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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Our Reconciliation with the Catholic Church

by Jeff and Lois Heron

Early years

My (Jeff) parents provided a loving home for my four siblings and for me. We grew up on a small, working horse farm in Michigan’s thumb area. Our blue-collar household was characterized by a healthy work ethic, polite manners, and biblical morality.

During my latter teen years, I benefited from a relationship with a dynamic pastor who took a positive interest in me. Consistent church attendance, positive peers, pastoral discipleship, and (I’m certain) the prayers of many added to my spiritual formation.

As a college freshman, I decided to major in pre-dentistry studies. But as I commuted between my parents’ home and campus that year, I realized that a career in dentistry was *my* choice. My new found growth in God’s grace began to challenge me to consider not just what I wanted to do, but what might *God* have designed for me as it pertained to vocation. I sensed that God wanted me to pursue a vocation in pastoral ministry.

I (Lois) was born in the late 1950s, the third of four children, to missionary parents. My early memories of life in South Africa are a spiritual and emotional amalgam of wonder and delight, as well as fear, darkness, and doubt. The prevailing winds of my childhood always carried with them the uncertainty of my mother’s health. The child-like understanding of the desolation chronic illness can cause dogged me with feelings of depression and insecurity. But I also had an unshakable determi-

nation — call it childlike denial — to see past the insecurities of my life and search for firm ground on which I could stand.

The shifting sands in early ministry years

We met at one of our denomination’s colleges and entered the pastorate during our college years by serving a small congregation near the college we attended. We also welcomed the first of our three children. Seminary soon followed, and then we were off and running in pastoral ministry, serving three more Wesleyan churches in Michigan, Arizona, and finally South Dakota, in our 34 years of Protestant ministry.

Little did we know when we entered the ministry after seminary training that we were taking a front row seat to witness the dissension that can accompany division which had begun to manifest centuries earlier in the Church. As evangelical and fundamental movements gained influence in politics and entertainment in the late 1970s to 1990s, churches seemed to take on more of a Christian country club mentality. We both started to question some of the bulimic

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Journeys Home

fascinations with trends and methods for growing a church. The sense of spiritual starvation that was surrounding us began to draw our own spirits toward a search for the sacred wisdom and understanding provided for anyone who inclined their ears to the words of Scripture.

Our desires to shepherd and care for the members of the churches we served were swallowed up by the sad effects of Protestantism — dissension, division, and discord. Furthermore, ours was not a unique experience — it was normal in many denominations to hear more about church divisions than anything else. Questions settled into our spirits: *Where is a firm foundation of authority? What is the purpose of the Church? What is worship? Is there nothing sacred anymore?*

Consumer-driven worship

Beginning in the early 2000s, a festering frustration settled in on us regarding the evangelical Protestant attitude toward worship, which could not be ignored if we were going to maintain our personal and spiritual integrity. The focus of attention was continually heightening on what a pastoral team could “make” happen on Sunday mornings and during the week that would appeal to the culture. Times of worship had to be slick, relevant, marketable, experiential, pleasing to all generations, and entertaining. *What had we come to?* The consumer-driven, man-centered notions of “church” and worship in the evangelical Protestant movement drove us to the margins of our endurance. Our desire to remain in pastoral ministry was swallowed up by what we were witnessing around us.

The longing for worship that was saturated with the spoken Word of God increasingly occupied our minds in our last assignment of formal ministry. We hungered for worship through thanksgiving and adoration of God’s saving work through Jesus Christ. We were starved for authentic worship of the Triune God. I (Jeff) had no idea that I would eventually find biblically-ordered worship in the Catholic Mass; however, the spiritual reading that consoled and challenged me was leading me further back into history, into my eventual consideration of the ancient Church.

