



July 2017 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



A Seminarian’s Quest for Christian Unity Leads to the Catholic Church

By Daniel Anderson

From the earliest days of dating my wife, Bobbie, I had told her that I believed I was called to the ministry. Theology is my passion. I enjoy the infinite journey into the depths of God and liken the study of theology to someone attempting to drink an endless ocean. Once you taste of the cup of theology, your thirst only increases and cannot be quenched until you consume the entire ocean. The further you go, the deeper it becomes. I love to wade into the ocean of theology, drink of its riches, and gather a canister of it to share with others.

In December 2013, I was having a crisis of conscience at my workplace. I was experiencing a measure of difficulty in performing my duties as well as a realization that the work I was doing was of little lasting value. Bobbie suggested to me that I step down and begin seminary training. I consulted my Baptist pastor, and he suggested I enroll in the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS). I also entertained the idea of enrolling at Redeemer Seminary, a Reformed institution. (I was raised and baptized a Presbyterian, and my parents were in support of this course.)

It was a whirlwind of changes. I stepped down from my position, retaining a lower position, applied at SWBTS, and began school in just over a month. I was excited at the prospect of deepening my faith, growing in theology, and pursuing a vocation I viewed as “valuable.” I entered the seminary that January believing that I knew exactly where I was going and where I would end up. I would become a Baptist pastor, probably an associate pastor with the aspirations of being a senior pastor one day.

For the first three months, I was enthralled with my classes, resonated with fellow students, and soaked up every bit of theology offered to me. But in April, something unexpected happened in my New Testament class: my Presbyterian upbringing interrupted my enthrallment. Theological topics such as election, predestination, eschatology, and sacraments came up in the class. What I had learned about these topics in my upbringing had a strong hold in my deeper parts. It came out in intense, sometimes heated, discussions between myself, other classmates, and the professor. I found myself defending what I was brought up to believe without knowing why I believed it. By the end of the semester, apart from feeling isolated, I felt as though I was not in the right school to match what I believed theologically. Was I really Reform-minded? Was I really a Calvinist or a Preterist, as my classmates and professor accused me of being? Or was I still a Baptist? I found myself in a theological quandary which would consume me over the summer.

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Journeys Home

Try Another Angle...

At the beginning of summer in 2014, I began to consider what I believed theologically and with which denomination I should identify. I asked my wife and my parents about it, as well as my former Presbyterian pastor. I studied the differences between Dispensational and Reformed theologies. I read books, listened to recordings, and had discussions with my current pastor, former pastor, and family members. In the end, I realized that I held to the Presbyterian theological view over the Baptist view. However, I did not want to change schools. I enjoyed SWBTS thoroughly and had made some friends. However, one Sunday in late July, on our way to church, I came to a conclusion and blurted, "I think we need to change churches." Bobbie, in her grace and patience, having followed my self-examination closely, offered her wisdom promptly, "Then you also need to change schools." She was right. It was naïve to think that I could endure an education in opposition to my beliefs. But time was short. I scrambled to change from one school to the other before fall semester began. Also, I needed to find a position at work which would fit my new school schedule. Thankfully, I was able to transfer to Redeemer Seminary and register for classes just days before the semester started, and a position at work opened up for me. My journey had taken a turn, but I was grateful to God for His direction and help, to my wife for her love and support, and to my parents for their support.

Rather dizzy from the rapid change, I still felt a measure of freedom as I entered Redeemer Seminary. I looked forward to my faith growing, allowing me to wade deeply into the ocean of theology which had lapped at my toes from childhood. I truly believed, once again, that this was where I was supposed to be and that I would one day become a Presbyterian pastor. During the fall semester, I also became involved in our new church and became friends with the new senior pastor. The dialogue I experienced in the classroom with students

and teachers and outside the classroom with my pastor, friends, and family was intoxicating. I embraced my faith and beliefs strongly.

Now, About Church Unity...

During the spring 2015 semester at Redeemer, I began to investigate the topic of ecumenism. The version of ecumenism I encountered in seminary was one of an inter-religious dialogue between denominations, encountering the beauty of theology and traditions in each denomination, and not placing them in positions of mutual exclusivity. In one class, I encountered Anglican ecclesiology which promoted tradition and Scripture together like a dance. Being of the *sola Scriptura* persuasion, this concept was quite foreign to me. For the first time, I glimpsed the benefit of certain traditions in the church, in teaching, and in practice. Though I did not realize or acknowledge it then, as I studied the different denominations' beliefs and practices, I was loosening my hold on *sola Scriptura*.

