



November 2016 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Unto the House of the Lord

By Greg Westwood

I am the fourth of five children who grew up in what would today be called an Evangelical home, though we didn't call ourselves that. I don't remember us calling ourselves anything but Christians, though I was aware that while most of the kids in my neighborhood were Catholics, we were Protestants.

I don't recall hearing much, if anything, during my childhood or adolescence about *sola fide*, *sola Scriptura*, or the other doctrinal differences that sparked the Reformation. Rather, the differences, as I understood them, were more matters of culture and styles of worship. For example, Catholics thought it was OK to drink alcoholic beverages, but we didn't. Catholics had to eat fish on Fridays, but we could eat whatever we wanted then. (Though you didn't want to eat fish too often, or people might start to think you were Catholic!) I knew, too, that Catholic worship was much more complicated than ours, that they focused a lot on Mary, and that their churches were far more ornate. But on the whole, I don't recall much discussion of the different beliefs of Catholics versus Protestants. They were who they were, and we were who we were.

Please don't misunderstand me on this point: we were on friendly terms with our Catholic neighbors, and we did a lot together. Pretty much all of my friends were Catholic, since the hobby of the only other Protestant kid in the neighborhood was to throw rocks at me. (Though now that I think of it, a lot of the Catholic kids also threw rocks at me.) And we were always taught to have respect

for honest differences of opinion. But while Catholics could be fine people, and could probably get into heaven, the idea that they might actually be *right* about some of those differences didn't occur to me until I was into my teens.

In fact, the only real theological discussion I remember hearing my parents get into was with a Sunday school teacher from the Southern Baptist church we were attending at the time. As I recall, he was maintaining that all you needed for salvation was faith, while my father was adamant that you also had to live your faith by obeying what God commanded. Neither was Dad buying the Sunday school teacher's argument that Baptism was a nice thing to do, but not really required. Nor his claim that once you had been saved (provided you were *really* saved) you could do nothing that would cause you to lose your salvation.

Now I need to pause in my narrative again to make clear that I don't mean to paint a caricature, and I'm sure a trained Baptist theologian could make a far better case for Baptist beliefs than I remember the teacher making here. I'm just remembering fifty-plus years later how they sounded to a boy of six or seven. In any case, my parents eventually left the Baptist Church *Continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

and started attending an Independent Church of Christ/Christian Church.

For those of you who may not know, the Independent Churches of Christ/Christian Churches, the non-instrumentalist Churches of Christ, and the Disciples of Christ all grew out of the Restoration Movement led by Thomas Campbell, his son, Alexander Campbell, and Barton Stone. Believing that what they viewed as “man-made creeds” caused unnecessary and sinful division in the one Body of Christ, these men left their Presbyterian and Baptist pulpits during the Second Great Awakening in the early 19th century to restore Christianity to the way they thought it was practiced in the first century.

Their disdain for creeds is expressed in Alexander Campbell’s maxim, “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent,” while their desire for Christian unity can be summed up in their adoption of another saying of disputed origin, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” (Not that either of these principles is anything like a creedal statement.) In their view, Christianity should not be divided, as Christ intended for there to be one visible Church. (They did get some things right!) They believed that these creedal traditions divide, but that Christians could find common ground by following the practice of the early Church, as best as it can be determined. This search for visible unity and for biblical simplicity is also shown by their unwillingness to use names of human origin, such as “Methodist” or “Lutheran,” opting instead for what the Church was called in the Bible: the “Christian Church,” “Church of God,” or “Church of Christ.”

Unlike most other Protestant confessions, the Restorationist churches have historically believed in the efficacy and necessity of Baptism by water for salvation. Moreover, they put much more emphasis on the centrality of what they usually call “the

Lord’s Supper” than do most other Protestants. The particular congregation I left as I came into the Catholic Church called it “the central act of Christian worship.” So while the Restoration movement certainly doesn’t view Baptism or the Lord’s Supper as *sacraments* (they call them “divine ordinances”), there is enough similarity to Catholic belief here to make my own road to Rome a little shorter and less bumpy than it is for many Protestants.

