



February 2016 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



How The Pope Ruined My TV

By L. David Perry, MD

I was born in the late 1960’s to a father who was a devout Southern Baptist and to a mother who was Jewish. Before my birth and in the first few years after my birth, my father witnessed Christianity to my mother, opening her eyes to many Old Testament verses that she had not seen or read in the Jewish Saturday school of her childhood. When I was three years old, my mother accepted Jesus Christ as both the Messiah who all the Jewish people had been waiting for as well as her own personal Lord and Savior. After this she was baptized at a Baptist church and became a devout Christian. I only have memories of both of my parents being Christian, and I can still recall the mystery and my fascination with the baptistery in the Baptist church we attended when I was in preschool.

After several moves around the country that took us from Ohio to California, we finally moved to Florida where I grew up. Soon after we moved to Florida, one of my father’s coworkers invited our family to attend his Presbyterian church, and from that time forward the Perrys were Presbyterian. I had a wonderful childhood in Florida and I was an avid sports fan. One of my favorite television shows was ABC’s Wide World of Sports, which was at the height of its popularity in the pre-cable television era of the 1970’s.

On August 6, 1978, Pope Paul VI died. What I soon learned was that the three major TV networks in the United States were obsessed with who would be the next Pope and how one is chosen. My father explained to me that some men would vote and then the color of smoke coming from their

chimney would tell the world that they had chosen a new Pope to lead the Catholic Church. Whenever I turned on the TV, it always seemed to be showing the same thing, the chimney. Finally, white smoke appeared on August 26, 1978 and Pope John Paul I had been selected by his fellow cardinals to be the next successor of St. Peter. Everything returned to normal in my world until September 28, 1978 when Pope John Paul I died. Oh no! There came the TV screen with the chimney again! Was I ever going to see ABC’s Wide World of Sports again? On October 16, 1978, Karol Wojtyla the Cardinal Archbishop of Krakow was chosen to be the Bishop of Rome and took the name Pope John Paul II. I had missed six Saturdays of ABC’s Wide World of Sports along with some college and professional football games so I was delighted to have my TV

Journeys Home

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...Journeys Home Continued...

back. As I rejoiced to hear the words, “now back to our regularly scheduled programming...”, I was completely unaware that the man who would become the most influential Christian of the twentieth century had just put on the mantle of the papacy. This man, with whom I was indirectly quite annoyed, I would one day call my Pope. He would bravely stand up to un-godly communism and I would marvel at his strength and courage as he battled Parkinson’s disease. When he passed away I was in a state of shock as I recall saying to my friends and family, “he was the only Pope I ever knew.”

The end of the 1970’s brought an end to my television interruptions and I continued with my typical American Presbyterian experience. My parents made sure that I was active in the Presbyterian middle school and high school youth groups. My maternal grandmother came to live with us and she did her best to maintain her Jewish identity. My father was very respectful of her faith, and he did his best to help her celebrate the Jewish holidays. He would read the prayers of the male head of the household and he, my brother, and I would wear yarmulkes during the family Seder meal as we celebrated the Passover. My father went out of his way to make sure his children understood Judaism. His position was that as Christians we were grafted onto Judaism. We needed to understand Judaism to understand Christianity. We needed to know our history, where we came from, to truly know ourselves as Christians.

In college I fell away from the faith. I stopped attending church, I stopped praying, and I stopped reading the Bible. Then in medical school I was confronted with something new. I became friends with a group of secular atheists. Most of my

friends were culturally Jewish and they enjoyed ridiculing both our Christian classmates as well as our Jewish classmates who practiced their faith. It took about a year with these friends for me to realize that I could not be an atheist. In my science studies I learned many things that led me away from atheism. The intricacy and beauty of the DNA molecule is just one example. I just could not buy atheism.

From a religious standpoint, I believed I should drop back and start over. I decided that I should become Jewish. I began some self-preparation prior to contacting any rabbi by starting to re-read the Old Testament. I got up to the books of First and Second Samuel and I realized that I would make a poor Jew. I knew the story of Jesus too well; how He was the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant and I realized that I was a Christian, even though I was not sure what it really meant to be a Christian.

