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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



My Catholic Story

By Jim Tonkovich

Jim will be a guest on *The Journey Home* program November 16, 2015

Unlike many of my fellow Reformed pastors and thinkers, I never had the time, energy, or interest in Catholic bashing. At Bates College in Maine, pursuing a BA in Philosophy, I benefited from St. Augustine, St.

Thomas Aquinas, the Church Fathers, and documents from Vatican II. During my Masters of Divinity studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, I never hesitated to consult Catholic Bible scholars, theologians, and historians. I also began to read — on my own and as assigned — Catholic spiritual writers such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and Henri Nouwen. My Doctor of Ministry in Christian Spirituality at Gordon-Conwell featured even more Catholic sources including Church documents and the writings of St. John Paul II.

In addition to that, I had grown up in the Eastern Orthodox Church, finding Protestant Evangelicalism (the Anglican strain — C. S. Lewis, John Stott, J. I. Packer, et. al.) while away at boarding school. We read Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* and Stott’s *Basic Christianity* and paid little attention to denominational differences.

To be honest, I was mostly oblivious to the fire-breathing fear and odium many still feel toward the Catholic Church. I sided with Methodism’s founder John Wesley who wrote *A Letter to a Roman Catholic* in 1749 — not a time known for ecumenical fervor and cooperation. “But if God still loveth us,” Wesley wrote to his Catholic friend, “we ought to love one another. We ought without this endless jangling about opinions, to provoke one

another to love and to good works. Let the points wherein we differ stand aside: here are enough wherein we agree, enough be the ground of every Christian temper and of every Christian action” (*Letter to a Roman Catholic*, July 28, 1749). Amen. Amen. And Amen.

My decision to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) came well after seminary. I spent quite a few years in business while I remained a licensed Congregational minister (not ordained) actively looking for work in the church or a Christian organization. Over time, however, and while working for a nondenominational youth ministry, I began to see how the Bible teaches that Christian churches should be connected, not independent in the manner

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

that congregationally governed churches are free to do as they wish based on a vote of the members.

That belief in an organizationally connected church led me to examine the Episcopal Church as well as various Presbyterian denominations. Since from my point of view the handwriting was already on the wall for the Episcopal Church and the theologically revisionist Presbyterian denominations, I found my way into the PCA. I found it is a biblically sound denomination with a solid commitment to Reformed (Calvinist) orthodoxy.

Yet even as a PCA minister, I had a strong sense of “Mere Christianity” or, as the hymn puts it, “Who serves my Father as a son is surely kin to me.”

Besides, I had far too many Catholic friends who had vibrant faith walks. These included the Newman chaplain at Bates, a former Trappist monk who was a faithful and dearly loved part of our InterVarsity Christian Fellowship chapter. When I worked in youth ministry in Connecticut, I took monthly personal retreats at a Passionist House where they treated me as though I was a visiting cardinal, ever gracious, generous, and available for spiritual conversation. In California’s Silicon Valley where I was pastor of a PCA church, I found a spiritual director at the Jesuit Retreat House in Los Altos. He assured me I’d make a good Jesuit as I assured him he’d make a good Calvinist.

About this time, David and Joanne, two of our best friends, became Catholic after years of discontent with the Episcopal Church. Their son, Will, and my son, Jon, had been best friends since the age of three and would end up as roommates at Thomas Aquinas College. (It should surprise no one that with a Thomas Aquinas College education, my son was received into the Catholic Church soon after his graduation.)

I had denominationalized the Catholic Church. It was another group along with Southern Baptists, Episcopalians, Eastern Orthodox, Methodists, and Mennonites. We prayed, studied Scripture, and worked together. Yes, we had disagreements over various points of doctrine, but it was not a problem.

The onset of questions

When I moved from California to the Washington, DC area in 1999, my good will toward Catholics was, to say the least, challenged.

I was an ordained PCA minister in good standing, but I was also new to the area and the Presbytery had the responsibility to ask me a few questions about what I believed before letting me be a part of the ministry in and around Washington. It was all quite routine.

As I stood before the group, the chairman of the Candidates Committee threw me a softball question, “If someone who has been baptized a Roman Catholic presents him or herself for membership in your church, would you rebaptize them?”

This, as far as I knew, was not a point of contention in our denomination and I gave the standard answer with a comic flourish at the end: “No, I would not rebaptize, because he or she was baptized with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If, on the other hand, someone was baptized in a liberal Protestant church, I would ask questions in case they were baptized with milk and honey in the ‘name of the Parent, the Child, and the Second Cousin.’”