The church we served was mired in dissension. I (Lois) was physically and emotionally undone by the strain of ministry, mostly by how it was affecting Jeff. My husband’s spirit — loyal and pastoral — began to diminish through a litany of demeaning circumstances in our service to the church. It was slowly pressing him toward the deconstruction of everything he believed about himself, his abilities and gifts, and his call. His devout faith in God and his commitment to daily immersion in prayer and Scripture reading along with spiritual reading served as his only source of spiritual refreshment and renewal. The evidence of the authority of the faith still present in the Catholic Church and the writings of early Church Fathers began to draw his spirit, so much so that he quietly began considering his perspective on the Catholic Church. He was finding answers to the questions we both had about the purpose of worship in the

authority and Sacred Tradition of the Church. And it was the secure authority of the Faith still intact in the Catholic Church that eventually drew him toward the Catholic Church after we resigned from Protestant ministry.

The example of our children

Our adult children’s support of us in our journey out of Protestant ministry was invaluable, because the path was rocky for much of our last twelve years in service to the church. We respect each of our three children (and spouses), admire their faith, and take note of their commitment to God. As our children matured in their faith they often encouraged us as we witnessed their determination to live God-honoring lives by raising their families according to biblical values. Our journey toward the Catholic Church included deep pain and loss; therefore, our steps were halting and often unsteady, yet they were steps nonetheless. Our three children and their spouses’ growing faith helped to propel us forward in our own journey into the Catholic Church.

Two of our children became Catholic after being drawn by her historical authenticity and the integrity present in the authority of her Sacred Tradition. When we would visit their families and worship with them, we were compelled by the sacred reverence of the worship of Almighty God. There was a profound sense of rest and peace in the worship that drew our spirits deeper into our association with the Catholic Church.

I (Lois) was reading a book which helped me discover more about meditation and prayer. But, what astounded me were the rich quotes of people I had never heard about! The profound faith of writers such as St. Clement of Rome, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Bonaventure, St. Therese of Lisieux, and St. John of the Cross reached into my life and drew me back into the richness of the Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church. And who was John Henry Cardinal Newman?! Why had I never heard or sung the stirring hymn, *Lead, Kindly Light*? It wasn’t long before I was devouring every book I could get my hands on about the Apostolic Fathers, early Church Fathers, and saints of the Church.

Gaining perspective

In October of 2012, we pulled back from what we were mired in by resigning from Protestant ministry — to remove ourselves from what had become a toxic environment. In the words of that great philosopher Popeye: “That’s all I can stand! I can’t stand it no more!” Come what may, we could no longer stand by and support what was happening all around us in the Protestant movement. Standing at a crossroad, our resignation caused us to confront many emotions. We decided to face the “whys?” of our years in ministry and allow God to answer them in His good time. That required solitude and a deliberate stepping away from everything familiar, so that we could respond in quiet obedience to God’s desire for us.

The immediate sense of freedom from the disillusionment that had barnacled onto our lives was liberating. We were exhausted emotionally, spiritually, and

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How Wide is the Narrow Gate?

By Marcus Grodi

It seems to me that this is the underlying question of our present culture and Christendom. Or maybe it could be stated, “How *narrow* is the narrow gate?” When we consider all of the issues in our world confronting us at this moment, and all of the answers being given by the myriad of contemporary Christian voices, is this not the question: What is still required for anyone to believe or do or not do to be a faithful Christian? What, in the end, is necessary for salvation?



Ever wonder why there has been such an increase in size and number of independent Christian churches in America and the world? Is it not that these churches are continually widening what is necessary to squeeze through the narrow gate, making it easier, more comfortable, more appealing, less demanding, and far more rewarding? Think about the battles within mainline denominations over moral, ethical, and theological issues: Is the end result of their debates and democratically decided conclusions ever a narrowing of the narrow gate? Even within the Catholic world, whenever debates arise over moral, ethical, theological, or disciplinary issues, are those challenging the established teachings and disciplines of the Church ever seeking to maintain or narrow the narrow gate, or always widening it?

St. Matthew presented our Lord’s discussion of the wide and narrow gates within an interesting context of several other important themes:

(11) If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

(12) So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

(13-14) Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

(15-16a) Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

Matthew 7: 11-16a

The entire context of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount is crucial to gaining the full intent of how *wide* or *narrow* the *narrow* gate is (i.e., “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” Mt 5:48.), but this immediate context says much.