So I began to read the Bible on my own and to sporadically attend a Presbyterian church. I would always go to church when I visited my parents. This continued for around a year until I met the young woman who would become my wife. I was so impressed with Kathryn’s faith, her Catholic faith. It was so refreshing to meet a young, beautiful woman who was truly committed to God. I knew that God wanted us to be married. We dated and I began regularly attending Mass with her. Within a year and a half we were engaged.

It was during our wedding preparations that my suppressed anti-Catholic tendencies emerged. We did not live in the same city during our engagement, and I had been visiting Kathryn at her family’s house for a weekend of wedding preparation. Kathryn explained that during part of our wedding service,

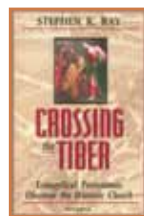
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FEATURED RESOURCES

Deep in Scripture CD



On this *Deep in Scripture* program, Marcus Grodi invites Steve Ray to discuss John 2:1-12. As a former Baptist, the Wedding at Cana caused Steve many difficulties in light of his faith background. Steve is known as “Jerusalem Jones,” because he leads Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land. In this discussion, he uses his intimate knowledge of Israeli and Palestinian culture to flesh out the story and explain how these previously “hard verses” now make sense in light of Catholic teaching.



Crossing the Tiber — By Steve Ray

An exhilarating conversion story of a devout Baptist who relates how he overcame his hostility to the Catholic Church by a combination of serious Bible study and vast research of the writings of the early Church Fathers. In addition to a moving account of their conversion that caused Ray and his wife to “cross the Tiber” to Rome, he offers an in-depth treatment of Baptism and the Eucharist in Scripture and the ancient Church. Thoroughly documented with hundreds of footnotes, this contains perhaps the most complete compilation of biblical and patristic quotations and commentary available on Baptism and the Eucharist, as well as a detailed analysis of *sola Scriptura* and Tradition.

\$35

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD for a \$35 donation.

\$50

Receive *Crossing the Tiber* for a \$50 donation.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *Crossing the Tiber* for a \$75 donation.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Obtain premiums by returning the envelope included with your newsletter, calling 740-450-1175, or by going online to chnetwork.org/premiums.

See page C for how to enroll in our *Premiums Club* and automatically receive these resources each month!

The New CHNetwork.org

By JonMarc Grodi, Manager of Outreach & Development | jmgrodi@chnetwork.org

We are excited to announce the launch of a powerful and beautiful new version of the CHNetwork website. We set out to re-focus our web content on outreach and to make resources and fellowship more accessible to people on the journey to the Catholic Church. Two years in the making, involving many long hours of planning and development, this new website surpasses our initial expectations and represents a very significant step forward in our work. Let me share with you some of the reasons why.



As I said, the website has been rebuilt from the ground up to focus on outreach and dialogue with non-Catholic Christians. We want this to truly be the website that you, your friends and family, priests, and other Catholic organizations, feel comfortable and confident sending non-Catholic inquirers and converts to for resources and fellowship.

Our online resources — conversion stories, articles, videos, and podcasts, now including the recently compiled archive of The Journey Home Program — have been completely redesigned and expanded. Throughout the site, topical, scriptural, or denominational tags will make it easy for visitors to find the resources they need. We have many great new resources on the way such as the Signposts interviews and our new Topic Pages that are topic-specific collections of the best CHNetwork and

other resources that can be easily shared with friends and family. In addition, there is now a “My Journey” page through which logged-in members may access the CHNewsletter archives, free eBooks, and other members-only resources and events we have planned.

We also have revamped and expanded our online discussion forums into a full-fledged online network integrated directly into our website! People on the journey to Catholicism or even those just beginning to explore can now register online and begin interacting with our staff and other members of the network. In addition to the main discussion forum, we have private groups being formed for fellowship among our clergy convert members as well as members of different denominational backgrounds. Lutherans or Presbyterians, for example, will be able to find fellowship with converts and inquirers from a similar background right on our website and all under the care of our staff and hand-picked volunteers. We are now able to deliver more of the network to everyone.

