



May 2015 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



A Charismatic Comes Home

by Kevin Stephenson

Childhood in the Episcopal Church

I was born in 1960 in Belham, England and christened (baptized) in the Anglican Church as an infant. My father had converted from Roman Catholicism to Anglicanism, just prior to marrying my mother who was Anglican. They had both moved from Jamaica to England for education years earlier. Born prematurely, I weighed only four pounds and, as a result, my eyesight did not develop. I was nearly legally blind, which required me to wear thick prescriptive glasses growing up. This resulted in significant eye hand coordination difficulties, learning disorders, and self confidence issues as a child. In 1969, my family moved to the United States to seek a better life.

I was confirmed in the Episcopal Church at twelve years old and became an acolyte. I loved serving and helping with the sacraments. I enjoyed putting on the robes and preparing the elements. I felt I was part of something very sacred. I treasure the memories and experience I had in the Anglican and Episcopalian church growing up. I particularly remember the majestic large cathedral and primary school, which I attended, of St. James Anglican Church in England. It was majestic and the parish priest was well-respected.

In the United States, my experiences at Saint John Episcopal Church were mostly positive. The parish priest loved us as family, and my parents were involved in the administration and activities. I served as an acolyte and lectionary reader and enjoyed the liturgical and sacramental services. I was very involved in youth group and choir. My priest was well-educated, holding a Masters in Di-

vinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, and the majority of the parishioners were well-educated and affluent, as well. I attended public school during this time where I was frequently the focus of bullying and fights.

My “Born Again” Experience

When I was a teenager, my mother and father sent me to live in Jamaica with my aunt, because I was struggling with the authority of my father. During my time in Jamaica, I joined a youth-based, evangelical group at my high school. I was fifteen years old when I had my “born again” conversion and accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. For the first time in my life, I discovered that God created me for His purpose. The definition of “me” was not determined by other kids in school or by my parents — my definition was designed by God.

Continued on page 2 ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

The Scriptures told me the greatest news I had ever heard, regarding God's love for me. Because of that love, I was commissioned to share that love with others. I now had purpose and my self-confidence increased. I came to believe my life had meaning. The suffering I experienced had purpose within God's will. My purpose was to share the love of Christ with other students who were being bullied like I had been.

My concerns with the Episcopal Church started when I discussed my "born again" evangelical experience and literal interpretation of Scripture with my parish priest. He did not see the significance of my born again experience since I was already baptized and confirmed as an Anglican. He also disagreed with my literal interpretation of Scripture. He stated that the majority of the mystical and miraculous events recorded in Scripture were allegorical and not to be taken literally. I rejected this interpretation and considered him "not saved" in the evangelical sense. Plus, I did not see the same level of joy and enthusiasm as that of "born again Christians" within the Episcopal Church. As a result, around 1977, I moved closer to the evangelical/fundamentalist school of thought.

Conservative Evangelical Fundamentalism

I attended a small conservative evangelical college in 1978. Many of the textbooks and teachers were influenced by Southern Baptist fundamentalist theology (Dallas Theological Seminary). They strictly considered Scripture to be the sole source for all faith and doctrine. They took a literalist point of view to the text and considered the sixteenth-century Reformation leaders, such as John Calvin and Martin Luther, as the Fathers of their theological orientation.

I studied classical Greek New Testament and Reformation theology and felt a call to pastoral ministry and evangelism. As a result, I joined Campus Crusades for Christ and Young Life youth ministry as a college student. My professors and fellow students were confident in their theological views and scathing in criticism of other faith groups that they considered heretical.

I enjoyed the intellectual challenge, textual criticism of Scripture, respect for the classical Greek and Hebrew languages, and the readiness to debate any topic on theology or Scripture.

My concern came with their criticism of the Pentecostals, Holiness, and Charismatic Christians. Because of their belief in signs, wonders, miracles, healing, and the spiritual gifts like speaking tongues, these groups were considered "another gospel." The majority of my student friends were either African Americans or Hispanics, and they were primarily practicing in these groups. I wondered how they could all be in error regarding their interpretation of Scripture, yet be so devout in spiritual practice. I could not find evidence in the Scriptures that signs, wonders, miracles, and spiritual gifts had stopped with the death of the first-century disciples. I found plenty of evidence of the miraculous and the supernatural in Scripture. How could one part of Scripture be literal and another part not?

Another point of concern was the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, which holds that, from the very beginning of Creation, only certain people are predestined by God to be "saved" and others are predestined by God to go to hell. They based this theology from passages of Saint Paul's teachings in the New Testament. I found it extremely bothersome that only those who believed like the fundamentalists would be saved, since those people tended to be of white, European descent. Furthermore, those destined to go to hell tended to be non-Caucasians. I considered these ideas and beliefs deeply disturbing.