Then a couple of professors brought to the table certain Catholic teachings and traditions as acceptable and legitimate. Furthermore, one professor stated in class, referring to Protestant church history, "Your church history is Roman Catholic." This was shocking to my ears. Nevertheless, I was resolute in my desire to continue my pursuit to become a Presbyterian pastor. I concluded that I could appreciate various traditions and practices in other denominations, even the Catholic Church, but still hold firmly to Presbyterian theology.

But one Sunday in April I had an idea. We were driving home from church when I engaged Bobbie in a discussion. "The division of denominations in our church is wrong, even harmful," I asserted, "Why did God allow His Church to become so divided and fragmented?" Bobbie listened patiently. I continued, "What if God allowed the divisions of the Church for something beneficial? The Church is a body made of many parts, and each part has a purpose or a gift. What if God allowed the Church to be divided so that each denomination would exercise a specific gift?"

Continued on page 5

FEATURED RESOURCES



Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth: The Catholic Church and God's Plan for You — By Catholic Answers

Whether or not you are Catholic, you may have questions about the Catholic Faith. You may have heard challenges to the Catholic Church's claim to be the interpreter and safeguard of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Such challenges come from door-to-door missionaries who ask, "Are you saved?", from peer pressure that urges you to ignore the Church's teachings, from a secular culture that whispers "There is no God." You can't deal with these challenges unless you understand the basics of the Catholic Faith. This booklet introduces them to you. *Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth* is a powerful, yet concise booklet that clearly defines the core beliefs of the Catholic Faith.

\$35

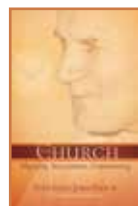
Receive a *Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth* for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive *Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth* and *The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community* for a donation of \$75.



The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, Community — By Pope Saint John Paul II

For ten years, Pope Saint John Paul II dedicated his Wednesday papal audiences to a thorough discussion of the Creed. Newly brought back to the English language, *The Church – Mystery, Sacrament, Community* presents the selection of those audiences that address the Church and her place in salvation history. John Paul gives remarkable insights into a wide range of topics such as the unity of the Church, the role of the papacy and ordained clergy, how the laity build up and spread the Kingdom, and the Church's dedication to ecumenism and unity among Christians. The scope and depth of Pope Saint John Paul II's discussion on the Church is a treasure for its readers.

NEWLY RELEASED

— 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.

A Rat is a Pig is a Dog is a Boy: Atheism and the Problem of Human Worth

By Kenneth Hensley, Pastoral Care & Resources Consultant



partially flooded mineshaft.

An astonishing rescue effort was immediately launched. Engineers were brought in to examine the situation and make recommendation, environmental scientists to run tests on the ground water, massive drilling equipment and men who could operate it. Even the U.S. Navy arrived, supplying underwater experts and nine decompression chambers, in hope the men would be brought up alive.

For three days Americans sat transfixed in front of their TV sets as engineers drilled a narrow shaft the entire distance down to the trapped miners. If they miscalculated the angle and failed to intersect the area where the men were waiting, it would be too late to start again.

Finally, news came that they had reached the men. As they were brought up alive, one by one, the entire nation celebrated. It was impossible to remain unmoved. Nine miners whom we'd never seen before and didn't know from Adam.

A billboard appeared in Pennsylvania that simply read, "God gave us a miracle!"

Value, Dignity, and the Christian Worldview

It's clear that we share a universal intuition and strong belief in the unique value of human life. We speak very naturally of people possessing "inherent value" — value that exists in them, not merely value we might subjectively churn up and assign to them. We speak of them as possessing "high" and "equal" value. We talk about the "dignity" each person "deserves." We use words like "priceless" to describe our children and grandchildren.

This is simply how we very naturally think and speak.

In fact, except in cases where human hearts have been deadened, by whatever means, and consciences completely seared, this belief in the inherent, high, and equal value of human persons seems as natural to us as belief in our own existence or in the existence of the physical world.

And of course the biblical worldview makes sense of our experience in this regard. If God exists and we have been created in His image and likeness, then we *do* possess unique value among created beings.

In other words, the Christian worldview provides a metaphysical basis and foundation for what we seem to intuitively know to be true.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth . . . When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands, and put everything under his feet O Lord,

July 2002. I remember hearing the terrible news. An explosion had ripped through a coal mine in Pennsylvania and nine miners were trapped 240 feet underground in a dark, par-



on our hearts and etched into our very beings.