Verse eleven reminds us that we are flawed, and that God knows far more what is good, right, and true for us than we do



“Heaven’s Gate”
Photograph by roger.salz (Flickr)

ourselves. In our lives, the people to whom we may be most motivated to do something selfless and *good* are our children—but just a quick read of any contemporary newspaper reveals how inadequately so many modern parents seem to know what is *good* for their children. They may think that what they are doing or giving is *good*, but their consciences have been so poorly formed in today’s culture and by the confusion of modern Christendom that what they are doing or giving is directly opposite to what our grandparents once thought was *good*.

This is why we must look to our Father who is in heaven to know what is good, right, and true — and, consequently, how *wide* that narrow gate really is. Do we learn this through the Bible *alone*? The evidence of so many biblically based Christian voices today, widening and widening that narrow gate, is proof enough that this was not the Father’s primary means; rather, He gave us His Church (Mt 16:18) as the “pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15) through which we have received the fullness of His Word. History has shown that private interpretation always leads to either widening or narrowing (scrupulosity) the narrow gate. We must listen to His Church which leads us in justice, mercy, and love.

Verse twelve gives the foundation for all ethics and morality, but, again, that quick read of any contemporary newspaper reveals how twisted so many people’s consciences have become. Far too many people today want done to or for themselves things that have always been viewed far from good, right, or true. It’s almost beyond belief what some people today want for themselves! And if this is true, it’s no wonder how people now treat each other around the world, pressing lawgivers, governments, and religious groups to pass laws to widen the narrow gate so that, in essence, there becomes little difference between the wide and easy way that leads to destruction and the narrow, hard way that once led to life. This is even more true why today “those who find it are few.”

In verses fifteen and sixteen, our Lord warned His disciples that, in their day and for all time until His return, there will be false prophets who will disguise themselves as trustworthy, authoritative, charismatic, and humble

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purveyors of truth. And sadly today the thousands and thousands of people who follow them are drawn specifically because they like the *fruit* they see — and they want the *fruit* these false prophets are promising: wealth, health, and freedom from suffering and cumbersome rules. They want this *fruit* because they have swallowed the false prophets’ redefinition of what is good, right, and true.

And these false prophets are not only non-Catholics: recently a self-proclaimed “faithful” Catholic politician publicly proclaimed that she believes that her twisted understanding of morality — fully in line with our modern culture’s redefinition of what is good, right, and true — is also fully inline with the teaching of the Catholic Church! If she had read the *Catechism* with an open heart and mind, she would realize to what a dangerous extent she is trying to *widen* the narrow gate for all those who trust her because of her “charismatic” persona.

So how wide or narrow is that narrow gate that Jesus says is so hard and is found by so few? Many believe that the one and only simple answer is faith *alone* in Jesus *alone*, reinforced by many Scriptures, such as John 3:16 or Romans 10:9 (“if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”). But this is precisely what is believed by so many today who are continually pressing the boundaries of that narrow gate to such an extent that it would be no longer recognizable by the founders of their particular Christian tradition or denomination. Faith *alone* in Jesus *alone* today includes almost anything. And even those within these traditions or denominations who are fighting against this “progress,” trying to hold tight to how they have always understood the Bible, cannot agree in unity what it means to have faith *alone* in Jesus *alone*.

This is why, particularly today, we must trust the Church to guide us into what is good, right, and true. History, however, has shown us that individuals, even groups of Catholic laity, priests, religious, bishops, or cardinals can be drawn away dangerously by the enticing voices of the world, the flesh, and the

devil, little by little giving the impression that even the Church has developed in her thinking as to how wide or narrow is that long-standing narrow gate. Individuals and groups of the faithful can always be wrong, which is why we must trust that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church: the faithful and hierarchy in union with Peter, the rock upon which our Lord established His Church.

How can we know what the Church teaches? We are blessed to have the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which St. John Paul II said, “is a sure norm for teaching the faith and thus a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion” (*Fidei Depositum*, 3). He also said that, “In reading the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we can perceive the wonderful unity of the mystery of God, his saving will, as well as the central place of Jesus Christ” (*ibid*, 2).