Instead of howls of manly laughter, all hell broke loose. Well, relatively speaking. The ten minutes budgeted to transfer a minister into the Presbytery turned into an hour of my justifying myself, captive to hostile questions from three ministers. The

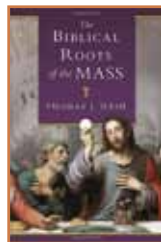
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FEATURED RESOURCES

The Eucharist & the early Christian Fathers CD



In this Deep in Scripture program, learn about how the Lord’s Supper can be best understood by looking to the witness of the earliest Christians.



The Biblical Roots of the Mass — By Thomas Nash

In this profoundly insightful and highly readable book, Thomas Nash brilliantly refutes the common charge that the Mass is “unbiblical” and explains how the story of the Mass is part of an unbroken story that begins in the Garden of Eden and continues today in your local parish. Nash offers an authoritative explanation of salvation history, showing how the Old Testament prefigures — and the New Testament wondrously records — Jesus’s one self-sacrifice of Calvary which is mysteriously made present at each and every Mass. *The Biblical Roots of the Mass* challenges Protestants to see the Bible as a truly Catholic story, while leading Catholics to understand the Mass as indispensable to achieving the Church’s divinely ordained mandate.

(Note: Thomas Nash will be a guest on *The Journey Home* November 2.)

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New Versus Old Wine

By Marcus Grodi

And they said to him, “The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.”

And Jesus said to them, “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.”

He told them a parable also: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it upon an old garment; if he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, ‘The old is good.’” (Lk 5:33-39)

This parable is certainly familiar to most Christians, but it is especially a favorite of Evangelical Christians. It is one of the most common teachings of Christ used to justify change, especially rejecting the supposed “old wine skins” of Catholicism, or other older expressions of Christianity, for the “new wine” and “fresh wineskins” of someone’s newer, fresher slant on theology, morality, or worship. I have many books in my old pastor’s library that proffer this opinion, even one entitled “Taste of New Wine” that fully endorses the “putting off of the old” ways of practicing the Christian Faith and ever replacing them with “the new.” And every new independent Bible church screams this call for new wine skins.

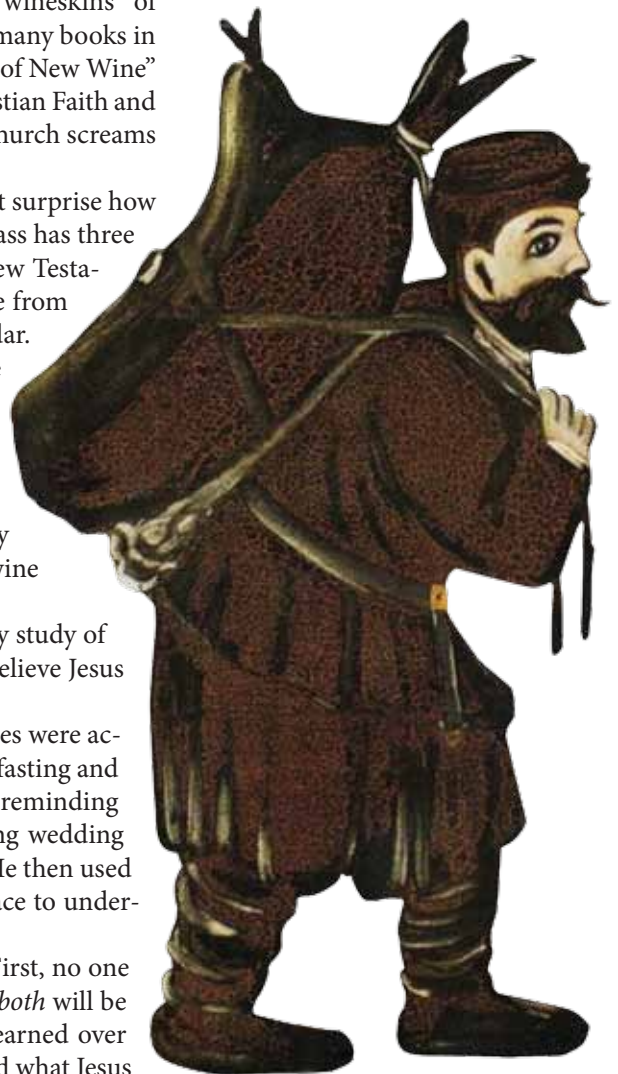
Along my journey toward the Catholic Church, I discovered with great surprise how full to overflowing the Catholic Mass is with Scripture! Every Sunday Mass has three scriptural readings for reflection in the homily: an Old Testament, a New Testament Epistle, and a Gospel reading. At least once each year, this passage from Luke, or its parallels in Matthew or Mark, appears in the liturgical calendar. Ever since my conversion, when this Gospel is read, I have moved to the front of my seat waiting to hear how the priest would handle this seemingly precarious text. And sad to say, I have yet to hear a single priest address it. It’s as if most presume this text, and therefore Jesus Himself, was advocating the kind of radical changes that over the centuries have led to schisms. “Don’t put the new wine of the Gospel into old, musty outmoded religious ceremonies; the new wine of the Gospel needs new wine skins, new expressions more in tune with our changing world!”

