God's grace alone. But Catholics can't accept that the good works are worth nothing at all. That doesn't fit with common sense. Neither does it fit with the many passages of Scripture which show us being judged according to our works. So Catholics admit that our good works can only be done through the power of God, but we also say the good works which we do in

weed out the sin in our lives. In other words, it is through our good works and sufferings that we can counter the effects of sin.

What do I mean by this? Well, Let's say we have stolen five hundred pounds from a neighbor. If we go to the neighbor and confess what we've done he may very well forgive us, but he will quite rightly still expect us to pay back the five hundred pounds. Paying back the money will be a good deed, but it may cause us some pain. So it takes a good deed and some suffering to counter the effects of that sin. So it is in our relationship to God. God forgives the fact of our sin through Jesus Christ, but we are still responsible for the effects of our actions. We still have to deal with the fallout from sin. You might be forgiven for breaking a vase, but you still have to pick up the pieces.

Suffering is another way this process of purification can take place. Through suffering we identify with the painful consequences of sin and by accepting suffering we can counter balance its deadly effect in our life. Jesus did this perfectly

as Hebrews 5.8-9 says: "Although he was a son he learned obedience from what he suffered, and once made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

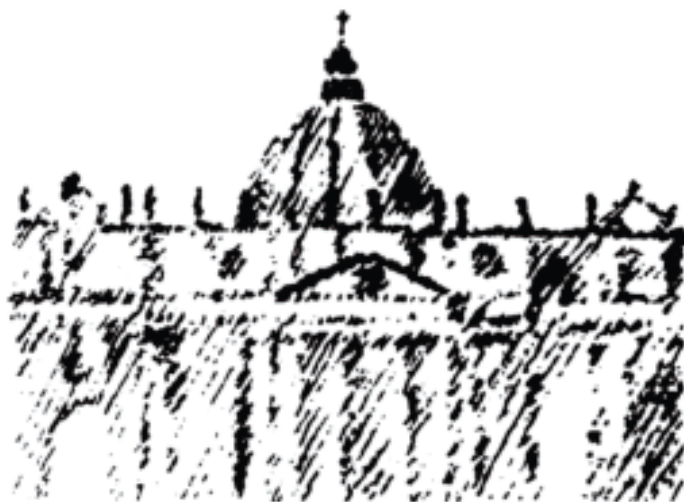
The same truth applies to us. In a wonderful passage at the beginning of Romans five, Paul says how he is justified by faith, but yet he rejoices in suffering because it is suffering which brings him a deeper hope and identification with Christ. Jesus himself tells us the grim truth that suffering is part of the Christian calling when he reminds us in Mt.10.38 that "anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

Suffering helps to purify us, but in a mysterious and exciting way the Scripture says our suffering may also help other people spiritually. So St. Paul writes to the Colossians, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body which is the church." In some way the mystery of human good works, self denial and suf-

fering help to complete the work of Christ in the world.

So good works and suffering are not just the empty fruit of our faith. As Hebrews says, they are the substance of our faith, the evidence of things unseen. Furthermore, good works and suffering have value in themselves. They change the world and they change us. They don't save us, but they make our faith real and through God's grace they can help to transform and purify us.

Underlying it all is a belief in God's boundless mercy and forgiveness. He gives the grace so we can have faith, then he gives the grace for us to put that faith into action. So faith and works are not separate, but one whole action of God with which we co-operate day by day. As we do the faith becomes real and we are finally brought to that perfection and wholeness which God has prepared for us in Christ Jesus from before the dawn of time.



# A Voice from a Catholic Pulpit

Fr. Michael DeTemple, O.P.

Sadly, a common misconception held by thousands of non-Catholics is not only the presumption that Catholics do not know the Scriptures or the Gospel and therefore are not saved, but that the gospel message is rarely preached from Catholic pulpits. Then on Trinity Sunday a month ago, as I was in the midst of compiling the articles for this edition of the CHJournal, my family heard the following homily proclaimed with great conviction and energy by Fr. Mike DeTemple, pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Zanesville, Ohio. When he was done I wanted to stand up and shout, "Amen!", not just in affirmation of what he proclaimed, but to say as a convert to the Catholic Church, "See! This IS what we believe!"

I'm not including this homily because it is the best sermon I ever heard (please, no offense Fr. DeTemple). Rather I include it because I believe it is representative of what is heard from sincere, faithful Catholic priests all over the world.

Please remember as you read the Scripture Readings for Trinity Sunday followed by Fr. DeTemple's homily, that these readings were read and heard from Catholic pulpits in over 220,117 parishes (churches) by over 404,461 priests and 3,267 bishops to potentially over 1 billion registered Catholics in nearly every language on earth. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2.14).

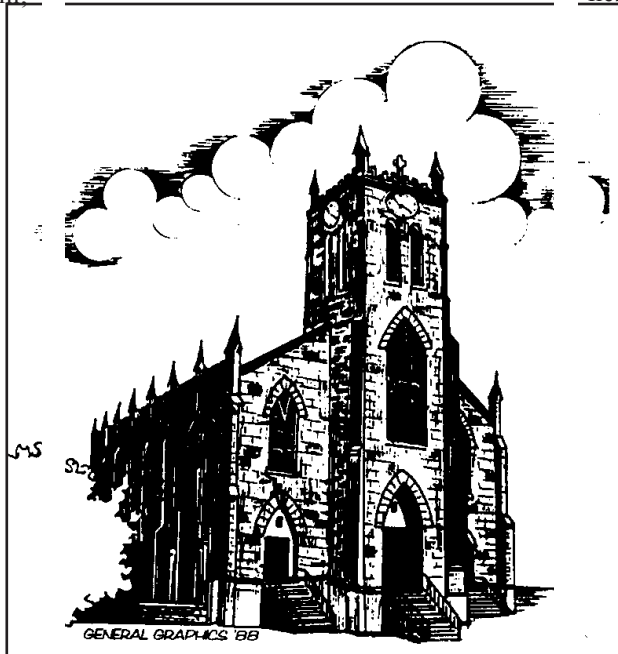
—Editor

## Reading One: Isaiah 6.1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim: each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth,

and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."



## Reading Two: Romans 8.12-17

So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

## Gospel: John 3.1-17

Now there was a man of the

Pharisees, named Nicode'mus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicode'mus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."

Nicode'mus said to him, "How can this be?"

Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

### Homily for Trinity Sunday:

Do you remember the first time you fell in love? Do you remember how it felt? How you wanted to be with that other person all the time; how you wanted to find out all about that other person, know everything there is to know about him or

her; do everything you could to please that person; forego anything to be with that person; spend everything you had for the sake of that other person? Sacrifice seemed natural. Commitment was easy. Do you remember this?

This is what we celebrate on Trinity Sunday. Only, we are not those who love. We are the Beloved. This is how God looks upon us. This is how God feels about us and the Gospel today gives us a glimpse.

John 3:16—Have you seen the banners at sporting events? It refers to the pinnacle verse in today's Gospel, which contains the heart of the Good News: God so loved the world (the motive) that He gave (a sheer gift) His only Son (Jesus is the gift that was given) so that everyone who believes (the role of faith) in Him might not perish (what we fear), but might have eternal life (the goal).

I remember the first time I read this passage on my own and really understood/discovered its meaning. I was stunned. It was as if I had never heard it before. Up to that point in my life, I had put the cart before the horse and I didn't know it. I had believed that if I kept the 10 commandments as perfectly as possible, if I did all the things Jesus tells us to do in the Gospel, then God would love me and at the end of my life, presuming my sins didn't outweigh my good deeds, I would be saved. God would allow me to enter heaven.

This view of the Christian life puts all the emphasis on our efforts and very little on God's grace. It's actually very ego-centric and arrogant, even though it sounds very good. In fact, it's a heresy known as Pelagianism. "We can save ourselves, thank you!" In my own life, when the turmoil of adolescence arrived, I began to have little hope of being saved. The cart was now careening downhill fast and the horse was nowhere to be found!

But what Jesus says very clearly in this passage is something very different: salvation is a gift. It is not something we can earn. Jesus has won it for us. I repeat: salvation is a gift. It is not something we can earn. Jesus has won it for us. The horse must come before the cart: God's love has to come before any response on

our part. If we, by our will power or virtue, could earn God's love, then Jesus died on the cross for nothing. In fact, He came to earth for nothing. If we can earn salvation, there is no need for Jesus at all.

Of course, the truth is, we cannot save ourselves. That's why God, out of his great love for us, gave us His only Son. He was a gift—and like any gift, we can either accept it or reject it. That is to say, we can believe this good news of God's unconditional love for us, open our hearts to it, and allow it to transform our lives, or we can continue the weary and futile struggle of trying to justify ourselves before God. One path leads to everlasting life, the other to death. God's love and gift must come first. Everything we do is in response! And even our response comes to life and is sustained in us by God: by the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts.

Once we fully understand and appreciate this tremendous gift of love in Jesus, we naturally want to spend the rest of our lives loving God in return. We want to do only what He desires, we want to be with Him, to do all that He has commanded us to do, to fulfill His will, to seek His forgiveness when we fail, to live as Jesus did, embracing His teachings and following His example. Our entire life becomes a response, prompted and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to the lavish and unconditional love God has so generously given in Jesus. Of course, we know we can never do enough to repay God, but in gratitude and love, we try to do all we can.

We are reminded of this truth every year on Trinity Sunday. God is a community of persons, expressed in relationship, and united in love. He wants us to be the same: a community of persons, expressed in relationships and united in love and by His grace, this is possible. That is why St. Paul often began or ended his letters with these words: "May the grace (gift) of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love (motive) of God and the fellowship (companionship) of the Holy Spirit be with all of you!"

# But How ARE Catholics Saved?

## from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Too often non-Catholics have never heard or read what the Catholic Church truly teaches on issues like Salvation or Justification. They have only too often accepted uncritically what Her antagonists say She teaches. What makes it doubly difficult is that the non-Catholic gospel is very easily simplified into four or five “Spiritual Laws” or a convenient collection of six to eight verses called “The Roman Road,” while the Catholic teaching on Salvation and Justification is a much wider and deeper understanding of Scripture and Tradition not easily reducible to a simple formula. As a result, Catholics are sometimes stymied when they are asked to describe succinctly “How are Catholics saved?”