As a result, I moved closer to Pentecostal theology and eventually experienced "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" with evidence of "speaking in tongues" around 1984 in my mid-twenties. I was married at this point with two children and led my Baptist wife towards Pentecostal/Charismatic beliefs as well.

The Independent Charismatic Church

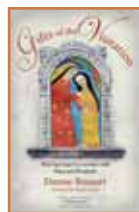
During the years in the Charismatic Church, I joined the praise and worship team as a vocalist and pianist. The non-denominational church I attended in [Continued on page 5](#) ►

FEATURED RESOURCES

Deep in Scripture



In this classic *Deep in Scripture* program, guest Denise Bossert discusses with Marcus Grodi the relationship between the Eucharist and the unity of the Church.



Gifts of the Visitation — By Denise Bossert

The biblical encounter between the Virgin Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, before the births of Jesus and John the Baptist, is at the heart of *Gifts of the Visitation*. Within each of those seasons, nine gifts emerge — spontaneity, courage, joy, readiness, humility, adventure, hospitality, wonder and awe, and thanksgiving — equipping readers to present Christ to the world as Mary and Elizabeth did. Bossert's encounter with Mary, which led her to Catholicism, serves as the window for discovering and exploring the gifts and helps readers look inside their own hearts to discover what the gifts of the visit between Mary and Elizabeth mean to them and how they can be Christ-bearers to others.

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From Here to Eternity: Five Essentials of Conversion

PART THREE: A SACRAMENTAL WORLDVIEW

By Dr. Kenneth J. Howell

There's no denying it. The sacraments are the heart and soul of the Catholic Faith, so much so that when people speak of returning to the Catholic Church after being away for a long time, they often phrase it in terms of returning to the sacraments. The sacraments are God's answer to our human need for forgiveness, for transformation, and for holiness. Summing up a long tradition, St. Bonaventure spoke of the entire sacramental economy as a Divine Remedy for our original and actual sin.



The sacraments, however, are more than an answer and a remedy for sin. They are also a question. When properly understood, the sacraments ask us to live in a thought world different from the culture around us. They beg us to understand more of God and to delve more deeply into the mystical realities of heaven. They beckon us to see the Divine Presence all around us and to seek the things that are above (Col 3:1). In short, the sacraments are part and parcel not only of a sacramental economy but of a sacramental mindset, a worldview that sees the universe differently from secular culture. A sacramental worldview involves seeing the divine in the human, the invisible in the visible, and the grace of God working through ordinary people and objects.

In our previous two installments, we have seen how being Catholic means a monumental shift from an obsession with the present and an individualistic *mindset* to a stance of listening to the wisdom of the ages and to a developing sense of truth greater than our personal judgments. When we recognize that we are neither the origin nor creators of truth, we begin to make our way into a much broader world of thinking and spirituality. To the docile of spirit the past can come alive by showing us the fundamental continuity of the Church throughout the ages. Those imbued with a teachable heart can also begin to accept truth as discovered by others and passed on to us. No one, however, should downplay the considerable obstacles to conversion for people who have mindlessly adopted the modern worldview. Late modern people, such as we are, tend not only to reject the past and to make themselves the criterion of truth, but even more problematically, they have built-in resistors to a sacramental view of things.

The Meaning of Sacrament

Our word “sacrament” comes from the Latin *sacramentum*, a word used prior to the spread of the gospel in the Latin-speaking world. For example, Pliny the Younger, the Governor of Bythnia in the early second century, uses the word in his famous letter to the Emperor Trajan. In briefly describing the worship of Christians, Pliny speaks of the *sacramentum* of the Christians, not in our later sense of “sacrament” — he hardly would have known that meaning — but in the sense of a “pledge” or “oath.” The early Christians chose *sacramentum* to translate the Greek *mysterion*, a word that St. Paul uses in Ephesians 3:3 and other places to describe God's plan of redemption revealed in Christ. Because the whole plan of salvation that centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ

was God's *mysterion*, later Christians came to speak of the sacramental economy which is extended through the sacraments. It is no wonder then that the Divine Mysteries would be called sacraments because they were the tangible means of conveying God's grace to the people of God.

