



## June 2017 CHNewsletter

“No Longer Adrift”  
By Dr. Joseph Johnson ..... 1

Featured Resources ..... 2

“Why Did the Reformation Happen?  
Part 5: Welcome to the Modern World”  
By Kenneth Hensley ..... 3

# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## No Longer Adrift

By Dr. Joseph Johnson

A native of South Carolina and the last of five children, I was raised in a Southern Baptist home. My mother was brought up in the Baptist tradition; my father in the Pentecostal Holiness Church. My father became Baptist in 1973, when I was two, so the home that I grew up in was markedly pious — somewhat different from the generically religious home of my siblings. I was converted at a Baptist revival meeting at age eight and later baptized in a lake at age 13. We were in church any time the door was open.

### Generically Evangelical

Our church split when I was 12, and my family migrated to a small, non-denominational church plant. The pastor was a former Assemblies of God minister, and his theological views came through in his sermons. We had been in the Charismatic movement while we were Baptist, so the migration to a non-denominational church wasn't difficult. Because doctrinal concerns are not a priority among non-denominationalists, it never occurred to me that the interpretation of the Bible by the minister often determined or influenced the beliefs of the congregants.

My family always emphasized a personal relationship with Jesus Christ — to know Him and follow Him. We were part of several churches growing up, but my parents always told me to go where I believed Jesus was leading me. My assumption was that a personal relationship with God through Jesus was all that was necessary to go to heaven, so the particular church you belonged to was irrelevant. I had never thought that Catholics were not Christians (I had Catholic relatives). I believed they were misguided, yes, but clearly part of the Christianity that I shared in.

### Jewish Christianity

I entered Lander University in 1989 as an engineering major, though I was terrible at math. While there, I discovered the philosophy and religion section of the library and developed an interest in early Christianity and its relationship to Judaism. After several conversations with the religion professor, I moved to Emmanuel College in the fall of 1991. In my studies of Church history and Judaism, I found a large Jewish Christian community in Roswell, GA that welcomed non-Jewish Christians.

These Jewish Christians receive various non-flattering labels, since most other Christians consider them to be theologically confused. Yet something resonated in me, perhaps because Jesus and His disciples were Jews and practiced Judaism. The non-Jewish worshippers in the synagogue were invited (never compelled) to adopt the customs of Judaism. The unspoken assumption was belief in Yeshua (Jesus), but the important thing was to practice *His religion*. So I lived my life as much as possible as a religious Jew who believed in Yeshua.

Continued on page 2 ➡

Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

Nevertheless, during my time in college, I began to evaluate my beliefs. In this conservative, Pentecostal college, I wrestled with issues of biblical inerrancy, classical and Reformation theology, and Existentialism. I began to read on my own (contrary to my professors' advice) the writings of Schleiermacher, Bultmann, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Heidegger, Nietzsche, the Neibuhrs, Brunner, Barth, Moltmann, and Pannenberg. I became convinced that the Bible was historically inaccurate and unreliable; I denied original sin and embraced a modalist view of the Trinity and Kantian skepticism. As my theological and philosophical views were becoming increasingly Existential, my moral principles were becoming compromised. I started drinking, smoking, and using profanity. I became a libertine, while believing all along in the goodness, innocence, and responsibility of man; I was, of course, none of those things.

C.S. Lewis's books helped me out of that quagmire. My skepticism faded away as I read what has been dubbed the "Moral Proof" for the existence of God in *Mere Christianity*. My problem with evil was alleviated through reading his little book, *The Problem of Pain*, which is sketched out autobiographically in his memoirs of the death of his wife, Joy (*A Grief Observed*). Like Lewis, I came to believe in God again, but no longer considered myself an Evangelical, although I still held onto a mild observance of my Jewish ritual life.

### The Reformed Tradition

My religious views began to change again in the fall of 1995, when I enrolled at Erskine Theological Seminary to pursue a Master of Arts degree in Theological Studies. In the spring of 1996, I married my college sweetheart, Toby Hall. God had put up with my liberalism until that time, when I was introduced to the new theology professor. We developed a great friendship, and his courses challenged my liberal opinions. This was the beginning of my journey into the Reformed faith.