Given the discussions presented in this Edition of the CHJournal, I give to you the official source from which to hear what the Church truly teaches about salvation, the Catechism of the Catholic Church. To hear the fullest presentation of Catholic teaching on this subject, one should read in entirety Part Three on “Life In Christ.” However, the following articles summarize the Church’s teaching on Justification, Grace, Merit and Holiness, all of which sum up to how one is saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

—Editor

The Catechism Of The Catholic Church  
Part Three: Life In Christ • Section One:  
Man’s Vocation: Life In The Spirit •  
Chapter Three: God’s Salvation: Law  
And Grace • Article 2 - Grace And Justification

### I. Justification

1987 The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” and through Baptism: [Rom 3.22; cf. 6:3-4]

But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. [Rom 6.8-11]

1988 Through the power of the Holy Spirit we take part in Christ’s Passion by dying to sin, and in his Resurrection by

being born to a new life; we are members of his Body which is the Church, branches grafted onto the vine which is himself: [Cf. 1 Cor 12; Jn 15.1-4]

[God] gave himself to us through his Spirit. By the participation of the Spirit, we become communicants in the divine nature.... For this reason, those in whom the Spirit dwells are divinized. [St. Athanasius, Ep. Serap. 1, 24: PG 26, 585 & 588]

1989 The first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit is conversion, effecting justification in accordance with Jesus’ proclamation at the beginning of the Gospel: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” [Mt 4.17] Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin, thus accepting forgiveness and righteousness from on high. “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man. [Council of Trent (1547): Densinger 1528]

1990 Justification detaches man from sin which contradicts the love of God,

and purifies his heart of sin. Justification follows upon God’s merciful initiative of offering forgiveness. It reconciles man with God. It frees from the enslavement to sin, and it heals.

1991 Justification is at the same time the acceptance of God’s righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness (or “justice”) here means the rectitude of divine love. With justification, faith, hope, and charity are poured into our hearts, and obedience to the divine will is granted us.

1992 Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ who offered himself on the cross as a living victim, holy and pleasing to God, and whose blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of all men. Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy. Its purpose is the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life: [Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1529]

But now the righteousness of God

has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. [Rom 3:21-26]

1993 Justification establishes cooperation between God's grace and man's freedom. On man's part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent:

When God touches man's heart through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, man himself is not inactive while receiving that inspiration, since he could reject it; and yet, without God's grace, he cannot by his own free will move himself toward justice in God's sight. [Council of Trent (1547): DS 1525]

1994 Justification is the most excellent work of God's love made manifest in Christ Jesus and granted by the Holy Spirit. It is the opinion of St. Augustine that "the justification of the wicked is a greater work than the creation of heaven and earth," because "heaven and earth will pass away but the salvation and justification of the elect ... will not pass away." [St. Augustine, In Jo. Ev. 72, 3: PL 35. 1823] He holds also that the justification of sinners surpasses the creation of the angels in justice, in that it bears witness to a greater mercy.

1995 The Holy Spirit is the master of the interior life. By giving birth to the "inner man," [Cf. Rom 7:22; Eph 3:16] justification entails the sanctification of his whole

being:

Just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification.... But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. [Rom 6:19,22]

## II. GRACE

1996 Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life. [Cf. Jn 1:12-18; 17:3; Rom 8:14-17; 2 Pet 1:3-4]

1997 Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an "adopted son" he can henceforth call God "Father," in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church.

1998 This vocation to eternal life is supernatural. It depends entirely on God's gratuitous initiative, for he alone

can reveal and give himself. It surpasses the power of human intellect and will, as that of every other creature. [Cf. 1 Cor 2:7-9]

1999 The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the sanctifying or deifying grace received in Baptism. It is in us the source of the work of sanctification: [Cf. Jn 4:14; 7:38-39]

Therefore if any one is in Christ,

he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself. [2 Cor 5:17-18]

2000 Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love. Habitual grace, the permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God's call, is distinguished from actual graces which refer to God's interventions, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctification.

2001 The preparation of man for the reception of grace is already a work of grace. This latter is needed to arouse and sustain our collaboration in justification through faith, and in sanctification through charity. God brings to completion in us what he has begun, "since he who completes his work by cooperating with our will began by working so that we might will it." [St. Augustine, De gratia st libero arbitrio, 17: PL 44, 901]

Indeed we also work, but we are only collaborating with God who works, for his mercy has gone before us. It has gone before us so that we may be healed, and follows

us so that once healed, we may be given life; it goes before us so that we may be called, and follows us so that we may be glorified; it goes before us so that we may live devoutly, and follows us so that we may always live with God: for without him we can do nothing. [St. Augustine, De natura et gratia, 31: PL 44, 264]

2002 God's free initiative demands man's free response, for God has created man in his image by conferring on him,

along with freedom, the power to know him and love him. The soul only enters freely into the communion of love. God immediately touches and directly moves the heart of man. He has placed in man a longing for truth and goodness that only he can satisfy. The promises of “eternal life” respond, beyond all hope, to this desire:

If at the end of your very good works . . . , you rested on the seventh day, it was to foretell by the voice of your book that at the end of our works, which are indeed “very good” since you have given them to us, we shall also rest in you on the sabbath of eternal life. [St. Augustine, Conf. 13, 36, 51: PL 32, 868; cf. Gen 1:31]

2003 Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. But grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church. There are sacramental graces, gifts proper to the different sacraments. There are furthermore special graces, also called charisms after the Greek term used by St. Paul and meaning “favor,” “gratuitous gift,” “benefit.”[53] Whatever their character—sometimes it is extraordinary, such as the gift of miracles or of tongues—charisms are oriented toward sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church. They are at the service of charity which builds up the Church. [Cf. 1 Cor 12] ...

2005 Since it belongs to the supernatural order, grace escapes our experience and cannot be known except by faith. We cannot therefore rely on our feelings or our works to conclude that we are justified and saved. [Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1533-1534] However, according to the Lord’s words—“Thus you will know them by their fruits” [Mt 7:20]—reflection on God’s blessings in our life and in the lives of the saints offers us a guarantee that grace is at work in us and spurs us on to an ever greater faith and an attitude of trustful poverty.

A pleasing illustration of this attitude is found in the reply of St. Joan of Arc to a question posed as

a trap by her ecclesiastical judges: “Asked if she knew that she was in God’s grace, she replied: ‘If I am not, may it please God to put me in it; if I am, may it please God to keep me there.’” [Acts of the trial of St. Joan of Arc]

### III. MERIT

You are glorified in the assembly of your Holy Ones, for in crowning their merits you are crowning your own gifts. [Roman Missal, Prefatio I de Sanctis; Qui in Sanctorum concilio celebraris,

et eorum coronando merita tua dona coronas, citing the “Doctor of grace,” St. Augustine, En. In Ps. 102, 7: PL 37, 1321-1322]

2006 The term “merit” refers in general to the recompense owed by a community or a society for the action of one of its members, experienced either as beneficial or harmful, deserving reward or punishment. Merit is relative to the virtue of justice, in conformity with the principle of equality which governs it.

2007 With regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man. Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality, for we have received everything from him, our Creator.

2008 The merit of man before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace. The fatherly action of God is first on his own initiative, and then follows man’s free acting through his collaboration, so that the merit of good works is to be attributed in the first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful. Man’s merit, moreover, itself is due to God, for his good actions proceed in Christ, from the predispositions and assistance given by the Holy Spirit.

2009 Filial adoption, in making us partakers by grace in the divine nature, can bestow true merit on us as a result of

God’s gratuitous justice. This is our right by grace, the full right of love, making us “co-heirs” with Christ and worthy of obtaining “the promised inheritance of eternal life.” [Council of Trent (1547): DS 1546] The merits of our good works are gifts of the divine goodness. [Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1548] “Grace has gone before us; now we are given what is due.... Our merits are God’s gifts.” [St. Augustine, Sermo 298, 4-5: PL 38,1367]

2010 Since the initiative belongs to

God in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. Even temporal goods like health and friendship can be merited in accordance with God’s wisdom. These graces and goods are the object of Christian prayer. Prayer attends to the grace we need for meritorious actions.

2011 The charity of Christ is the source in us of all our merits before God. Grace, by uniting us to Christ in active love, ensures the supernatural quality of our acts and consequently their merit before God and before men. The saints have always had a lively awareness that their merits were pure grace.

After earth’s exile, I hope to go and enjoy you in the fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for heaven. I want to work for your love alone.... In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is blemished in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in your

continued on page 34...



# Salvation from the Perspective of the Early Church Fathers

By Chris Erickson

The disputes between Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as amidst the various Protestant traditions themselves, should, if nothing else, cause one to wonder what the earliest Christian communities thought on any subject being contested. What did those who learned their faith directly from the preaching of the Apostles themselves say regarding man's salvation? For this, of course, we turn to the writings of these Early Church Fathers.

The writings of the Church Fathers—respected Christian teachers of the early centuries recognized as special witnesses of the Christian Faith because of their antiquity, orthodoxy and personal sanctity—allow us a glimpse into that early window of Christian life and thought.

The earliest Fathers were conversant with the apostles themselves, and therefore were unparalleled in their position to receive extensively accurate instruction in Christian Faith. One such person was an Eastern (Greek) Father, Polycarp of Smyrna (AD 69-156). Irenaeus of Lyons (AD 130-200) had this to say about Polycarp: "But Polycarp also was not only instructed by the apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also by the apostles in Asia appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried on earth a very long time...having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down..." (Against Heresies 3:3; AD 191).

What exactly did these first Christians believe and teach with regard to salvation? It is important to note that these Christian teachers of antiquity were not attempt-

ing to define precise theological points of doctrine; they were more concerned with general concepts, instructions, and admonitions for living the Christian faith in a time of often intense persecution. Therefore we won't find the early Fathers engaged in dissecting a particular Pauline phrase in order to understand the Christian concept of justification. Moreover, such an approach would be foreign to the early Church since it can lead to misconceptions: "Those who are particular about words, and devote their time to them, miss

the point of the whole picture" (Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, Bk. II, Ch. 1, AD 150-215).

Nonetheless, the Fathers of the

Church had written on related matters concerning salvation, such as the role of faith and grace, the role of obedience, righteousness, baptism, etc. From these we can ascertain the mind and thought of the early Christian communities concerning salvation.

A common mistake often made is to misrepresent the Fathers by choosing selective quotations that bolster one's own personal beliefs, discarding those that do not. It will hopefully be obvious to the reader that this study has avoided that error.

Clement of Rome (AD 96)

The earliest Christian document outside the New Testament writings comes to us from Clement of Rome: *The Letter of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth* (commonly known as *Clement's First Letter*). It was so highly esteemed in Christian antiquity that for a while it was even accepted as part of the canon of Scripture in Egypt and Syria. Many scholars believe Clement is identified as the Clement mentioned by Paul in *Philippians 4:3*. Regardless, Clement was the bishop of Rome at the close of the first century. He was familiar with St. Paul's Epistles, and

he certainly believed and taught that we are justified by faith:

And we, therefore...are not justified of ourselves or by our wisdom or insight or religious devotion or the holy deeds we have done from the heart, but by that faith by which almighty God has justified all men from the very beginning (ch. 32:4).