As I moved out of childhood and into and through adolescence, I started thinking and behaving entirely too often in ways that give the word “adolescent” its bad name. Though I was still actively attending my church and its youth group, I was also becoming increasingly fascinated with the minds of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and other Eastern thinkers, and with girls. And I was finding all kinds of reasons not to believe in God — reasons that I was sure no one had ever thought of before, such as why, if He was all-good and all-powerful, He nevertheless allowed evil to exist.

Then one day, while feeding my inner nerd in a public library, I saw a book with a rather dirty and unattractive cover that I picked up, glanced at, and put back, then picked up, glanced at, and put back again, and again. I think this happened about five times. Today, I think my guardian angel must have been asking God, “What do I have to do? Hit him with it before he’ll take it?” The book was *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, and once I finally got around to reading it, I couldn’t put it down. I went on to read everything else by Lewis I could get my hands on. While not himself a Catholic, Lewis was nevertheless plainly in love with small-c catholic Christianity, and he was able to awaken in me just a little of that love. Meanwhile, I was still reading the Bible fairly often, though with no great devotion, care, or regularity. And one day I happened upon 1 Corinthians 3:11–15:

Continued on page 5 ➤

FEATURED RESOURCES

Deep in Scripture CD



In this *Deep in Scripture* program, Marcus Grodi and Kenneth Howell discuss the scriptural basis for prayer to the saints and for our departed loved ones. They examine relevant Scriptures and then turn to the tradition present in the early Church Fathers to see how the early Christians regarded such practices. They also discuss the meaning of Baptism and how Christians should respond to sin.

\$35

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

\$50

Receive *The Biblical Basis for Purgatory* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *The Biblical Basis for Purgatory* for a \$75 donation.



The Biblical Basis for Purgatory

— By John Salza

The Biblical Basis For Purgatory offers definitive scriptural explanation of this distinctively Catholic doctrine. Building on the teachings of Christ and St. Paul, this insightful book shows how the existence of a place of temporal punishment after death is not only a logical extension of what we know about the reality of sin and God’s justice, but is also a supreme expression of God’s love and mercy.

— 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 plus a bonus item each month!

How Do You Make Sense of Purgatory?

By Matt Swaim, Communications Coordinator

The question of purgatory is one that is an obstacle to many as they explore the claims of the Catholic Church. The powder keg of the Continental Reformation itself was touched off by Martin Luther's vigorous objections to Catholic teaching about this mysterious and misunderstood stage of the soul's purification.



Part of why so many object to the idea of purgatory has to do with the fact that many simply don't know what it actually is. Some think of purgatory as a third place you go if you're not holy enough for heaven and not bad enough for hell, while others think it's merely a spiritual holding cell where you wait until your living relatives post your bail through the practice of buying indulgences.

We asked our members as part of our weekly online community question about some of the best ways they heard purgatory explained so that it made sense to them. Many of them wrestled with this doctrine on their way into the Catholic Church and had great insights to share. Here are a few of our favorites:

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"Someone once said to me that when you die you come face to face with Jesus. At that moment you see the intense love that He has for you. When you experience that intense love, you are overwhelmed by thinking about all the ways that you failed Him. You think about all of the times that you had failed to love, like He loved you. Thinking of these things causes you pain because of what you had done and had failed to do. All you want is to make things right. You keep going over these hurts until you finally are freed from them by accepting God's mercy. That is purgatory."

DEACON MARTY, VIA THE CHNETWORK BLOG

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"A friend of mine explained it this way ... The people in purgatory want to be there. It's like if you imagine someone you really admire came to your front door early in the morning and you answered the door in your pajamas with your hair disheveled, not having brushed your teeth yet etc. You would ask the person to wait a minute while you got yourself cleaned up, then you would go to them when you were ready. Purgatory is where we will finish getting ourselves ready to meet Jesus if we don't finish in this life."