Reformed theology was initially associated with the former priest, Ulrich Zwingli, and later associated with the French attorney, John Calvin. Calvin's best-known contribution to the Reform was the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

The controlling theme for Calvin is the sovereignty of God over His creation — particularly the doctrine of election, or predestination. The so-called "Five Points of Calvinism" are a later development from the controversy in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Another of Calvin's foundational doctrines is his emphasis on the covenant as the primary means through which God has worked with His people and in the world. This continuity with ancient Israel in terms of covenant oaths and amendments has become a hallmark of Reformed thinking. It was Calvin's covenant theology that slowly drew me away from my Jewish observances, as I now understood that Jesus, the giver of the New Covenant, had updated the terms of the "new agreement."

Covenant theology reinforced my understanding of the Church's government. My "mere evangelicalism" gave way to a more historically connected view of the Church. It was now not merely "Jesus and me." I came to believe what St. Cyprian had written in *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, "You cannot have God for your Father if you do not have the Church for your mother .... God is one and Christ is one, and his Church is one; one is the faith, and one is the people cemented together by harmony into the strong unity of a body." Calvin had written about this plainly in the *Institutes* (4.1.i):

I shall start, then, with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the

*Continued on page 5* ➤

## FEATURED RESOURCES



### Deep in Scripture CD

Tim Staples, Director of Apologetics at Catholic Answers and former Assemblies of God youth minister, joins Marcus Grodi to tackle the question of faith and works that is a point of contention between so many Christians. In some places, it seems the Scriptures tell us that we must do things to be saved but in other places, it seems there's nothing we can **do** to be saved. Tim and Marcus give great insight into the Catholic perspective on the topic of justification.



### Navigating the Tiber: How to Help your Friends and Family Journey Towards the Catholic Church — By Devin Rose

In *Navigating the Tiber*, Devin Rose draws from his own experience as a convert and Catholic apologist to help guide conversations with your Protestant friends and family members with whom you are sharing your Catholic Faith. Not only does he equip you with the knowledge — from Scripture, the early Church, and Christian history — needed to answer their questions and challenges, he shows you how to deal with the common aspects of a convert's journey, including:

- The best subjects to talk about — and avoid — plus the right order to put them in
- The five biggest non-doctrinal problems that keep Protestants out of the Church
- What to do when their anti-Catholic friends pressure them
- Adapting your efforts to their particular Protestant tradition
- The importance of continual prayer and friendship, whether they convert or not

\$35

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# Why Did the Reformation Happen?

## PART 5: WELCOME TO THE MODERN WORLD

By Kenneth Hensley, Pastoral Care & Resources Consultant



In this brief series we've been working on two central questions: What was the Reformation? And why did it happen?

In "What Was the Reformation?" I argued that at its

heart the Reformation was a dispute over the issue of authority. In short, the separation that occurred at that time between Catholic and Protestant was a separation between those who continued to embrace the spiritual authority of the Catholic Church and those who rejected that authority to stand on the authority, ultimately, of their own interpretation of Scripture and the Fathers of the Church.

There's more to it, of course. But that's the heart of the disagreement. And it remains the heart of the disagreement to this day.

There are now many, many Protestant sects and denominations and independent movements and churches and more coming into existence all the time. And while they disagree with one another on a whole range of issues, both doctrinal and moral, there is something upon which there is perfect agreement among them:

- Jesus did *not* establish a Church with the authority to decide matters of faith and practice.
- And if He did, it no longer exists.
- And if it does exist, it certainly isn't the Catholic Church!

The spirit of Protestantism expresses itself like this: God has given us His Word in the holy Scriptures. He's put His Spirit in our hearts. He's given us pastors and teachers to assist us in understanding the holy Scriptures. What more do we need? This is what the Reformation was at its heart.

### The Stage is Set

So why did it happen? And why did it happen *when* it happened?

After all, at the time Luther and Calvin and the other Reformers came on the scene, the Catholic Church had held its position of spiritual authority for a very long time. The 16th century of Christian history was underway! Why that precise moment and not the 15th century, or 14th, or 12th, or some other?

Let me quickly summarize what we've seen in our earlier articles.

It turns out there were a number of historical, cultural, societal, and spiritual forces that in the late 15th and early 16th centuries were literally driving the world in the direction of the explosion that was to occur.

1. There was the invention of the printing press resulting in a dramatic increase in literacy as, for the first time in history, inexpensive tracts, pamphlets, and books became available to the average person.
2. There was an explosion of new theological ideas.
3. Colleges and universities and faculties of theology were springing up throughout Catholic Europe.
4. There was the rise of an educational philosophy that made fun of the "overly philosophical" theology of the official

Doctors of the late Medieval Church and advocated a return to the "pure" study of the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Church Fathers.