One might determine that Clement held a Reformed view of justification; however, Clement had more to say on the subject. In fact, it would lead future critics to say that Clement moved away from Pauline teaching toward ethical interests. Actually, Paul and Clement were saying the exact same thing. They both spoke of salvation in terms of requiring a comprehensive response on the part of the Christian: believing that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and living a life of holiness. Hence Clement would not only write of being justified by faith, but he would also say:

We should clothe ourselves with concord, being humble, self-controlled, far removed from all gossiping and slandering, and justified by our deeds, not by words (ch. 30:3).

Is the reader led to conclude that there exists an inherent self-contradiction in Clement's letter? Or was Clement promulgating the essential truth of the Gospel notwithstanding Paul's teaching on the necessity of faith for salvation? Clement did not understand Paul to be offering an either/or proposition, but rather both/and. According to Paul sin and grace are entirely opposed. "For what participation has justice with injustice? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14).

It was an entirely new way of life that was required of the Christian to inherit God's promises: faith and an inner conversion of the heart that would naturally show itself in good works of holiness. Clement believed that both Christ's and Paul's teaching held that if the latter is missing, the former is barren (cf. Mt. 7:21; Lk. 13:24; 1 Cor. 13:2; 15:1,2; James 2:14ff).

Clement taught that the Christian moral life is imperative for salvation,

that faith and obedience is what God considers righteousness. Clement points out that our actions—our good deeds prompted by faith—is what God reckons as righteousness: "Why was our father Abraham blessed? Was it not because he acted in righteousness and truth, prompted by faith?" (ch.31:2-3). Clement further instructed the Church of Corinth that Abraham inherited God's promises because of his (1) faith, (2) obedience and (3) hospitality:

It was obedience which led [Abraham] to quit his country, his kindred, and his father's house, so that, by leaving a paltry country, a mean kindred, and an insignificant house, he might inherit God's promises (ch. 10:2).

Because of [Abraham's] faith and hospitality a son was granted to him in his old age (ch. 10:7).

Paul tells us that justification requires faith. Clement affirms that. But what does faith require? Paul says that faith requires (1) believing (cf. 1 Thes. 2:13; 2 Cor. 5:7), (2) obedience (cf. Rom. 1:5; 6:16), and (3) love [hospitality] (cf. Gal. 5:6), exactly what Clement said in Chapter 10 quoted above.

Paul and Clement accentuated the necessity of faith, that our salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ, and nothing we can do of our own accord (including holy deeds of the heart) apart from that faith will gain us our salvation. But they both taught that faith requires conversion that proves itself in Christian moral living, works of grace—fruits of the Holy Spirit working in us. St. Augustine would later remark that

Without love faith can indeed exist, but can be of no avail" (De Trin. XV 18, 32).

Clement refers to several scriptural passages (Isa. 40:10; 62:11; Prov. 24:12; Rev. 22:12) to augment his plea to the Corinthians to persevere in doing good, which will eventually pay a reward:

We must, then, be eager to do good; for everything comes from Him. For he warns us: 'See, the Lord is coming. He is bringing

his reward with him, to pay each one according to his work' (ch. 34:2,3).

What is this reward we are to receive, this pay according to our work? Eternal salvation. For what are we being paid—our works? Partially, yes, but correctly understood! It is "our" work only insofar as it is our cooperation with God's grace as opposed to "the works of the Law." Hence it is God's work in us manifesting itself in the fruits of the Holy Spirit that lead us to salvation, beginning with faith, supported by faith, and persevering in faith. (Matt 10:22; Trent, sess. 6, ch. 8;).

Protestant traditions have generally objected to that on the principle that it would result in God paying us the reward of salvation for something we do. It would therefore cease to be gratuitous.

However, Paul condemns those who make salvation a wage or salary as if we can buy our salvation through our own works or deeds apart from faith and God's grace. Paul doesn't condemn receiving a payment/reward as a filial inheritance from God for those who have faith working in love (cf. Gal. 5:6), for those who do God's commands. This type of labor can only boast in God. Thus St. Augustine's famous adage: "When God rewards my labors, He only crowns His own works in me."

Ignatius of Antioch (AD 35-107)

The writings of another Apostolic Father from the East, Ignatius of Antioch, are further testimony of how truly far back this teaching reaches. Ignatius tells us that along with baptism, faith and charity, our works will be our deposits to receive what is our due:

Let your baptism be ever your shield, your faith a helmet, your charity a spear, your patience a panoply. Let your works be deposits, so that you may receive the sum that is due you" (Letter to St. Polycarp, 6).

Is Ignatius telling us that we are due something from God? Our due is death as a result of sin. But what is our due after baptism, faith, charity and obedience to God's will? Then, we are due God's promises according to the conditions God set forth.

God did not have to offer us any conditional element. He did not have to offer us anything. It's entirely gratuitous from beginning to end. His infinite love drove Him to put Himself in a position of "owing" something to man, if man would only love and obey Him. If we are to love Him, we must first believe in him (faith). And John 14:15 tells us that if we truly love Him, we will obey him (conversion, holiness, right living, good deeds, righteousness).

Ignatius was quoted above as saying, "let your works be deposits, so that you may receive the sum that is due you." He would also say:

Therefore, let us not be ungrateful for His kindness. For if He were to reward us according to our works, we would cease to be (Epistle to the Magnesians, Ch. 5).

Again, do we conclude that another Church Father is self-contradictory? Or do we acknowledge a distinction present in the early Christian communities between our own works (works of the Law) that lead us to boast in ourselves, and the works of God in us built upon an interior conversion that can only lead to our boasting in God alone. To abandon that truth leads every early Christian writer to appear self-contradictory, it poses an apparent disharmony between Paul and James, and consequently leads to a Reformed view of justification.

Ignatius' letters were written while on his way to martyrdom, and he recognized the importance of our actions "motivated by faith," as opposed to a "momentary act of professing" that faith:

Those who profess to be Christ's will be recognized by their actions. For what matters is not a momentary act of professing, but being persistently motivated by faith (The Letter of Ignatius to the Ephesians, ch. 14:2).

This is a corollary to our Lord's warning in Matthew 10:22: "But he who endures to the end will be saved."

Polycarp of Smyrna (AD 69-156)

Polycarp of Smyrna was an Eastern Father acquainted with Ignatius and well versed in Paul's Epistles. In Polycarp's Let-

ter to the Philippians, he says: "...knowing that 'you are saved by grace, not because of works' (Eph. 2:5,9,9), namely, by the will of God through Jesus Christ" (ch. 1:3).

Polycarp affirms Pauline teaching, as did Clement and Ignatius. But he also affirmed the necessity of love, obedience and living a life of holiness. This is seen when Polycarp quotes St. Paul and then adds his own admonition, drawing from 1 John: "For 'he who raised him from the dead will raise us also' (2 Cor. 4:14; 1

Cor. 6:14; Rom 8:11), if we do his will and follow his commandments, and love what he loved (1 John 4:11,12), refraining from all wrongdoing" (ch. 2:2,3).

Let us remember that Polycarp conversed with the apostles, sat at the feet of St. John as Irenaeus tells us, and that the apostles obviously thought him to be a man of outstanding repute since they did appoint him Bishop of Smyrna. It would, then, be safe to say that Polycarp did not depart from Pauline thought, but instead felt quite comfortable to quote Paul and add his own qualifier "if we do..." Polycarp must have believed this was harmonious with the full corpus of Paul's teaching and that of the other apostles.

Polycarp taught that there were a number of moral commands to which the Christian must adhere in order to inherit the Kingdom. Faith without meeting these moral demands will not be enough. Polycarp argued that anyone occupied in these three things: growing in the faith, accompanied by hope, and led by love, has fulfilled the commandment of righteousness (ch. 3:2-3). Drawing from the Scriptures he would also say: "'Whenever you are able to do a kindness, do not put it off' (Prov.3:28), because 'almsgiving frees from death' [Tobit 4:10ff]" (ch. 10:2).

Justin Martyr (AD 100-165)

The Eastern Father Justin Martyr echoes the teaching of Ignatius insofar as

he makes it clear that it is not those who "merely profess" Christ, but those who "do the works" the Saviour commanded that will be saved:

Those who are found not living as he taught should know that they are not really Christians, even if his teachings are on their lips, for he said that not those who merely profess but those who also do the works will be saved (cf. Matt. 13:42, 43; 7:15,16,19)" (The First

Apology of Justin, ch.16).

Justin would also say that "Each man goes to everlasting punishment or salvation according to the value of his actions" (The First Apology of Justin, ch. 7). "The matters of our religion lie in works, not in words" (Hortatory Address to the Greeks, ch. 35).

Yet Justin also proves himself consistent with the other Fathers in affirming the necessity of faith: "For Abraham was declared by God to be righteous, not on account of circumcision, but on account of faith" (Dialogue with Trypho, ch. XCII).

Athenagoras (2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD)

Athenagoras, an Eastern Father, argues that Christians must live in a strict moral manner, because they must give an appropriate account of all their life in order to receive the reward of salvation:

But since we are persuaded that we must give an account of all our life here to God who made us and the world, we adopt a temperate, generous, despised way of life. For we think that, even if we lose our lives, we shall suffer here no evil to be compared with the reward we shall receive from the great Judge for a gentle, generous, and modest life (A Plea Regarding Christians by

Athenagoras, ch.12).

Irenaeus (AD 130-200)

Irenaeus, a Western Father, in his writings, *Against Heresies*, Book I, confirms the necessity of a life of love and holiness, as well as keeping our Lord's commandments in order to receive eternal life:

But to the righteous and holy, and those who have kept his com-

mandments and have remained in his love...he will by his grace give life incorrupt, and will clothe them with eternal glory (ch.10:1).

It is the entire gamut of the Christian moral life, according to Irenaeus, that brings salvation.

Irenaeus criticized the Gnostics of being "devoid of sense" because "they keep silent with regard to His judgments and all those things which will come upon those who heard His words, but have not done them. For it would better for them if they had not been born" (*Against Heresies*, Bk. IV, ch. XXVIII).

Irenaeus believed that conversion was dependent upon Christ's grace, and apart from that grace, man has no power to procure salvation. The more we receive that grace, the more we are obligated to love Christ:

No one, indeed while placed out of reach of our Lord's benefits, has power to procure for himself the means of salvation. So the more we receive His grace, the more we should love Him (*Against Heresies*, Bk. IV, ch. XIII).