There is far more to say and see, and thus we invite you to visit the new website, explore, and let us know what you think! **Current members may visit www.chnetwork.org/activate for a fast-track account registration on the new site.**

Our hope is that this website will be an encouragement to your own journey of faith and will empower us all to better share the beauty and truth of the Catholic Church with all Christians. Thanks, as always, for your generous support and prayer. ■



...Journeys Home Continued...

she would place flowers at the base of the statue of Mary in her church. I was appalled since this appeared to be direct worship of an idol. I was so upset that I began to think that I might not be able to marry her. It caused a great deal of pain for both of us and for several hours I could not speak to Kathryn. I retreated to my guest room and would not emerge as I contemplated how to call off the wedding. After several hours she knocked on the door and gave me one of her high school religion books she had found, hoping that I might read it and feel more comfortable marrying a Catholic.

I can only remember the introduction to that book, but it had a profound effect on my life. The introduction was by a Catholic bishop and in it there was a copy of the Nicene Creed. The bishop stated that the Nicene Creed was the source of all Christian orthodoxy. I did not even know what "orthodoxy" meant so I stopped reading and looked the word up in a dictionary. This bishop sounded very sure that he knew what correct Christian teaching was. I realized that I did not have that assurance. I don't remember any more from that book, but I realized that I should not break off the engagement; I would marry this good Catholic girl and raise a Catholic family.

After our marriage, my wife kindly offered to go to a Presbyterian church on Sundays and we could attend Mass on the Saturday vigils. I was lazy and immature in my faith so I decided we would simply attend Mass on Sundays. I became relative-

ly sympathetic to Catholics but overall I thought Catholicism could not really be right.

One Sunday, when we had been married around four years it was the Feast of Corpus Christi and the Gospel readings were from John 6. The priest gave his homily on the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. I was shocked. On the way home from the church I questioned my wife about this. I had attended Catholic Mass for years and had not realized what Catholics believed about the Eucharist. By now I knew many Catholics, both friends and relatives from my wife's side of the family. I knew them to be good, reasonable people. How could they possibly believe such a ridiculous and farfetched teaching as the real, bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

I was sure that the reading from John's Gospel, in which Jesus exhorts His followers to "eat his flesh and drink his blood," was something added to the Bible by the Catholic Church. We got home from Mass and I went and got my Good News Bible that was given to me when I was baptized as a teenager. I went straight to John 6 and there it was. I decided I needed to find a better Bible translation. So after work the next week, without my wife's knowledge, I went to a local Evangelical Christian bookstore. I headed straight for the Bible section. I needed to go to the "real" Bible; I grabbed the biggest, most ornate copy of the King James Bible that I could find. I sat down in the aisle and read the entire sixth chapter of John's Gospel. I'm sure that the

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OR CALL 740-450-1175 FOR THESE AND OTHER GREAT RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CATHOLIC FAITH.



MEET OUR NEWEST STAFF MEMBER!

Seth Paine is a web designer and media specialist who received his master's degree in digital media from the Harvard Extension school. A non-denominational Christian for most of his life, he entered the Church the Easter of 2008 and just a month later met his wife, Michelle, also a convert. They now live in Ohio with their two daughters. Seth has a passion for sharing the beauty of the Catholic Church through media and the Internet.

Seth Paine | seth@chnetwork.org

Developer
of Web
& New Media

so many resources — on-line and in print — to make this mission as easy as possible.

It is not our responsibility to “push, pull, or prod” anyone into the Kingdom; all we are called to do is share with them what we have received by grace through the mercy of God. It is through your words and efforts — for example, by pointing someone to our website or passing along a CHNewsletter or giving them a book — that Christ can work to “draw men

into the Church and through it to join them more closely to himself.”

Thank you for working with us in this grand mission. Thank you for your prayers and financial support, but especially for your active witness to Christ and His Church. May we, together with those whom Christ has brought home through our witness, “share in his life of glory.” ■

From the Hermitage

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | LittlePortionHermitage.org



In the Latin rite of the Catholic Church, Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, February 10th this year. The Lenten season is a time when the Church encourages us to focus — perhaps more intently than we normally do — on the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Lent is a particularly good time to take personal inventory of our spiritual lives, to admit to ourselves and another human being (in the context of sacramental confession when necessary) the exact nature of our sins and shortcomings, and to renew our commitment to drink deeply from the wellspring of God’s mercy.

