

## September 2017 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## How I Became The Catholic I Was

By Fr. Richard John Neuhaus

This is more a story than an argument. It is in some ways a very personal story, and yet not without broader implications. It is just possible that some may discern in the story suggestions of an argument, even an argument about the nature of Lutheranism, and of Protestantism more generally.

When in 1990 I was received by the late John Cardinal O'Connor into full communion with the Catholic Church — on September 8, the Nativity of Our Lady — I issued a short statement in response to the question “Why.” With Lutheran friends especially in mind, I said, “To those of you with whom I have traveled in the past, know that we travel together still. In the mystery of Christ and His Church nothing is lost, and the broken will be mended. If, as I am persuaded, my communion with Christ’s Church is now the fuller, then it follows that my unity with all who are in Christ is now the stronger. We travel together still.”

When Cardinal Newman was asked at a dinner party why he became a Catholic, he responded that it was not the kind of thing that can be properly explained between soup and the fish course. When asked the same question, and of course one is asked it with great frequency, I usually refer to Newman’s response. But then I add what I call the short answer, which is simply this: I became a Catholic in order to be more fully what I was and who I was as a Lutheran. The story that follows may shed some light on that short answer.

In the statement of September 8, 1990, I also said:

I cannot express adequately my gratitude for all the goodness I have known in the Lutheran communion. There I was baptized; there I learned my prayers; there I was introduced to Scripture and creed; there I was nurtured by Christ on Christ; there I came to know the utterly gratuitous love of God by which we live astonished. For my theological formation, for friendships beyond numbering, for great battles fought, for mutual consolations in defeat, for companionship in ministry — for all this I give thanks .... As for my thirty years as a Lutheran pastor, there is nothing in that ministry that I would repudiate, except my many sins and shortcomings. My becoming a priest in the Roman Catholic Church will be the completion and right ordering of what was begun all those years ago. Nothing that is good is rejected; all is fulfilled.

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*Journeys Home*

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

My story begins at St. John's Lutheran Church in the Ottawa Valley of Canada. To be brought up a Lutheran, at least a Missouri Synod Lutheran, at least there and at least then, was to know oneself as an ecclesial Christian. Of course I did not put it that way as a young boy, nor was it put that way to me, but I would later see what had happened. An ecclesial Christian is one who understands with mind and heart, and even feels with his fingertips, that Christ and His Church, head and body, are inseparable. For the ecclesial Christian, the act of faith in Christ and the act of faith in the Church are not two acts of faith but one. In the words of the third century St. Cyprian, martyr bishop of Carthage, "He who would have God as his Father must have the Church as his mother." In an important sense, every Christian, even the most individualistic, is an ecclesial Christian, since no one knows the gospel except from the Church. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* — no salvation outside the Church — applies to all. For some, that truth is incidental; for the ecclesial Christian it is constitutive, it is at the very core, of faith and life.

In my Missouri Synod childhood there were seemingly little things that made a big difference. Some would call them "non-theological factors," but I see now that they were fraught with theological significance. Across the street from the parsonage of St. John's was an evangelical Protestant church. Also across the street lived my best friends, the Spooner brothers, who with their devoutly Catholic family attended St. Columkil's Cathedral. I am sure it was unarticulated but self-evident to me by the time I was five years old that St. John's and the cathedral had more in common than either had with the evangelical chapel. For one immeasurably momentous thing, our churches baptized babies. Then, too, our being saved was something that

God did through His Church; it was a given, a gift. It did not depend — as it did for Dougy Cahill, our evangelical friend — upon feelings or spiritual experience. It depended upon grace bestowed through things done.

Unlike the Spooner boys, I was in catechism class taught to speak of *sola gratia* (by grace alone), and was told that the truth in that phrase divided us from the Catholics, but, as best I can remember, I was much more impressed by the *gratia* and disinclined to pick a fight over the *sola*. We both knew that we were to keep the commandments and try to please God in all that we did. The distinction supposedly was that I, as a Lutheran, tried to be good in gratitude for being saved, while Catholics tried to be good in order to be saved. I don't recall ever discussing this with the Spooner boys, but I expect we would have thought it a distinction without much of a difference. We knew we were baptized children of God for whom Christ died, and that it was a very bad thing to get on God's wrong side. In catechism class I was told that they, as Catholics, were more afraid of God's punishment than I, who was sure of forgiveness, but I never noticed that to be the case.