But is this what Jesus was saying? Strangely enough, it was through my study of the pros and cons of industrialization that helped me *hear* what I now believe Jesus was trying to say.

In the opening incident that led to the parable, the pharisees and scribes were actually accusing Jesus of rejecting the old religious customs of prayer and fasting and replacing them with new ones. Instead, Jesus clarified their thinking by reminding them of the actual practice of their old customs: there are times, during wedding traditions, for example, when fasting is at least temporarily suspended. He then used this as a key to open the hearts of those who were being touched by grace to understand who He actually was.

This led Him to expand on this with two related rhetorical parables. First, no one repairs an old garment with a piece from a new garment, for in the end *both* will be destroyed. The point here is that there was a tried and true method, learned over maybe centuries, of how to repair torn clothing. Someone who advocated what Jesus was warning against was someone who was either ignorant of or pridefully resistant to the wiser way of doings things: a torn older garment is repaired with similar older, matching material; likewise a torn new garment is repaired with similar new, matching

LUKE
5
33-39



‘Man with Wineskin’ by Niko Pirosmani

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material. This wasn't a contrasting of old versus new, but rather an affirmation of the need to understand and follow the tried and true traditions.

The second parable was essentially saying the same thing, but with an expanded application. The centuries old tried and true method, or "technology," of making wine involved putting new wine, or unfermented grape juice, in fresh new wine skins, usually made with goat skins or goat stomachs. As the grape juice fermented, it became good "old wine", and the new skin became an old wine skin as it expanded naturally in response to the fermentation. In this process, new wine became old wine, and new skins became old skins, and as Jesus said, "no one after drinking old wine desires new," adding, perhaps with a smile, "The old is good."

Only someone either ignorant of or pridefully resistant to following the age-old tradition would even consider putting new unfermented grape juice into an already expanded old wineskin. An ignorant person might make this mistake, put grape juice in an old wineskin, watch it later explode, destroying the old skin and spilling the wine, and thereby conclude that this is why old wine skins, and analogously old traditions, must be discarded! He would reason that "The newness of the Gospel must be put in the new wineskins of innovation and 'spirit-led' expression, free from the constraints of the worthless old wineskins of outmoded tradition!"

What these Reformers don't at first realize is that their "new wine" in "new wineskins" always naturally becomes "old wine" in "old wineskins" as the next generation of new thinkers, unaware of the longer history of "spiritual wine making," demand even newer wine in newer wineskins. This is why, ever since the Protestant Reformation, when this parable was first used to justify all the revised expressions of Christianity, this parable has continued as the justification for each subsequent new expression. Now our landscape is overrun with hundreds of "new wineskins" all claiming they have rediscovered and preserved the true "new wine."

Jesus, however, was not contrasting old wine versus new wine, nor old wineskins versus new wineskins. Rather He was emphasizing the traditional process of turning grape juice into the wine that everyone wanted and preferred. There was a tried and true way of doing this, that everyone, at least the older members of the crowd, knew from tradition if not practice. The younger listeners, and particularly the stubborn ones, needed to heed the wisdom of their elders, if they wanted to produce good wine.

This wasn't a comparison of the Old Testament versus the New, or the Mosaic law versus the new law of the Beatitudes, or the old religious ceremonies versus the new "life in the Spirit" Christian worship, even the pharisaical Jewish Faith versus the new Christian Faith; rather it was an appreciation of the age-old process of living in obedience to God. And now that the incarnate Christ is identified as the new Bridegroom, the continuity of the old continues with Him as the focus. This is why the Church is a continuity of the Old Testament People of God, not a brand-new "wine skin" casting off the old, so the "new wine" can ferment into something new. The fermentation of the "new wine" of the Gospel in the "new wineskins" of each new believer must follow the age-old process of growth within the traditions passed down from the beginning.

Old wine held in old wineskins today, following the age-old process, is just as good as the old wine produced in this manner hundreds if not thousands of years ago. And the gospel of Jesus Christ, as passed down in the apostolic Deposit of Faith, and preserved, protected, and proclaimed by the Church established by Christ is just as good as the Gospel handed down from Jesus to His Apostles. It isn't something twenty-first-century new; nor is it a new rediscovery of Acts chapter two, freshly implanted in the newest wineskin of a "customer-friendly" environment. The true new wine and the old wine are one and the same, involving a life-long conversion process as guided by the Holy Spirit within the Body of Christ, the Church. Outside of this Church, there is no assurance that any new or old expression of the Gospel is trustworthy. ■

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What a Crazy, Crazy Year!