Since God became flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ, Christ embodied the divine realities of the whole Trinity. The reality of God becoming Man (Incarnation) is what explains the presence of the sacraments in the Church. This truth changes everything in terms of how we view all reality, both material and immaterial. The early Church Fathers expressed this truth on many occasions and in many ways but none captured it as succinctly as St. Irenaeus in the late second century:

God instructed the people, who were prone to turn to idols, instructing them by repeated appeals to persevere and to serve God, calling them to the things of primary importance by means of those which were secondary; that is, to things that are real, by means of those that are typical; and by things temporal, to eternal; and by the carnal to the spiritual; and by the earthly to the heavenly. *Against Heresies*, bk 4, sec 3.

Here is the essence of a sacramental view of reality, the movement of the heart from things temporal to things eternal, from physical to spiritual reality, from earthly to heavenly truth. This means that the presence, love, and grace of God are not distant things but realities all around us every day. The material world is not brute fact for us; it is filled with divine presence. Chance meetings between people are not accidents, but divinely arranged encounters with the promise of grace. At the core of Catholicism is a different way of looking at the world, a view that involves seeing every natural and human thing as a manifestation of the Divine.

The Difference a Sacramental Mindset Makes

Sadly, not all Christians look at the world through sacramental eyes. Many American Protestants view the sacraments as pure symbols of an inward faith; that the faith of the individual is what makes any sacramental power possible. “Christ alone forgives sin,” they would say, “No water in baptism or bread and wine can do that.” Thus, using water in baptism is only because it is what Christ commanded, not because baptismal water has any effect. Underlying this view is the assumption of many in the Protestant Reformation — brought to fullest expression in the English and Colonial Puritans — that God only deals directly with each human soul. The outward

Continued on page 4 ➤

ordinances of the church are per se not instruments of grace. Even though John Calvin and the Calvinist tradition spoke of “means of grace,” those means were the *occasions* of God’s grace being given to the soul, not real instruments of grace.

A sacramental view of the physical world, however, sees God as choosing to use material reality as *conduits* of divine grace. Christ alone forgives sin — it is certainly true — but Christ has chosen to use the waters of baptism to convey His forgiveness and His regenerating power. The Catholic Church does not, as is sometimes ascribed to it, believe that water, bread, or wine have some inherent magical power in and of themselves. Rather, the Church believes that this divine arrangement is grace building on nature. The natural world embodies and conveys divine grace. And this is the real difference between a sacramental view of reality in Catholicism and the modern mindset of much of the West in which natural reality is just bare and brute fact.

The Church is More than Structure & Function

The difference between a flat modern worldview and a rich sacramental one becomes clear in the differing views of the church as an institution. The barren worldview of modernity views the church as just another human organization with arbitrary structures and societal functions. This is why the secular media always seems to be so uncomprehending of the Catholic Church: its doctrines, practices, and moral positions. Non-Catholic Christians in the West also tend to view the Church in this way as well, which explains why Catholic ways are so strange to them.

The sacramental view, on the other hand, sees the Church as the embodiment of Christ, priests as agents of Christ’s forgiving and life-giving grace, bishops as authoritative representatives of Christ’s authority, and the Pope as a real instrument of unity in the Church. The different aspects of the Church are all interrelated and interconnected. Doctrines are embodied in devotional practices (e.g., the Rosary), wisdom is mingled with moral judgments, and public prayers in the liturgy encapsulate biblical themes for everyone’s benefit. The common denominator of Catholicism’s diverse forms of work and worship is the enduring presence of Jesus Christ in His Mystical Body, the Church.

One of the best modern expressions of this truth came from the pen of Karl Adam in *The Spirit of Catholicism*. I must confess that I’ve never liked the English title of that book; in German the original was *Das Wesen des Katholizismus* or “The Essence of Catholicism.” Adam was not trying to capture the “Spirit” of Catholicism in the way that post-Vatican II people talk about “spirit of Vatican II,” which essentially means ignoring the details of Catholic teaching. Adam was rather attempting to get at the root of what made Catholicism tick. Among all its diverse forms and manifestations, what was the essence (*Wesen*) of Catholicism? Adam’s book is full of truth and wisdom but he is at his best when he captures the meaning of this faith as wholeness:

The history of Catholicism is a bold, consistent, comprehensive affirmation of the whole full reality of revelation. Of the fullness of divinity revealed in Christ

according to all the dimensions of its unfolding. It is the absolute, unconditional and comprehensive affirmation of the whole full life of man, of the totality of his life-relations and life-sources. And it is the unconditional affirmation, above all else, of the deepest ground of our being, that is to say of the living God. (p.10)

As Adam proceeds to explain the implications of this wholeness, this catholicity (cf.καθολικός), he insists that Catholicism only wants “the whole Christ” and “the complete community, the *orbis terrarum*, as the medium wherein we grasp this Christ” (p. 10). In essence, the Church is more than its outward appearances, its structures and functions. It is the living Body of Christ.