JESSA, VIA THE CHNETWORK BLOG

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"Being in purgatory is like being the crying toddler who knows he's been naughty so he must be in trouble. He keeps looking down because he's ashamed to look up. He's afraid that his Father will be really mad and punish him as much as he deserves. But God is the loving Father standing by with his arms outstretched saying, "Look up, my son." The Father is waiting to embrace him but the child remains suffering. The Father sees the suffering heart of his child and counts it as

being sufficient punishment for whatever he has done. The child wants to look up, but can't yet bring himself to do so. But the only way out of purgatory, is for the child to end his own suffering by fully accepting the love of his Father without holding any of his own love for anything else back (e.g. our idolatrous love of sin)."

BLIND DIDYMUS, CHNETWORK COMMUNITY FORUMS

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"One of the clearest explanations for me went something like this: if I went to heaven right now, would I really have yet developed a proper "taste" for it? Or do I, even though saved, still carry some baggage, some attachment to sin, some self-centeredness that would dim the light of heaven, at least for me, if not for others? Maybe it'll be gradual or maybe it'll be instantaneous, but there must be some kind of process to purge all that junk away before I'd be fit to really appreciate the joy of heaven."

GREG, VIA FACEBOOK

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"For me, the best thing I've ever heard is what Pope Benedict said in Spe Salvi 47. It's not about time, because purgatory is outside of the realm of creation, which means it's outside of time — rather it's about purification, like the purification bath that one needed in Judaism to be clean to approach the presence of God in the temple. This is what helped me get past the one thing that always hung me up about purgatory as a Protestant — the idea of counting days and years. That always seemed kind of petty for God, and in fact I think the idea of counting days and years is based more on a medieval credit model than on Scripture or the Church Fathers."

DR. JIM PAPANDREA, AUTHOR OF HANDED DOWN: THE CATHOLIC FAITH OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

As you can see, a stumbling block like the Church's teaching on purgatory becomes much more surmountable when it's explained by someone who has had to come to grips with it themselves, as so many of our members have.

Here's what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has to say about purgatory:

"All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned." (CCC, 1030-1031)

Essentially, purgatory is a hopeful place — all who are there are on the path to heaven. As St. Catherine of Siena ponders, “I do not think that apart from the felicity of heaven, there can be a joy comparable to that experienced by the souls in purgatory. An incessant communication from God renders their joy more vivid from day to day: and this communication becomes more and more intimate, to the extent that it consumes the obstacles still existing in the soul.”

In this month of November, dedicated to the Holy Souls in purgatory, let us pray for them, that they may attain the fullness of eternal fellowship with the Godhead, and that we ourselves may join them in the life to come. ■

CHN Community QUESTIONS

Be sure to subscribe to CHNetwork.org/blog and participate in our weekly CHN Community Questions!

Have you checked out the new CHNetwork RCIA Resource page?

chnetwork.org/RCIA

The Coming Home Network International would like to invite those who are involved with the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) to journey along with our members and take advantage of the wealth of resources we’ve developed in our 20+ years of helping people into the Catholic Church.

Our brand new landing page at CHNetwork.org/RCIA is designed to equip those of you going through the RCIA process, sponsoring someone into the Church, or leading an RCIA class this Fall. The majority of our members have experienced RCIA as part of their own journeys, and in light of those experiences we believe that the conversion stories, fellowship opportunities, and other resources that the CHNetwork has to offer make a perfect complement to the class.

MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

November 5, 2016

Annual Catholic Men's Fellowship Spirit 2016 Conference
Diocese of Allentown, PA | cmfda.org

Here are some of the things you'll find when you visit CHNetwork.org/RCIA:

- Quick access to our 20 year archive of episodes of *The Journey Home*, featuring full-length video interviews with members from a variety of faith backgrounds, as well as written conversion stories, interviews, and many articles, videos, and podcasts addressing questions common to those wanting to know more about the Catholic Church.
- An invitation to join our online community forums and groups, where other converts and those who are preparing to join the Catholic Church are readily accessible to be spiritual companions on your journey.
- Easy registration as a member of the CHNetwork in order to receive our FREE CHNewsletter, FREE eBooks from the CHNetwork library, and a FREE copy of our *Read the Bible and Catechism in a Year* guide.