Don't get me wrong. I was not theologically precocious at age five, or even ten. I was not even especially devout. I really didn't like having to go to church. But I am looking back now, trying to understand the formation of an ecclesial Christian — a Christian of lower-case catholic sensibilities who would, step by step, be led to upper-case Catholic allegiance. There were other seemingly little things. St. John's and the other Lutheran churches I knew had a high altar. As did the cathedral. With candles. Also important, there was not a bare cross but a crucifix. And a communion rail at which we knelt and received what we were taught was really and truly and without any equivoca-

## FEATURED RESOURCES

### Deep in Scripture CD

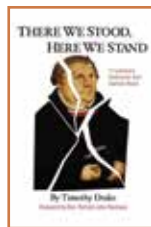


In this classic *Deep in Scripture* program, Marcus welcomes Timothy Drake, a former Lutheran, to discuss how the story of the Road to Emmaus opened his eyes to the importance of the Old Testament in understanding Jesus. They also discuss the Eucharistic themes of this story.

\$35

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

### There We Stood, Here We Stand — By Timothy Drake



Nearly 500 years after Martin Luther nailed his 95-theses to the church door at Wittenberg, the Lutheran Church has split again and again. What went wrong? These thought-provoking testimonies by eleven former Lutherans reveal how far the Lutheran Church has strayed from Luther. They include moving stories from four former female pastors, three former pastors, and others. Their intensely personal stories address the differences between Lutheranism and Catholicism — differences so profound that they have led many into the Catholic Church. Whether you are Lutheran or Catholic you'll come away from this book with a new, and perhaps life-changing perspective.

\$50

Receive *There We Stood, Here We Stand* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture CD* and *There We Stood, Here We Stand* for a donation of \$75.

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

tion the Body and Blood of Christ. As were the Spooner boys taught, and as we both said we believed, although we agreed that we sure couldn't figure it out. And we had catechisms to memorize that were almost identical in format and questions, although not always in answers. And everybody knew that the way to tell the difference between Catholic and Lutheran churches and all the others is that Catholics and Lutherans put a cross on top of their steeples instead of a weather vane or nothing at all.

Then, too, although in catechism class I heard about *sola Scriptura*, we both knew we had a Magisterium, although I'm sure I never heard the term. When it came to settling a question in dispute, they had the pope — and we had the faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. It was perfectly natural to ask the question, "What's our position on this or that?" The "our" in the question self-evidently referred to the Missouri Synod, and the answer was commonly given by reference to an article in the synod's official publication, *The Lutheran Witness*, usually written, or so it seemed, by Dr. Theodore Graebner. Why the Spooners went to one church and we to another seemed obvious enough; they were Catholics, and we were Lutherans. They were taught that they belonged to the "one true Church," and I was taught that I belonged to the Missouri Synod and all those who are in doctrinal agreement with the Missouri Synod, whose community made up "the true visible Church on earth." So, between their ecclesiological claim and ours, it seemed pretty much a toss-up. They were taught that, despite my not belonging to the one true Church, I could be saved by virtue of "invincible ignorance." I was taught that, despite their not belonging to the true visible Church on earth, they could be saved by — in the delicious phrase of Francis Pieper, Missouri's chief dogmatician — "felicitous inconsistency."

I doubt if ever for a moment the Spooner boys thought that maybe they should be Lutheran. I am sure that I as a boy thought — not very seriously, certainly not obsessively — but I thought about being a Catholic. It seemed that, of all the good things we had, they had more. Catholicism was more. Then, too, I knew where all those good things we had came from. They came from the Church that had more. Much later I would hear the schism of the sixteenth century described as, in the fine phrase of Jaroslav Pelikan, a "tragic necessity." I thought, then and now, that the tragedy was much more believable than the necessity. But in my boyhood, the division did not seem tragic. It was just the way things were. I do not recall anything that could aptly be described as anti-Catholicism. My father's deer hunting buddy was a Catholic priest, and deer hunting, for my Dad, was something very close to *communicatio in sacris*. In the Missouri Synod of those days, praying with Catholics — or anyone else with whom we were not in complete doctrinal agreement — was condemned as "unionism." The rules didn't say anything about the deep communion of deer hunting.

Of course, we kids went to different schools: they to the "separate" (meaning Catholic) school and we to the "public" (meaning Protestant) school. Sometimes they would walk home on one side of the street and shout, "Catholic, Catholic ring the bell / Protestant, Protestant go to hell." To which we on the other side of the street reciprocated by reversing the jingle. It was all in good fun, much like a school cheer. I don't think for a moment that either of us thought it had any reference to the other's eternal destiny. It is just the way things were. There were other differences. Tommy and Eddie went to confession, and I was curious about that. At St. John's Lutheran, on Saturday evenings before "communion Sunday," people came to "announce" for communion, a pale ritual trace of what had once been confession, utterly devoid of any sense of sacramental mystery. It was a simple matter of writing down their names in the "communion book," and, if my Dad wasn't there to do it, it was done by my Mother or one of my older siblings.