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215)

Clement of Alexandria, an Eastern Father, will also speak of the necessity

of believing and obeying if grace is to abound: "Rightly, then, to those who have believed and obey, grace will abound beyond measure" (*Exhortation to the Heathen*, ch. 5).

He presents "faith" as the first movement in a process that leads to salvation. That means more is required if we are to reach the goal of salvation:

We have discovered faith to be the first movement towards salvation.

After faith, fear, hope, and repentance (accompanied by temperance and patience) lead us to love and knowledge (*The Stromata*, Bk. II, ch. VI).

Clement echoes the earlier Fathers, and we see a familiar teaching being handed down from the early Christians: 1) "For by grace we are saved---but not, indeed, without good works...For this, we have the greatest need of divine grace..." (*The Stromata*, Bk. II, ch. I); and 2) "The same from the foundation of the world is each one who at different periods is saved, and will be saved by faith" (*The Stromata*, Bk. VI, ch. VI).

Clement is simply teaching what he received from the earlier Christians, that salvation will require faith and conversion. Inner conversion will show itself externally in a life of holiness; without that, faith is barren. All is necessary and all is only made possible through Christ's grace.

A Cloud of Early Witnesses (AD 160-320)

Tertullian (AD 160-223), a Western Father, recognized the necessity of both faith and doing God's will in order to be saved. He exhorts "those who are justified by faith in Christ, and not by the Law, to have peace with God" (*Against Marcion*, Bk. V, ch. XIII). And he also writes:

We make petition, then, that He supply us with the substance of His will and the capacity to do it--so that we may be saved both in the heaven and on earth (*On Prayer*, part III, ch. IV).

Theophilus (approx. AD 180), an Eastern Father, spoke of a life of doing well and obeying God's command to procure salvation:

To those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek immortality, He will give eternal life everlasting life" (*Theophilus to Autolytus*, Bk. I, ch. XIII). "For man drew death upon himself by disobeying. So, by obeying the will of God, he who wants to can procure for himself life everlasting (Bk. II, ch. XXVII).

Origin (AD 184-254), another Eastern Father, would speak about having communion and friendship with God only if, along with faith, we lived our life according to the teaching of Jesus: "It is those who not only believe, but also enter upon the life that Jesus taught" (*Against Celcus*, Bk. III, ch. XXVIII).

Cyprian (d. 258), a Western Father, did not think it was possible to have faith in Christ if you did not do what He commanded:

How can a man say that he believes in Christ, if he does not do what Christ commanded him to do? From where will he attain the reward of faith, if he will not keep the faith of the commandment? ... He will make no advancement in his walk toward salvation, for he does not keep the truth of the way of salvation" (*The Treatises of Cyprian*, Treatise I, ch. II).

Cyprian believed that the righteous man is not only he who believes in God but he who lives in faith: "Assuredly, then, whoever believes in God and lives in faith is found righteous and is already blessed in faithful Abraham" (*The Epistles of Cyprian*, Epistle LXII, ch. IV). "Living in faith" to Cyprian was simply keeping the faith of the commandments, doing what Christ commanded.

Lactantius (AD 240-320), a Western Father, continues this same thought:

Labors that are endured and overcome all the way up until death, cannot fail to obtain a reward.... And this reward can be nothing else but immortality (The Divine Institutes, Bk. III, ch. XII).

And again: "The spirit must earn immortality by the works of righteousness" (Bk. IV, ch. XXV).

Basil the Great (AD 329-379)

Basil the Great, an Eastern Father, tells us of being "acceptable to God" through obeying the gospel, purging sins, and being active in good works:

He who would obey the gospel must first be purged of all defilement of the flesh and the spirit that so he may be acceptable to God in the good works of holiness (The Morals, 2, 1).

Speaking on penance, Basil believed that simply renouncing sins was not enough for salvation; rather, an act of penance was necessary as well:

Mere renouncement of sin is not sufficient for the salvation of peni-

tents, but fruits worthy of penance are also required of them (The Morals, 1, 3).

Ambrose (AD 340-397)

The writings of St. Ambrose, a Latin Father, would be very much akin to St. Paul. Ambrose taught that faith—not works that would lead one to boast—is necessary for salvation:

God chose that man should seek salvation by faith rather than by works, lest anyone should glory in his deeds and thereby incur sin (In Ps. 43

Enarr. 14).

Ambrose would also say: "Without the support of faith good works cannot stand" (On the Duties of the Clergy, 2, 7). That means that with the support of faith, good works can stand. If they can stand, then they certainly do not lead one to boast in himself, they do not lead one to sin. Ambrose has in mind a distinction here between "works" leading us to boast in God and "works" leading us to boast in ourselves. These latter works can never stand, with or without the support of faith.

Ambrose would also confirm the sentiments of Clement of Alexandria insofar as faith is the first movement in a process when Ambrose said: "Faith is the beginning of a Christian man" (Explanation of Psalm 118: 20, 56, 57). This implies that there is more to follow, since faith is not said to be the beginning, the middle and the end of the Christian man, as if there were no other obligations. Furthermore, the whole chapter of Psalm 118, which is what Ambrose is commenting on, is a treatise on faith, obedience and love.

John Chrysostom (AD 347-407)

John Chrysostom, an Eastern Father, was very familiar with Pauline thought. In Chrysostom's sermon on Ephesians 1:4-5, he asked why God chose us:

And why did [God] choose us? 'That we should be holy and blameless before him.' So that you may not suppose, when you hear that he chose us, that faith alone is sufficient, he goes on to refer to manner of life. This, he says, is the reason and the purpose of his choice—that we should be holy and blameless... Being holy is a matter of sharing in faith; being blameless is a matter of living an irreproachable life (Homilies on Ephesians, 1, 1-2).

Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430)

St. Augustine, a Latin Father, taught that righteousness consists of doing good works:

How speedily are the prayers of people who do good works heard! For it is precisely in fasting, alms, deeds and prayer that our righteousness in this life consists (In Ps. 42 Enarr. I, 8).

But Augustine made the critical distinction that Paul made, that Luther refused to make:

We do the works, but God works in us the doing of the works (De Dono Perseverentiae, 13, 33).

Conclusion

What we find in the writings of the early Fathers is a consistent voice in early Christian life and thought affirming the indissoluble necessity of faith in our Lord

# Justification By Faith

By Dr. William Marshner

The Catholic Church holds that faith in Jesus Christ is not saving faith unless it bears fruit in good works. Vice-versa, the Church holds that such works are so intimately joined to faith, that, without them, it is impossible for the believer to grow or persevere in his faith.<sup>1</sup> In this way, good works are necessary for salvation.

Most Protestants are uncomfortable with such a statement. Without denying the importance of good works, Protestants tend to see them as symptoms of the one thing necessary rather than as necessities in their own right. For Luther, good works were merely symptoms of confident faith; for Calvin, they were symptoms of irresistible grace. Few Protestants today are familiar with the details of Luther's or Calvin's personal thought; what they have inherited from these great forebearers is rather a general orientation, whose core is the conviction that according to St. Paul, we are justified *sola fide* (by faith alone) or *sola gratia* (by grace alone), either formula being understood to exclude any essential role of good works.

## Stages of Justification

Catholic and Protestant views on the respective roles of grace, faith and works cannot be compared meaningfully, unless one specifies what stage of the justificational process one is talking about. In the preparatory stage, for instance, in which prevenient graces first stir a person towards an interest in religious truth, towards repentance, and towards faith, Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists are at one in saying "*sola gratia*."<sup>2</sup>

A second stage is the very transition from death to life, which is the first stage of justification proper. Here the parties are at one in saying "*sola fide*," though they seem to mean different things by it. Protestants tend to mean that, at this

stage, by the grace of God, man's act of faith is the sole act required of him; Catholics mean that faith is the beginning, foundation and root of all justification, since only faith makes possible the acts of hope and charity (i.e. love-for-God) which are also required.<sup>3</sup> However, since most Protestants have a broad notion of the act of faith, whereby it includes elements of hope and love, it is often hard to tell how far the difference on this point is real and how far it is a matter of words.

Finally, however, there comes a third stage, that of actual Christian life, with its problems of growth and perseverance. The man justified by faith is called to "walk" with God, to progress in holiness. It is at this stage that the parties sharply diverge. Catholics affirm, and Protestants strenuously deny, that the born-again Christian's good works merit for him the increase of

grace and of the Christian virtues. As a result, Protestant piety has no obvious place for the self-sacrifices, fasts, and states of perfection which are prominent features of Catholic piety.

At each stage, neither the apparent agreements nor the apparent disagreements can be understood without looking at certain metaphysical quarrels, the chief of which is over the very existence of what Catholics call "grace."

## Grace

What Catholics call "sanctifying grace" or "habitual grace" turns out to be a deeply mysterious entity: a quality of man which is a property of God. In order to cope with such an entity, one needs a sophisticated metaphysics of participation. The Church Fathers and their successors, the Scholastic Doctors, took the trouble to work out such a metaphysics because the existence of grace as a real entity in man—ontic grace—was and is the foundation, without which the whole Catholic understanding of justification makes no sense.

The Protestant Reformers, however, impatient with metaphysics, preferred not to cope with such an entity and denied its existence.<sup>4</sup> To them it seemed simpler to say that grace is something wholly in God, namely, His favor towards us. But then,

if grace is not something real in man, our "justification" can no longer be conceived as a real change in us; it will have to become a sheer declaration on God's part, e.g. a declaration that, thanks to the work of Christ, He will hence-

forth consider us as just, even though we remain inwardly the sinners we always were. Hence, the Protestant doctrine of "forensic" or "extrinsic" justification.

Now watch what happens to our own act of faith: it ceases to be the foundational act of an interior renewal and becomes a mere requirement, devoid of any salvific power in its own right, which God arbitrarily sets as the condition on which He will declare us just. Whereupon, watch what happens to our good works: they

cease to be the vital acts wherein an ontologically real “new life” consists and manifests itself; they become mere human responses to divine mercy—nice, but totally irrelevant to our justification—or else they become zombie-like motions produced in us by irresistible divine impulses, whereby God exhibits His glory in His elect.

#### Justice of Works

St. Paul expounds and contrasts two economies of justification or two orders of righteousness. Thus, Philippians 3:9 says: “(I counted all things loss) that I might be found in Him, not having my own justice, which is from the Law, but the justice which is from the faith of Jesus Christ, the justice that comes from God through faith.” Here the main contrast is between justice from the Law and justice from faith, whereupon a second contrast emerges between my own justice and justice from God.