We're continuing to build the best possible network of fellowship and resources for seekers of truth who find themselves drawn toward the Catholic Faith, and our new RCIA welcome page is one more important part of that effort.

Please share this exciting new resource with your pastor, your parish secretary, your parish's RCIA team, and anyone you know who might be interested — and let them know it's easy to find by visiting chnetwork.org/RCIA! ■

WHAT IS THE CHNETWORK?

The Coming Home Network International was established to help non-Catholic Christians, clergy and laity, discover the beauty and truth of the Catholic Church.

Through the one-on-one outreach of our pastoral staff and volunteers, our monthly CHNewsletter, regional retreats, social media, and through the online community forums and groups at our website CHNetwork.org, we strive to ensure that each person touched by grace has fellowship and resources for their journey of continual conversion to Jesus Christ.



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The Coming Home
Network International



www.chnetwork.org

Criteria For Unity

By Dr. Kenneth Howell

"Criteria For Unity"	
By Dr. Kenneth Howell	A
"From the Hermitage: The Coming of Christ"	
By Br. Rex Anthony Norris	C
Prayer List	D

This month begins the 499th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. As we enter this year, and prayerfully consider what we need to do by grace to help heal this division between brothers and sisters, we're presenting below a condensed version of the Epilogue that Dr. Kenneth Howell wrote for our publication of Karl Adam's *Roots of the Reformation* (available at chnetwork.org).

1) Seeing the need for unity

The social evils of our day, increasingly prevalent since the 1960s, have had much the same effect on Catholics and Protestants in the United States. We are witnessing an unprecedented cooperation between them in fighting against the social evils of abortion, euthanasia, and sexual license. It seems that the disintegration of the society around them has moved Christians to address the need for a more united witness of the Gospel, much as a similar disintegration affected German Christians during the 1940s.

2) Desiring unity

Seeing the need for unified witness, however, does not solve the problem of how to bring about that unity. The problem of Christian unity often seems intractable. Even though many seek it, it always seems to be beyond the grasp of well-intended efforts. Why is unity among Christians so hard to achieve? In a very real sense, the answer to that question is simple. To use the words of the Apostle James in his letter, "You have not because you ask not" (James 4:2). Unity must become an overwhelming desire for every Christian, a consuming passion that motivates each one. Our Lord Jesus commended the example of the persistent widow who pestered the judge to give her relief from her oppressor (Luke 18:1ff). A prayerful passion for unity, an intense seeking of the heavenly Father's gift provides the key. Unity among Christians, like every aspect of God's will, finds its answer in Jesus' promise, "Seek and you will find" (Matthew 7:7).

Yet desire for unity is not enough. We must know where the path to unity lies, and why we have not been able to find it ... [I see] two pressing needs for the Catholic Church and all Christians: the need for divine grace and the need for repentance from past sins and injustices.

3) The need for divine grace

Our lack of unity as Christians derives not only from a deficit of effective methods or clever organization, but also from the poverty of divine grace within our lives. While honest and open dialogue is necessary, while organizational questions must be considered, in the end unity only comes

about as a result of Christians being filled with grace. The teaching of Christ Himself must penetrate more deeply into every Christian heart, for "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). If He is truly the vine, the source of all grace, then we the branches must take our sustenance from Him. It is this grace of the Redeemer's divine life that will unite people torn by distrust and suspicion. Every layman, every priest, every bishop, in short, every member of Christ's Mystical Body must be "full of grace" (Luke 1:28). And it is in this need that we find Mary, Jesus' mother, as an example of believing simplicity. Her consent to God's will in her life (see Luke 1:38) provides a perfect example of how God's desires can accomplish great things when those desires live in the hearts of God's redeemed children.