And there was this: St. Columkil's had a bishop, put there, it was said, by the pope in Rome. St. John's had, well, my Dad, put there, as he told the story, by his seminary classmate who got him the call. To be sure it was, in Missouri parlance, a "divine call," but I wonder now if as a child I intuited that there was, between Bishop Smith and my Dad, some qualitative difference of ecclesial authority. Not that I was inclined to doubt what my Dad taught. After all, he had the Bible, Martin Luther, and the St. Louis faculty on his side. And he was indisputably authoritative in manner. Not for nothing during his days at seminary was he called "Pope Neuhaus." But this young boy sensed, although he could not say just how, that between the Bishop of Pembroke and the pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in Pembroke, there was a qualitative difference of office.

It was not a matter of life-or-death urgency. Live and let live was the order of the day. Where we differed, we were right and they were wrong. In disagreeing with Catholics, everybody on our side — what was vaguely described as the Protestant side — was agreed. But then, we Lutherans disagreed with many Protestants and took the Catholic side when it came to, for instance, baptizing babies and knowing that Jesus is really and truly and without equivocation present in the Holy Communion. It was all very confusing and didn't bear too much thinking about. I would in time come to understand that the question is that of authority, and it must be thought about very carefully indeed.

I will return to the question of authority, but for now I simply underscore the ways in which being brought up a Missouri Lutheran — at least then and at least there — produced an ecclesial Christian. One might also speak of a sacramental Christian or an incarnational Christian, but, whatever the terminology, the deepest-down conviction, the most irrepressible sensibility, is that of the touchability, the visibility, the palpability of what we might call "the Christian thing." To use the language of old eucharistic controversies, *finitum capax infiniti* — the finite is

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

capable of the infinite. Put differently, there is no access to the infinite except through the finite. Or yet again, God's investment in the finite can be trusted infinitely. Although Lutheran theology discarded the phrase, it is the *ex opere operato* conviction evident in Luther's ultimate defiance of Satan's every temptation by playing the trump card, "I am baptized!" *Ex opere operato* is the sacramental enactment of *sola gratia*. It is uncompromisingly objective. By it, morbid introspection, the delusions of religious enthusiasm, and the deceptively clever postulations of the theological imagination are called to order by truth that is accountable to no higher truth. The One who is Truth speaks in the voice of the Church — "I baptize you"; "I forgive you yours sins"; "This is my body."

Moving forward to my teenage years, I had in high school what our evangelical friends would call a born-again experience, and for a time viewed with contempt the ritual and sacramental formalities of what I thought to be a spiritually comatose Lutheranism. For a time, I suppose I might have been a good candidate for the Baptist ministry, but it did not last. Missouri's traditional hostility toward "pietism" — an exaggerated emphasis on the affective dimension of Christian faith — struck me as hostility toward piety. But after a period of frequently anguished uncertainty about the possibility of sorting out subjective experience and egotistic assertiveness from the workings of grace, I came to a new appreciation of Luther's warnings against religious enthusiasm. Several years later, at Concordia, St. Louis, I was to discover the possible synthesis of piety, clear reason, and ecclesial authority in the person and teaching of Professor Arthur Carl Piepkorn.

The students most closely gathered around him called him — behind his back, to be sure — "the Pieps," and those who in American Lutheranism today describe themselves as "evangelical catholics" — perhaps a fourth or more of the clergy — are aptly called the Piepkornians. Piepkorn was a man of disciplined prayer and profound erudition, and was deeply engaged in the liturgical renewal and the beginnings of Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue. At St. Louis he taught the Lutheran confessional writings of the sixteenth century, which he insistently called "the symbolical books of the Church of the Augsburg Confession." They were, he insisted, the "symbols" of a distinctive communion within the communion of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. They represented a way of being catholic as the heirs of a Reformation that was intended to be a movement of reform within and for the one Church of Christ.

Piepkorn underscored the Church's tradition prior to the Reformation, the tradition of which Lutheranism was part. The accent was on continuity, not discontinuity. Perhaps the sixteenth century break was necessary — although that was never emphasized — but certainly the Lutheran Reformation, unlike other movements that claimed the Reformation heritage, had

no delusions about being a new beginning, a so-called rediscovery of the gospel, by which the authentic and apostolic Church was reconstituted. Lutheranism was not a new beginning but another chapter in the history of the one Church. The Church is not a theological school of thought, or a society formed by allegiance to theological formulas — not even formulas such as "justification by faith" — but is, rather, the historically specifiable community of ordered discipleship through time, until the end of time. Piepkorn emphasized that we are Christians first, catholic Christians second, and Lutheran Christians third. In this understanding, the goal was to fulfill the promise of the Lutheran Reformation by bringing its gifts into full communion with the Great Tradition that is most fully and rightly ordered through time in the Roman Catholic Church.