This second contrast reappears in Romans 10:3, “(The Jews) not knowing the justice of God and seeking to establish their own justice, did not submit to God’s justice.”

We learn the result of this Jewish conduct in Romans 9:30-32, “What shall we say then? The gentiles, who were not pursuing justice, laid hold of justice, but the justice which is from faith. Israel, however, pursuing the law of justice, did not attain the law” (i.e. did not accomplish or fulfill it). The exact interpretation of this text has been debated,<sup>5</sup> but for our purposes it suffices to see that Paul was speaking of a justice pursued by way of works and that such justice was the great ambition of the Jews in connection with the Law of Moses.

The point that Mosaic legal justice was a matter of works reappears in Romans 10:5, quoting from Leviticus 18:5, in contrast with the justice from faith. The same is said in Galatians 3:12 (“But the law is not from faith; rather the one who does those things will live in them”) and in Romans 2:13 (“It is not the hearers of the Law who have been justified before God but the doers of the Law will be justified,” i.e. will be declared just at the last judgment), and this is expounded at length in Romans 2: 23-27.

So, over against the justice of God, which is the justice of faith, there is a self-justice which is of the Law and which is

a justice of works. This latter would give men a basis for boasting (Rom. 4:2, Eph. 2:8-9), since works give one a strict right to be considered just: “To the man who has works, his salary is not counted as a favor but as something due,” (Rom. 4:4). Now, as a matter of practical fact, does anyone really have this self-justice of Law and works? Over and over again Paul answers in the negative (cf. Rom. 3:20; 9:31-32; Gal. 3:10, quoting Deuteronomy 27: 26 and the context indicates that the

curse has indeed gone into effect).

To this day, the sad doctrine that our justification must be something merely declaratory has one of its most powerful roots in this fateful mistake: what St. Paul considered the paradigm experience of the Jew under the Law is confused with the paradigm experience of the Christian under the power of grace! And it is interesting to note that the revivalist wing of Protestantism tends to escape this mistake. Encountering Christ in deep experiences of conversion, they taste the power of His victory over sin in their own lives; having tasted it, they have not a doubt in the world that they have been changed inwardly, that God has given them new hearts, and that the nightmare experience of Romans 7 is over for them. Of course, the Christian can fall back into that nightmare. This is the grain of truth in St. Augustine’s later exegesis.

In summary, then, what was wrong with the Jewish project to achieve righteousness from the Law is this: the project prescinded from God’s grace. Taken in abstraction from grace, the Law was powerless; destined to be disobeyed at least inwardly,<sup>6</sup> the Law served to provoke and deepen sin.

Though it may seem odd to summarize our discussion in that way, introducing suddenly the mention of grace, there is a reason for doing so. Romans 7, with its abstract dialectic of Law and sin, better

self and concupiscence, has to be understood consistently with what St. Paul has already said in Romans 2. There he seems to treat the keeping of the commandments as a real possibility: “for when the gentiles, who do not have the Law, naturally do the things of the Law...” (Rom. 2:14). In fact, he says, “God will render to each man according to his works: eternal life to those who, dedicating themselves with perseverance to good works, seek glory, honor and immortality...glory honor and

peace to all who do good, to the Jew first and to the Greek” (Rom. 2:7) and this in a context in which the revelation of Christ is not even under discussion yet.

These words certainly show that St. Paul did not regard good works as impossible, misguided, or pernicious, as some Protestant exegetes have tried to hold. Quite the contrary. But if St. Paul seems to admit justifying works in Romans 2 and to exclude them in Romans 7, the most plausible explanation is that he is speaking of the total human condition in chapter 2, where grace is at work among Jew and gentile alike, whereas in chapter 7 he is showing what happens when the Law is isolated from grace. Such isolation is exactly what is sought, when man seeks his own righteousness on the basis of law.

The Jewish project to seek one’s own justice from the Law was not only psychologically impossible (Rom. 7) but also contrary to the plan of the ages, in which the Law had no function but this: in leading us to Christ, to render itself obsolete. Now we can understand why Paul cried out in frustration at the obtuse Galatians: “If the Law can justify us, there is no point in the death of Christ” (Gal. 2:21).

#### Justice of God through Faith

Let us examine that other kind of justice mentioned by Paul: the justice which comes from God through faith.

“For in it (the Gospel) the justice of

God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "The just shall live from faith;" (Rom. 1:17). What is this justice "of God" (*dikaiousune theou*)? If the genitive is one of attribution, then what has been revealed is God's own attribute rather than something He gives to men. Thus Origen<sup>7</sup> and Pseudo- Ambrose.<sup>8</sup> But if the genitive is one of source, then what is revealed is a justice conferred on men by God. Thus Chrysostom,<sup>9</sup> Augustine,<sup>10</sup> and most modern exegetes.<sup>11</sup> What lends weight to the second interpretation is the fact that God's own justice gets revealed precisely in His

conferring justice on men, as Paul himself suggests: "so that He Himself might be just and render just the man who has faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:26). By contrast, Luther's notion that "the justice of God" here refers to His vindictive action against sinners is totally unsupported either by the Fathers or by the modern scholars.

The thought of Romans 1:17 is picked up again in Romans 3:21-22, and here there is no doubt that God's justice is something which comes to men, is communicated to men.

In this light, look again at a text we saw before: "[The Jews] not knowing the justice of God and seeking to establish their own justice, did not submit to God's justice" (Rom. 10:3). We can now see that the contrast is not between God's attribute and man's achievement, but rather between something God communicates to man and something man tries to achieve on his own. Both pertain to man, and so, they are rivals.

Now, we can begin to understand this "non-submission." It was not the attitude of the true heroes of the Old Testament. Besides the example of Abraham, we have a whole catalogue of Jews who lived "by faith" in Hebrews 11, a document which, if not by Paul himself, was certainly written by someone intimately familiar with his thought. There is not time for me to give an account of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, or of David, Samuel and the prophets. These men who through faith

conquered kingdoms, did what is right and earned the promises (Heb. 11:32f). Now the key to these men, by virtue of which they are said to have lived "by faith," is not that they did not do any works of the Law! Obviously. Rather, the key is that they lived in total dependence upon God's promises, in total openness to what God would yet reveal. That is why there is no contradiction between their attitude and the surprising turn which revelation took in Jesus Christ.

But the other and later Jews had so reduced faith to the keeping of the Law,

that the Law could not be provisional; as a result, their whole attitude toward God was not one of expectant faith but one of satisfied accomplishment. So, when the justice that God had all along intended to confer upon man was revealed in Jesus the Servant-Messiah, they did not submit to it. Not so obtuse as Luther, they could see that this "justice of God" was means for them and so was a rival to the justice they already thought they had. And not so obtuse as the Galatians, they could see that if the Messiah's death had a point to it, then the Law could not justify them.

Now, if what Paul means by *dikaiousune theou* is not something to remain in God but something meant to be conferred on us, then we must reckon with that mysterious possibility: a quality of man which is the property of God. Does St. Paul say anything to indicate a knowledge of this possibility? Indeed he does: "God has made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we in him might become justice of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

This verse is the pattern on which Athanasius would learn to say, "God became man, so that man might become divine." It is not a question of replacement but of participation, and the participation is real in both directions. First in Jesus: just as really as the Word took our humanity, just that really his humanity became God. And then in us: just as really as Christ-God took our sins (so really that even the Father forsook Him—Mark 15:34), just that really

we receive God's justice. For if we dare to believe that in the Incarnation our nature, without ceasing to be a human nature, received God's subsistence, then we may easily believe that we, in Christ, receive God's justice as our quality.

In fact, St. Paul even has a name for this quality. In the very next verse (2 Cor. 6:1) he says: "As God's co-workers, we beg you once again not to have received God's grace in vain." What we should not "receive in vain" is exactly what Paul has just said we have "become" in Christ. God's justice is His grace, a gift given to men. That is why the justice of God is identically "the justice which comes from God through faith" (Phil. 3:9).

What emerges from these texts, then, is the existence in man of a justice conferred by God. But this justice is tied into faith, whether before Christ's coming, as in the case of Abraham, or afterwards, as in our case. What we must explore next is the nature of this tie-in between justice and faith.

#### Justice and Faith

St. Paul's most important text on faith is Romans 10:13-17:

Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how shall they call upon one in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how shall they hear if no one preaches? And how shall anyone preach unless he has been sent...But not everyone has obeyed (*hupekousan*) the Gospel. As Isaiah said, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So faith depends upon preaching and preaching upon the word of Christ.

We have here an order of necessary conditions, which inverts to yield the following order of precedence: (1) The word or teaching of Christ, i.e. the Gospel; (2) the mission to preach given to the Apostles; (3) their preaching; (4) our hearing, and finally (5) an act which may be described equally well as faith (*pistis*) and as obedience (*hypakoe*).<sup>12</sup>

The point that faith is based on hearing is made also in Galatians 3:2 and 5. And the point that faith is receiving the words of the Apostles in a spirit of



obedience to God is found again in I Thessalonians 2:13. This is why Paul twice speaks of “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5 and 16:26, the genitive being appositional) and also why 2 Cor. 10:5 says that every thought (or every intellect) is to be brought into a captivity which is “obedience of Christ.”

These texts indicate that what St. Paul called “faith” certainly included the scholastic sense of the term (assent or submission of the intellect to the truths taught by Christ to His Apostles, and by them to us, on the authority of God) but also included more. The reader should remember that the scholastic definition of ‘faith’ was designed to do a technical job, namely, to designate the common content of ‘living faith’ (*fides caritate formata*) and ‘dead faith’ (*fides informis*). It does this job very well; the common content is intellectual assent to the revealed message.

But St. Paul’s term ‘faith’ was used by him to designate man’s rightful response to Christ’s message. Now, where this message consists of truths of fact (e.g. “Before Abraham was, I am”; “I and the Father are one,” etc.) intellectual assent is all there is to the rightful response; but where the message contains imperatives (“Repent and be baptized”), consolations (“Fear not, I have overcome the world”), promises (“But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice”), examples (“When you pray, pray like this: Our Father...”) etc., there the rightful response is to do as one is commanded, take the consolation, trust the promise, heed the example and so forth. Indeed, to believe in a command intellectually and then not do it, to accept a consolation intellectually and then not feel it, to acknowledge a promise and then not trust it—these are even unnatural responses. “Dead faith” is an ugly thing—not just “unformed” but deformed by sin and shot-through with the self-contradiction which lies at the heart of every sin.