The only way to become "full of grace" is to be nourished by divine grace through word and sacrament. If we had Jesus here with us in person, simply doing as He asks could immediately unify us. If we had questions of doctrine, we could ask Him and His divine judgment would stand. Yet Catholics and many Protestants believe that Jesus is here on earth today! All traditional Christians believe that Jesus speaks to us through His word, the Bible. The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed an ancient Catholic belief that the Sacred Scriptures are the very "soul of theology." This high confidence in the authority of the Scriptures explains the prominent place of the Gospels in Catholic liturgy and in the liturgies of many Protestant communions. The Gospels put us in touch with the historical Jesus who is one and the same as the living resurrected Christ. This same Christ is present to us through His instruction within the Church as the Church is fed on the Scriptures.

Christ is preeminently present to us through the sacraments. The sacraments provide us with an additional opportunity to be "filled with grace" by bringing us not only the teaching of Christ but also the divine life of the Savior. Why did Christ give us the sacraments and especially the Eucharist? He knew that human efforts alone could not achieve the will of the Father. Since we could do nothing without Him, He determined to give us His life through the channels of grace called the sacraments. The greatest

Member's Section November 2016 CHNewsletter

Member's Section November 2016 CHNewsletter

Prayer List



Clergy

- For Leonard, a non-denominational minister, that his wife be healed of her physical ailments.
- For a former United Church of Christ seminarian, that the Holy Spirit would grant him the gift of faith once more.
- For an Anglican nun, that the Lord would guide her as she begins to seriously investigate the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- For Connor, a former Anglican seminarian, that his curiosity about the Catholic Faith would guide him home to the Church.
- For John, an Anglican priest, that our Lord Jesus would guide him to a job so that he may support his family and also become Catholic.
- For Emily, an Evangelical missionary in India, that her mother may come to accept her becoming a Catholic Christian.
- For Fred, a retired minister in Arizona, that the Holy Spirit would convert his questions to convictions.
- For a Calvary Chapel minister, that God would lead him to the fullness of the faith in the ancient Catholic Church of the Apostles.
- For an Assembly of God minister in Missouri, that the witness of his friend would guide him to full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ For Anne, an Evangelical minister, that her RCIA classes would enrich her faith in Jesus and guide her to the Easter Sacraments.

■ For Richard, a Baptist minister in the south, that the Holy Spirit would guide him back to the Catholic Faith of his youth.

■ For a Jehovah's Witness elder in Canada, that the Lord Jesus would grant him grace and courage as he journeys home to the Catholic Church.

Lay

■ For Troy as he goes through RCIA and is hoping to come into full communion with the Church this coming Easter, that the Holy Spirit will work in his life in a powerful way.

■ For Cindy and her family to be able to proceed with their desire to become Catholic and move past the obstacles they have encountered in their journey.

■ For Cathy who is discouraged in her journey, that she be able to connect with a caring priest who can help guide her towards the Church.

■ For Mary who is beginning RCIA, that she find good local Catholic support since most of her knowledge of the Church has come from reading and watching *The Journey Home*.

■ For Jeremy that his journey towards the Church be blessed and smooth.

■ For a Methodist in Missouri who isn't able to attend RCIA on account of personal reasons, that she continue to go forward with her journey.

■ For a Southern Baptist in North Carolina who is troubled and confused about Marian doctrines, that she come to better understand the role of Mary in our faith life.

■ For Edward who thinks that Catholics are deluded and misguided, that through God's abiding grace he once again be drawn towards the Church.

■ For Debbie that she be able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist and for her husband's heart to be softened towards her desire to be fully Catholic.

■ For an Evangelical in Ohio to be able to proceed with his longing to be Catholic.