Of the three spiritual disciplines — prayer, fasting, and almsgiving — I find fasting to be my least favorite ... and therefore the one I most need to practice on a regular basis. I try to fast on bread and water every Friday throughout the year with varying degrees of success. Failing my fast isn’t nearly as important as trying again, and again, and again. So I keep on trying. And since without God’s grace I have no hope of succeeding in my endeavor to fast well, I see my failures as an opportunity for spiritual growth. In our weakness is hidden Christ’s strength, if only we are open to receive it. Because even our failures can be made worthwhile in God’s economy of salvation, I find that they lead me to feast on the mercy of God poured out through His holy Word and His holy Sacraments.

Speaking of fasting and feasting, I recently came across a Lenten reflection attributed to author, teacher, and Methodist pastor William Arthur Ward (1921-1994). I’ve included it below for those of you who want to join me in another sort of Lenten fasting (and feasting) in addition to the Lenten fast prescribed the Church.

Fast From-Feast On

- Fast from judging others; Feast on the Christ dwelling in them.
- Fast from emphasis on differences; Feast on the unity of life.
- Fast from apparent darkness; Feast on the reality of light.
- Fast from thoughts of illness; Feast on the healing power of God.
- Fast from words that pollute; Feast on phrases that purify.
- Fast from discontent; Feast on gratitude.

- Fast from anger; Feast on patience.
- Fast from pessimism; Feast on optimism.
- Fast from worry; Feast on divine order.
- Fast from complaining; Feast on appreciation.
- Fast from negatives; Feast on affirmatives.
- Fast from unrelenting pressures; Feast on unceasing prayer.
- Fast from hostility; Feast on non-resistance.
- Fast from bitterness; Feast on forgiveness.
- Fast from self-concern; Feast on compassion for others.
- Fast from personal anxiety; Feast on eternal truth.
- Fast from discouragements; Feast on hope.
- Fast from facts that depress; Feast on verities that uplift.
- Fast from lethargy; Feast on enthusiasm.
- Fast from thoughts that weaken; Feast on promises that inspire.
- Fast from shadows of sorrow; Feast on the sunlight of serenity.
- Fast from idle gossip; Feast on purposeful silence.
- Fast from problems that overwhelm; Feast on prayer that [strengthens].

If you are like me, you will most likely not succeed in 100% of your Lenten fast (or feast). No worries. We are not saints (yet). To grow along spiritual lines is the whole point of our Lenten disciplines. We progress toward perfection (cf. Phil. 3:14).

See you at the empty tomb. ■

TAX NOTICES



If you need a record of your 2015 contributions for tax purposes, please contact Wendy Hart, wendy@chnetwork.org or 740-450-1175 ext 100

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NEWSLETTER DONATION

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

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If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation & join the Premiums Club, please go to www.CHNetwork.org/premiums, call 740-450-1175, or complete this form & mail to:

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

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

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Discover

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MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

March 5, 2016

Catholic Men's Conference
 Diocese of Springfield, MA
www.spfldmensconference.org

March 12, 2016

Catholic Women's Conference
 Diocese of Rochester, NY
www.rochesterercwc.org

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Prayer List



Clergy

- For Eric, a non-denominational seminarian, that he may find a faithful Catholic friend in his area.
- For the wife of a former Berean Fellowship pastor, that she may be able to overcome the strangeness of the Catholic Church.
- For a Bible Church minister, that he may find a Catholic priest in his area who is able and willing to talk with him.
- For a Lutheran minister in California, that unloving Catholics would not hamper his entry to the Catholic Church.
- For the wife of an Anglican priest in Europe, as she and her husband are preparing to enter the Church, that they have a smooth transition.
- For a Pentecostal minister in Iowa, that the Holy Spirit would guide his studies and bring him home the fullness of the faith found only in the Catholic Church.
- For an Anglican priest, that God would guide him to the Catholic Church in a way that will not jeopardize his work as a prison chaplain.
- For an Episcopal priest and his wife as they struggle to meet the needs at their

church while transitioning towards finding new employment and being received into the Catholic Church.

■ For David, a former missionary in the south, that our Lord Jesus would give him an overwhelming hunger for Him in the Holy Eucharist.

■ For an Episcopal priest in Texas, that our Lord would guide him to gainful employment enabling him to resign his ministry and enter the Catholic Church.