By Marcus Grodi

Dear Members,

As we approach the end of this year, I first want to thank each of you for your prayers and your support. Without your partnership, we could not do any of our work — including the production for EWTN of their weekly *Journey Home* program.



If you sit back and consider all the news of this past year — international, national, and local — it's hard not to think this was a crazy, crazy year. In fact, between the time I write this article and it has landed into your hands, who knows how many more crazy things will have happened!?!

What I mean by crazy are the unbelievable changes that have occurred in our culture; the changes in how the seeming majority now understand morality, sexuality, marriage, and family — changes that few of us, let alone our parents and grand-parents, ever imagined!

When George Orwell wrote *1984* sixty-seven years ago, he predicted a very strange and radical world! Well, we have lived thirty-one years beyond his vision, and the world has turned out to be little like his projection. Yet in other ways, the craziness is far worse than anything he anticipated — he never dreamed about today's radical changes in morality and sexual lifestyles.

Every one of us has a friend or family member who either belongs to another Christian tradition or goes to no church at all. How will they ever *hear* the truth of Catholic teaching when so many Christians in our society now accept and even defend the radical inclusiveness and tolerance of our otherwise secular and relativistic culture? Entire Christian denominations, along with their colleges and seminaries, are now promoting the modern morality and hyper-tolerance — all with the goal of offending no one.

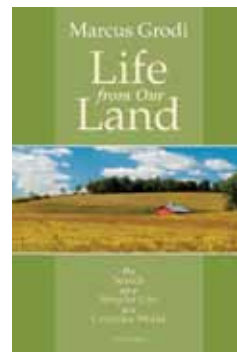
We live in a world that now believes that the worst underlying sin is offending another person, that we should change all our beliefs and actions to avoid causing anyone offense.

Presently in our country, any who speak out against the changes in morality, as now supported by law in our land, are being sued or drawn into court. A baker who refuses to bake a wedding cake for a same-sex "marriage" is run out of business; a clerk who refuses to give a marriage license to a same-sex couple is jailed; many colleges are implementing the use of non-gender pronouns (ze, instead of he or she).

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Surveys show that more and more Catholics are also giving into the pressures of our culture — more than half of self-proclaiming American Catholics believe that living together before marriage or even without marriage, that abortion, contraception, and homosexual acts are no longer "sins," and that the Church should change its "ultra"-conservative, outmoded views. Recently, I received an email from a man who was a life-long Catholic and an ordained permanent deacon, but who had left the Church to become a Protestant minister. Now he writes books and internet blogs promoting a radical ecumenical approach to Christianity and morality — decrying the Church of his birth for its medieval ignorance.

Where do we go from here? My first response is to say thank God for the Catholic Church, which has remained steadfast in defending truth. Never has there been more need for faithful lay apostolates, like the Coming Home Network International, to stand beside the Church helping her proclaim her truth to those who otherwise might never hear. The clambering of contradictory voices in our culture, on the airwaves, or over the Internet, makes it almost impossible for so many in our culture to hear the truth — so many of our children and grandchildren, neighbors, and friends. Apostolates like ours are committed to using whatever means God has provided to break through this clamor and help those outside the Church discover, by grace, the profound and life-changing — life-saving — truth of the Catholic Church. And by God's mercy we are also finding that our work is helping many Catholics discover the truth they too often have either taken for granted or never heard.



Also, on a practical level, I have written a book to hopefully reach so many of those who have been drawn into the many alternative *gospels* infecting our modern society. In this book, entitled *Life From Our Land* (Ignatius Press), I discuss what my family and I have learned from life on our rural land. The book is not about farming, but about what we have discovered it truly means to be a Christian today — about how Christ is calling us to

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Member's Section

Member's Section

From The Hermitage

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | LittlePortionHermitage.org



Dear friends, May the Lord give you peace.

During the month of November, the Church celebrates All Saints Day (Nov 1) and All Souls (Nov 2) to remember those women and men who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, and those whose faith was known to God alone. The Church also recommends to our prayers the Holy Souls in purgatory — the men and women who have been saved by Christ's death on the cross, are already united with God in Christ through Baptism, and yet are still in need of purging of the consequences of personal sins.