5. There was a growing spirit of individualism that expressed itself in an emphasis on religion as something personal and in resentment of centralized authority, not only in the Church but in the state as well. Nations were on the rise. Anti-papal sentiment was flourishing.
6. Finally, there was a Catholic hierarchy in desperate need of spiritual and moral reform. To quote Pope Adrian VI, writing at the time of the Reformation,

We know that for years there have been many abominable offences in spiritual matters and violations of the Commandments committed at this Holy See, yes, that everything has in fact been perverted ... The first thing that must be done is to reform the curia, the origin of all the evil. (Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, p. 139)

### Enter Martin Luther

Now, for those of you wondering if I would ever get around to it, no, I'm not discounting the role of men like Martin Luther who disputed the very teaching of the Church. I'm not arguing that real, meaningful, substantive disagreement about Christian doctrine *wasn't* a crucial factor in the Reformation. It was.

What I'm arguing is that when Luther emerged onto the stage of history, he emerged onto a stage that was in nearly every way imaginable prepared for the role he was to play. Or to use a different metaphor, Luther didn't "cause" the Reformation any more than a



man who strikes a match in a room filled with gas can be said to have "caused" a fire. The atmosphere had already been created. All that was needed to burn down Christendom was a single spark.

Enter one Augustinian monk and Scripture scholar, matchbook in hand.

### Welcome to the Modern World

While thinking through the various historical and cultural forces that were driving the world in the direction of the explosion that was to take place and that we refer to now as the Reformation, a thought occurred to me: I recognize each of these forces. This is the world in which we still live.

I've simply described our modern world!

And it's true. In fact, I think it's fair to say that what brought about the Reformation was the birth of the modern world. But now some five centuries have passed (500 years exactly since Luther first made his stand) and we find ourselves living in a world in which the trends of thought and feeling that led to the Reformation in the 16th century have become nothing less than established assumptions of contemporary life.

Talk about an explosion of theological ideas and points of view! I believe it was Chesterton who once commented that when people cease believing in God, rather than believing in nothing it appears that they will believe in *anything*. Well, look around. Even within Christianity there are as many views now as there are heads, to paraphrase a complaint Luther himself once made.

Talk about individualism and an emphasis on religion as something personal, even private. And again, forget the world in general; all one has to do is witness the slow demise of confessional forms of Christianity in the West and the simultaneous growth of independent Christian fellowships whose only doctrinal position appears to be something along the lines of “me and Jesus.”

Distrust of authority? We see this within Christianity and within the political sphere, but the trend goes much deeper. Read Allan Bloom’s *Closing of the American Mind*. We live at a time when the authority of reason itself is distrusted in favor of “what I feel,” when one can stand up and say “two plus two equals four” or “triangles must have three sides” and know that someone is sure to respond, “Well, that may be your opinion...”

A Church in need of spiritual renewal? The situation today may be not be nearly so bad as at the time of the Reformation, but there’s always the need for reform.

## Conclusion

In so many ways, I can see that my own conversion to Catholicism involved swimming upstream against each of these currents.

I remember wandering into the local Christian bookstore as a young believer, eager to learn the teachings of Christianity, only to face the harsh realization that the teachings of Christianity really must be described in the plural — the “teachings.” I quickly discovered that there were a lot of different views as to what the true teachings of Christianity are.

But being a child of the modern world, for many years as a Christian I viewed it as a definite sign of humility that everyone had his own opinion and no one held his opinion to be “authoritative” or “binding” on anyone else. The only historic Christian Church that made that absurd claim was the Catholic Church, and everyone I knew assumed that Catholicism was some sort of strange and arrogant throwback to a time when everyone just blindly followed.

And of course, this led very naturally to a belief that if one wanted to learn the true doctrines of Christianity, one wouldn’t listen to

some authoritative Church or Creed or Council or Tradition (What? Are you insane?). What one would do is go back to the sources, *ad fontes*, “back to the fountain.” Basically, one would study the Bible and *decide for oneself*.

Can you see why it might be more natural for modern believers in Christ to be Protestant than to be Catholic, more natural for Protestants to be independents than to be Anglican or Lutheran? After all, the more one moves down the chain from Catholic to “Bible only” Christianity, the more one’s Christianity “fits” these basic assumptions of modernity, which gave rise to the Reformation and have since become woven into the very fabric of how we see the world.