How wide is that narrow gate? Prayerfully read the *Catechism*, and find out. ■

STAY CONNECTED BY EMAIL!



We have a number of email lists that may be helpful and spiritually edifying to you: Conversion Story Email Club, The Journey Home Program, Deep in Scripture Radio, Deep in History Videos, and more. Visit CHNetwork.org/email to customize your email preferences and stay connected with your favorite CHNetwork content.

FEATURED RESOURCES



By What Authority? An Evangelical Discovers Sacred Tradition CD

In this insightful talk from a Deep in History conference, Mark Shea skillfully explains the role Sacred Tradition plays in the Catholic Church.



By What Authority? An Evangelical Discovers Catholic Tradition — By Mark Shea

In this book, Mark Shea gives a lively and entertaining presentation of his conversion to Catholicism and his discovery of Christian Tradition. As an Evangelical, Shea accepted the principle of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) as the basis of faith. Now as a Catholic convert, he skillfully explains how and why Sacred Tradition occupies a central role in divine revelation.

\$35

Receive *By What Authority* (CD) for a donation of \$35.

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Receive *By What Authority* (CD) and *By What Authority* (book) for a donation of \$75.

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On Pilgrimage

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | LittlePortionHermitage.org

Summer is in full swing here in the northern hemisphere. For many of you this means traveling to and fro across the country — *or the world!* — visiting friends and family. Maybe you will be traveling to attend a summer event like the Newport Jazz Festival. In any case, you will be experiencing the sights and sounds of new people, new places, and new things along the way.



An especially fruitful thing to do during the season of travel is to visit one of the many Catholic shrines located throughout the United States or abroad. A shrine is a place set aside for the glory and praise of God in honor of a particular person or event in the life of the Church. At last count, the United States had at least one shrine in thirty-five of our fifty States plus the District of Columbia.

A favorite pilgrimage site of mine is St. Anthony's Shrine in downtown Boston. The Mass is celebrated multiple times a day. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered throughout the day as well. The National Shrine of Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Massachusetts is another favorite. The Shrine of Saint Anne de Beaupré located a few miles outside Quebec City in Canada with its many places for pilgrims to lodge is a great place to visit for a retreat.

If you are planning to travel to England this summer, I hope you will visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. Walsingham, England is unique in that located in the town is a shrine dedicated to Our Lady which is maintained by catholic-minded members of the Church of England, *much to chagrin of the decidedly more*



St. Anthony's Shrine, Boston
Photograph by jimcintosh (Flickr)

anti-Catholic members of that same Protestant body, while not too far away is situated the National Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham which is maintained by the Catholic Church.

Whether you are Catholic, thinking about becoming Catholic, or are simply intrigued by the Catholic Church, I encourage you to go on pilgrimage. ■

*When fair April with his
showers sweet,
Has pierced the drought of
March to the root's feet
And bathed each vein in liquid
of such power,
Its strength creates the newly
springing flower;
When the West Wind too, with
his sweet breath,
Has breathed new life — in
every copse and heath —
Into each tender shoot, and the
young sun
From Aries moves to Taurus on
his run,
And those small birds begin
their melody,
(The ones who 'sleep' all night
with open eye,)
Then nature stirs them up to
such a pitch
That folk all long to go on
pilgrimage**

*From the Prologue of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*



Visit www.chresources.com
or call 740-450-1175 for these and other great resources to learn more about the Catholic Faith.

RECENT CONVERT?

Have you been recently received into the Catholic Church? If so, please get in touch with the CHNetwork office so we can update our records.

Former non-Catholic clergy/academics — please contact Jim Anderson at jim@chnetwork.org

Former non-Catholic Laity — please contact Mary Clare Piecynski at maryp@chnetwork.org

THANK YOU!

Marcus Grodi and the staff of the CHNetwork would like to extend our deep gratitude and appreciation to Bruce Sullivan and Dr. Charles Feicht who have served until recently on our Board of Directors. We are grateful for the many valuable contributions they have made over the years to the direction and mission of the CHNetwork. Thank you both!