It's something we simply know.

Naturalism, Value, and Dignity

But what if the worldview of the modern garden-variety atheist is true?

Assume that it's true, for a moment. Climb inside the materialist worldview and think about what a strict materialism would imply about the value and dignity of human life. I'm talking about the kind of atheistic materialism most modern atheists espouse: no God, no human souls, no spirits. Just matter.

What if you and I really are nothing more than very complicated biochemical machines that appear for a moment, gears spinning, and then disappear forever? What if we really have come from nowhere and are going nowhere? What if we *really are* nothing more than the product of an entirely impersonal material universe, that we don't have souls, that we aren't spiritual beings at all?

What becomes of inherent value and dignity, then?

That's right. If materialism is true, we possess no inherent value. In that case the only "value" we possess is what we are willing to grant to one another in the few moments we have before the quicksand covers us completely.

Of course this is something consistent atheists admit all the time. Listen to how casually Ingrid Newkirk, the president of PETA (Peo-



ple for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), speaks of what her atheism implies for human value:

Animal liberationists do not separate out the human animal A rat

is a pig is a dog is a boy. They are all mammals. (*Vogue Magazine*, September 1, 1989)

Here's how atheist philosopher James Rachels puts it:

As Darwin clearly recognized, we are not entitled — not on evolutionary grounds, at any rate — to regard our own adaptive behavior as 'better' or 'higher' than that of a cockroach, who, after all, is adapted equally well to life in



its own environmental niche. (*Created from Animals*, p. 70)

Read these quotations a couple of times. Allow their meaning to sink in. This is what one has to accept as

true and live with if one does not believe in a higher origin for the human race and a higher purpose for human life. This is consistent naturalism. This is what is simply *true* if there is no God and we are merely the accidental products of nature.

In fact, in the circles of consistent naturalists, to deny the equal value of all living creatures is to commit the grave sin of “speciesism.”

To the consistent naturalist it is unwarranted and wrong to assign different values or rights to individuals based on the species of which they are members. You know, like saving a child from a burning building before saving a rat — simply because the child belongs to the human species.

(Of course I would be willing to bet that in that situation both Ingrid Newkirk and James Rachels would favor the child over the rat, but they might be ever-so-slightly embarrassed that their “speciesist” impulses got the better of them.)

Is there any way to escape this implication of the naturalist worldview? Is there any way to justify our thinking of human beings as possessing inherent, high, and equal value — a value inherently “higher” than that of rats and pigs and dogs and cockroaches — without believing in our creation in God’s image?

Peter Singer, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, doesn’t think so. In fact, as an atheist he has admitted that the Judeo-Christian doctrine of man’s creation in the image and likeness of God may be the only foundation there is to support such an idea.

James Rachels agrees. He writes that with the rejection of the biblical worldview,

The traditional supports for the idea of human dignity are gone They have not survived the colossal shift of perspective brought about by Darwin’s theory [A] Darwinian may conclude that *a successful defense of human dignity is most unlikely*. (Created from *Animals*, pp. 171-172, emphasis added)

The Problem of “Equal” Value

So much for inherent value and high value; what about “equal value”?

We all say yes to this. Whether we believe in God or not, everyone believes in treating people as though they possessed equal value and dignity.

But can an atheist justify this belief on the basis of the worldview he holds?

Atheist philosopher Joel Feinberg has spent time thinking through this exact question from a naturalist perspective. Since people quite obviously have inequalities of “merit” — inequalities of gifting, talent, ability, personality, character, inequalities in the contribution they make to society — why is it, he asked, that we seem to have this universal intuition and strong belief that each human being possesses “equal value” and should be treated with “equal dignity?” Why do we believe this and strive to practice it?

His conclusion was that this intuition and belief, however common it may be, has no grounding or basis whatsoever in the natural world. It seems to be some kind of irrational and unjustifiable attitude we share, a subjective feeling that everyone has equal value, when in fact they don’t (see J.P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism*, pp. 144-145).

Application to Apologetics

It’s my belief that this can be a powerful evangelistic tool.

Because when you talk to your agnostic or atheist friend about this question of value and you draw out this inescapable implication of the naturalist worldview, it’s going to bother your friend. Why? Because as the image and likeness of God, she knows that human beings are worth more than cockroaches. She knows people have inherent, high, and equal value. She feels this in her bones and more than likely she lives as though it were the case.