Because of this, for me becoming Catholic involved going against the grain of how I had come to think about many things. It almost seems like a miracle — a miracle I thank the Lord for each and every day. ■

## NEWSLETTER DONATION

The CHNewsletter is our primary means of outreach and communication within the CHNetwork. We ask that members consider making a yearly tax-deductible gift in the amount of \$35 or more to continue receiving the newsletter.

## WATCH & SHARE DEEP IN HISTORY CONFERENCE TALKS



The CHNetwork is excited to be making available talks from our past Deep in History conferences

on our website. Be sure to visit [chnetwork.org/deep-in-history/](http://chnetwork.org/deep-in-history/) for the newest releases. We plan to have all the talks available by the end of 2017!

## 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](http://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



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# What Sets the Catholic Church Apart From All Other Christian Traditions?

By Marcus Grodi

"What Sets the Catholic Church Apart From All Other Christian Traditions?" By Marcus Grodi ..... A

Fall Retreat in Orlando, Florida.....B

CHNetwork Staff Interview.....C

Over Holy Week, I had the great privilege of attending all the Masses in the beautiful cathedral in Toledo, OH. I attended the Chrism Mass on Wednesday, and watched as all the priests and deacons of our diocese processed in together with our bishop. Before the consecration of the oils, we witnessed the priests reaffirm their priestly vows. It was a glorious celebration!

On Holy Thursday, we gathered to celebrate the gift of the Eucharist and the ordination of the Apostles as *Alter Christus* — as His priests consecrated to celebrate the sacrifice of His Body and Blood. It was also a celebration of the apostolic succession that continues this consecration and sacrifice in His Mystical Body until He comes again in glory. It was a glorious celebration!

On Good Friday, we gathered to commemorate His death on the cross — His sacrifice for our sins. We venerated this instrument of death, which by grace has become the instrument of our salvation. And we left in darkened silence. It was a glorious celebration!

Saturday was a somber day as we reflected on His absence from the world, as He visited and released those trapped in death. Then late in the evening we gathered on the front steps of the cathedral by the fire — reminiscent of the courtyard fire where Peter once denied knowing his Lord. With candles lit, we processed behind the bishop and the cross, into a lit sanctuary, celebrating the resurrection of our Lord and Savior! The bells rang joyously; we heard the story of our salvation read from the Scriptures; several gained rebirth through Baptism, and then with several more candidates they were received into full communion with the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. It was a glorious celebration!

And then on Easter morning I attended my local parish, and the number of attendees was so great that a separate additional Mass was needed in the gymnasium. And even with this, I had to stand along the back wall. Why so many? Because He is risen! He is risen indeed! The entire weekend was a glorious celebration!

I did something else on Easter morning — it's kind of a secret. Sometimes, after I've gone to Sunday Mass, I attend services at a local non-Catholic Christian church. I do this primarily as a visiting onlooker — to keep my memory fresh of how our separated brethren worship our common Lord.

I don't just attend churches connected with my own past — Lutheran, Congregational, or Presbyterian; I visit churches of other traditions. I want to understand and witness how God mercifully shares His grace and brings people to faith outside the walls of the Catholic Church.

So on this Easter morning, between the Easter Vigil and the morning Easter Mass, I went to an independent "mega-church" where I know many of my old friends and high school classmates attend. They have all abandoned their childhood denominational church traditions and enthusiastically joined this new brand of evangelical Christianity. They worship in the large packed auditorium seating well over a thousand, and it was, also, glorious — but of course in a different way. The music was contemporary with drums and electric guitars, and the two lead singers were as good as any professionals I have ever heard. The entire experience was a brilliant, closely choreographed media presentation of the Easter gospel message of the cross. The entire hour-long experience, including the skilled and charismatic preacher, was quite moving. It is understandable why this growing independent evangelical movement is drawing so many thousands of unchurched and otherwise lost souls to desire a closer walk with God through Christ. I will note that there was little worship involved in this gathering. Other than a short prayer near the end, there was no ritual, no congregational singing, no act of confession; it was all a media driven proclamation of the gospel — designed to draw any who were interested to come back to other meetings of the church for further spiritual growth.

As I reflected on the six gatherings I attended over Holy Week, I wondered how I would explain what was the most significant difference between the five Catholic liturgies and the local independent evangelical Easter celebration? Or, in other words, what is the most significant difference between the Catholic Church and all other non-Catholic Christian traditions?





# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For David, a minister in Delaware, that he would be granted the gift of discernment as he investigates the Catholic Faith.
- For a Lutheran seminarian in Sweden, that he and his wife may both discover the graces found only in the Catholic Church.
- For Brian, a Church of God minister, that he would find his true home in Christ's holy Catholic Church.
- For David, a minister in Colorado, that the Holy Spirit would guide him as he seeks vocation possibilities in the Catholic Church.
- For a former Wiccan priestess, that she may find grace, peace, and holiness in the sacraments.
- For David, an Episcopal priest, that all obstacles to his entering into full-communication with the Catholic Church may fall by the wayside.
- For Jamie, the wife of a minister, that her husband's heart may soften and open the way for her to become a Catholic Christian.
- For Chris, an Anglican priest, that the Lord Jesus would enable him to get all the paperwork organized that he needs to enter the Anglican Ordinariate.

## Laity

- For an Anglican who is struggling to understand the Catholic view of salvation.
- For Randy who is interested in the Catholic Faith, that he come to understand the beautiful gift God has given to the Church in the papacy.
- For a man in South Africa who was drawn to the Catholic Church but on account of some painful experiences in his personal life is attending a charismatic church.
- For Sally who is having various struggles as she tries to settle into parish life as a Catholic.
- For a man from a non-denominational background in New York who has lots of questions about Catholicism.
- For a married couple to find the answers they need in order to flourish in their life as Catholic Christians.
- For a lady in India who is looking into possibly returning to the Catholic Church but still has concerns and doubts.
- For Leslie, that her praying of the Rosary lead her closer to Mary and Mary's Son, Jesus.
- For a man who has decided to go back to the Lutheran Church because he agrees with more of their teachings, that he continue to be open to the Holy Spirit's promptings.

- For Amber who is still reading and listening to Catholic radio, that she know when to move forward with her interest in Catholicism.
- For Mona who is very drawn to the Catholic Church and hungers for the Eucharist.
- For a former Jehovah's Witness who is reading and learning more about the Catholic Church.
- For a woman who desires to become Catholic but her husband, a former Catholic, is vehemently against it.
- For Alexis who is struggling with her prayer life, that she find meaningful ways to go deeper in prayer.
- For Heather, a convert, who is having a hard time being fully engaged in her Catholic Faith.
- For Jennifer who wants to begin RCIA and is wondering how best to pursue her interest in Catholicism in the meantime before it starts in the fall.
- For Nancy and her husband as they look to take the next steps in becoming Catholic.
- For Joann who is planning to begin RCIA this fall and is praying for guidance as she has many questions and conflicts.

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](mailto: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*: Wednesday 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

**June 5**

Fr. Richard Rojas\*  
 Former Presbyterian

**June 12**

Br. Martin Davis OP\*  
 Former United Methodist

**June 19**

Fr. Bonaventure Chapman OP\*  
 Former PCUSA, UCC, & Episcopal Church USA

**June 26**

Emily Stimpson Chapman\*  
 Former nominal Catholic & Evangelical

To access the full archive of past Journey Home programs go to [chnetwork.org/journey-home](http://chnetwork.org/journey-home).

\*Schedule is subject to change.



► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

goal of faith ... for those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother.

The Presbyterian system was an innovation. It was developed by John Calvin, and was a conscious rejection of the ancient hierarchical, episcopal governance of the Church by bishops. It was introduced in Scotland by a former priest, John Knox, who had been a student of Calvin but was exiled for participating in the murder of Cardinal Beaton.

In my pursuit of theological roots, I listened attentively to my Reformed professors, and my wife and I joined the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in 2000. The ARP Church is a small Scottish group, organized in the United States in 1789. Our daughter was baptized there in 2000, and I joined Second Presbytery in 2001 as a student of theology, while working on my Master of Divinity.

### Mere Christianity?

In 1997, my wife and I had been consulted on curriculum considerations for the religion department at a local Christian school. We joined the faculty there, wrote, and taught the curriculum. The driving impulse for this non-denominational Christian education was C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*. His minimalist approach, as I later realized, rested on Protestant assumptions about the nature of the Church. This is a glaring element which he does not unpack.

I climbed to the chair of the religion department and held that position for almost ten years. However, life for me there became increasingly difficult. I served on the curriculum philosophy committee and had become convinced that “classical Christian education” was the best way to educate children.

In the fall of 2000, shortly after the birth of our daughter, my wife experienced significant changes in her health. She was hospitalized, and we almost lost her. God was gracious; she recovered, though with some residual effects, and went on to homeschool our daughter in a classical curriculum. My faith had been tested, but God proved Himself faithful.