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NEWSLETTER DONATION

The CHNewsletter is our primary means of outreach and communication. We request a yearly tax-deductible gift in the amount of \$35 or more to continue receiving the newsletter and remain a supporting member of the CHNetwork.

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CHNetwork
Attention: Ann Moore
PO Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or ann@chnetwork.org if you have any questions or concerns.

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Prayer List



Clergy

- For a Lutheran minister in Indiana, that she may soon enter into full-communion with the Catholic Church with great joy.
- For Fr. Skip, a former Baptist seminarian who was ordained a Catholic priest in June, that the Holy Spirit would richly anoint his new ministry to God's children.
- For a minister of the United Church of Canada, that our Lord Jesus would guide him as he seeks to learn more deeply the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- For a minister in Pennsylvania, that his desire to learn more about the Catholic Faith would lead him Home to the ancient Church of the Apostles and Prophets.
- For a Methodist minister in Ohio, that, as he works through layers of religious and cultural programming which have cut him off from the Catholic Church, God would grant him the grace to come home to the Catholic Church.
- For Jeff, a minister in the Midwest, that our Lord Jesus Christ may successfully get him through his struggles that hinder his journey to the Catholic Faith.
- For a former Nazarene minister in Idaho, that his voracious reading would, by God's grace, clear away all impediments blocking his coming into full-communion with the Successor of St. Peter.

Laity

- For Kevin, that his annulment will be granted soon and he will be able to partake of the Eucharist.
- For Bryan who has gone through a difficult period, that he not be discouraged in pursuing his interest in the Catholic Church.
- For a woman in Europe who is suffering from health problems that prevent her from moving forward with her interest in the Church.
- For a Baptist who is attending Mass and is drawn to the "something more" in Catholicism, that he have clarity and direction as he pursues truth.
- For a man in the south who listens to Catholic radio and has read Catholic books but doesn't know how to continue his interest in the Catholic Church without the support of his wife.
- For Sarah, a recent convert, who is having a hard time finding continued support for her faith journey.
- For Mary who wishes to be Catholic but is homebound without transportation, that Jesus open the right doors for her to be able to visit a local parish.
- For a man in Europe who is struggling with his journey but is becoming more open to the Catholic Faith.
- For Jeffery, that he find peace and the ability to move forward with his journey.
- For Jamie as she waits on an annulment decision and hopes to make friends in her local parish.
- For a man who is no longer pursuing the Catholic Faith and is considering becoming an ordained clergy in a Protestant denomination.
- For a convert in Virginia, that she not be discouraged in her journey as a new Catholic and be able to find good local Catholic friends.
- For Scott to embrace the fullness the Catholic Church has to offer.
- For an Evangelical to know how best to proceed with telling her family and friends of her wish to be Catholic.
- For Cindy who was recently received into full-communion with the Catholic Church, that Jesus bless and guide her continued faith walk.
- For a woman in New Jersey who is on the journey and has been going to weekly adoration, that our Eucharistic Lord draw her heart ever closer to Himself.
- For Dean who has been drawn to the Catholic Church to his great surprise, that the Holy Spirit continue to work in his life.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702 or email prayer requests to prayers@chnetwork.org.

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

Please also pray for the Coming Home Network International's staff and Board of Directors.

President/Founder, Marcus Grodi
(former Presbyterian pastor)

Resident Theologian, Dr. Kenneth Howell
(former Presbyterian pastor)

Senior Advisor: History & Theology, Jim Anderson
(former Lutheran)

Director of Studio/Media, Scott Scholten
(former Presbyterian)

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(former Mormon)

Publications and Laity Coordinator, Mary Clare Pieczynski

Manager of Outreach, JonMarc Grodi

Financial Assistant, Wendy Hart
(former United Methodist)

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► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

physically. Our souls cried out for attention and rest. Peace had been pushed to the margins of our lives for so long as we tried to keep our heads above the tide of discontent and despair. The rest and peace of God returned. It was uncanny how light our lives had become — we had forgotten what true peace felt like. (We were often told there was a visual difference in both of us.)