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 or general descriptions 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

November 7

Lynda and David Murphy*
Former Baptist and Vineyard Christian Fellowship

November 14

Paul Bennett*
Former Presbyterian Church USA

November 21

Deacon Patrick Lappert*
Convert from Judaism

November 28

Doug Beaumont*
Former Evangelical

To access the full archive of past Journey Home programs go to chnetwork.org/journey-home.

*Schedule is subject to change.

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — each man’s work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

“Wow!” I thought, “That sounds a lot like what I hear the Catholics call purgatory!” Not much later, I read in the same epistle, this time from chapter 11, verses 23–30:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

That didn’t sound to me as if St. Paul saw the Lord’s Supper as a merely symbolic re-enactment, but as if it were something much more than that, though I couldn’t quite make out what. At any rate, it was beginning to look as if maybe some of these “mere human traditions” really had a divine basis. A few seeds had been planted in some pretty dry ground. It would be much later before fruit became visible.

I hadn’t paid enough attention in my high school biology class to know that abortion kills an already living human being, but the fact that it destroyed *potential* human life (as I thought it to be) was enough to shock me when I first heard about the *Roe v. Wade* decision. “What kind of a people are we becoming,” I thought, “when we start to think we have the right to take such a thing out of God’s hands and into our own?” I wish I could say that my outrage led me to learn more about abortion and maybe even to try to combat it in some way, but at this stage of my life, I let my own interests and concerns crowd out any active concern I might have felt for the destruction of this “potential human

life.” The most I was willing to do was to offer a very muted and almost apologetic demurral when someone defended the practice in my presence.

Nevertheless, meager as it was, my pro-life inclination did do two things. First, it fostered in me a new respect for the Catholic Church, which stood fast in her defense of life when so many other Christian communions were succumbing to the spirit of the age, and which had taught so many of the leading lights in the pro-life movement. Second, it led me in my senior year of college to accept the invitation of a very intelligent and lovely young woman to accompany her and others on a bus trip to a convention in Milwaukee. The convention was of a group called “Life is For Everyone,” and Richard John Neuhaus (who was still a Lutheran pastor at the time, and with whose work I was slightly familiar) was to be the main speaker. The lovely young woman was Paula Richards, who a year or so later consented to become my wife.

Since this is my story, and not hers, I’ll just say that she grew up in a Christian home, and had been active in several Protestant denominations. After our wedding, she and I attended the United Methodist Church in which we were married and in which her parents were active. We both liked the music. (It’s hard to beat those Wesley brothers when it comes to hymnody.) And the style of worship, which was somewhat more liturgical than what I had grown up with, appealed to me as well. However, when the Methodist bishops, with little or no dissent, passed a resolution in support of the abortion license, we transferred our membership to the Christian Church I had grown up in, and in which my dad and one of my brothers served as elders. (If this leads you to think that differences in doctrine between the various Protestant denominations were not particularly important to us, you would be right. But that would eventually change.)

For the next twenty years or so we were quite active in the church, teaching Sunday school classes to the kids and leading Sunday evening youth groups. Since we weren’t especially happy with the published curriculum we were given, Paula wrote her own, which our pastor read and approved for use in the classes she taught. I was made a deacon, we made some good friends, and in short, we thought we had found the church that would bury us when our time came. As I said, doctrinal distinctives were not high on our list of priorities at the time. But Paula’s and my theological views were being shaped ever so slowly by our reading of Catholic and Orthodox authors, and by our interaction with Catholics and other Christians in the pro-life movement.

One person especially deserving of mention in this context was Chris Chambers, who was our mentor as we began sidewalk counseling in front of an abortion mill on Jefferson Avenue. He engaged me in several fascinating theological discussions and lent us a book called *Surprised by Truth*, which was edited by Patrick Madrid, containing the stories of converts to the Catholic Faith. I highly recommend it.

This kind of interaction between Christians of different denominations working together in pro-life action, in free stores,

...Journeys Home Continued...

in homeless shelters, in prison ministries, and in other areas, has sometimes been called the “ecumenism of the trenches” and I can vouch for its ability to bring Christians at least a little closer together. If you’re interested, you can read more about that in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, jointly edited by the late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus and his Baptist friend, Chuck Colson. That’s another book I highly recommend.