After leaving the Christian school in 2007, I took a call to pastoral ministry at a nearby independent Presbyterian parish. It was an unusual situation for a Presbyterian church to be out of the jurisdiction of a presbytery, which is the proper ordaining body. I withdrew from the ARP presbytery and was ordained by the local elders of the independent parish. In 2008, our parish voted to join the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, in which I was then properly ordained in the Presbyterian tradition. It was in this year, too, that my son was born and baptized.

### Relentless Questions

During my ministry in this parish, questions began to arise about certain aspects of my faith. I spent some time studying the liturgy and sacraments. I had been confident enough as a student of Calvin to become one of his theological heirs. However, as I prepared the liturgy week to week, questions continually came up, such as: on what authority did the Reformers “reform” the Mass, and how do I know my parish's liturgy is pleasing to God? I found a “high view” of the sacraments (efficacious, not merely symbolic) in Calvin's *Institutes* and in the Westminster Larger Catechism. I later discovered Calvin's view and defense (along with those of Luther, Bucer, and Zwingli) of the perpetual virginity of Mary.

In American religion, and in the Evangelical community and the Presbyterian tradition specifically, there were various things happening that gave me pause. Several Reformed ministers and theologians whom I respected were dragged through the mud in the media and openly declared to be heretics by self-appointed judges. I understood this controversy, called the “Federal Vision,” to be typical Reformed theology, with its emphasis upon the sacraments and the covenant. The blogosphere was a landmine of gossip and slander. These accusations brought to the forefront the problem of biblical interpretation and the sufficiency of Scripture. One man's heretic was another's saint. I became angry and worried.

The general political climate didn't help. Throughout the nation as a whole, conservatives and liberals in my own Reformed tradition were at each others' throats. The Presbyterian world was fracturing and splitting as controversy after controversy assaulted the Reformed world. Jesus had promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church (Matthew 16:18), and it seemed like He was failing.

To complicate matters further, I learned of Dr. Frank Beckwith's resignation from the Evangelical Theological Society to return to Rome, and the “resignation under fire” of Dr. Bruce Waltke from a prominent Reformed seminary over his interpretation of Genesis. Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth (John 16:13), so how did all these splits in the Christian world occur? Denominations now numbered well over 20,000. How did I know where “the Church” was to be found? By the time I resigned from my presbytery in 2012, there had been 48 splits, each group claiming Calvin as their founder. Dr. John Frame of Westminster Theological Seminary discerned 22 different issues that were keeping Reformed Christians out of each others' pews. Ongoing controversies of theistic evolution, homosexual unions, female deacons, charismatic gifts, exclusive psalmody in worship, general liturgical principles, acceptable styles of music, etc., have only added to the problems. Yet all claimed to be using the same Bible.

### The Sweater Unravels

I returned to my studies of Church history and started at the beginning: the Apostolic Fathers and Church Fathers, both east and west, and the development of the canon of Scripture. I was shocked by the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch. Though I had read them 20 years before, I had never viewed them with Reformed glasses. There was nothing in those letters that sounded at all Presbyterian! Or why, in AD 95, was Clement of Rome bypassing the authority of the Apostle John to settle a matter of discipline in the Church at Corinth, claiming the authority of Rome to be that of God? The more I studied, the more I felt drawn to the Catholic view, though I kept saying, “This can't be right.” I sought the wisdom of friends and mentors to help steer me through these troubled waters. But on whose authority should I accept their observations or interpretations as correct?

In 2010, my daughter and I attended the Catholic Confirmation of a friend. I remember being impressed with the amount of Scripture heard during the Mass. I had been working on liturgical studies, so I was shocked at how similar the Mass was to the Reformed liturgy at my parish.

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

In the middle of 2011, I read John Henry Newman's *On the Development of Christian Doctrine* and G.K. Chesterton's works on his conversion. Newman had begun his study as an Anglo-Catholic (the conservative end of the Anglican spectrum) and finished as a Catholic convert. G.K. Chesterton was a major inspiration to C.S. Lewis and his essays, "The Catholic Church and Conversion" and "Where All Roads Lead," which were powerful and common sense defenses. In the process, I learned of Lewis' devotion to Mary, his belief in purgatory, and his habit of praying the Rosary. Yet Lewis never became Catholic.