In this understanding, the conclusion of the Augsburg Confession of 1530 was taken to be normative. There the signers declare:

Only those things have been recounted which it seemed necessary to say in order that it may be understood that nothing has been received among us, in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or to the church catholic. For it is manifest that we have guarded diligently against the introduction into our churches of any new and ungodly doctrines.

For us Piepkornians, everything was to be held accountable to that claim. In some streams of Lutheran orthodoxy, as well as in Protestant liberalism, a very different notion of normativity was proposed. In the language of the twentieth-century Paul Tillich, catholic substance was to be held in tension with Protestant principle, with Protestant principle having the corrective and final word. But a principle that is not part of the substance inevitably undermines the substance. And what is called the Protestant principle is, as we know from sad experience, so protean, so subject to variation, that it results either in the vitiation of doctrine itself or further schism in the defense of doctrinal novelty. Theology that is not in service to "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) turns against the faith once delivered to the saints. Ideas that are not held accountable to "the Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15) will in time become the enemy of that truth. Such was our understanding of the normative claim of the Augustana to have received nothing contrary to Scripture or to the Catholic Church.

But the Lutheran chapter in the history of the Church did occasion schism, and for that unhappy fact there was blame enough to share all around. In my judgment, the division was tragic but not necessary. There was and is no truth that requires division from the pillar and bulwark of truth. The Catholic Church, as Chesterton observed, is ever so much larger from the inside than from the outside. And especially is that the case, I would add, for those whose identity

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### Three Things for September

By Marcus Grodi

"Three Things for September"

By Marcus Grodi ..... A

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This article in our monthly CHNewsletter opens what we have called for many years, the Member's Section. We have designated this inside section, containing membership-related articles and prayer requests, with the idea that this section could be removed, leaving the outside portion, with the conversion story and related articles, for evangelization. So, first, please consider removing and saving this inner section for your own edification, but giving the remainder of the newsletter away to a friend, family member, or coworker who needs to discover the fullness of the Catholic Faith. You might also consider giving this to your priest to help him know more about our work.

Second, this September marks the 20th anniversary of the start of *The Journey Home* program on EWTN! On September 7, 1997, I hosted Dr. Thomas Howard as the first guest on this new live program. That episode was the first television program I had ever hosted, and it was only by grace that I not only survived that first nail-biting experience, but have continued to do so these twenty years! (July 2016 was the 20th anniversary of my first appearance on Johnnette Benkovic's *Abundant Life* program. It was from this appearance that I was invited to appear on Mother Angelica's *Live* program in December, 1996, which eventually led to her invitation to host *The Journey Home* program, which began in September, 1997. So, we have just finished the 20th season of the program, and this month is the 20th anniversary of the start of the program and begins the 21st season.)

As I've mentioned many times, Mother Angelica's reason for suggesting the program was to give comfort to the many letters she had received from people who bemoaned that their siblings, children, and grandchildren had left the Catholic Faith. She felt if they could hear the stories of people who have come home to the Church, it would give them hope that this also might happen with their loved ones. I had an additional reason for gladly accepting the invitation to host this program — I hoped the stories would reach out to our separated brethren. We know from reading your letters and emails that many of you have come to the Coming Home Network via watching *The Journey Home* program. We are grateful to EWTN for this connection, and especially for allowing us to produce the program in our own studio — a studio built almost entirely through your generosity! Whenever you watch an episode of *The Journey Home*, remember that neither EWTN nor the Coming Home Network could exist without your prayers and generosity.

Third, we are featuring as this month's conversion story that of a very prominent American convert, Fr. Richard John Neuhaus. This month marks the 27th anniversary of his reception into the Catholic Church from his strong Lutheran roots and the 26th anniversary of his ordination to the Catholic priesthood. Fr. Neuhaus was a regular guest on several EWTN programs, especially for news-related reports concerning the Vatican. He also appeared on *The Journey Home* program in 2003, six years before his death in 2009. His journey of faith from Lutheranism to the Catholic Church, from the Lutheran pastoral ministry to the Catholic priesthood, involved many controversies, mainly because his own theological position evolved from a more liberal, progressive to an increasingly conservative, traditional perspective. He moved from a more "spirit of Vatican II" perspective to be a staunch defender and proponent of the authentic interpretation and implementation of the Vatican II documents. I wish his last book, *Catholic Matters*, was still in print because I would highly recommend it as a good summary of his views.