Through these influences, and through our continued reading of Scripture, Paula and I gradually came to cobble together some rather vague beliefs that bore a dim and distorted similarity to Catholic teaching. We thought that maybe, when a believer partook of communion, Christ became really and materially present within the believer. We thought that there had to be some kind of purging process after death, since few, if any, of us are quite pure enough to stand in the presence of God immediately after we die. We believed that Baptism was not just a sign, but actually worked, through the power of God, an inner change on a person, making him a new creature in Christ.

While we were aware that our thinking was a bit out of sync with the majority of our fellow worshippers, we didn’t worry too much about that. Within the limits of fallen humanity, we all loved the Lord, we all tried to live Christian lives, we prayed together, played together, and helped each other through the various challenges of life. Our minister’s sermons gave wise counsel on how to be disciples and how to effectively love God and one another. You could do a lot worse than that, and I remain grateful to, and fond of, the fine ministers and others who helped us in so many ways to grow in the Christian life.

But around the mid ‘90s we quit teaching kids and began to attend a Bible study for adults, which I also sometimes led. Because many of the study guides we used were written by teachers who were far more explicitly Protestant and Calvinistic in their orientation than Paula and I were, we were forced to confront head-on the causes for the 16th century schism known as the Reformation. We were already familiar with the doctrine held by many Protestants of *sola fide* (“faith alone,”), but we had thought it was a minority opinion, and saw little scriptural evidence to support it. What we learned for the first time was that for the Reformers, this doctrine was, in the words of Martin Luther, the article on which the true Church rises or falls. In

fact, this was the doctrine that, more than any other, was used to try to justify splitting Christ’s Body yet again, after already being so wounded by the great East-West schism of the 11th century. We began to think, “If this is indeed the foundation on which the churches that grew directly or indirectly out of the Reformation are built, and if that foundation was as shaky as we have seen it to be, maybe the whole split ought never to have happened at all.”

We began to search more intently for the truth in these matters, mainly through our reading of Scripture, but also from other sources: books and magazines; EWTN, Sacred Heart radio (our local EWTN affiliate); discussions with our Sunday school classmates and others; and (for me, though not for Paula) through some internet forums where such things were discussed.

One of the things our particular denomination stressed was the idea that “where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent.” It became increasingly clear to us, however, that far from being true, this was not even coherent, since the maxim itself is nowhere found or implied in Scripture. Rather, in 1 Timothy 3:15, the Bible itself teaches that the Church is

“the *household of God*, which is the *church of the living God*, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.” Moreover, Ephesians 3:10–11 says that His intent was that, “through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I began to think that if it is through the Church that heaven’s rulers and authorities are taught, then maybe the Church might have some things to teach me as well. What was even more important, she has the *authority* to teach me. I had read many times St. Peter’s saying that “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20 KJV) but now it was beginning to hit home. I began to think that, by “private interpretation,” St. Peter must have meant any interpretation that was not delivered through the Church, and that finding two or three, or a hundred, thousand, or million who agreed with a given interpretation didn’t make it any less private.

But that presented a problem. In order to receive the authoritative teaching of the Church, we must first be able to *identify* the Church. I couldn’t see how a Church that was at most invisibly

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...Journeys Home Continued...

united could teach authoritatively, nor did it any longer seem at all plausible to me that the Church went off the rails early in the 2nd century, recovered sufficiently in the 4th century to deliver the canon of Scripture, and then wandered in a Roman desert until the Reformers corrected the canon and paved the way for the Church's full recovery in 19th century Kentucky.