Laity

- For a recent convert who is struggling financially.
- For Troy who is continuing to read and learn about the Faith, that his faith life be enriched and blessed.
- For a Baptist who is attending Mass regularly but wonders how he can be sure Catholicism is true.
- For Bruce who doesn't see himself becoming Catholic on account of a few specific struggles with the Church, that he continue to be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance.
- For a convert in the south who is hoping his family will join him in becoming Catholic.

■ For Jeff who is no longer pursuing the Catholic Faith, that he seek to always go deeper in his relationship to Jesus.

■ For Michael who has been attending Mass for a long while and is hoping to come into full communion with the Catholic Church but is waiting on an annulment.

■ For Cecelia who has watched EWTN for decades and is now in RCIA.

■ For Doug to be able to move forward with his wish to be Catholic.

■ For Lorrie to be able to find an excellent RCIA program and a good church home.

■ For Simon, who is on the journey, that he find answers to his questions about the Catholic Faith.

■ For Ruth, that she will feel led to come fully into the Catholic Faith.

■ For Sam who is re-examining his faith journey and looking for ways that he can use his gifts and talents for God's glory.

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.

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



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET
The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 1 PM ET

RADIO

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET
The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

February 1

Steve Ray*
 Former Baptist

February 8

Jay Sardino*
 Revert

February 15

Fr. Warren Tanghe*
 Former Episcopal priest

February 22

Ernie Freeman*
 Former Assemblies of God

February 29

Jeffrey Morrow*
 Convert from Judaism &
 former Evangelical Protestant

*Schedule is subject to change.

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 4

other customers and the bookstore workers were watching and thinking I was having a conversion to Jesus Christ right there in the store. The truth was, I was freaking out! Over and over I read, “You must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the son of man.” As a Protestant I had never seen this text before. On the surface it appeared that Protestants were failing to live up to a command directly given by Jesus. I prayed about this for several months and came to the conclusion that there were two distinct possible interpretations of this Scripture passage. The typical Protestant interpretation being figurative and meaning that “eating the flesh ... drinking the blood of the son of man” meant some special way that the Christian had belief or faith in Jesus. However, the Catholic interpretation would be more literal. In some miraculous way the Christian must truly eat the flesh and drink the Blood of Jesus. I understood that both of these interpretations could not both be correct at the same time. Only one of the two could be correct, and I did not know which one was true.

After several months of painful prayer, I remembered that my mother-in-law had given me a book several years prior which might help me with this investigation. I could not even remember the title of the book, only that it had to be somewhere in our house. I searched frantically through the house until I finally found it in the back of the closet in my home office. The book was *Crossing the Tiber* by Stephen Ray. I can truly say that this book changed the entire trajectory of my life. In the book I discovered the Church Fathers. I was amazed that there were extra-biblical writings from the first, second, and third centuries. I could actually read what the first Christians wrote about and what they believed.

After finishing *Crossing the Tiber*, I noticed that my in-laws had a lot of books on their shelves that I wanted to read. My wife and I had a family tradition of having Sunday dinner with her parents at their house. We would go over to my in-laws’ home in the mid-afternoon and just visit and watch sports on television and finally have dinner. I started to take these afternoons as an opportunity to sneak away somewhere in their house and read a Catholic book. I would mark my place when I was finished that day and leave it on the book shelf as I had found it, so I could continue where I had left off the next Sunday. I did not want my wife or her parents knowing that I was reading Catholic writers because I was just educating myself. I was definitely not converting! As I made my way through the Catholic writers, I began to gravitate to three saints: St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Justin Martyr, and St. Augustine. They reached out through

the centuries and challenged my perception of Christianity and what it means to be a Christian.

St. Ignatius of Antioch attracted me because his writings were so old. His epistles to local churches in the Mediterranean region and Asia Minor are dated to the first decade of the second century, and in some ways read like St. Paul’s epistles from the Bible. I could feel the connection to the early Christians of the first century, the Apostles and the other men and women who actually knew Jesus. I found Eucharistic themes in St. Ignatius’ writings, such as in his *Letter to the Romans*: “I have no desire

for corruptible food, or for the pleasures of this life. I want the bread of God which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, of David’s seed, and I want his blood as my drink that is love incorruptible.”

And in his *Letter to the Smyrneans* regarding the Gnostics who failed to follow the true faith he says: “They abstain from the Eucharist and prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, that flesh that suffered for our sins but which the Father raised in his kindness.” It was clear in the writings of St.