I believe one of the reasons he became such a controversial figure was because he believed that God was calling him into the frays of controversy. He was given the graces as well as the courage to tackle big issues. Through his writings and public persona, especially through his founding and editing of the journal, *First Things*, he delved into politics, economics, culture, as well as theology and philosophy. I believe it was through his sometimes brash engagement in these issues that the Lord brought his life and convictions in line with the authentic teachings of the Catholic Church.

Though other converts may come to your mind more readily, I do believe that Fr. Neuhaus was one of the most influential converts in the twentieth century. *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!

eth century. Because my own childhood faith was Lutheran like his, I found his conversion story and writings very helpful during the many months of searching that led to my own conversion to the Church. And it was a great pleasure and privilege to eventually interview him on *The Journey Home* (EWTN will re-air the program this month on September 4. You can also watch the video of his *Journey Home* program anytime on our website at [chnetwork.org](http://chnetwork.org).)

Since we are just one month away from the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, I thought it would be timely to feature Fr. Neuhaus' story. George Weigel, a long-time friend of Fr. Neuhaus, explains his conversion in maybe a diminished perspective:

Father Neuhaus's reception into full communion with the Catholic Church didn't have all that much impact on his work, as his Catholic sympathies

were well-known before the reception. He came out of that part of Lutheranism that regarded the Lutheran movement as a reform movement within the *Una Sancta*, and when it became clear that the vast majority of Lutherans did not accept that that was their ecclesial position, he moved on.

In this, however, I see a succinct description of how the Holy Spirit leads a person, sometimes over many years, to become so convicted in truth, that he has no other option but to follow that truth regardless of where it leads. This has been true of many of our CHNetwork members: God in His mysterious grace opens the heart and mind of a non-Catholic clergyman or layman to recognize the truth of the Catholic Church. For years, these new convictions begin shaping their work and beliefs, and maybe they think they can go on, remaining in their present positions and responsibilities. But then, in God's good timing, they come to recognize that God is calling them to *come home*. As Fr. Neuhaus himself says, in his Foreword to the book, *There We Stood, Here We Stand* (See page 2 to order a copy.):

I vividly recall waking up the next morning [after being received into the Church] and realizing that something was very, very different. I tried to put my finger on it, and then it came to me: For the first time in many years, I was not beginning the day with the question weighing on my mind, Where do I belong in the Church of Jesus Christ? I knew where I belonged; I was there. I was home.

I pray that Fr. Neuhaus' story is an encouragement to you to consider more deeply the fullness of truth in the Catholic Church, whether if you are still on the journey, or if you are a convert or a life-long Catholic to re-consider more fully the depth of our Catholic Faith. For this is where we belong; this is home. Thanks be to God! ■

## A BEAUTIFUL UPGRADE



We've recently launched a beautiful and powerful new version of

our website, [chnetwork.org](http://chnetwork.org). Along with the overhaul to the look and feel of the site, you'll notice six new main pages: Conversion Stories, Answers, Connection, Spiritual Direction, and Vocational Support. Take a few minutes to explore, share the new website with others, and let us know what you think!

## 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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# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For Michael, a former missionary, that the Lord would guide him as he tells the elders of his congregation that he is becoming a Catholic.
- For a Southern Baptist minister in Georgia, that in his quest to chase after the fullness of Jesus the Holy Spirit would bring home to the Holy Eucharist.
- For Esther, the wife of a minister, that our Lord would guide her home to the Catholic Church.
- For an Assembly of God lay minister in Asia, that the Holy Spirit would bring her back to the grace of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- For Jonathan, a Pentecostal minister, that our Lord Jesus Christ would grant his desire to want to know more of God's truths.
- For Jackson, a Baptist seminarian, that God would guide him to faithful Catholic friends willing to show him the truths of the Catholic Faith.
- For a former Methodist minister, whose wife is humiliated that he is now a Catholic, that the Holy Spirit may soften her heart.
- For a former non-denominational minister, whose wife filed divorce papers on Holy Thursday.
- For Paul, a former Old Catholic priest, who is discerning the possibility of being a Catholic priest, that our Lord would show him the path to follow.

■ For Brian, a Southern Baptist minister, that his wife may be granted a heart to love the Church and Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

■ For Tim, a former Anglican priest, that our Lord Jesus would guide him to gainful full-time employment.

■ For a married couple who are strategizing how the husband can resign his associate pastorate at the Seventh Day Adventist Church so they can enter the Catholic Church.