The Church itself then is a mystery, a sacrament of God’s presence and working in the world. Because the Church and her members are “hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3), she and they will always be, to some extent, incomprehensible to the outside world. As a sacramental reality, the Church appears ordinary and even pedestrian but within her visible structures lie an invisible, spiritual power to sanctify the world.

The Eternity of the Sacraments

When one develops a sacramental worldview, he realizes how unfathomable invisible reality is. With physical and finite things there is always a finite amount of knowledge that is to be had. Although in practical life we may not know all that is to be known of the material world, this is because of the limitations of time. Thus, in the sciences, given enough time, we could in principle know all of material reality because the objects known are physical, finite, and limited. It is quite otherwise with invisible realities; they possess an infinite depth that is forever beyond our knowledge. The deeper we pierce into the invisible realities of God, and the denizens of heaven, the more unfathomable they become. A sacramental view of reality sees the invisible in the visible and the divine presence in every physical creature. The spiritual is underneath, around, and within the physical although it is never to be fully possessed by us.

Becoming Catholic has never been easy but it may be more difficult now than ever. Seeing the world as flat, lifeless, and meaningless poses seemingly insurmountable obstacles to conversion but, once a person is willing to see physical reality as suffused with God’s presence and a conduit of grace, he has taken the first step toward deep conversion. The eternity promised in the future becomes the eternity grasped in the present for eternal life is simply to know God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. ■

NEWSLETTER DONATION

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We Would See Jesus

By Marcus Grodi

The Coming Home Network International exists to help non-Catholic Christians, clergy and laity, “come home” to the Catholic Faith. Most non-Catholic Christians do not realize that the Catholic Church is their home; that the Scriptures they so love came to them through the Church; and that their Savior Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for their sins, built this Church upon His hand-chosen Apostles centered around the leadership of the Apostle He called the Rock.



It isn't that God isn't calling them home; rather it's partially because so many anti-Catholic barriers and presumptions exist in our culture, in our world, that it's very difficult for them to hear the truth. In fact, we are often quite surprised when we are contacted by inquirers from extremely anti-Catholic Fundamentalist traditions! Some of these barriers are the anti-Catholic myths that have been around for hundreds of years that connive to instill fear and suspicion toward anything Catholic. But maybe the worst barrier that keeps our friends and family members from coming home is us.

It isn't that we're all that bad — though we all know, from the words we recite in every Mass, “...that we have greatly sinned, in our thoughts and in our words, in what we have done and what we have failed to do.” In many ways the biggest problem is that our non-Catholic Christian friends just don't understand our Catholic Christian traditions, and our freedoms (cf. Gal 5:13). Many things that we Catholics think are fine and dandy, our non-Catholic Christian friends consider grave sins if not downright offensive!

My first Catholic friends were fraternity brothers in college. They went to Mass every Sunday, and confession occasionally, but between these ritual obligations they were the most noteworthy drinkers, smokers, tokers, and gamblers of the frat house. And they seemed to see nothing contradictory in their actions.

Later as a young minister, I met my first priest through the local ministerial association. We occasionally met for lunch, when I discovered that he was a chain smoker. Then one weekend he invited me to stop by a cabin where he and two other priests were spending a few days off. There I encountered three carousing, chain-smoking priests, who were spending their holiday gambling and drinking.

One topic that never came up in any of my relationships with Catholics, priests or laity, was Jesus Christ. In my evangelical understanding of faith, I left these relationships believing even more that Catholics, particularly priests, are not Christians — and when the scandal began

breaking, I was even more convinced. When my mother heard that Marilyn and I were becoming Catholic, the first thing that came out of her mouth was that we were joining the church of the drunkards, smokers, gamblers, philanthropers, and the mafia!

After twenty+ years of our work, our data shows that less than 1% of American non-Catholic clergy have shown any interest in becoming Catholic. What is the problem? I do not believe it is because the information is not accessible. The apologetics have been around forever and now are even more easily available due to technology. Rather, I believe one of the problems is that they often can't hear the truth because they are not impressed by the “Christianity” of Catholics — laity, priests, deacons, bishops, diocesan personnel, or religious. American non-Catholics in general, based on a long history, do not believe that Catholics are Christians; that the Catholic Church is truly a Christian church; and that Catholic doctrines are Christ-centered. And when we Catholics flaunt our freedoms, and even our uniquely Catholic devotions, we are not understood by our separated brethren.

This is why we emphasize in the work the Coming Home Network that before anyone can hear the apologetic arguments of the Church, they have to be convinced through our relationships with them that sincere Catholics are sincere Christians.