Ignatius that he believed in the real, bodily presence of Jesus Christ in the

Eucharist. So this idea was not a medieval invention.

St. Justin Martyr lived a little later than Ignatius. His writings date to AD 150-160. Justin wrote to the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius around AD 155 to defend Christianity and explain how Christians worshiped. In defending Christian worship, Justin said this:

On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place. The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things. Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves and all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation. When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss. Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks that we have been judged worthy of these gifts. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: ‘Amen.’ When he who presides has

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“You must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the son of man.” As a Protestant I had never seen this text before.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the 'eucharisted' bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent."

In reading Justin Martyr's summation of Christian worship it was obvious, even to me, someone who had only passively sat through Catholic Masses, that he was indeed describing a Catholic Mass.

The pastor at my Presbyterian church in Florida was a knowledgeable Christian and a great preacher and teacher. He was fond of quoting and telling little anecdotes about St. Augustine, so I had a respect and interest for the ancient Christian pastor named Augustine. It was rather shocking and ironic when I discovered that Augustine of Hippo was a Catholic bishop and believed in the authority of the Catholic Church. In his letter *Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus*, Augustine says, "lastly, does the name itself of Catholic, which, not without reason, amid so many heresies, the Church has thus retained; so that, all heretics wish to be called Catholics, yet when a stranger asks where the Catholic Church meets, no heretic will venture to point to his chapel or house." In the same letter Augustine has this to say regarding the authority

of the Catholic Church, "For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church."

So now I was confronted by three men, two of whom had died for their Christian faith, and one who was recognized as one of the greatest Christian men outside the apostolic age, as well as one the brightest and most prolific minds of Western Civilization. I knew that I was not as brave as St. Ignatius or St. Justin, but I knew I wanted the same faith they had, a faith worth dying for. And I could never begin to put my faith and intellect against Augustine. I was "outvoted" by, as Chesterton would say, "the democracy of the dead."

During the time of my engagement with my wife, I had wagged my finger at her and told her that I would never join the Catholic Church. In my past I had been very anti-Catholic, believing that Catholicism was a syncretic religion of true Christianity and Roman paganism. So I decided that before I joined the Catholic Church I needed to seriously explore what modern Protestants say about Catholicism. I avoided some of the classical anti-Catholic books knowing that they were filled with straw-man arguments and blatant errors regarding Cathol-

icism. Instead I investigated what different online sources had to say. I discovered two Protestant apologetic arguments that I needed to investigate.

The first regarded the Church Fathers. When I read the Church Fathers I could clearly see Catholic themes in their writings, and according to Catholics this verifies the claim that the Catholic Church is the original Church, the one founded by Jesus Christ Himself. So Catholics, as Catholic apologists say, are simply practicing Christianity the way it has always existed and following the teachings of the Apostles, while it is the Protestant communions who have changed the faith. From a Protestant perspective, the Church Fathers are quite a difficult obstacle to

overcome. There are no early Christian writings that reflect what modern Protestants and Evangelicals would recognize as their faith. However, Protestant apologists often explain this by saying that there were indeed "true" Christian communities practicing "true" Christianity in the first three centuries after Christ, but when Emperor Constantine came to power he legalized the Christian community in Rome which was led by a Pope who taught false Christian doctrine. After the Pope of Rome came to power he had all the writings and evidence of the early Christians destroyed.

This theory made sense to me and gave me at least a plausible theory on how to explain away the Catholic Church Fathers. I thought this could be a legitimate way that a Protestant could be knowledgeable about the ancient Christian writings and at the same time avoid joining the Catholic Church.

St. Irenaeus of Lyon poked a hole in this theory. Around AD 180, St. Irenaeus published his most famous work, *Against Heresies*. In this book he diligently records the false beliefs regarding Jesus Christ and the Christian Faith up to that time, and it is from these works that we can learn about some of the Gnostic heresies. In *Against Heresies* there is no record of any form of Christianity that resembles modern Protestant/Evangelical Christianity. In fact the Catholic Church has done a good job of chronicling and preserving various bishops' writings that teach against false Christian ideas throughout the centuries. St. Augustine wrote voluminously regarding false Christian teachings, but he never mentions Christians who believe in the Trinity but deny the validity of some or all of the sacraments. I came to find the idea that the Catholic Church somehow suppressed and wiped all evidence of "true" Christianity from history implausible. It is much more reasonable to simply read the evidence of

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I knew that I was not as brave as St. Ignatius or St. Justin, but I knew I wanted the same faith they had, a faith worth dying for. And I could never begin to put my faith and intellect against Augustine. I was "outvoted" by, as Chesterton would say, "the democracy of the dead."