So, a rightful response to Christ’s total message must not only include faith in the narrow sense but must be what St. Paul calls “obedience of faith,” which is just what Catholic theology calls the acts of faith, hope and love.<sup>13</sup>

We are now in a position to see the tie-in between faith and justice. Observe first of all how St. Paul expresses the connection in prepositions. He speaks of God’s “justice which is from (ek) faith” (Rom. 9:30; 10:6); he says we are “justified

from faith” (Gal. 2:16; 3:24). So justice is distinct from faith; it proceeds from it. Justice has its source and point of departure in faith.

However, lest we should get the idea that justice is a direct “output” of faith, or a natural derivative, it is vital to see that a divine action intervenes between faith and justice: “God justifies the Gentiles from faith” (Gal. 3:8,30; cf. Rom. 3:24). This divine action is highlighted by Paul’s other favorite preposition, the instrumental *dia*, through. “God’s justice is through faith” (Rom. 3:22; Phil. 3:9) “he justifies the gentiles through faith” (Rom. 3:30).

So man gets justified, but God does the justifying, and He does it by means of faith, using faith as an instrument. Elsewhere we have it (Phil. 3:10) that “the justice from God is on the basis of faith (*epi*)” and (Heb. 11:7) “according to faith (*kata*).”

These prepositions instruct us on how to take Paul’s meaning when he dispenses with prepositions in favor of a simple instrumental dative: “For we think that man is justified by faith” (Rom. 3:28); “through Him (Christ) we have access by faith” (Rom. 5:1). The meaning is the same as before. Faith remains God’s instrument in justifying, and not (as Luther supposed) man’s instrument in getting justified.

Luther supposed that God took a thing

of no real value (our faith) and made it stand for something of value. God doctored the Book of Life! Such an idea has no foundation in the text. The key verb here (*logizomai*) is used throughout the Septuagint (Psalm 106:31; Isa. 40:17), and even in Koine Greek, and in the New Testament (Acts 19:17), and even in St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans (2:26; 9:8), to mean an honest reckoning, based on a real equivalence of value between the two things. Nowhere does the crediting presuppose a disproportion between the thing

furnished (e.g. faith) and the value put on it (e.g. justice).

No, indeed; what Abraham’s faith is said to count for in Gen. 15:6 is the very thing which the keeping of the Law is said to count for in Deuteronomy 6:25 and 24:13. Living faith is worth righteousness. Yes, but not in the way that works are worth it.

Hear how Paul continues the passage which he started about Abraham (Rom. 4:4f):

To the one who works, his wages are not credited to him according to grace but according to what is owed. But to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited to him for righteousness.

So, if faith is really worth righteousness, it is not worth it in the way that works are. The latter have their value in the order of strict justice, whereas faith has its value in the order of grace (*kata charin*).

Does it follow, then, that the order of grace is arbitrary, unreal, an order in which the worthless is accorded fictitious worth? Not at all! We have seen what living faith really is. It is that rightful response to the Gospel, whereby man assents to the truths, heeds the commands, feels

the consolations, trusts the promises—in short, it is that total attitude toward God from which (as from a source) or through which (as by a means) God can draw forth every good work with the further help of His actual graces. Between such faith as a basis and the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” as an apex, there is a real continuity and proportion. That is why God can use faith to justify us, and why He can, without dishonesty, credit that faith to our account as the root and foundation of all justice.

### The Obedience of Faith

For as St. Paul himself says, in a verse which ought to have stopped the mouth of Luther forever, “We are God’s handiwork, having been created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Our new creaturehood in Christ Jesus is our reception, through grace, of the “obedience of faith.” Through that faith, as through an instrument, God has refashioned us, making us now prompt to obey.

Our new estate is thus ordered to good works as to its intrinsic and God-intended finality. With what joy, therefore, do we walk in them, we who believe! And woe to us if we do not walk in them, for then we betray our faith and frustrate God’s handiwork.

So we have, and are intended to have, works. Does it follow that we may boast? Not at all! For our works, unlike the works attempted by the Jew under the Law, are not from us but from God. Rooted in God’s gift, brought forth by living faith, God’s instrument in us, these works are grace-works. They are our justice through faith, and therefore they are justice in the

order of grace (kata charin), not in the order of self-achievement where boasting arises.

Living faith: our quality but God’s instrument; good works: our deeds but God’s handiwork; our deeds as men living in Christ, not the motions of “graced” zombies still dead in sin—these are the possibilities overlooked by Luther and Calvin but preached by Paul and defined by Trent.



Born in 1943 and raised in the Lutheran Church, Professor Marshner pursued graduate studies at Yale University, attained the S.T.D. from the John Paul II Institute, and is now the chairman of the Theology Department at Christendom College. This article is excerpted from Appendix 4 of “Reasons for Hope,” published by Christendom Press.

#### NOTES

1 Council of Trent, Canons on Justification, especially canon 24; Denzinger-Schoenmetzer # 1574. The Church considers herself bound to this position by James 2:14-26.

2 The teaching of the Second Council of Orange is given in Denzinger # 374ff. and that of Trent in #1553. To say that, prior to a person’s conversion (or baptism), his or her “good deeds” may merit God’s grace is Pelagianism or worse; even to say that man has the initiative in this preparatory stage, or that his first response of faith is his own free motion, his own step towards the grace of God and not already an effect of the grace of God, is a heresy (Semi-Pelagianism).

3 Trent, Decree on Justification, chapter 8 (Denz. # 1532), and canon 9 (Denz. 1559).

4 See the magnificent discussion in Louis Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism* (Westminster: Newman Press) 1956.

5 Compare the view of St. John Chrysostom, *Patrologia Graeca* (hereafter=PG) 60, col. 563, with that of Aquinas, *In epistolam ad Romanos*, c.9, lect 5 in fine.

6. I say “at least inwardly” because, as far as public and merely external observations are concerned, Paul concedes that he himself was blameless: *Philippians* 3:6. See Aquinas’s comment, *In ep. Ad Phil.* c. 3, lect. 2.

7 PG 14, col, 861.

8 *Patrologia latina* (hereafter PL) 17, col, 56.

9 PG 60, col, 409.

10 PL 44, col 211.

11. Cf. Sanday-Headlam, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (IGC) p. 25.

Catechism continued from pg 24...

own justice and to receive from your love the eternal possession of yourself. [St. Therese of Lisieux, “Act of Offering” in *Story of a Soul*, tr. John Clarke (Washington DC: ICS, 1981), 277]

#### IV. CHRISTIAN HOLINESS

2012 “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him . . . For those whom he fore knew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.” [Rom 8:28-30]

2013 “All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.” [*Lumen Gentium*, 40, 2.] All are called to  
34 The Coming Home Journal

holiness: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” [Mt 5:48]

In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ’s gift, so that . . . doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints. [*Lumen Gentium*, 40, 2.]

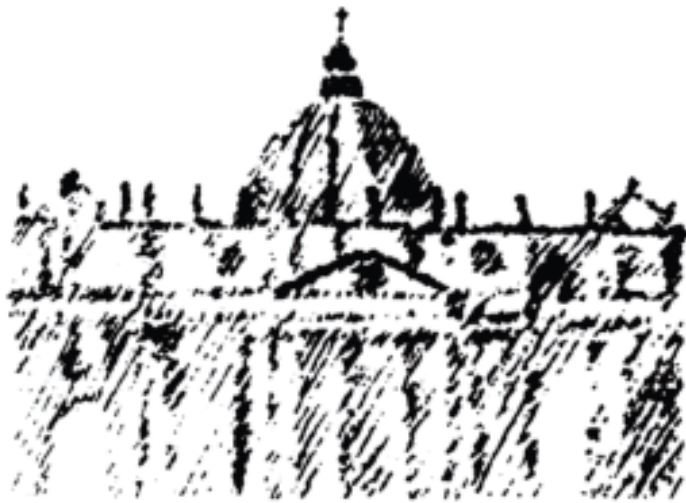
2014 Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called “mystical” because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments - “the holy mysteries” - and, in him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God calls us all to this intimate

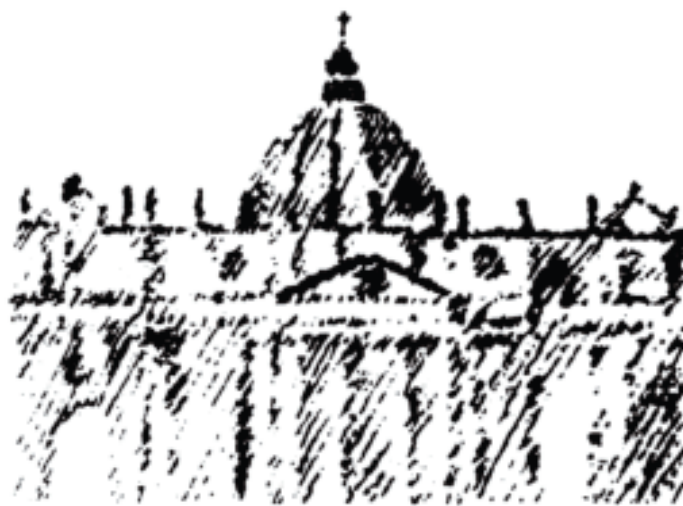
union with him, even if the special graces or extraordinary signs of this mystical life are granted only to some for the sake of manifesting the gratuitous gift given to all.

2015 The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. [Cf. 2 Tim 4] Spiritual progress entails the asceticism and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes:

He who climbs never stops going from beginning to beginning, through beginnings that have no end. He never stops desiring what he already knows. [St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Hom. In Cant.* 8: PG 44, 941C]







# NOT By Faith Alone

By James Akin

Most Christian traditions that trace their theologies and doctrines from the Protestant Reformation are known for their convictions that the truths of the Christian faith are found in *Sola Scriptura*, or Scripture alone, and that we are justified *sola fide*, or by “faith alone.” Ironically, the expression “faith alone” only appears once in the Bible—in James 2:24—where it is rejected as a description of how we are justified.

The Bible’s rejection of this phrase is a burr under the saddle for Protestants, for if they wanted to use terms the way the Bible does, then they would have to give up their chief slogan—the one which defines the whole movement.

When Catholics point out this problem, Protestants often try to do damage control by attacking the kind of faith being discussed in James 2, by saying it is somehow inferior or bad faith.

The way some attempt to do this is by pejoratively labeling the faith James speaks of as “dead faith.” Using the phrase in verses 17 and 26, they treat “faith without works is dead” as if it were a definition and say, “If faith

does not produce works then it is dead faith. It is dead faith that James says won’t save us.”