When Saint Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he addressed the fact that many Christians did not understand the actions and freedoms of other Christians. He spent two entire chapters (14-15) dealing with this growing problem. He wrote that “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (15:4). This encourages us to recognize that Saint Paul's advice therefore can apply to us today.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “the sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us....They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions” (1131). The *Cat-*

EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television and radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



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The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 1 PM ET

RADIO

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The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

May 4

Fr. Shane Tharp*
 Former Unchurched

May 11

Marty Douchette*
 Former Evangelical Orthodox Church

May 18

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle*
 Revert

May 25

Bruce Sullivan*
 Former Church of Christ minister
 Re-air from 9/13/10

*Schedule is subject to change.

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The May Magnificat

May is Mary's month, and I
 Muse at that and wonder why:
 Her feasts follow reason,
 Dated due to season—

Candlemas, Lady Day;
 But the Lady Month, May,
 Why fasten that upon her,
 With a feasting in her honour?

Is it only its being brighter
 Than the most are must delight her?
 Is it opportunist
 And flowers finds soonest?

Ask of her, the mighty mother:
 Her reply puts this other
 Question: What is Spring?—
 Growth in every thing—

Flesh and fleece, fur and feather,
 Grass and greenworld all together;
 Star-eyed strawberry-breasted
 Throstle above her nested

Cluster of bugle blue eggs thin
 Forms and warms the life within;
 And bird and blossom swell
 In sod or sheath or shell.

All things rising, all things sizing
 Mary sees, sympathising
 With that world of good,
 Nature's motherhood.

Their magnifying of each its kind
 With delight calls to mind
 How she did in her stored
 Magnify the Lord.

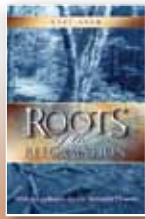
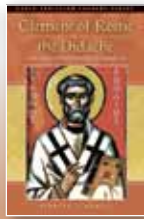
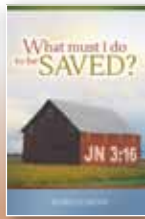
Well but there was more than this:
 Spring's universal bliss
 Much, had much to say
 To offering Mary May.

When drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple
 Bloom lights the orchard-apple
 And thicket and thorp are merry
 With silver-surfed cherry

And azuring-over greybell makes
 Wood banks and brakes wash wet like lakes
 And magic cuckoo call
 Caps, clears, and clinches all—

This ecstasy all through mothering earth
 Tells Mary her mirth till Christ's birth
 To remember and exultation
 In God who was her salvation. ■

Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Poems*. London: Humphrey Milford, 1918; Bartleby.com, 1999. www.bartleby.com/122/. [3/27/15]



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

Prayer List



Clergy

- For Marcus, a Pentecostal seminarian, that God would use his study of Church history to bring him into full-communication with the Catholic Church.
- For a Lutheran minister in Indiana, that he may soon come rejoicing into full-communication with the successor of St. Peter.
- For a military chaplain stationed in Europe, that the Holy Spirit would guide him as he seeks how best to become a Catholic Christian.
- For Amelia, a former Baptist lay minister, that she would discover her vocation in her new home, the Catholic Church.
- For a Baptist minister in California, that the grace of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist would bring him home to the Catholic Church of his youth.
- For an Episcopal priest in the south, that she may find a clear path to come home to the Catholic Church.
- For Ben, a Methodist minister, that God may light a path for him into the Catholic Church.
- For a Baptist missionary in Arizona, that she may be healed of the fear of Catholics that was taught to her all her life.

Laitiy

- For a woman who is going through the annulment process but is struggling with the hurt and pain it is bringing up.
- For Sarah as she goes deeper in her faith as a new Catholic.
- For Phyllis, that she find solace in our Blessed Mother's care and come to understand her intercession better.
- For Stan who is reflecting more on tradition and the continuity of the Church, that his heart be opened to the fullness of the Catholic Church.
- For Ken, that he have peace as to what direction to pursue with his desire to be Catholic.
- For Leslie, who is looking for a deeper understanding of Catholic teaching.
- For Aaron who is wanting to share his journey to the Church in a sensitive manner with his family and friends.
- For David who is on the journey but still working through a few theological struggles.
- For Adam to be able to effectively explain to his family and friends his conversion to the Catholic Church.
- For Steven, that his family come to understand his desire to be a Catholic Christian.