Now, she may say that she believes human beings are the mere excretions of a thoroughly material universe with no inherent value, and on a more or less intellectual level she may truly believe it. In fact, she may insist that Ingrid Newkirk is entirely correct in saying that “a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy” and that professor Rachels is exactly right in saying that we human beings are not “entitled” to think of ourselves as being “higher” or “better” than cockroaches.

She may commit to all of this on paper. But unless she’s a member of ISIS, the chances are she lives more or less as though she believed what Christians believe about the value and dignity of human persons.

Now, this is no “proof” of God’s existence. But it is a powerful argument for our being more than accidents of nature. And it’s a powerful illustration of the tension atheists live with, attempting to hold a view of the world that contradicts who they are and what they intuitively know to be true — in this case, that human beings possess inherent, high, and equal value.

My experience is that putting your finger on that tension can lead to the most interesting of conversations. ■

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

"Easter Blessings — Over 100 Strong!"	A
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Easter blessings — Over 120 Strong!

Each year, the staff of the Coming Home Network International is privileged to walk alongside many men and women who are seeking a closer relationship with our Lord Jesus and His Church. Easter is always a particularly joyous season when we hear from those who have entered into full communion with the Catholic Church. These are seekers who have journeyed to the Church often with great personal cost and sacrifice. Sometimes they leave behind the security of work in Protestant ministry, others lose friends and familial relationships become strained, still others have spouses who voice serious opposition to their conversion and their marriages experience difficult trials. Yet, through all these heavy crosses and difficulties, they rejoice because they have found the pearl of great price and are eager to partake of the Eucharistic table and the sacraments Jesus gave to us in His Church. This past Easter season, over 120 CHNetwork members, including 25 who came from backgrounds in fulltime Protestant ministry, were received into the Catholic Church. We would like to share with you some of their reflections and thoughts so you, too, can rejoice with them — and pray for them — in their new life as Catholic Christians.

*I have reached the other side of the Tiber and have arrived safely home! Easter Vigil was a profoundly moving experience. The culmination of a ten year journey for me. It's a very surreal feeling to finally be in this place. Much like having the blindfold taken off in the middle of a town square of a city you've never been to before. What's next, and where do I go from here. It can almost look intimidating if I allow it to. But I'm so excited about how pregnant with possibility the future is. **JEREMY, A FORMER METHODIST PASTOR***

*I am indeed a Catholic now! ... I thank you so much for your support and guidance at a time when I needed it most. **GREG, A FORMER EPISCOPALIAN***

*I've been received into the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil service! I'm so very happy to be able to be in communion with our Lord Jesus now. It was a wonderful service, felt like the most beautiful moment of my life. Now I'm growing in His grace and being so thankful for leading me this (His) way ... Thank you for your prayers and the wonderful work you do for the Coming Home Network. It's highly appreciated. **A FORMER BAPTIST IN THE NETHERLANDS***

*Our Easter was wonderful! We crossed the Tiber as a family. My wife and I were confirmed and received first Eucharist. Our 4 children were baptized. So thankful to finally be home! **JONATHAN, A FORMER BAPTIST ACADEMIC***

*I am sending a couple of pictures of the Easter Vigil of my profession of faith. It was so very special I am so thankful, truly eternally grateful, for your prayers and help in this process. What a blessing you are! ... I am looking forward to growing in the faith. **KATHY, A FORMER EVANGELICAL***

*Thanks so much for checking up on us. Sharon and I did enter the Church last weekend at Easter Vigil. It was quite a moving experience. We do feel blessed Thanks again for the support from your organization. The materials from the Coming Home Network have accelerated our learning experience immensely. The opportunity to read and hear how others have surmounted obstacles to come into the Church has also been instructive and inspiring. We will always be grateful to CHN. **MARK, A FORMER PRESBYTERIAN***

*My wife and I were both received into full communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. It was truly wonderful. This Easter is the best Easter I've ever celebrated. I'm so overwhelmed by God's love and grace ... I just want to serve the Lord in any way He would have me to. **JAMES, A FORMER BAPTIST PASTOR***

*I was brought into full communion at the Vigil service! Thank you for your prayers and the resources of the CHN ministry! **MICHELLE, WIFE OF A FORMER WESLEYAN MINISTER***

Continued on page B ➡

*We encourage you to remove this Member's Section and share the conversion story and article with a family or friend!

CHNetwork Staff Interview



What is your name and title?
 Bill Bateson, IT/Facilities Coordinator

How long have you worked for the CHNetwork?
 11 years

Before working at the Coming Home Network, what was the most unusual or interesting job you've ever had?