But this argument does not work. A reading of the passage clearly shows that James is not using the phrase as a definition. He is not defining the term “dead faith.” In fact, the term “dead faith” does not appear in the text. He is stating a fact, not offering a definition.

One way we know this is because

James offers proof for his assertion, not documentation for his definition. He does this by first citing how useless it is

People would be boasting of having dead faith (vv. 14). James would be making the ridiculously redundant statement that

dead faith without works is dead faith (vv. 17, 26) and offering to prove that dead faith is barren (v. 20). He would be offering to show people his dead faith by his works (v. 18)! In verse 19, James would be commending people (“you do well”) for having dead faith (v. 19).

James would be telling us that Abraham’s dead faith was active with his works, that Abraham’s dead faith was made complete by his works (v. 22), and that Abraham believed God with dead faith, which was then reckoned to him as righteousness and resulted in his being the friend

of God (v. 23).

Another attempt to impugn the faith in this passage does not involve treating “faith without works is dead” as a definition but seizes on the statement that “Even the demons believe—and shudder” (v. 19). Faith and belief are the same word and concept in Greek (we simply lack a verb for “to faith” in English, so we use “to

continued on page 42...

# Faith Alone, Faith and Works, or Is It Something Else?

By Marcus C. Grodi

There is an old story, which I'm sure most of you have already heard and of which I'm a bit stale on the details, but it is the best story I can think of to illustrate a point I believe needs to be made in the midst of this apologetic discussion of the issues of salvation and justification. The story goes something like this ...

Years ago along the northern coast of New England there was a small village. Directly off the coast within sight of land was a treacherous shoal of rocks. During one particularly devastating Nor'easter, a sailing ship with over a hundred passengers struck the rocks and sank. People watched helplessly from shore as the ship and her passengers were smashed again and again against the rocks. Shocked by what they witnessed, they immediately swore to never let this happen again.

A Life Saving Society was established with rescue boats, life-preservers, blankets, emergency rations, as well as training courses on how to use the boats, to maintain their equipment and to administer medical assistance when necessary. Everyone in this small town was involved and deeply committed to the Society's goals.

A year went by and then again during the stormy season another ship faced similar peril, but this time the Society was ready, and almost all on the ship were saved. Great rejoicing followed, with new plans to insure that next time all would be saved.

Years went by, and although the stormy seasons came as usual, no ships came near the rocks. But the Society continued. New generations of recruits were sworn in, and since no ships were imminently in peril, they eventually saw the need to add other activities to help fight boredom. There were athletic teams, nature clubs, fellowships for all ages, as well as debating societies. New facilities were needed to accommodate all these new activities, and the attractive and spacious grounds became a bragging point for

this small community. Sometimes large crowds would come from miles around to hear well respected debaters argue over a wide range of topics, including such things as what was the optimum number of rowers per boat versus the number of people needed on shore, who had the authority to organize a society, or even over the legalities incurred over rescuing versus not rescuing people.

As years went by and no ships crumbled on the rocks attendance and membership began to dwindle, so additional programs were instituted to encourage the recruitment of new blood. Colorful uniforms were awarded to those of higher rank and trophies were given to those with the highest attendance or recruitment statistics. Being a high ranking member of the Society became a mark of prestige in the community and even an expected line item on one's resume if one intended to run for public office. Often at political rallies one would hear candidates debating over the future needs and goals of the Society, sometimes even boldly questioning whether, given the growing financial needs of the struggling community, the Society had long since outlived its purpose. Was it truly their responsibility to save these souls? Hadn't these foolish seafaring people accepted the perils they faced when they set sail? Was it not all a part of the will of God whether they lived or died? A part of His greater plan?

Then one day during the annual storming season, the worst Nor'easter in years hit, and a large sailing vessel carrying one hundred thirty-eight emigrants bore down on the rocks. The few remaining members of the Society watched with terror from shore. They wrung their hands

and gnashed their teeth, for not only had the life-saving boats and equipment long since disintegrated due to neglect, but the members no longer knew how to use them. They were also split over whether they should or should not make any valiant efforts to save these people. Wasn't their fate solely in the hands of God? It was a shame to watch them perish but wasn't it somehow God's will, His predestined plan? Wasn't their primary responsibility to pray for those in peril, hoping that God in His infinite mercy might choose to save their lives and souls? Or on the other hand others argued that it was up to them to rescue these dying people. God had placed them there at that moment with the freedom to respond to their desperate need, and it was how they responded that would determine not only the fate of the people on the ship, but their own eternal destinies. God would judge them by how they treated "the least of these!"

The Life Saving Society remnant stood arguing, debating, impotent to do anything out of neglect, while all one hundred thirty-eight emigrants perished.

This story, of course, can be used to illustrate all kinds of things in the mission, or lack thereof, of the Church. But I was reminded of this story as I read through the many articles we were considering for inclusion in this Journal. I remembered debates I have heard (and taken part in) over different aspects of all that is necessary for Salvation, not just between Catholics and Protestants, but also between different Protestant sects—especially during my seminary days—and I sensed the need to include a cautionary thought: that we not miss the central most critical issue which

is too often missing in our polemics.

Those arguing for “the necessity of both Faith and works done in Grace” can be just as wrong as those arguing for “Faith Alone” if either one forgets this most essential, central critical element. And I believe that in both cases if this central element is not only remembered and emphasized, but also experienced through humble surrender, then the end result for both sides of the debate will be essentially the same: people being saved by faith through grace in Jesus Christ and

changed hearts, all of this is meaningless grandstanding. A Rosary said because one should or must, without a changed heart, without a heart in surrender and love of Christ, is just what Jesus warned about in Matthew 6—“babble like the pagans, who think they will be heard because of their many words.” Again any sincere Catholic knows this to be true, evidenced by the thousands of sermons calling for changed hearts preached from Catholic pulpits all over America.

St. Paul seems to be the most often

in and through his Church.

This central, critical element is simply the necessity for changed hearts.

We can believe all the correct things, even profess them with our lips, we can have the faith to move mountains, but as St. Paul emphasizes in Romans 10:9-10, we must believe them in our hearts. Faith alone without a changed heart cannot save you. Saying a quick prayer during an emotional moment at a crusade, camp meeting or altar call can’t save anyone without a heart touched and changed by the Holy Spirit. With a changed heart, one’s faith will lead to the recognition of the need for repentance and surrender of self to Christ; for forgiveness of self and others; for charity towards God and others; for prayer for self, others and even enemies; for a constant increase of Christ and decrease of self; for a life of obedience, holiness and growth in grace. Any sincere Evangelical knows this to be true as witnessed by the thousands of sermons calling for changed hearts preached from pulpits all over America. But sometimes this is lost in the debates over semantics.

We can also do all the good works and rituals expected of us by our Church. We can faithfully fulfill every ‘rite-of-passage’ and regularly practice every sacrament and sacramental. We can staunchly defend every doctrine, dogma or legislation of our Church, fighting even against those in our own Church who might desire to water down the requirements. But without

quoted supporter of both sides of the debate, but even he strongly emphasizes the necessity of a changed heart. For example, in I Corinthians 13 we hear him with great conviction argue that love is greater than anything else, including faith. But when one looks at how he describes the kind of love that is greater than all, isn’t it obvious that what he is really talking about is a changed heart: love that springs from a heart that is patient, kind, not jealous, not pompous, not inflated, not rude, not self-seeking, not quick tempered, etc.?

St. James is also another witness often brought into the debate, but what does he say?

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, his religion is vain. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep one self unstained by the world...Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show his works by a good life in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. (1.26-27; 3.13-15)

I could easily make a longer, detailed Scriptural defense of this, but the best way to recognize the necessity of a changed heart as a requirement for salvation and justification is to listen to what Jesus taught about how we are saved. I don’t mean reading Jesus through “the eyes of Paul” or through our particular interpretation of Paul (plan A versus plan B, etc.), but merely reading the words of Jesus and listening for what he told his followers was necessary for their salvation.

Recently I read through the Gospel of St. Matthew listening for Jesus’ instructions on this and I ended up with over ten pages of notes. Nearly everything he said challenges us to have hearts surrendered to the Father as the foundation for our faith and our works. Apart from changed hearts, both faith and works are powerless to bring us to the Father. I leave this project primarily to you, for unless we do it for ourselves, nothing anyone summarizes can truly change our hearts. But here are a few snippets from Matthew:

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (4.17)

Jesus’ proclamation was the same as His precursor, John the Baptist, and what were they both calling their followers to but changed hearts? Earlier when the Scribes and Pharisees came forward to be baptized (3.7-12), why was John so mad that they came?! Why wasn’t he elated to see them? Weren’t these the same teachers of truth Jesus would later tell his disciples to follow (23.1-12) though not imitate? Wasn’t the problem in both places that the Pharisees had hard hearts? (cf., Mk. 3.5)

Blessed are ... for they shall see God  
...

I remember that the Beatitudes were a bit of a bug-a-boo for us “Faith alone” folks, some of us relegating them to “Plan A” which had then been replaced by Paul’s “Plan B.” But aren’t these in fact the most clear statement of how Jesus understood the necessity of changed hearts if we are to “see God” (5.3-12)?

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, SO THAT you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven ... You,



therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (5:44-48)

Being a “child of God” is a common Scriptural description of those who are being saved (John 1.12-13; 1 John 3.1-3), but here Jesus states that one criterion for becoming a son of the Father is a changed heart—not the mere act of loving or praying for an enemy, but a heart sincerely and sufficiently open to doing this.

...your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (6.1-18)

What is it about our prayers, our alms giving, our fasting, our actions, and our beliefs that the Father is looking for in secret? Is it not the sincerity of our hearts?

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ...for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (6.20-21)

Where your heart is will be the key to what ever rewards in heaven we receive from the Father. Is this only those rewards we receive after salvation, or is this not also the reward of salvation itself?

Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (7.21)

These are very strong words from our Savior, but what’s missing from someone’s inadequate profession is not merely good works, but all the things Jesus has been teaching up to this point, which involves hearts that are surrendered to the will of God.

Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.... Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. (8.8-10)

Was it merely this centurion’s belief in Jesus’ miraculous powers that impressed Jesus, or was it not his humble, malleable heart which caused him to set aside his Roman attitude of superiority to recognize his true unworthiness?

Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. (9.13)

The righteous were those who may have believed and claimed the right things or who did the right things, but who did so from self-centered hearts. What Jesus wanted instead were those who had humbly faced up to their sinfulness—those with changed hearts.

You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.... I tell you, on the day of judgement men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. (12:34-37; see also 15.18)

Seems like our words are VERY important, both to eternity and to our justification. But NOT our mere words (see also 10:32-33), but the source of these words: our heart.