- For a man in the United Kingdom who is struggling with the authority of the Church and wonders whether it matters what denomination he is in.
- For Betty, as she reads and continues to learn more about the Catholic Faith, that she be able to connect with a local parish.
- For an Evangelical in Ohio who wishes to become Catholic, that his wife come to understand and support his faith journey.
- For Rob, that his family will feel drawn to join him in his Catholic Faith.
- For Jessica, that the Holy Spirit reopen her heart to the Catholic Church despite the negatives experiences she had in a local parish.
- For Julie who unexpectedly feels herself drawn to the Catholic Faith and has been learning more about Catholic teachings.
- For Deirdra, as she reads and watches EWTN and considers joining RCIA.
- For Ann, who has been interested in Catholicism for many years and is considering moving forward with her journey.

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 <i>(former Presbyterian pastor)</i>	Senior Advisor: History & Theology , Jim Anderson <i>(former Lutheran)</i>	Office Manager , Ann Moore	Manager of Outreach , Jon Marc Grodi	Board of Directors: Marcus Grodi (President), Msgr. Frank Lane (Chaplain), Dr. Robert Geiger (Vice President), Dr. Charles Feicht (Secretary), Bruce Sullivan (Treasurer), Dr. Marian Schuda (Director), Donald Brey (Director)
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		Publications and Laity Coordinator , Mary Clare Pieczynski		

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

New Jersey around 1985 was one of the fastest growing churches in the community. There were many former Roman Catholics and Baptists also attending. We considered all established denominations (both Protestant and Catholic) as “dead” in the Holy Spirit. We had professional musicians playing contemporary praise and worship music. There was lots of dancing, singing, and shouting. It was fun being a member of the worship team. Within a few years the church had grown to over 1500 families. The pastor did not have a college degree or seminary training. His wife was a former Roman Catholic. They spent a few years in non-credited, Word of Faith Bible institutes and started a church in New Jersey during the mid-eighties. It was common to hear long sermons promoting the “health and wealth” gospel.

I felt I was on the cutting edge of what God was doing in the church. Charismatic experiences and purported healings were common during the worship events. During one of the praise and worship sessions, I believed I saw heavenly angels. My experience of the Holy Spirit was very emotional. I felt that this was the greatest spiritual experience I could know.

However, with all the fun, enthusiasm, and church growth, I started to have problems with the theology, lack of pastoral accountability, and emotionalism. I was concerned about the autocratic style of management regarding the church authority. It was still important for me to ask questions and not to dismiss reason. The pastor made it clear that he was in charge and questioned anyone who challenged his spiritual authority. He placed more emphasis on personal inspiration rather than sound, historical, orthodox theology. There was also much competition between other independent Charismatic churches and frequent “sheep stealing” (members jumping from church to church). It appeared that we were simply entertaining people. Sexual scandal and financial misconduct were rampant as well.

The environment became much worse and my faith was shaken with the collapse of two prominent, multi-million dollar, charismatic ministries during that time. I always had a lingering concern about the shallow theology, the lack of accountability for ministers, the sheep stealing, the uptick in financial/sexual scandals, and the ridicule of established denominational churches. This was not much different from how my fundamentalist brethren criticized other Christian groups. The “health and wealth” movement was doing considerable damage to people, and I was concerned about the exploitation of the vulnerable. Many of the upstart preachers had no theological formation and were treading on heretical teachings and practices.

First Experience with Church History

I started to question the teachings and history of the charismatic movement and felt I could do better; so I decided to enter the Oral Roberts University Graduate School of Theology program in 1991. I believed that God was calling me to be a pastor, and, having been scarred by many of the negative

experiences I had with ill-educated pastors in the charismatic church, I felt I needed graduate-level education in theology. At ORU, I studied Church history, systematic theology, and the Hebrew Old Testament.

One of the more challenging classes I took in seminary was Church History. We started studying the early Church Fathers. It was quite a shock for me to discover that my beliefs about Scripture, the formation of the early Church, and experiences of the first to third century Church were all wrong! As a Protestant, I thought the Bible was intact and complete during the time period of the Acts of the Apostles. I was taught that the Roman Catholic Church, under the influences of power hungry monarchs and nobles, corrupted the true Church. I thought the true Church was not resurrected until the sixteenth century through the Reformation.

I discovered that there were Roman Catholic saints who experienced miracles and formulated strong doctrinal thought during the early centuries. I was amazed by mystics, like St. Anthony of Egypt, who wrestled with evil and had ecstatic experiences and visions. I thought only the modern day Pentecostals had those experiences! I discovered my first North African Church Father, St. Augustine of Hippo, a fourth-century Father. I was amazed that Africans had any influences on Christianity. I began to study the ecumenical councils, like the Council of Nicaea, and the Nicene Creed. I also learned that concepts of hospice and healthcare were formulated through the Catholic monastic movements.