## Lay

■ For Victor, that his seeking of the truth will lead him to the fullness of truth in the Catholic Church.

■ For a woman who had converted to the Catholic Church but now no longer believes in Christianity.

■ For a man who feels like he should remain Anglican at this point so as not to cause distress in his family since they do not share his interest in the Catholic Faith.

■ For Colin who attends Mass and watches EWTN, that he know when to move forward with his interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For a woman who is drawn to Christianity but has found a very unwelcoming reception from local Catholics, that she not be discouraged in her journey.

■ For Linda who is drawn to the Church but is concerned about Catholics not evangelizing as much as Protestants.

■ For Alisha who is interested in Catholicism but struggles with reprogramming a lifetime of thinking as a Baptist.

■ For a Lutheran who is drawn to the Church and hoping that she and her husband will be able to move towards becoming Catholic together even though he has been very anti-Catholic in the past.

■ For Leslie, a convert, whose marriage is in serious difficulty, that she continues to trust in God and His grace.

■ For Kathy who is searching for a parish she can relate to and begin RCIA at, that she find good local support so she doesn't feel so alone.

■ For Jennifer who decided to delay RCIA and becoming Catholic in order to give herself an opportunity to do further study before making a decision about conversion.

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

#### September 4

Fr. Richard John Neuhaus\*  
 Former Lutheran  
 Re-air from 5/26/2003

#### September 11

*The Journey Home* 20th Anniversary  
 Special

#### September 18

Barbara Heil\*  
 Former Charismatic, Pentecostal, and  
 Word of Faith

#### September 25

Carl Loewenstine\*  
 Former Lutheran

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...

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as Protestants depends upon their being outside. And so it was that for thirty years as a Lutheran pastor, thinker, and writer, as editor of *Una Sancta*, an ecumenical journal of theology, and, later, *Forum Letter*, an independent Lutheran publication, I worked for what I incessantly called “the healing of the breach of the sixteenth century between Rome and the Reformation.” For a long time there seemed to be believable, albeit painfully slow, movement toward that goal. Very hopeful was the reappropriation of the Lutheran tradition associated with the nineteenth-century “evangelical catholic,” Wilhelm Loehe, and the *ressourcement* — the going back to the sources — evident in the 1970s production and reception of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Then, too, there were promising new levels of understanding and theological reconciliation achieved in the formal Lutheran-Roman Catholic theological dialogues. These hopeful signs, however, were not to last.

The last several decades have not been kind to Lutheranism. By the end of the 1980s it seemed evident to me that real, existent Lutheranism — as distinct from Lutheranism as an idea or school of thought — had, willy-nilly but decisively, turned against the fulfillment of its destiny as a reforming movement within the one Church of Christ. Lutheranism in all its parts, both in this country and elsewhere, had settled for being a permanently separated Protestant denomination — or, as the case may be, several Protestant denominations. Some of my Lutheran friends say that, in entering into full communion with the Catholic Church, I acted precipitously, I jumped the gun. To which I say that I hope they are right; and if, someday in some way that cannot now be foreseen, there is ecclesial reconciliation and a healing of the breach of the sixteenth century, I hope that my decision will have played at least a minuscule part in that happy outcome.

Mine was a decision mandated by conscience. I have never found it in his writings, but a St. Louis professor who had been his student told me that the great confessional Lutheran theologian Peter Brunner regularly said that a Lutheran who does not daily ask himself why he is not a Roman Catholic cannot know why he is a Lutheran. That impressed me very deeply. I was thirty years a Lutheran pastor, and after thirty years of asking myself why I was not a Roman Catholic I finally ran out of answers that were convincing either to me or to others. And so I discovered not so much that I had made the decision as that the decision was made, and I have never looked back, except to trace the marks of grace, of *sola gratia*, each step of the way.

My reception occasioned some little comment, including the observation that I and others who make this decision have a “felt need for authority.” This is usually said in a condescending manner by people who believe that they are able to live with ambiguities and tensions that some of us cannot handle. Do I have a felt need for authority, for obedience, for submission?

But of course. Obedience is the rightly ordered disposition toward truth, and submission is subordination of the self to that by which the self is claimed. Truth commands, and authority has to do with the authorship, the origins, of commanding truth. By what authority? By whose authority? There are no more important questions for the right ordering of our lives and ministries. Otherwise, in our preaching, teaching, and entire ministry we are just making it up as we go along, and, by acting in God’s name, taking His name in vain.