You hypocrites. Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ (15.7-9)

BOTH sides of the debate can be equally guilty here, because if our teaching of either “Faith Alone” or “Faith and works” is done apart from also emphasizing that a changed heart is crucial for salvation, then our teachings can become merely precepts of men.

There is so much more in Matthew and the other gospels as well as the other New Testament epistles that clearly emphasize the central importance of a changed heart as the underlying criterion for salvation, and my guess is that most of you reading this are saying, “Duh, who said otherwise?!”

Well, the fact that Christians are so uncharitably divided over these very polemics—men and women, scholars, clerics, and laity; churches, movements,

denominations; taking sides and railing vengeful, hateful, prideful and boastful epithets at one another—all of this and more proves to me that these polemics, as important as these distinctions are, too often blind us to what is most important: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (22.37-38).

One last quote from Jesus. In this statement, which is perhaps his clearest on what it truly takes to be a disciple, he doesn’t emphasize “faith alone,” though faith is certainly presumed, and he doesn’t emphasize “faith and works,” though again works are clearly mentioned. What He requires are hearts changed and surrendered and submissive to the will of God.

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ... For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. (16.24-27)

My wife Marilyn and I recently returned from our first pilgrimage to the Holy land. It was a blessed experience, and there is much I would love to tell you. But there was one particular incident that sticks out in my mind which clearly emphasizes this point.

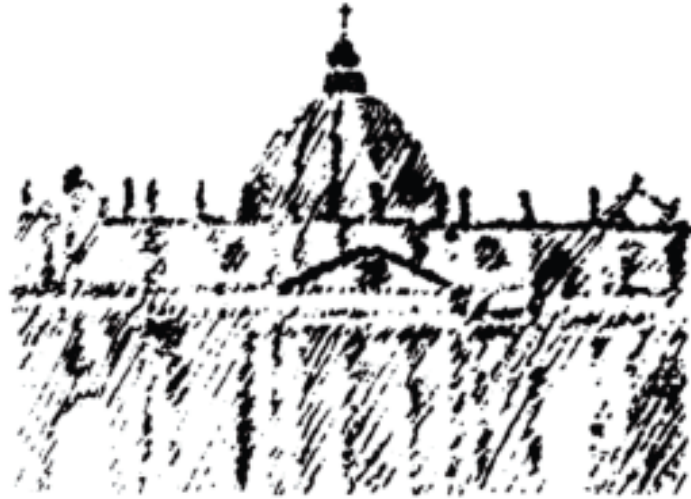
We were at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, an ancient Byzantine church, the oldest surviving church in Israel, built over the cave where from antiquity it is believed Jesus was born. To get down to the spot marked with a star one must walk bent over through a stone tunnel, one at a time, into the ancient cave.

While we were there waiting in line, there were over two hundred other Christian pilgrims from all over the world, representing many languages, cultures, customs, and sects, all trying anxiously to get into the tunnel. There was so much excitement about touching the very place where Christ was supposedly born, that people began shoving and cutting into line. Some began yelling back and forth—maybe even cursing, though I couldn’t

understand their languages.

At one point a priest of another Christian tradition became so angry that his particular pilgrims weren't able to "cut in line" that he began pushing through the crowd ordering everyone to make way for his people. But he was quickly shouted down by those in front until he gave up and his group was ordered by the guards to go to the end of the line. All of this just to see the sight where Our Savior—the gift of God's love—was born! Had we forgotten why Jesus had come? Where were our hearts?

When I listen to two Christians arguing over whether we are saved by "Faith Alone" or by "Faith and works," I also wonder whether we have forgotten:



Akins, continued from page 38...

believe" instead). So people ask, "What kind of faith do demons have?" "Only mere intellectual assent," Protestants answer. "They intellectually assent to the truths of theology, but this is as far as their faith goes."

This understanding of the faith James is speaking of as mere intellectual assent is much closer to the truth, but it still creates problems with the text—in fact, it creates many of the same ones.

For a start, people would be boasting of having mere intellectual assent (v. 14). James would be offering to show others his mere intellectual assent by his works (v. 18). He would be commending people for having mere intellectual assent (v. 19). He would be saying that Abraham's mere intellectual assent was active along with his works (v. 22).

Finally, he would be saying that Abraham had mere intellectual assent in God's promise and that this resulted in him being reckoned righteous and made the friend of God—the opposite point he made concerning demons having faith and the opposite of the point of this passage, which is to show that mere intellectual assent is barren (v. 23).

The "mere intellectual assent" solu-

tion fails, just as the "dead faith" solution did. In fact, any solution is going to fail that tries to impugn the faith James is talking about and says it is some kind of bad or inferior faith. This can be seen just by going through the passage and substituting "bad faith" and "inferior faith" wherever faith is mentioned (something the reader can do for himself).

One must conclude that James does not see anything wrong with the kind of faith he is talking about. The faith isn't the problem; the fact that the faith is alone is the problem. To understand what kind of faith James has in mind, one must avoid the temptation to read something bad into it.

This is where the "mere intellectual assent" solution went wrong. Its advocates correctly identified verse 19 as the key to understanding the kind of faith under discussion. It is intellectual assent. The problems were created by adding the term "mere" in order to make it sound bad. Leave "mere" off and the problems vanish; the passage makes perfect sense.

Someone can indeed go around boasting that he intellectually assents to God's truth (v. 14), prompting James's need to show that intellectual assent without works is dead and barren (vv. 17, 20, 26). James could indeed offer to show his

intellectual assent by his works (v. 18) and he could commend a person for having intellectual assent (v. 19a), while saying that even the demons have it but it doesn't stop them from shuddering at the prospect of God's wrath (v. 19b).

James can speak of how Abraham's intellectual assent was active with and completed by his works (v. 22). And he can draw his conclusion in verses 24 that man is not justified by intellectual assent alone. What James is saying is that intellectual assent is a good thing ("you do well," v. 19a), just not a complete thing if you want to be saved (vv. 14, 17, 20, 24, 26).

One could say that a person is justified by faith alone if one meant what Catholics have historically called formed faith—faith formed by charity (cf. Gal.5:6)—but not by intellectual faith alone.

In any event, if one wishes to use the language the Bible uses, one would say that one is justified by faith apart from "works of the Law" (Rom. 3:28), but not by "faith alone," apart from works (Jas. 2:24).

# Before You Object ...

By Fr. Ray Ryland

A new associate of the Coming Home Network recently sent an e-mail in which he spoke about the issue of justification and salvation. He said he understands Catholic doctrine, but has some difficulty in accepting it on an emotional level.

"In Protestant theology," he wrote, "or at least that of evangelical Protestants, the conversion experience of accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior suffices for salvation. As you know, this is sometimes expressed as 'eternal security,' and indeed it does provide lasting comfort to believers to be assured of their salvation."

Limitations of space, of course, preclude discussing a vital issue raised by relying on one's conversion experience for assurance of salvation, but the issue is this: How can I know whether I have given my life to Jesus Christ on his terms or on my terms? How do I determine the truth in this all-important matter?

The belief that one has assurance of salvation — absolute assurance — mistakenly identifies what we may call "objective redemption" and "subjective salvation." "Objective redemption" denotes the fact that in his life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ has redeemed the whole universe. Period. Our Christian faith demands that we be absolutely assured of this fact.

Whether I personally benefit from this objective redemption, however, depends on my response. The merits of Christ have to be received and acted on in my life. That is the process of "subjective salvation." Unless by God's grace I appropriate the objective redemption wrought by Jesus Christ, it can have no effect on my life. If I simply take comfort in the fact that Christ has redeemed the world, and do not work continually at receiving that redemption more and more fully into my life, I am living in a serious delusion.

A number of years ago a book was written about an incident in New York City involving two elderly men, the Collier brothers. Neither had married, and they

had always lived on upper Park Avenue in the large home where they were born. One day neighbors realized they had not seen the old men for quite a long time. They called the police, who broke into the house and found the old men dead. The coroner determined they starved to death. Neither has been disabled. They simply sat in their home and starved.

The police also found a fortune in cash and negotiable securities, all of it in plain sight. Those old men had starved with a fortune at their fingertips, simply because for some strange reason they refused to buy food.

In the tragedy of the Collier brothers we can see a parable of the Christian life. Because we belong to Jesus Christ through baptism, we are surrounded by all the riches of heaven. They belong to us. But unless we use them, apply them to our lives, we too will starve spiritually, and forever!

Each of us Christians has the comfort of assurance that Jesus Christ has redeemed us and destined us for everlasting union with him in glory. But none of us can see the whole future course of his life on earth. Only God can see there. Not one of us, therefore, can have absolute assurance that till his dying day he will always persevere in appropriating Christ's redemption in his life.

The correspondent I referred to at the beginning expressed his feelings with regard to the Catholic doctrine which I have just summarized. He said, "my reaction to the Catholic doctrine is one of walking on a tightrope and in constant fear of falling to one's eternal death."

My response is this. Suppose you really were walking on a tightrope from which you could fall to your destruction. Which would you prefer? Would you want to know the danger you were in, so you could guard against it? Or would you prefer not to know the danger and blithely assume you were walking on solid ground?

My correspondent further expressed

his misgivings this way. He said that according to Catholic doctrine, "notwithstanding a lifetime of generally successful and sincere attempts to walk the straight and narrow, if I were to stumble and fall into mortal sin and then suddenly and unexpectedly die, I would lose everything and be cast into darkness." He asked, how does one "live in confidence and faith, rather than in fear of stumbling?"

The fact is, no one ever "stumbled" into mortal sin. By definition, mortal sin involves serious matter which is freely chosen and to which full consent is given. One has to choose to commit mortal sin; one cannot simply "stumble" into it. Moreover, while we can and must judge that certain actions constitute mortal sin, objectively speaking, only God knows whether in a given instance all the conditions for mortal sin were met.

The whole point in living the Christian life is to keep one's eyes on Jesus, not on fear of falling into sin. Remember what happened to Peter when he asked to be allowed to walk to Jesus on the water. At Jesus' invitation he was actually miraculously walking on water, until he took his eyes off Jesus and began looking fearfully at the waves. Then he began to sink. And so do we all when we take our eyes off Jesus.

The scriptural command to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" means striving to let the objective redemption of Jesus Christ unfold in our lives, by his grace. It means to let that objective redemption become more and more fully our subjective salvation. Our confidence, our serenity, our joy come from knowing that "God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Phil. 2:12f.)

God's "good pleasure" is to bring us home to him. We have the ticket. Jesus Christ paid for it. God forbid that we should ever throw that ticket away.