Searching for biblically ordained worship

We knew if we were going to be faithful to Christ, we were going to have to be faithful to His Bride — His Church. *Where would we worship together now that we had left the ministry?* We knew we hungered and thirsted for biblically ordained worship and the stability of a Church that held firm the teachings of Christ and the Traditions of the Faith. *Where would we find that integrity?* Our minds and spirits were determined to rightly order our loyalty and trust in a true and reliable authority to which we could offer up our lives. We had some “shopping” to do. There are plenty of evangelical and mainline Protestant churches to choose from! “Shop ‘til you drop” took on a new meaning one Sunday after yet *another* visit to *another* church.

During our examination, we discovered that our niggling doubts really settled around the persisting questions: *Why does division in the Protestant movement still prevail after 500 years? And why does the Catholic Church remain intact after 2,000 years?* The very oldest Protestant denominations date back to the sixteenth-century Reformation, yet they themselves have fractured so many times in the 500 years since the Reformation that they have ceased to have a strong identity with the founders of their denominations. Our own denominational movement was birthed out of Anglicanism, which in several theological respects shares similar roots with the Catholic Church, yet it’s beleaguered with the Protestant proclivity of fracturing and mutation.

It was apparent to us that denominationalism was continuing to do to the Protestant movement exactly what the Reformers did to the Catholic Church. The incessant chipping away at the apostolic authority of Christ’s Church that took root in the Reformation had dwindled the Movement down to a club mentality. That helped to explain the disrespect of pastoral leadership and even rebellion against authority in the local churches of many denominations. Protest and division are in the genetic code of the movement. Because there is no secure center of authority or Tradition, the movement is more like a mutant cell dividing at will. To date there are some 33,000 Protestant denominations — yet, there is still one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Our list of questions kept growing: *Surely there was a reason that billions of faithful believers around the world have remained faithful to the Catholic Church? Surely there was a reason that the Catholic Church has not altered its worship through history to stay relevant with each generation? Surely there was a reason why the papacy and the authority of the Church (Magisterium) stand as a paragon of biblical authority?*

Looking for a good builder

Our doubts about the condition of the Protestant movement soon drove us to the threshold of the Catholic Church. We had been drawn to the biblical pattern of worship present in the Masses. We were compelled and comforted by what we came to discern about the stability of the apostolic authority present in the Magisterium. We were convicted and consoled by the holiness of the sacraments of the Faith. What we soon came to realize is that the security of historical and biblical stability could only be the result of what was protected in the mandate of Christ to Peter and the Apostles: “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Mark Shea provides an excellent analogy regarding the firm foundation of the Catholic Church. As you think of what Christ intended the Church to be, it is helpful to think of the three things you need to build a brick house: bricks, mortar, and trowel. Consider that the Catholic Church has a big enough pile of bricks to build a house. Catholic teaching says *written* Sacred Tradition (Scripture) is *materially* sufficient: all the bricks necessary to build its doctrines are there in Scripture. But there are also other building materials besides Scripture that have been handed down from the apostles and the early Church Fathers. The other building material is stored in the *unwritten* (and eventually written) Sacred Tradition (this is the mortar that holds the bricks of the written Tradition together in the right order and position). The third necessary building material is found in the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Church (this is the trowel in the hand of the Master Builder). Taken together, these three things are *formally* sufficient for knowing the revealed truth of God. You can build a Church that the gates of hell will not prevail against when you have all three materials to build with — bricks, mortar, trowel — Sacred Scriptures, Sacred Tradition, Sacred Authority. You can build a Church whose authority and tradition bear the integrity of the historical Church beginning in the New Testament and flourishing through the last 2,000 years.

A pivotal fact, often ignored by Protestantism, is that the ancient Church, the Church established by Jesus Christ through the Apostles, *passed on* the faith of the New Covenant with God. They passed it on through oral and written tradition with the authority Christ had established in them. This is the monumental difference in how the Catholic Church has been built as opposed to the Protestant movement.