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...Journeys Home Continued...

the Church Fathers and see that the early Church was indeed Catholic.

The second strong objection came from the Book of Hebrews itself. I came across an essay that made the claim that the Book of Hebrews was proof that the Catholic Mass was invalid, idolatrous, and anti-biblical. This sparked my interest since I did not want to become Catholic because it meant admitting to myself that I was wrong. I began to read the Book of Hebrews expecting to get the biblical support I needed to keep me a Protestant. However, a recurring theme began to appear in Hebrews. Jesus is a high priest in the Order of Melchizedek. Who is Melchizedek? He was a high priest of God whose sacrifice was bread and wine. Jesus is the final high priest of God offering His Body on the altar of the cross. How is Jesus a priest like Melchizedek? At the Last Supper Jesus gave bread and wine to His disciples saying, “this is my body ... this is my blood” thus completing the priesthood of Melchizedek. But Jesus’ sacrifice was His own Body and Blood. If Jesus is to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek, the bread and wine He offers must be the true sacrifice of His Body and Blood! Now the words of Sacred Scripture, as recorded by St. Luke are illuminated and clarified. “And he took bread, and he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the chalice after supper, saying, ‘This chalice which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’” (Lk 22:19-20). The Book of Hebrews not only did not dissuade me from becoming Catholic, it confirmed it all the more.

I continued to attend Mass with my wife without sharing too much of what I had discovered. Later that next winter, we attended a Marriage Encounter weekend. During one of the discussions with Kathryn, the topic actually turned to the Eucharist. I explained the details and theology of the Eucharist, and shared with her its roots in Christian history. She then asked me a fateful question. “Do you just know this, or do you believe it?” I thought for a moment and realized that I really believed it. I knew I had to become Catholic. The next morning was Sunday, and I was the only non-Catholic at Mass. It was the saddest and loneliest Mass I had ever attended, but I left the service with a new mission — to become Catholic.

It was February of 2001, so I had to wait through Easter and start RCIA in the fall of 2001. It seemed like such a long time before I would join the Church. My time in RCIA, however, turned out to be very enriching to my faith and helped me learn

more about the Catholic Church’s teachings on doctrines such as the Blessed Virgin Mary, confession, and purgatory. Finally I was confirmed and received my first Holy Eucharist at the Easter Vigil in 2002. After becoming Catholic I began to identify closely with the parable of the man who finds a hidden treasure in a field and sells all that he has to buy the field (Mt 13:44). The Catholic Church is the Kingdom of God, right now, present to me and all of us, but it’s not hidden; it’s really out in the open for all to see as the visible Catholic Church.

Several years after joining the Church, I volunteered to be a sponsor for my parish RCIA. I was paired with a young man

who told me his interest in the Catholic Church started after Pope John Paul II died. He told me how all the national and cable news stations were covering the Pope’s death and papal funeral almost twenty-four hours per day. He was so intrigued by this man and the impact he had made on the world that he wanted to learn more about the Catholic Church and this ultimately led him to RCIA. I thought it was ironic that as a child I was annoyed by the television coverage given to John Paul II’s election to the papacy but the television coverage of John Paul’s funeral moved my friend to conversion. I’m still amazed at the faith journey I have travelled and feel blessed to be a member

of the Catholic Church. I continue to look for ways to be the best Christian that I can be and to evangelize the world around me. I am currently trying to head out into the deep of St. John Paul’s Theology of the Body so that I may better share this message with my community. ■



DAVID PERRY is a practicing physician. He is married to his wife, Kathryn, and they have four children (14, 12, 9, 7) who all attend Catholic school. David and Kathryn host an ecumenical Christian small group. He has given lectures on Catholic medical ethics and has spoken on *The Theology of the Body and Humanae Vitae*. David is now serving as the RCIA coordinator for his parish, Sacred Heart Cathedral, in Knoxville, TN.

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