During the month of November, I encourage you to pray for the men and women who have gone before you in death, the saintly souls in purgatory. ■

Prayer For All the Souls in Purgatory

O Lord, who art ever merciful and bounteous with Thy gifts, look down upon the suffering souls in purgatory. Remember not their offenses and negligences, but be mindful of Thy loving mercy, which is from all eternity. Cleanse them of their sins and fulfill their ardent desires that they may be made worthy to behold Thee face to face in Thy glory. May they soon be united with Thee and hear those blessed words which will call them to their heavenly home: "Come, blessed of My Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Amen.¹

¹ Rev John P. O'Connell and Jex Martin, *The Prayer Book* (Chicago: The Catholic Press, Inc., 1954)



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Prayer List



Clergy

- For Kathleen, a United Methodist minister, that the Holy Spirit would guide her home to the fullness of the Catholic Faith.
- For a Presbyterian minister who is concerned that her becoming Catholic might be detrimental to her husband's parish ministry.
- For an Episcopal priest in Rhode Island, that, through prayer and reflection, he would discover the path he must take to the fullness of the Catholic Faith.
- For a United Methodist minister in Indiana, that her special experience with God would call her "further up and further into" His holy Catholic Church.
- For Allen, a nondenominational minister, that as he and his wife begin RCIA the Lord Jesus would continue to bless and guide their journey.
- For an Eastern Orthodox priest in Asia, that God would grant him the grace to find his way back to full communion with the Successor of St. Peter.
- For a United Methodist minister in the South, that his study of Scripture and Church History would bear good fruit in his journey.
- For Wayne, a minister in New England, that Jesus would guide his prayers, study, and writing and lead him home to the Catholic Church.
- For Morgan, a former lay minister, that the Holy Spirit would inspire him and his wife to fully embrace all that God is offering them through His Church.

Laitly

- For Susan who has fallen away from the faith, that her intrigue into the Catholic Church bear abundant fruit in her life.
- For Jon who is attending Mass and is hoping to be received into the Catholic Church, that his wife's heart be softened towards his desire to be Catholic.
- For a nondenominational woman in Illinois who wants to begin RCIA but is encountering opposition from her husband who is a fallen away Catholic.
- For a man in Indiana who recently returned to the Church and is trying to navigate through annulment issues.
- For Robert who has been seeking truth his whole life, that he continue to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.
- For Mark to find answers to his questions about religion and come back to the Faith of his childhood.
- For a Pentecostal in Arizona, that his wife and children come to fully embrace the Catholic Faith and move along with him towards full communion with the Church.
- For a man in California who is very discouraged in his faith journey and is wondering if he will ever be able to overcome his Protestant objections to the Catholic Church.
- For Greg, that he can find helpful answers to his questions about Catholic theology.
- For Caroline who is in RCIA and is eagerly awaiting coming into full communion with the Catholic Faith.
- For a convert to the Orthodox Faith who has become dissatisfied with his experience there, that he receive the grace to come completely home to the Catholic Church.
- For Judith to find good local Catholic friends who understand her conversion.
- For a man in Europe who is concerned that the Catholic Church isn't as focused on evangelization and outreach as his Pentecostal background.
- For Shirley who has been intrigued by the Catholic Church since she was a child and is considering how God might be leading her towards the Catholic Church.
- For a former Baptist in Michigan who is practicing Catholic devotions and is excited about going through RCIA.
- For Dawn, to find a good connection with local Catholics and be able to go deeper in her Christian walk.
- For Amber who is continuing to read and pray about the Lord's leading in her life.
- For Jerry, who watches Mass and is hoping that his wife will join him on his journey.
- For Rhonda who has many questions about the Catholic Faith and does not have the support of her family regarding her interest in Catholicism.

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)
- **Manager of Primary Members**, Jim Anderson (former Lutheran)
- **Director of Studio/Media**, Scott Scholten (former Presbyterian)
- **Office Manager**, Ann Moore
- **IT/Facilities Coordinator**, Bill Bateson (former Mormon)
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...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

sticking point was my unwillingness to pronounce the Catholic Church “no church at all,” that is, I wouldn’t affirm that the Catholic Church is nothing more than a non-Christian cult, rather, someone suggested, like the Mormons.

I was sent back to committee and then three months later was received into the Presbytery. Those who remained silent during the anti-Catholic inquisition apologized for not defending me and all’s well that ends well. Yet something else happened, indiscernible at the time. Something shifted. In part, the anger at the Catholic Church that was hurled at me made me curious, and I began asking questions:

- If the Reformed doctrine of forensic justification by faith alone is the *sine qua non* of the Church, why was it so conspicuously absent from discussions of soteriology for fifteen centuries? The obvious conclusion is that between the death of the last Apostle and Martin Luther’s epiphany there was no Church. That, of course, made no sense at all.
- If the Catholic Church taught salvation by works, then what do thoughtful, biblically literate Catholics do with New Testament texts that affirm salvation by grace through faith? And why did every Catholic document I had ever read affirm that salvation comes only by the grace of God?
- If *sola Scriptura* is the rule and the Bible is the final authority for faith and life, where were the verses in the Bible that taught *sola Scriptura*? And what did St. Paul mean in 1 Timothy 3:15 when he called *the Church* “the pillar and foundation of the truth?”