The Protestant movement began with a protest against the authority of the Catholic Church and gradually turned into a *movement* of protest and innovation. In other words, there was no way that the universal (Catholic) Church established by Christ through His Apostles would simply start over because of some dissenting voices. So the Protestant movement innovated with what was already the universal Church that Christ ordained. However, the Protestant movement only borrowed the bricks of the Catholic Church. They had thrown out the mortar

and the trowel in their attempts to reform what they thought was wrong with Christ's Church.

Sola Scriptura

"Scripture alone" ("bricks" only) is a phrase used to describe how Protestants build their understanding of Christianity. Protestantism insists that only Scripture is authoritative for Christian faith and life. It denies the Catholic teaching (and historical reality) that Sacred Scripture is actually a written portion of a much wider, sacred, and authoritative Tradition, which includes other elements passed down orally and by patterns of behavior known as ritual or tradition. When an understanding of the Faith is based on bricks alone without the mortar and trowel of Sacred Tradition and Sacred Authority, a serious consideration needs to be addressed. If Scripture were the only legitimate source of Christian belief and practice, the early Christians who lived before the New Testament was written and circulated could not have lived the Faith.

Sola Scriptura also explains one aspect of why there are so many Protestant denominations. It explains why we had the keen awareness of how fluid authority is in the Protestant movement. If an individual or a group interprets Scripture by using some handpicked bricks to shape their theology, there are other bricks that are, by necessity, left in the collection of bricks we refer to as Holy Scripture. That is the nature of innovation. The various Protestant denominations (read: "innovations") have taken the bricks they find authentic, fascinating, satisfying, consoling, and invented a form of church using their own ideas, methods, equipment, technology to attract people to their innovation. The manufactured mortar and trowel of the multifarious innovations lack the secure integrity of the Faith and so the innovations are endlessly changing according to each generation.

Finding the "New Testament Church"

During our examination of the tenets of our Protestant movement over the years of ministry we could never go deeper into history than the 1500s (ironically, our denomination was established in the late 1960s). Like most denominations and non-denominations, our history was short and the weight of the theology sparse. During our own examination of what we believed, we looked at the foundation of our denomination's theology. A common theological foundation in the Evangelical tradition is that the denomination is like the "New Testament Church." But we began wondering how we could know what the New Testament Church was like or what it taught about faith and worship.

Often enough, the answer was, "the Bible." But who taught us that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God? Who decided what books would be included in the Bible? We discovered that there were a lot more gospels and letters that weren't included in the Bible. We knew that Paul had no New Testament when he wrote to the Thessalonian Christians, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the *traditions* which you were *taught by us*, either by *word of mouth* or *by letter*" (2 Thessalonians 2:15; emphasis added).

Counting the Council of Jerusalem referred to in Acts 15 and Galatians 2, the Catholic Church has convened twenty-two Church Councils over the 2,000 years of history. The purpose of nearly every council was to keep the brick house intact by using the trowel of the Church of Christ to respond to heresies. The councils did that by keeping the mortar pure and the trowel sharp.

Accounts of the Faith in the Triune God being held intact with the Sacred Authority entrusted to the early Church is evident beginning in the New Testament. Christianity is born from the saving action of the Triune God, but the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is not laid out explicitly in the New Testament. It was through controversies over how to best interpret difficult passages of Sacred Scripture that the Catholic Church councils formulated "how the mystery of the Blessed Trinity was revealed, how the Church articulates the doctrine of the Trinity, and how, by the divine missions of

the Son and the Holy Spirit, God the Father fulfills the 'plan of his loving goodness' of creation, redemption, and sanctification" (CCC, 235). In other words, had Christ left us with a mandate to see Sacred Scripture as the sole authority of the Christian life, we would have been lost from the beginning in controversy about the nature of the Lord Himself.

Back to the issue of worship

In observing the extreme difference between worship in the Catholic Church and the Protestant movement, we assembled with worshipping believers every Sunday at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The Holy Spirit drew us deeper into consideration of reconciling with the Catholic Church as we learned from the priests and observed the intellectual and theological integrity with which they served God. Worship embodied the integrity and the authenticity that we hungered and thirsted for — every word, every action, every moment of the Mass bore the full solemnity of the Christian Faith and that deeply impacted us.