I had also thought the historical Catholic Church was not distinguishable from corrupt monarchs and despot nobles during that time, and that the Reformation was the answer to systemic Church corruption (even though it seemed racist in many forms, primarily in the doctrines of Calvinism). But then I discovered that the original Reformers (eg., Martin Luther, John Calvin) created great havoc and schisms in the sixteenth century Church. There was much collusion with monarchs and nobility during that period; they were no better than the Roman Catholic clerics they accused. There was plenty of land grabbing and executions in the name of Reformation idealism taking place.

History opened my eyes to yet another struggle: the predominant slave traders and holders in Europe and the United States were Protestant Christians. They were primarily Anglican and Southern Baptist (fundamentalists). For 400 years they were not moved by conscience to stop the barbaric practice.

I also was concerned with the growing liberalism in established Protestant denominations (Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.). Philosophies such as feminism, sexual liberation, and relativism were exerting more influence on Protestant church leadership and, thus, doctrine.

How could God allow His Church to do this? My Pentecostal theology was not adequate in dealing with a theology of suffering. I was in conflict and I started to question my faith more.

A Deistic Stance

Despite the questioning, struggling, and soul-searching, by 1997 I graduated with a M.Div. and a M.A. in Marriage and Family Therapy. Around the same time, I was licensed as a Missionary Baptist minister and became an associated pastor for an African American Baptist church. I was also chaplain for an Oncology Medical Center and taught advanced theological studies for future pastors at an internationally known charismatic mega-church in Tulsa.

My marriage, however, had suffered greatly during my time in seminary. I spent more quality time with my classmates than I did with my first wife. I was preoccupied with the stress of the academic experience and demands, and I neglected my family. We were under a tremendous amount of financial stress and were far away from our families on the East Coast. In 2002 we divorced. My first wife wanted to move back to her family in New York. I remained in Oklahoma with my sons, who were attending high school and college.

After all the things I uncovered in the history of the Church, I wondered how God could ever allow those bad things to happen to His Church. If God was not involved in Church history, then why should I think He cares about my personal life? I acknowledged there was a Creator, but I doubted if He was directly involved in human matters. Furthermore, I was certain that He was not involved in organized religion from a historical perspective. It was hard to separate the European kings, queens, princes, bishops, and popes from the legacy of political, economic, and theological corruption.

Relativist philosophy was common in psychological/counseling theory, which challenged absolutes and championed “non-judgmentalism” and “unconditional positive regard” for all people. It was the theists who were the source of problems in the world. They were the hypocrites. Truthfully, all I really wanted to do was to justify my own failures and betrayal towards my wife, family, and the church. I created an excuse to sin freely without consequences. It would take a divorce and several years of darkness for me to make the full journey home.

My Journey to the Roman Catholic Church

Growing up as an African American in Northern New Jersey in the 70s and 80s, the only Roman Catholics I knew lived primarily in Italian, Irish, and Latin American neighborhoods. I was never invited to attend a Roman Catholic Mass and was never evangelized by a Roman Catholic. The Catholics I knew were “cultural” Catholics. It was the evangelicals and Pentecostals who were actively evangelizing the Catholics, and many Catholics ended up converting to Protestantism.

Interestingly enough, I dated and ended up married to a Roman Catholic named Monica. After the birth of our daughter in 2004 my heart started to soften towards Catholicism. My wife and I were both in our 40s and I did not think we were capable of having children. We knew our daughter was a gift from God. My wife insisted that our daughter be baptized Catholic. I reluc-

tantly agreed. During my daughter’s baptism, the parish priest asked me to vow that I would raise her in the Catholic Church and instruct her in the Church’s teachings. I agreed. At the time, I felt convicted of my hypocrisy; but I realize now that moment was the beginning of my journey to the Catholic Church.

My son was born in 2006, and he also was baptized in the Catholic Church. Again, I made a vow to raise him Catholic. I gradually started attending Mass with my wife and children and began to realize that it wasn’t totally foreign to me. Because I was raised Anglican, it brought back memories of the time I spent as an acolyte at the altar with the Anglican priest. I felt God bringing me full-circle in my faith. I felt a strong call to know Christ and His Church. I felt a longing to receive Jesus — the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. I wanted to be able to take the Real Presence of Jesus within me to others.