Not that I ran out to purchase the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* during this time; nonetheless, the questions sat at the back of my mind quietly taking root.

Scary, smart Catholics

Two years later, I became managing editor of Chuck Colson’s daily radio commentary, *BreakPoint*. Colson, a dyed in the wool Baptist, was happy to learn from, pray with, and work with Catholics. He had lots of Catholic friends and, along with Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, founded and chaired Evangelicals and Catholics Together. Because of my work with Chuck, I got to know some of those friends including Fr. Neuhaus (I had been a *First Things* reader and Neuhaus fan for years), Robert P. George, Russell Hittinger, Fr. Robert Sirico, Michael Novak, and other prominent Catholic thinkers. At a conference we hosted, I became friends with J. Budziszewski, Professor of Philosophy and Government at the University of Texas in Austin. At the time he was an Anglican, but not long after was received into the Catholic Church. Those latent questions suddenly began bubbling to the surface as I had people with whom I could talk them over.

The angry Calvinists I met at the Presbytery meeting and those I’ve spoken with since seem to make the tacit assumption that Catholics — including Catholic scholars and theologians — are rather stupid. After all, their doctrines contradict each

other and run contrary to the obvious, face-value meaning of the Bible we share. Fr. James Schall, now retired from Georgetown University wrote, “To mock or misrepresent Catholicism seems permissible if, as it is supposed, it is composed of dunderheads who cannot argue coherently about anything, not even what they believe and the grounds for it” (“Confident Catholicism Revisited,” *The Catholic Thing*).

These new friends, however, were anything but dunderheads. Not only did they have vibrant relationships with God through Christ, they were recognized scholars, authored academic books, had standing in the Public Square and among Protestants. They were also scary smart. Maybe they knew something.

By what authority?

In 2006, I left *BreakPoint* to become president of the Institute on Religion & Democracy (IRD). The IRD was part of the Mainline Protestant renewal movement, and my first summer at the IRD included trips to three national denominational meetings: the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) General Assembly, the Episcopal Church (TEC) General Convention, and my own Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) General Assembly.

At the PCUSA and TEC meetings I saw first-hand how, in contrast to Christians through the ages, the liberal denominations have substituted feelings for facts, passions for authority, and sentiment for reason. Their belief seems to be that if they “create space for dialogue,” emote, and vote, they can determine the New Revised Standard Version of God’s truth by Roberts Rule’s and simple majority — and Christian orthodoxy, their own confessional documents, and dissenters can all pound sand. (I should add that there were and are good, solidly orthodox dissenters who are still fighting the good fight in those groups. They are courageous men and women who deserve our prayers — and invitations to attend RCIA.)

The impact of the first two meetings sank in as I flew between TEC’s General Convention and my own PCA General Assembly.

I was reading Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper’s discussion of “the sovereignty of the individual person” and the individual conscience before God in his *Lectures on Calvinism* when a conversation began in the row behind me. Two women who did not know each other discovered that they had both been volunteers at the TEC General Convention. “Were you there,” asked one, “when Katherine Jefferts Schori was elected presiding bishop?” The General Convention had elected Schori, one of its few female bishops, to lead the denomination.

“Oh, yes I was there and it was wonderful,” replied the other. “Couldn’t you just feel the Spirit?”

“Yes, yes. I felt the Spirit.”

Hmm, I thought, here we have “the sovereignty of the individual person” writ large. I was not encouraged.

Katherine Jefferts Schori’s theological positions are troubling, to say the least. In her inaugural sermon as presiding bishop-elect, she announced, “Our mother Jesus gives birth to a new

...Journeys Home Continued...

creation and we are His children.” No doubt many in attendance including the women in the row behind me thought this creative, panentheist, gender-bending was wonderfully profound. In truth, it is self-evident gibberish and heretical gibberish at that. Yet, there were at least two women who “could feel the Spirit.”

I arrived at my own General Assembly sobered. What, I asked myself, is keeping our thoroughly orthodox denomination from voting to affirm same-sex marriage, ordain practicing homosexuals, and rewrite or reject the doctrine of the Trinity? (Live issues at the PCUSA and TEC meetings)? What will keep us on the straight and narrow? The PCA’s Westminster Confession is already an edited version of the original. What was keeping us from doing more editing? (Good news: They removed all the anti-Catholic “whore of Babylon” references that were in the 1646 Puritan original.)