I would say the most interesting job is when I was a drywall finisher. It was just one of those skills that I learned to do well when I worked construction and it was rewarding to see the final product.

How would you describe your job to a stranger on an airplane?

I've never actually flown in an airplane! So lets say if, in general, someone would ask me what I did for a living I usually say that I work in IT and that I am a video editor and then see how the conversation goes from there. I hope I can tell them about *The Journey Home* program and then share how the Coming Home Network helps others come home to the Catholic Church. It's always interesting to see a reaction from them, whether it's good or just a blank stare!

What does a typical day in the office look like to you?

When we are not in the studio prepping a set or recording, I spend most of my time on computers, working on video and audio editing.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

Since *The Journey Home* is produced and recorded in our studio, I would say it's really rewarding getting to meet the guests and to hear their stories firsthand.

Who do you nominate to be our next staff interview?

Scott Scholten ■

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.



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

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Prayer List



Clergy

- For David, a minister in Virginia, that our Lord Jesus would bless and guide him as he seeks God's will.
- For Tim, a Presbyterian minister, that his yearning for knowledge about the Holy Eucharist would lead him to the altar of Jesus.
- For Mary, a minister in Texas, that her desire to come closer to God, would motivate her to seek the fullness of His truth in the Catholic Faith.
- For Tom, a non-denominational minister, that God would open doors for him to enter fully into Catholic life and communion.
- For Andrew, a minister in Colorado, that his search for truth may find fulfillment in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Jesus.
- For a Baptist minister in England, that, through his praying of the Divine Office, the Holy Spirit would guide him home to the Catholic Church.

Laity

- For Jes, to be open to learning more about the Catholic Faith and to discovering the truth of Christ's Church.

■ For Lydia who is convinced that the Catholic Church is the fullness of truth, that she be able to find good local support for her journey.

■ For Erin not to be discouraged with the obstacles she has encountered as she explores more about the Catholic Church.

■ For a former Methodist who is overjoyed to have become Catholic at Easter but wishes his wife would also be drawn towards the Catholic Faith.

■ For Louise who is drawn towards the Catholic Faith after a life-changing experience last year.

■ For Daniel who has many doubts and frustrations, that he come to a better understanding of God and His love.

■ For a convert who is having difficult experiences in the Catholic Church and is considering going back to her Presbyterian church.

■ For Cynthia who has recently returned to the Church after many years, that her devotion to the Rosary enrich her spiritual life.

■ For a young woman who was received into the Church this Easter and loves being Catholic but is wondering how best to explain the Catholic Faith to her parents.

■ For an Evangelical couple who long to receive the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation but are waiting to receive word on annulment petitions.

■ For Marina to be able to connect well with a local priest who can guide her with her interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For a woman in California who is having a difficult time since her family doesn't share her desire to be Catholic.

■ For Bill who is watching EWTN and *The Journey Home* and enjoys our publications, that he know how best to move forward with his journey.

■ For a Baptist who is discerning how best to move towards the Catholic Church without leaving behind her husband who just recently experienced a profound conversion to Jesus.

■ For Dawn to be able to connect well with her local priest and for her husband to be given the grace to be open to the truth of the Catholic Faith.

■ For Katherine who is wrestling with whether Jesus really founded the Catholic Church.

■ For Lydia who is convinced that the Catholic Church is the fullness of truth and is looking to become more involved in her local church.

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: 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

July 3

The Journey Home preempted for other EWTN programming

July 10

Lisa Brandel*
 Former Southern Baptist

July 17

Fr. Paul Key*
 Former Presbyterian minister

July 24

Bonnie Rapkin*
 Convert from Judaism

July 31

David Shawkan*
 Former Muslim

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

*Schedule is subject to change.

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

We discussed this at times throughout the rest of the day. In the end, however, I was convinced that the division caused by the Reformation was not a good thing. The world sees Christians as divided and factious, not a united body as the Scriptures describe it to be. The Church should somehow be visibly united. I decided to take upon myself a research project with the end goal of finding a way to unite the denominations. In my mind, of course, this uniting of denominations meant a uniting of all Protestant denominations. I believed wholeheartedly in Reformed theology, and I believed that the Catholic Church was in error, according to the accusations leveled against it by the Reformers. I was unsure how to engage in my research project, but I hit on the idea of interviewing many church leaders, pastors, and priests from every major denomination — including the Catholic Church.