I found myself no longer satisfied with "our answers." I could not find the favorite *solas* of the Reformation anywhere in the Church Fathers. Atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell noted in his *History of Western Philosophy* that Luther's "new religion" was the most novel turn in Western Philosophy since the Greeks!

In the process of looking for a way out of these conundrums, I stumbled upon the website Called to Communion and was taken back at how these graduates of Reformed seminaries could have become Catholic. About the same time, a blogger friend of mine, Devin Rose, asked me to read a manuscript he had recently published, called *If Protestantism is True*. I read it with a critical eye but kept thinking to myself, "I haven't ever thought that through..." I watched the issues of authority, interpretation, canon, the papacy, and *sola fide* melt away.

### Facing Toward Rome

Some have described the crisis in Protestantism as a crisis of authority. As I noted earlier, how could I know that *my* liturgy, which I used at *my* church, was pleasing to God? The Lord had promised that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth. I then asked myself, If He had promised that, either Jesus was a colossal failure or He had accomplished it — somewhere. The only places I knew that made that claim were the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches. It certainly could not be in Protestantism, where there are divergent opinions on any given issue. How could I trust Protestants? How could I trust Calvin?

Coming into the Catholic Church, I chose St. Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, as my patron, since he was Calvin's nemesis in Geneva. He had been banished by Calvin under pain of death, though he also many times invited Calvin to debate. It seemed odd to me that Calvin refused to consider Francis' rhetorical and logical prowess. While De Sales was no orator or rhetorician, he was a persuasive writer. He used his skills and stuffed the doors of Genevans with his pamphlets.

De Sales saw over 70,000 Calvinists return to the Catholic Church during his ministry. He wrote a personal account of the Reformation, called *The Catholic Controversy*. In the opening pages, he spoke of the mission of the disciples of Jesus, under authority, bringing the Gospel to the world. He asks a simple question that infuriated me: Who sent Luther? What bishop sent Calvin? How did they discern their vocation, whose fruit was the fracturing of the Church and scandal among the faithful? How does one evaluate the Reformers' messages, which they were spreading all over Europe?

Cardinal Newman's axiom, "to be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant," was ringing true in my life. My wife and I both studied

the early papacy, asking the question, "Why Rome and not Jerusalem?" I had been taught in seminary that Rome's appeal to history was questionable and had no solid foundation in the early Church. However, to see the historical development of the papacy, its scriptural foundation, and its service as a unifying role in the Church of the first millennium was gut-wrenching. A very helpful text was *The Early Papacy: To the Synod of Chalcedon in 451* by Fr. Adrian Fortescue, D.D.

It was acknowledged by St. Ignatius of Antioch, a student of the Apostle John, in his prologue to *To the Romans*, that the Church at Rome "presides in charity" over all other churches. The connection of the papacy to St. Peter was acknowledged by both Eastern and Western bishops at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451).

I had been taught that one of the reasons the Eastern churches split away was the Pope "overstepping his bounds." Yet here they were enthusiastically agreeing with him. The ministry of Pope St. Leo the Great at Chalcedon was proof enough for me that this assertion was false.

### Running Toward Rome

I had always been fascinated with the development of the canon of Scripture, and it never occurred to me that if I trusted the Lord to form the infallible Scriptures through fallible men — particularly through the Catholic Church — why could I not trust them with the other things they taught? As Frank Beckwith observed, on what objective basis did I cherry-pick the doctrines or canon of Scripture itself from the other things taught by the same Church? I had none other than my subjective reasons, which, as already seen, had changed so often. To add insult to injury, in Bible college, I was referred to the Council of Carthage for the definitive list of New Testament books, but they didn't tell me that the same council had listed the longer Old Testament canon from the Septuagint.

I had studied biblical languages and canonical history, so Luther's subjective decisions to "add and subtract" were never problematic; I had implicit faith in the magical canon. After all, for Presbyterians the opening chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF, 1647) made it clear:

IV. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

I never questioned it; the elect of God simply “know the canon” of Scripture by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. I never questioned this circular reasoning, particularly the assumption in WCF (viii) that the Old Testament is to be received in Hebrew. I was told in seminary that St. Jerome contradicted St. Augustine on the canon of Scripture. The former scholar preferred the Hebrew canon, the latter the canon of the Septuagint in Greek. But the Elect must have always “known” the 66 books of the Bible were normative!