It was sadly amusing to read that a Lutheran denomination in this country is undertaking a major study with a view toward revising its teaching on sexual morality, with particular reference to homosexuality. Especially striking was the assurance that the study would be conducted “without any prior assumptions.” Imagine that. The entire course of Christian fidelity is obedience to the received truth of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ and the Spirit’s guiding of the Church’s reflection on that truth. At some point this Lutheran body will arrive at its new teaching. Through a complicated process of bureaucratic planning, interest group agitation, and a legitimating majority vote, it will eventually arrive at the point of saying, “this we believe, teach, and confess.” Undoubtedly Scripture will be cited, but, as Luther said, biblical texts, like wax noses, can be twisted to fit. If, as seems probable, this body adopts a new teaching and one asks by what authority it teaches this new doctrine, the only honest answer will be, “Because we will it to be so.” “It is what was decided by the procedures adopted by our religious society,” they might say. “Ours is, after all, a voluntary association, so nobody else has any right to complain.” By the rules of that denomination, the Church through time and the contemporary Church universal, to which Christ promised the Spirit’s guidance, does not get a vote.

From my boyhood intuitions as an ecclesial Christian, it seemed self-evident that, if God intended to reveal any definite truths for the benefit of humankind, and if Jesus intended a continuing community of discipleship, then some reliable

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means would be provided for the preservation and transmission of such truths through the centuries. Catholics believe that God did provide such reliable means by giving the Apostles and their successors, the bishops, authority to teach in His name and by promising to be with them forever. The teaching of the Apostles and of the apostolic churches, securely grounded in the biblical Word of God, continues to this day, and will continue to the end of time. Catholics believe that, under certain carefully prescribed circumstances, the pope and the whole body of bishops are able to teach with infallibility. That is a word that frightens many, but I don't think it should. It means that the Church is indefectible, that we have God's promise that He will never allow the Church to definitively defect from the truth, to fall into apostasy. Infallibility, Avery Cardinal Dulles writes, "is simply another way of saying that the Holy Spirit will preserve the Church against using its full authority to require its members to assent to what is false." Without that assurance, he adds, "the truth of revelation would not be preserved in recognizable form." And, I would add, to obey the truth we must be able to recognize the truth.

The question of authority, the question of "Who says so?," has been with the Church from the beginning. In Corinth some invoked Peter, some Paul, some Apollos, and some Christ. And so it was later with the Montanists, the Arians, the Nestorians, the Valentinians, the Donatists, and on and on. A sure mark of a heretical and schismatic community, said St. Augustine, is that it names itself by a man or an idea rather than by the simple title "Catholic." Also centuries later, for example in the sixteenth century, those who had sense enough to know that the Church did not begin with their new theological insight tried to reconstruct Christian history to fit their views. Thus the Lutheran Matthias Illyricus Flacius compiled the *Magdeburg Centuries*; thus followers of John Knox claimed to have reestablished the polity of the New Testament Church; thus the

"Landmarkist" historiography of American Baptists who trace the lineage of the one true Church through Cathari, Waldensians, Lollards, Albigenses, and all the way back to Jesus Himself. All such efforts attempt to answer the question of authority. Some are less ludicrous than others, but none is plausible. As St. Augustine and all Catholic teachers have known, the teaching of the Church is lived forward, not reconstructed backward.

St. Augustine appealed to the *securus judicat orbis terrarum* — the secure judgment of the whole world, by which he meant the Catholic Church. Yes, but what do you do when that judgment is unclear or in heated dispute? Augustine's answer is that you wait, in firm communion with the Catholic Church and in firm confidence that the Holy Spirit will, as promised, clarify the matter in due course. The point is that apostolic doctrine cannot be maintained over time without apostolic ministry, meaning ministry that is both apostolic in its origins and apostolic in its governing authority. This argument is brilliantly advanced in his polemic against the Donatists, who appealed to St. Cyprian as precedent for refusing to recognize the sacraments of the *traditores*, those who had lapsed in time of persecution. Yes, answered Augustine, the holy Cyprian was confused, and admitted as much, but he awaited clarification by the *securus judicat orbis terrarum*. The one thing he would not do, unlike the Donatists, was to break communion with the Catholic Church.

The Church is holy in practice and correct in doctrine, said the schismatic Donatists, and therefore it cannot exist in communion with the unholy and erring. It follows that the Donatists are the true Church. To which Augustine replied:

If, therefore, by such communion with the wicked the just cannot but perish, the Church had already perished in the time of Cyprian. Whence then sprang the origin of Donatus? Where was he taught, where was he baptized, where was he ordained, since [you claim

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**CHNetwork**  
P.O. Box 8290  
Zanesville, OH  
43702-8290



740-450-1175



info@chnetwork.org



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that] the Church had been already destroyed by the contagion of communion with the wicked? But if the Church still existed, the wicked could do no harm to the good in one communion with them. Wherefore did you separate yourselves?