What, then, were the plausible candidates for a Church which was one, holy, catholic, and apostolic? The question almost answered itself, though I did spend some time looking at the claims of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. While I saw much of great spiritual goodness, truth, and beauty in those Churches, the bulk of evidence from the early Church Fathers appeared to support early acceptance of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

As it became clear how far our views were diverging from those of our classmates, and how much that divergence was causing distress in some of those classmates, with sadness we decided to leave that class. We still attended the morning worship services and remained involved in several activities. But the hour we used to spend in adult Bible study, and in which our two daughters still living at home attended Sunday school, was now spent in a nearby Catholic church trying to learn what the Mass was all about.

This went on for maybe a year, and the discomfort caused by our growing distance from our old church became ever harder to bear. At length, we made an appointment with our pastor to tell him that we were thinking of becoming Catholic. Bear in mind that this was a man whom I had known and admired for over thirty years, and that Paula had known and admired for about twenty. (We both retain our respect, admiration, and love for this man and for many others there today.) It was not an easy interview for any of us. He told us that, while he had welcomed many former Catholics, we were the first to move in the other direction in his long practice of the ministry.

Over the next few weeks, the pastor and I engaged in several e-mail exchanges. They revealed that, despite his long experience, intelligence, and good education, his knowledge of what the Catholic Church really teaches was lacking in several respects. Finding his arguments and his replies to my arguments unpersuasive, we finally decided to make the final break. We began looking into how one goes about formally entering the Catholic Church.

We asked a Catholic friend for recommendations for a good Catholic priest to shepherd us through the process. I had already met one of those priests, Fr. Paul Berschied, a few years earlier, and I knew him to be actively pro-life, so Paula and I began attending St. Cecilia's Church in Independence, Kentucky. Our two daughters still living at home, Abigail and Mary, were required to attend Mass with us, but as they were both in their teens, we thought that beyond that requirement, they were of an age to decide for themselves what path to take. Since they were still very attached to the church we had been attending, we made long and hurried drives back after Mass to get them to their Sunday school classes.

Paula and I enrolled in both St. Cecilia's RCIA program and in a course on basic Catholic doctrine taught by Fr. Philip DeVous at the Catholic Center in Erlanger, Kentucky. Meanwhile, Fr. Berschied very graciously offered to talk to Abigail and Mary, as well as to our eldest child, Rachel, and answer their questions, even though they were not yet considering entering the Church themselves. Though all three of them came to love Fr. Berschied, I can't imagine how he managed the first couple of talks, where all three daughters were somewhat tongue-tied and perhaps even a little resentful of the upheaval their parents' shocking behavior was causing the family.

My mom and dad had pretty much agreed with our earliest moves toward Catholicism, probably because neither we nor they recognized these for what they in fact turned out to be. And since Dad had passed away in November of 2000, he was spared the pain of our final break with the congregation he loved and had helped found. However, several difficult conversations still had to be worked through as we broke the news to my mother and to Paula's parents, as well as to my brothers, who were both elders in our former denomination, though in different cities. My mother died in 2007, and though she never quite reconciled herself to our move, neither did she ever waver in her love for us. We likewise remain close to both Paula's and my side of our family, though we are saddened that, so far, none of them has shown any interest in entering the Church themselves.

Paula and I were received into the Church at Easter Vigil 2005. Our joy, though tempered by the impending death of Pope John Paul II, and by the recent legalized killing of Terri Schiavo, was nevertheless great. Like so many others before us, we echoed and continue to echo the words of the Psalmist, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.'" A year later, at Easter Vigil 2006, all three of our daughters joined us in the Church Christ Himself established. God is indeed good. ■



GREG WESTWOOD is a retired business analyst and systems analyst. His wife, Paula, is Executive Director of Right to Life of Greater Cincinnati, and a weekly contributor to EWTN's "Son Rise Morning Show." He and Paula have three married daughters, Rachel, Abigail, and Mary, three well-beloved sons-in-law, Darren, Luke, and Alex, and a grandson who has yet to make his presence known to the wider world. Greg and Paula are blessed to be parishioners at St. Anthony Church in Taylor Mill, Kentucky, under the able leadership of Fr. Matt Cushing.

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