Study: The Interviews Begin

When Bobbie and I walked into the priest’s office at the local Catholic parish, I thought I knew exactly how my interview would go. I had a list of questions of an ecumenical nature to ask the priest, as well as several other questions concerning which I was curious how he would answer. One of the questions I asked was, “What is your view of the other denominations?” He answered, “The other denominations, the other Christians, are wayward Catholics.” What? I could tell that answer shocked my wife more than me. I immediately remembered my professor from school stating that our church history is Catholic. I understood that the priest meant that the original Protestants (and those born into Protestantism) effectively departed from their Catholic faith and heritage and were in effect “wayward.” I continued to interview him, asking him about the strengths of other denominations, about Catholics worshiping Mary, about transubstantiation, and about the Sacraments. Every answer he offered was not only sufficient, but near invulnerable.

We left the priest feeling as though our foundations were rocked. Bobbie turned to me and asked, “Are we becoming Catholic?” I responded with trepidation, “I don’t know.” I didn’t even want to think about it or acknowledge the possibility. But I could not stand firmly on what I believed following that interview.

Two weeks later, in the middle of June, I interviewed a Baptist minister. I asked him the same main interview questions that I had asked the priest. When I asked the question about other denominations, the pastor wanted to know what denominations I was referring to. I responded with the usual denominations such as Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and I added the Catholics at the end. He said that the other Protestant denominations had their strengths and good things they were doing, but when it came to the Catholics he said that they weren’t even Christian. Based on my interview with the priest, I could only conclude that Catholics were certainly Christian if they believed what he said. I had difficulty with this interview. The Baptist minister highlighted the dividing lines between Catholics and Protestants in a way that seemed irreparable. How was one to even try to unite these two conflicting belief systems?

I lined up a few more interviews for the weeks ahead. In the meantime, I theorized as to how I might find common ground between the denominations. It wasn’t Communion, because of all the opposing views of symbolism, transubstantiation, and everything

in between. It wasn’t Baptism, because of the opposing views of symbolism, effects, requirements, and grace conferred. It wasn’t the Scriptures, because of the opposing interpretations. What about the Creed? The Nicene Creed? After all, we say the Nicene Creed in church every Sunday and so do many other denominations, including Catholics. We can all agree on the Creed right? But what about the line, “I believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic church?” What does each denomination think “catholic” means in that line? My church taught that it means “universal” (and has an asterisk with a footnote in the bulletin defining the term thusly). But, the priest said that “catholic” in the Creed means the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the “one” means united within the Catholic Church, according to the priest. I concluded that I could not find a way for each denomination to agree with each other on the meaning of the Creed, either. I continued to mull this dilemma, and it occurred to me that someone must have written about this already. So I did a search on the internet. I typed in, “Christ founded a visible church.”

The Internet Search

The first link that appeared was to a website named “Called to Communion” which facilitates dialogue between Reformed Christians and Catholics. The article that appeared had the same name as my search: “Christ founded a visible church,” by Bryan Cross (calledtocommunion.com/2009/06/christ-founded-a-visible-church). I read the entire article plus some of the 500 or so comments following. The article shattered everything I thought I knew regarding division, unity, authority, tradition, Protestantism, and Catholicism. My research and hypotheses took a mortal blow as point by point the article tore it all down. Moreover, the article had support which I could not obtain: the early Church Fathers. Following the blow to my research, I came to the realization (or more aptly I was humbled) that I did not have the authority to draft any kind of document that would legitimately promote the fracturing of Christianity that occurred at the Reformation. This realization of lack of authority extended to my pursuit of a pastoral position. I could no longer with any confidence think that I had the authority to interpret, teach, and preach the Scriptures to any future congregation, let alone the congregation I was in and for which I had just become a pastoral intern.

Over the next week, I pored over the remaining 400 or so comments on that article, as well as other articles on the site. I also read many Church Fathers’ writings to see what they said on various subjects. I estimate that in the months of June through August I read over 5,000 pages of articles, writings, Scriptures, and other material. As I studied the early Church writings, I came across many statements that were glaringly Catholic. Subjects such as transubstantiation (though that exact word was not used until later times), confession, penance, intercession and relics of the saints, devotion to Mary and other saints, Apostolic succession, promotion of unity, judgment against schism, and more were found within many of these documents.