I could only come up with one answer: the good will of a converted clergy. And while that is a truly marvelous thing — something for which we should praise God — it also struck me as a very slender reed on which to hang the future. Given the right provocation, the PCA could, claiming the guidance of the Holy Spirit, make radical changes in Christian doctrine to accommodate the spirit of the age just as surely as the PCUSA and the Episcopalians have.

How long, I began wondering, can the PCA, any other Protestant group, or for that matter Protestantism in general maintain orthodoxy in a post-modern world? Protestantism began with a strong nominalist streak (cf. Louis Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*), and what is post-modernism if not nominalism on steroids? The seeds of its destruction were inherent in the Protestant system from the beginning as historian Brad Gregory argues in his book *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*.

Every individual Protestant and every Protestant denomination — really just a collection of (more or less) like-minded individuals — claims the authority to interpret the Bible and define doctrine. But the buck has to stop somewhere. In the final analysis, the buck either stops with me and the like-minded group I have chosen to join (and can choose to leave) — a very scary prospect — or it stops with a Church that actually has the authority to decide, an authority given to her by God.

This was the crucial issue, settled finally as I read in Blessed John Henry Newman’s argument by inference in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. In light of the evil brought by original sin, he wrote, the Catholic Church’s infallibility is “a provision, adapted by the mercy of the Creator, to preserve religion in the world, and to restrain freedom of thought, which of course in itself is one of the greatest of our natural gifts, and to rescue it from its own suicidal tendencies” (p. 220).

It is those suicidal tendencies of freedom of thought that are killing the Protestant Mainline and infecting Evangelicalism. This is Protestantism’s Achilles heel and without the authority of the Catholic Church, the dissolution will continue. Given that state of affairs in Protestantism, it is wise, as Newman

knew, to opt out of “private judgment” into the security of the Catholic Church.

Lex orandi, lex credendi

In 1971, I committed my life to Christ for the first time and began a self-conscious and determined walk with God. Since then, I have maintained a daily “quiet time” of Bible reading and prayer. Over the years, I have used a variety of study guides, methods, and structures. Sooner or later, I have found, one way of doing things gets stale and I try something else.

After several years of praying Morning Prayer and the psalms from the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer*, I hit one of those stale periods. At an IRD board meeting, I saw prominent Methodist theologian holding a book that looked sort of like a Bible with four of five brightly colored ribbons holding his places. He saw me look at the book inquiringly and explained: “It’s the *Liturgy of the Hours*. I pray it every day.”

A couple of weeks later, I went into the Catholic Information Center in Washington (conveniently located around the corner from my office) and bought a Breviary of my own. Once I figured out how to use it (it is not intuitive), I joined the throng of priests, religious, Catholic laypeople, and handful of Methodist theologians who pray the psalms and the seasons. That is, I began praying like a Catholic.

Not only that, but I began to visit Catholic churches for prayer and often stayed for Mass. A favorite church was St. Matthew’s Cathedral, not far from my office in downtown Washington. As the head of a small think-tank, I often needed quiet space to decompress, think, and pray. When I did, I headed to St. Matthew’s.

The cathedral is a huge building, as you would expect. Opened in 1913, the main mosaic over and around the nave depicts the evangelist surrounded by wonderful art-deco angels. The chapel to the right as you enter is dedicated to St. Francis and shows the Italian countryside. Our Lady’s chapel is to the left.

With all that splendor, any seat is a good one. Yet after many visits, I suddenly became aware that I sat in the same pew every time. It was an inconvenient location: up front and way to the left. It was an effort to get there, but unconsciously that’s where I always sat: in front of the tabernacle in the presence of Jesus.

For a Presbyterian, I was always a bit high church when it comes to the sacraments. I agreed with Flannery O’Conner who, when someone opined that the Eucharist was just a symbol and a good one, commented, “Well, if it’s a symbol, to hell with it.” I firmly believed in the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine, but a *spiritual* real presence only. Contrary to some ministers who feel compelled to instruct everyone that at the consecration, “nothing happens,” I believed something happened though I couldn’t say exactly what.

The Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is of a different order entirely. This was not some ephemeral spiritual something, but a spiritual and physical reality that drew me in.

That was doubly reinforced one Sunday when my wife and I attended a local Anglican church. It is a church I know well with

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ministers who are friends of mine. The preaching, the piety, and the love for God and His people are on display every Sunday. It's a great church. Nonetheless, after we found a pew and spent a few minutes praying, a panic hit me. Something was very, very wrong. I glanced around trying to figure out what was wrong. An imminent terrorist attack? Some evil influence walking in with someone? Then it dawned on me: there was no tabernacle.

With all the reading, thinking, conversations, journaling, and prayer I put into the decision to come into the Catholic Church, that moment was the crowning event. Jesus Christ — Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity — there in every Catholic church and conspicuously absent from every other.