Who decided the canon? The Council of Rome in AD 381, presided by Pope Damasus I, confirmed the same 73 books translated into Latin by St. Jerome in AD 384 and reaffirmed them at the Council of Florence in 1439. This is the same canon which was handed down untouched until it was challenged by Fr. Martin Luther in the early 1500s but again reaffirmed by the Council of Trent in 1545. It was the Holy Spirit who guided the Church to affirm the canon that was to be read at Mass — just as Jesus had promised.

But to learn that Luther added the word *allein* (“alone”) to Romans 3:8 was troublesome. As an exegete, I understood clarification of a passage from the original language to the receptor language. But Luther purposely added to the text to clarify his understanding of how one is saved, in contrast to the hierarchical and sacramental system of the Church. Equally, in translating the New Testament into German, he initially thought James, Hebrews, and Revelation (among others) taught questionable doctrines and shouldn’t be in the canon! Just as with Luther’s removal of the seven “disputed” books in the Old Testament, these books taught doctrines believed by Christians everywhere — until this one man rejected them.

Luther’s novel theology of *sola fide* (faith alone) melted as I found it nowhere in the Church Fathers. My wife had always wondered about Jesus’ words of judgment against our works and how that is played out if we are given imputed righteousness by faith alone. The typical explanations did not do justice for us, considering that the outcome of the judgment is heaven or hell (see Matthew 25). The books that Luther (and with him all of Protestantism) rejected did indeed teach the contribution of our good deeds, prayers, and acts of piety toward our own salvation, as well as for the dead. It was becoming easier to believe that, when Jesus said in Matthew 12:36, “I tell you, on the day of judgment men will have to give an account for every careless word they utter,” this would be accomplished in purgatory, where we would “pay the last penny” (Matthew 5:26).

Arguably, these books had no Hebrew originals and did teach doctrines believed by Catholics and Orthodox. Yet, had Calvin and Luther lived to the year 1947, they would have seen that most of the “disputed” books of the Old Testament did have Hebrew originals, as discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls. My wife and I both found these facts to be quite unsettling.

### The Game Changer: “God in a Box”

I had developed the habit of stopping by the local Catholic church to pray. On one occasion, I walked in and my eye caught the tabernacle lamp. I paused, and staring straight at the tabernacle, asked out loud, “Is that really you?” The answer to that question would be a game-changer. Tears began to stream down my face as my heart comprehended what my mind could not.

My wife had always thought the Catholics had it right in their interpretation of the Passover narratives in the Gospels. When Jesus said, “This is my body,” why should we think that He had to be speaking figuratively? I had come to that conclusion, too, while studying the Church Fathers, and the unconscious bias of “We don’t believe that because it’s Catholic” began to fade.

There were several events transpiring in my Presbyterian parish, and we feared it might be closing its doors. I offered to resign, which certainly would help with the parish finances. When my resignation was accepted, I was not sure where my family would worship. I had wanted to go back to teaching, and with an end in sight on my doctorate, I was looking to teach at the college and university level. I left my presbytery in July 2012, now free to look for a new teaching job. This also afforded me an opportunity to investigate the Catholic Church.

### Finally Home

I had already sought the wisdom of several seminary professors to help me with my intellectual problems. I also sought the help of converts Scott Hahn and Fr. Dwight Longenecker, whose own stories and wisdom resonated with me on many levels. My wife and I started RCIA (the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) in the fall of 2012 to see for ourselves what the Catholic Church believed and taught. We would still have the freedom to walk away if we chose to. I asked my parents what they thought about the possibility of us becoming Catholic. They said that, if that is where the Holy Spirit was leading us, then go for it. They weren’t without some concerns, but they supported our decision. My in-laws however, prayed for our souls, believing us to be joining a cult.

It wasn’t more than a few weeks into RCIA that my heart longed for home. I began to find comfort in the Magisterium of the Church (the teaching authority of the bishops in communion with Rome), the faithful guardians of truth, led by the Holy Spirit in councils and visible in the papacy, to preserve the identity and unity of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. At the Easter Vigil of 2013, we were confirmed in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. Since then, we helped to start an independent Catholic cottage school that focuses on a classical approach to learning.

I had embraced “mere Christianity” for most of my life. However, having come home to the Catholic Church, as Fr. Dwight Longenecker observed, I have experienced *more* Christianity. I have enjoyed a closer walk with Christ and partaken of Him in Holy Communion — the rich heritage of the faith that conquered the pagan Roman Empire through love and truth and which birthed saints whose lives, works, and deeds have compelled me to leave everything behind and not look back. ■



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