I didn’t know what to do with this information. It was all so new to me. I turned to my pastor and asked him for help. I also asked the same question to a Presbyterian pastor who was a Catholic until his late youth. The question was: What do I do with the early Church Fathers’ writings when they say something overtly Catholic? They both answered nearly the same way, saying that I should take from

...Journeys Home Continued...

the Fathers whatever supports my beliefs and disregard the rest. That didn't settle well with me nor with my wife, who listened to me talk daily about what I was learning and researching. I was at a loss and felt conflicted. I did not want to leave my church, my school, and enter into a foreign land where no one would follow us. After all, my parents and my sister and her husband went to the same church as we. They supported my schooling and pursuit within the Presbyterian denomination. What would they think if we entered into the Catholic Church? I would soon find out.

Is Someone Praying For Us?

One August day, while I was at work, pondering everything that I had read, suddenly I felt someone praying for me. I felt it so strongly, that I had to stop working and just focus on this feeling. It was as though someone was praying that I might know the truth, and that I might find what I'm looking for. Because it felt like we were on the road to Catholicism, it occurred to me that the only people who might be praying for us would be the only Catholics we knew: our next door neighbors, Phil and Joyce. I decided to call and ask them to come over so that I could inquire if they were praying for us. With Phil and Joyce sitting on our couch that evening, I asked them, "Have you been praying for us, and if so, what exactly have you been praying?" Joyce replied, "That you might know the truth," and Phil continued, "And that you might find what you are looking for."

Phil and Joyce had no idea as to what we were going through, other than that we had met with their priest back in June. They didn't know that Bobbie and I felt like we were being dragged by God into the Catholic Church. They listened intently as we told them of the previous two months, and they offered answers to several questions about beliefs and practices that we didn't understand. They also provided more reading material (those 5,000 pages weren't enough!) to help with other questions we might have. After they left that night, Bobbie and I looked at each other, not knowing what to say.

The two weeks following that night were certainly the most difficult of this journey. We felt impelled towards the Catholic Church and repeatedly assured each other that we didn't want to go. My parents became more involved at this point, and understandably they were against our projected path. We had many arguments and disagreements.

Then I was once again faced with a decision to be made concerning school. Would I stay or go? This decision involved more than just a change in schools, but also a change in vocation. If we joined the Catholic Church, I could not become a priest. My desire to teach theology would probably have to be squelched. This caused much stress for Bobbie. She did not know what we should do. Lastly, I had to decide if I was willing to step down as pastoral intern at my church. It was two weeks of loss: loss of friends, loss of intimacy with family, loss of vocation, comfort, and foundation.

I had begun this journey with confidence and a measure of certainty about our future. We had hopes for my vocation, for our faith, and for the road ahead. Then, in the beginning of September, we exited our car and walked to the entrance of the Catholic church. This two-year journey had ended, and a new one was beginning as we walked through the door. I also decided to transfer to the University of Dallas, a Catholic institution.

RCIA Begins

When we first arrived at St. Joseph Catholic Parish to attend RCIA (the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults), we had no idea what to expect. We had already researched, prayed, and worked through many of the barriers our Protestant minds had encountered regarding the Catholic Church. We entered a class called, "RCIA Inquiry." This class was led by a joyous and kind elderly woman who had been leading it for many years. She welcomed us into the room, offering us the hand of friendship and the love of a mother. She had heard of us previously as she asked, "Are you friends of Phil and Joyce?" We were taken aback by the fact that they already knew who we were, and honestly, it kind of set us on edge. We were already far out of our comfort zone entering this class and would be stretched even more in the classes to come. Nevertheless, that first class was our foot in the door and the beginning of this part of the journey.

The next week, after we had sat, prayed, and talked for a moment, our teacher asked us if we knew about the Rosary, the Hail Mary, or the Mysteries. We had already worked through many barriers in our Protestant minds, but we had not approached this one. Throughout most of our lives, we were taught that Catholics worship Mary and commit idolatry regularly. We were taught that praying to the saints or to Mary is wrong, and one should always pray to God alone. Nevertheless, we knew we would have to work through this issue going in. However, it was the most difficult one we had to work through.

Consider the impact of living in a religious culture that teaches you most of your life of the errors and failings of another religious culture. We are talking about years of formation and thinking one



**CHNETWORK
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...Journeys Home Continued...

way is right and another wrong. Yet this is formation from a false understanding of the Catholic tradition concerning the veneration of saints and Mary. That week, the teacher recited part of the Rosary in class to show us what it was like. It was difficult; our defenses were up. My wife and I discussed it after class, both expressing our difficulty with these types of devotions. However, we believed in the Catholic Church, despite our difficulty, so we kept our eyes on our Lord, present in the Eucharist.