A few months later in January 2011, I was received into the Church at the Catholic Information Center.

The good and the bad of it

When people would talk with Richard John Neuhaus about the problems in the Catholic Church, Fr. Neuhaus would respond: "You don't know the half of it." And it's certainly true that Rome has her share of problems. Coming into the Catholic Church is like most decisions in life: while solving some problems, it opens up a host of others. Reception into the Catholic Church is the right thing to do, but it is not a panacea.

Bypassing the headlines announcing Church scandal and statements by the Pope that are far too easy to rip out of context, I want to address the personal challenges.

Unlike many Protestant ministers who enter the Catholic Church, I did not give up my career. I last worked as a pastor over fifteen years ago and have since been a nonprofit executive and writer.

I did, however, give up relationships that I miss. Having said that, my friends are still my friends — including minister friends who were fellow members of the Presbytery. The sad part is that while we bump into each other occasionally, we no longer see one another on a regular basis nor do we work together.

The same is true of people with whom I went to church for years. Yes, we're still friends, but we hardly ever see each other. And while that is in part due to the nature of all our far-too-busy lives in the Washington, DC region and the nature of an area church as opposed to a parish, most of it has to do with not sitting in adjoining pews on Sunday and deciding to meet for lunch.

Why Catholic parishes don't seem to work that way is a bit of a mystery, but in my limited experience, they don't. And besides, it is hard to compare decades long friendships with new ones.

Having said all that, it has all been worth it. When former Anglican theologian R.R. Reno was received into the Catholic Church, he wrote, "In order to escape the insanity of my slide into self-guidance, I put myself up for reception into the Catholic Church as one might put oneself up for adoption. A man can no more guide his spiritual life by his ideas than a child can raise himself on the strength of his native potential" (quoted in Richard John Neuhaus, *Catholic Matters: Confusion, Controversy, and the Splendor of Truth*).

I have believed that second sentence for ages. We cannot raise ourselves; we are incapable of shouldering the responsibility to figure it all out ourselves; we need the Church. But which church? Over the past years or so, I have come to believe Reno's first sentence as well. There is only one Church to which I can safely entrust myself, only one that is not simply a collection of like-minded individuals that I can "join" if I so choose and fit their criteria, only one into which I am simply "received."

Are there difficulties? Of course, but as Blessed John Henry Newman wrote, "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt, as I understand the subject; difficulties and doubts are incommensurate" (*Apologia Pro Vita Sua*). Difficulties are part of seeing through a glass darkly and as such are scattered throughout the Bible, inherent in every theological system, and buried in every church's history.

Are there doubts? I began with piles, but over years of reading, thinking, and discussing, they have all been sorted out or worn down to nothing. I have moved from, "The Catholic Church is not the solution, but..." to "The Catholic Church is probably not the solution, but..." to "The Catholic Church may be the solution, but..." to "The Catholic Church is probably the solution, but..." to "The Catholic Church is the solution, but..." to surrender. The Catholic Church is and always has been the solution.

As Fr. Neuhaus noted, "Rest comes with surrender, with being shaken out of the state of *incurvatus est* [being turned in upon oneself], with submission to an other, and finally to the Other. The Other is embodied, as in the body of Christ, the Church" (*Catholic Matters*). And it's good to be at rest. ■



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BLOG

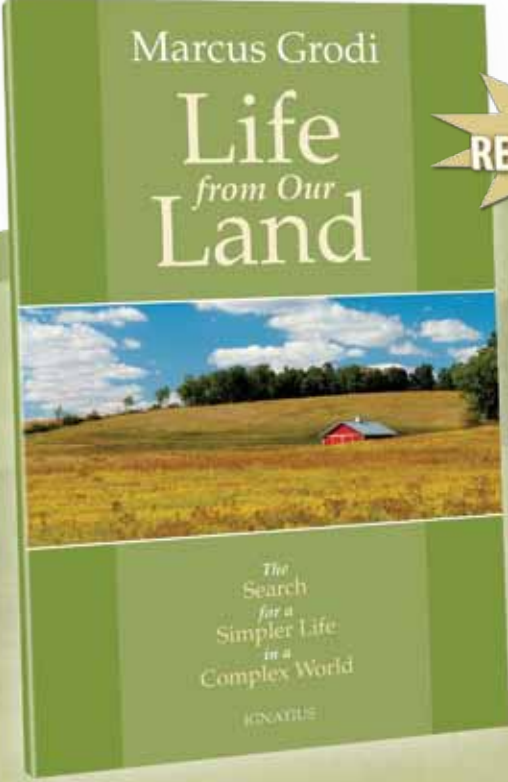
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