I was still resistant to Catholicism (and to the inevitable annulment process), but I finally made a decision to attend RCIA in 2008 at Saint Benedict Catholic Church. I purchased an unabridged copy of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. (Like St. Augustine’s mother, St. Monica, I put my dear wife, Monica, through hell during those early days.) It was during this time I started revising my Protestant beliefs and studying the Roman Catholic Faith from a biblical and historical perspective. I started to see the sacramental and liturgical nature of the Catholic Church throughout the Old and New Testaments. I had read through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* twice and Holy Scripture a few times. I began to study the early Church Fathers more closely.

Sacraments as Christ Intended for His Church

Sacramental theology became a favorite study for me. For instance, I took another look at this scriptural reference: “*Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them’*” (John 6:53-56). I came to understand that the hearers at that time took this statement literally (that is why so many of them abandoned Christ after He spoke those words). This was also the historical interpretation of the text for the first fifteen centuries of the Church. As a Protestant, we had communion services a few times a year, and believed the Eucharist to be symbolic only. Observing the Catholic faithful receiving Communion every week (sometimes even daily!), demonstrated that the Eucharist was truly significant in the Catholic Church.

Unknowingly, God had been preparing me to understand the Sacrament of Confession years before. Around 1993, I began professional counseling in order to work through my family of origin issues. Professional counseling gave me something I never had before — the secular confessional. It was the only place I could talk about my pain and guilt with another human being without experiencing shame. My counselor became a secular priest. Within my Protestant theology there was not a place for confes-

...Journeys Home Continued...

sion or true self-disclosure to another human being. I had always suffered in silence. It was because of this experience in counseling that I decided to go into the field of Marriage and Family Therapy.

The Sacrament of Confession began to make sense to me when I read: *“Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much”* (James 5:14-16). In this text, St. James states that the confession of sins results in the forgiveness of sins. Healing and reconciliation to God really takes place. As a professional mental health counselor, I understand the power of confession to another human being.

The Sacrament of Baptism took on a new significance to me after studying this Scripture passage: *“Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’* (Acts 2:38, NASB). The Apostle Peter made it clear in the text that the Sacrament of Baptism was necessary for the forgiveness of sins and for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. When I witnessed my children’s baptisms, I knew that the seal of the Holy Spirit was placed upon their souls.

I also became convicted of the supremacy of the Apostle Peter as head of the Church Jesus founded. *“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven”* (Matthew 16:18-19, NASB). I believe this to be a literal statement about the hierarchal nature of the early Church — and the Lord made Peter its head. This was confirmed in the writings of the Church Fathers. When it came to faith and doctrine, the early Church looked to St. Peter and the Apostles for guidance.

Suffering Transformed

Through the yearlong process of RCIA, I began to see the historical Christian Church from a non-Protestant perspective. I was drawn to Church history and enjoyed many discussions regarding the early Church Fathers. History was rich with saints and martyrs of the Faith who understood suffering. I studied the sacraments, and thus, I could see the origin of many of my former Protestant beliefs and practices. I had a great sponsor and was allowed to ask tough questions to the presenters. I enjoyed the intellectual challenges, and I liked the structure and accountability of the priests.

The annulment process was the most difficult part of my journey to the Roman Catholic Church. I had to revisit my first marriage and talk with the pastor who counseled us at that time. It dredged up unresolved anger and wounds. Many times I con-

sidered not going through the process. My sons from the first marriage were also frustrated with the process. I had to explain to them that our family was legitimate, but the marriage was not considered valid in the Catholic sense. This was very difficult. However, I was motivated by the children God had given me with Monica and Monica’s need to again start receiving the Holy Eucharist.

I was received fully into the Roman Catholic Church at Easter in 2009 under our parish priest. I received the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation, and holy Communion, and Monica and I had our marriage convalidated. As I received the Sacrament of Confirmation, I was anointed with the chrism oil and felt overwhelming joy, restoration, and empowerment. I also experienced a feeling of profound joy and peace as I received Jesus in the Eucharist.

Since being received into the Catholic Church, I have become a member of the Knights of Columbus. I also attended a Curcillo weekend. I have sponsored my son-in-law who entered the Catholic Church. With my background in counseling, I understand the power of confession and forgiveness. All the pain I had carried around for years was finally gone. I was able to confess and be *absolved*. Confession is now a regular practice of my life. Today, I plan on revisiting the gifts God has given me through pastoral care and counseling and return the service to His people.

I still struggle to live a holy life. I try to attend Mass and receive the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist every day. I also go to adoration, where I spend time before the Blessed Sacrament on a daily basis. I also try receiving the Sacrament of Confession at least once a month (or more depending on my struggles). I now have purpose. I now believe my life has meaning. The suffering I experienced had purpose within God’s will. The Catholic Church is like a mansion with thousands of doors that contain countless theological treasures that stretch back to the first centuries. It is endless. ■



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