We were now taking part in the biblically ordained purpose for worship of the Triune God that was fulfilled in the New

“If Scripture were the only legitimate source of Christian belief and practice, the early Christians who lived before the New Testament was written and circulated could not have lived the Faith.”

...Journeys Home Continued...

Covenant! The conformity of the worship to the Scriptures is unmistakable. The Old Testament reveals the long history of God's covenant with mankind through the Jewish nation. They were set apart from all nations by their worship and their conduct. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, fulfilled that covenant through His incarnation, death, and resurrection. He incarnated God's ultimate desire for humanity — fidelity to and worship of our Creator. The disciples and early Church already knew how to worship God, but now they understood why they worshipped God, and God alone in the sacred tradition of the Old Covenant now New Covenant. The wholeness of their lives depended on their rightly ordered conduct. Their holiness also depended on the value they placed on rightly ordered worship of Almighty God, worship that was ordained by God through Moses.

The first believers in Christ were Jews, God's chosen people; therefore, God continued His fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New Testament's traditions of worship. These were not little "t" traditions that cultures embrace as they form; these are big "T" traditions in that they are the acceptable and ordained form of worship according to God's point of view. That is Sacred Tradition. This answered yet another one of the persistent questions we had over the years as we witnessed the commercializing entertainment-driven "worship" many Protestant churches offer up every Sunday.

"All roads lead to Rome"

Our years of restlessness now manifested itself in the words St. Anselm used to describe the Christian life: "*faith seeks understanding*." The questions about God and faith that had made us uneasy were finally finding their answers. Looking back over those thirty-four years of Protestant ministry, we could see how our questions about life and faith had changed and we found the answers we had previously accepted did not satisfy our desire for rest and peace. We had witnessed the accidental (sometimes deliberate) domestication of the Triune God and our worship of Him. The disturbing, catered, "God in a box" notion of church that we had witnessed over the decades had actually seeded a longing in our spirits for the divine Mystery of Faith.

The gravitas that accompanied these realizations had led us in the "long obedience in the same direction" toward the threshold of the Catholic Church. There was no turning back from the truth and the security that we had found in the writings of the early Church Fathers and from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. God was restoring our joy! And, He was doing this right in the midst of what was once so foreign — the Roman Catholic Church! We eagerly attended Mass each week, sometimes daily. The liturgy was welcomed and worshipful, and united us with the ancient Church as well as today's global Church. The hungering darkness of our past gave way to Light!

During the Lenten season of 2014 we resolved to be reconciled with the Catholic Church! We voiced our desire to our priests and spiritual formation director. The Church's apostolic authority revealed itself to us in an unexpected way. We came

to understand the little idiom, "all roads lead to Rome" in a new way. Even though we were ready to run the aisles of our Catholic parish declaring our love and devotion to the Church, we had another road to walk. We were required to participate in a formation program to help us understand and experience the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. That would take more time. But it was time well spent! The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults follows the Sacred Tradition of culminating at the Easter Vigil that takes place on Holy Saturday, the evening before Easter Sunday.

Our parish used the series produced by the Augustine Institute — *Symbolon: The Catholic Faith Explained* series — as a part of the R.C.I.A. process. What a gift! The more we learned, the more our hunger and thirst was satisfied. We eagerly anticipated Easter 2015, when we would finally stand with thousands of believers around the world and in eternity and confess our faith in the Triune God and declare our loyalty to His Church. Each of our children and their families gathered around us to witness for the first time their parents' sublime peace as we finally reconciled with the Catholic Church. Now that we are here standing on solid ground, the joy of the Lord has indeed returned. The security of the ancient Church, its Sacred Authority and its Sacred Tradition, is incredibly consoling. We have come to peace and rest in the universal Church — the Catholic Church — the true and reliable source of our Faith.

Our decision to reconcile with the Catholic Church has not been arbitrary or motivated by rebellion against the Protestant movement. It has actually been a lifelong conversion of mind and heart through the circuitous path of ministry in the Protestant movement. It is in the solid foundation of the Catholic Church that we discovered that the beauty, goodness, and truth of the Faith remains revered, and flourishes in our world today. ■



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