“Wherefore did you separate yourselves?” Augustine’s question echoes down through the centuries, directed at all who have separated themselves from communion with the Catholic Church. Today the criticism is heard that the Catholic Church, for all its magisterial authority, will permit almost anything in teaching or practice so long as one does not formally break communion with the Church. There is truth in that, although I think it not a criticism but a compliment. While what Lutherans call the *publica doctrina*, the public teaching, of the Catholic Church is lucidly clear, it is true that the Church bends every effort, puts the best construction on every deviant opinion, in order to avoid what Augustine calls “the heinous and damnable sin of schism.” For instance, in the twenty-three years of the supposedly authoritarian pontificate of John Paul II, the number of theologians publicly censured can probably be counted on the fingers of one hand, and the only schism has been that of the integralist Lefebvrist of France. Disagreement, confusion, and false teaching can do great evil, but the remedy for such evil is always to be found in communion with that body that is gifted with the charism of providing *securus judicat orbis terrarum*.

Councils can err, said the Reformers. No, says the Catholic Church, but the Church’s teaching lives forward, and no definition, including that of councils, is entirely adequate to the whole of the truth. The Catholic Church has always taught with St. Paul that now, as he says in 1 Corinthians 13, we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now we know in part; then we shall understand fully, even as we have been fully understood. Along the way to that eschatological fullness — which is a frequently jagged, confusing, and conflicted way — it is promised to the Church that she will not, she will not irretrievably, lose the way. It is not everything that we might want, but it is enough; it is more than enough.

The Church’s teaching lives forward; it is not reconstructed backward — whether from the fifth century or the sixteenth or the nineteenth or the twenty-first. But through all the changes of living forward, how do we know what is corruption and what is authentic development? Recall Cardinal Newman’s reflection on the development of doctrine, a reflection that has been incorporated by magisterial teaching. He suggested seven marks of authentic development: authentic development preserves the Church’s apostolic form; it reflects continuity of principles in testing the unknown by the known; it demonstrates the power to assimilate what is true, even in what is posited against it; it follows a logical sequence; it anticipates future developments; it conserves past developments, and, throughout, it claims and demonstrates the vigor of teaching authority. And thus it is, said St. Vincent of Lerins in the fifth century, that in authentic

development of doctrine nothing presents itself in the Church’s old age that was not latent in her youth. Such was the truth discovered by Augustine, a truth “ever ancient, ever new.”

And so it is that this ecclesial Christian, this son of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Pembroke, this former Lutheran pastor of St. John the Evangelist in Brooklyn, was led to September 8, 1990, to be received into full communion by John Cardinal O’Connor in his residence chapel of St. John the Evangelist, my patron saint. In every way, including my awareness of the intercession of St. John, the continuities are ever so much more striking than the discontinuities. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, my Protestant brothers and sisters are, by virtue of baptism and faith in Christ, truly but imperfectly in communion with the Catholic Church. Which means also, of course, that I am truly but imperfectly in communion with them. Moreover, and according to the same Council, all the saving and sanctifying grace to be found outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church gravitates toward the perfection of that imperfect communion. Some view the Catholic Church as claiming to be self-sufficient, but that is not true. Her ecclesiology is such that, of all Christian communions, she knows herself to be most in need. Nowhere are the words *Ut unum sint*, “that they may all be one,” prayed so fervently; nowhere is the wound of our broken communion felt so keenly; nowhere is the commitment to reconciliation so relentless or irrevocable.

It would take another essay to survey the current prospect for such reconciliation. Suffice it to say that, whether with respect to the Orthodox Church of the East or the separated communions of the West, these are hard times for ecumenism, hard times for the hope for Christian unity. But the Church has known many times that were harder, much harder; she has learned that the better part of fidelity is sometimes simply persistent waiting upon the movement of the Holy Spirit toward possibilities that she can neither anticipate nor control, but for which we must together pray.

As for now, I end where I began — as in my life’s course I began where I have ended — by saying again: “To those of you with whom I have traveled in the past, know that we travel together still. In the mystery of Christ and His Church nothing is lost, and the broken will be mended. If, as I am persuaded, my communion with Christ’s Church is now the fuller, then it follows that my unity with all who are in Christ is now the stronger. We travel together still.” ■



FR. RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS (1936 – 2009) was the Editor-in-Chief of *First Things*. This article is adapted from a presentation at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, a seminary of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. It was printed in the April 2002 issue of *First Things*. Used with permission of *First Things*.

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