We finished the Inquiry portion of RCIA a few weeks later. The leaders asked us if we wanted to continue, and for us there was no turning back. So we were ushered into the RCIA Candidate class. It started with a potluck one night. We gathered there with our children, and Phil and Joyce joined us as well. Until this time, Phil and Joyce had been our mentors, helpers, and guides. Since the day we had considered becoming Catholic, they were there with open arms and a loving embrace to help us — just as they had been praying for us for years. RCIA was now an experience filled with fellowship, food, and even a trivia game. During the potluck, we were to find out who our sponsors would be. We expected to have sponsors we did not know. To our surprise and joy, we were told that Phil and Joyce would be our sponsors. They had been, and continued to be, so important to us every step of this journey.

Now the Hard Part: The Wait

During our first month in RCIA, we had continued going to our old Presbyterian church off and on. We had not told our friends there of our decision to join the Catholic Church, but we did not want to leave them abruptly without explanation. It takes a lengthy conversation to explain our conversion and to discuss how this means we aren't losing our salvation or faith. The question then came up between Bobbie and me about receiving Presbyterian communion. We asked Father Keith about it. He advised that if we are sincere in believing what the Catholic Church teaches about the Eucharist, then we should abstain from receiving communion anywhere else. This made us hunger all the more for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The next six months seemed very long.

Our patience waned as we desired to be in full communion with the Church and to receive the Sacraments.

Our conversion brought us much loss and pain. Our friends and family didn't understand. Many arguments and disagreements occurred, and we lost friendships. (My wife was able to retain hers — thank the Lord!) Add to this no access to Christ in the Eucharist during that period of waiting; it was very difficult. I'm not complaining about the process or the time it takes to be received into the Church. It was just a difficult time for us. If it were not for Phil and Joyce, I am not sure how we would have made it through RCIA. I do know we would still have followed through, because this was the most important decision of our lives, but it would have been significantly more difficult without them. We survived by keeping our eyes on the intimacy with Christ which we would gain in time.

Full Communion Within Our Grasp

Finally, we were only a few weeks away from the Easter Vigil. We attended a one-day retreat at the church on a Saturday. On this day, we would receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Sacrament of Reconciliation was something I had read about, and I eagerly looked forward to receiving the grace. For me, walking through the

confessional door was the hardest part. Father Keith agrees that entering into the confessional isn't easy, but the joy you experience from the grace received eclipses your reservations. My wife and I entered into the confessional separately and solemnly, and came out relieved and joyful. I was so refreshed by the experience that I had to be reminded to do my penance. We finished the retreat refreshed and joyful, yet still with heavy hearts from the losses mentioned above. Soon, however, we would taste of the Bread of Life.

Nothing characterizes the Catholic Faith more, in my opinion, than what took place at the Easter Vigil. Everything about the four marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) was presented in a tangible way during this event. We are one Church, united by one faith, set apart for one God, universal in culture and in family, and led by the successors of the Apostles, gathered together in Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The family element was so abundantly clear at the Vigil. For, though we had lost friends and intimacy with family, we saw that God gave us new family and friends. One of my coworkers came to the Vigil to support us, the loving elderly woman from RCIA Inquiry was there for us, my youngest sister came to sit with us, and even one of my professors from the University of Dallas came down to support us. I cannot tell you how much that touched Bobbie and me to be supported in such a way. We felt united by our common faith, not just in a spiritual or abstract way, but tangibly. It brings tears to my eyes to reflect upon the love we experienced all along our journey and especially at the culmination of the journey.

True Christian Unity at Last

There we were, kneeling before the altar upon which the Holy Spirit had descended to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Lord. Our whole embodied soul reflected in awe of the presence of our God and Savior in front of us, and our hunger and thirst was about to be satisfied. At the appointed moment, we rose from our seats and proceeded toward the priest. With a contrite heart and an open mouth, we feasted upon our Lord, receiving Him into our bodies and souls. The heavens opened up and time stood still as we all communed together — with those present, with those who had gone before us, and with those who will join us in the future. By the grace of God, we had entered into full communion with the Church Christ founded. Our decision to enter in, receive, participate, and commune with the one true Church is the most important decision of our lives.

God has led us to this point; we do not know where He will lead us from here. We will continue to write about our spiritual journey, hoping and praying that our experiences and stories will encourage you, bless you, even challenge you as you continue on your own journey of faith. ■



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