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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## An Orthodox Jew Finds Jesus

By Charles Hoffman

In July 1990, my wife, Sara, and I visited Poland as part of a pilgrimage. It was my first trip back since 1937, when I was four years old and visited my grandparents in Krakow. During our pilgrimage, we visited Auschwitz, the notorious concentration camp. It was an extremely emotional experience for me. I saw pictures of little children who died in Auschwitz just because they were Jews. Items on display included children's shoes, clothing, and other articles. I realized then that, but by the grace of God, I could have been in those pictures. Those shoes and belongings could have been mine.

I was born into a Jewish family in Berlin, Germany in October 1933. In that same year, Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Soon afterwards, democratic Germany became a dictatorship, and Hitler was the *Fuehrer* (Leader). "Crystal Night" is the name given to the night of November 9, 1938. In most German cities, store windows of Jewish shops were broken; Jewish houses and apartments were destroyed; and synagogues were demolished and set on fire that night. Many Jews were arrested; some were beaten; some even killed. On that night, I was at my aunt's apartment in Berlin. Gangs ran into the courtyard of the apartment complex, screaming hatred. In that complex was a synagogue, which they destroyed, along with all the sacred scrolls and prayer books. As a five-year-old Jewish boy, I was terrified.

After 1938, it became extremely difficult for Jews to leave Germany. By the grace of God, my mother and I left on May 13, 1939. With some nine hundred other Jews, we boarded a ship called the St. Louis, bound for Cuba, where my father was waiting for

us. Upon arrival, the Cuban government would not grant us entry. After a week of futile negotiation, our ship turned toward the United States, hoping for asylum. The U.S. Congress debated our fate, then refused us entry. The German captain had no choice but to return to Europe. He did not want to go to Germany; he knew only too well what would happen to the Jewish passengers. Finally, after intense negotiations with several European countries, England, France, and Holland accepted us. My mother and I, including some three hundred who were Polish citizens, fortunately went to England. Though I was born in Germany, my mother and I were Polish citizens on account of my father being Polish. The six hundred Jews holding German citizenship were accepted by France and Holland. Eventually, almost all of the latter died in concentration camps when Nazi troops occupied those countries. Because of this ill-fated odyssey, my mother and I are considered Holocaust survivors.

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Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

My maternal grandmother and other relatives on my mother's side were able to get out of Germany. Most of my Polish relatives on my father's side were killed in concentration camps when the Germans occupied Poland. From 1939 to 1943, my mother and I lived in London, England. During most of that time, we experienced the terror of daily bombings. Coming to the United States in 1943 was a tremendous blessing. I quickly came to appreciate what a great country it is.

Although my mother was not well-versed in her Jewish Faith, she insisted that I be taught and practice the Orthodox Jewish tradition. Modern Judaism is divided into Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform branches, representing an extremely wide theological spectrum. It is the Orthodox branch, which today represents only about ten percent of all Judaism, that most closely mirrors the beliefs of Pharisaic Judaism at the time of Jesus.

While attending college in New York during the 1950s, some of my best friends were Christian. We had many discussions about religion. Up to that point in time I had not read the New Testament, and nothing my Christian friends said, nor the way they acted, attracted me to Jesus or Christianity.

Christians often told me that it was Jews who killed Jesus. I rejected this and blamed the Romans. However, while in college, I did read parts of the New Testament as an assignment in an English literature course — my first real encounter with Jesus Christ. His teachings impressed me; my misgiving was that He claimed equality with God. I felt it important to defend the doctrine of God's unity. Also, Jesus was not the glorious Messiah that I had been taught to expect, but a man who had suffered and died. As an Orthodox Jew, I felt I had no choice but to reject Him.

In 1956, my wife, Irma, and I were married in an Orthodox Jewish ceremony. In 1957, I graduated from Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn (now part of NYU) with a Bachelor of Electrical Engi-

neering degree. A few years after graduation, something began to bother me. I wanted to understand what motivated Jesus to make the claims He made about who He was and why God allowed Him and His Jewish followers to start a new religion called Christianity, which had now grown to over a billion believers, while we Jews were so relatively small in number. The Holy Spirit was encouraging me to search for answers by investigating the beliefs of Christianity from its foundation to the present. At the time, I did not realize that God would turn this investigation into a conversion process.

There were some weighty Christian claims that I had to address: that the one God is a Trinity of Persons; that Jesus, the Messiah, was God; that He became man; and that He had to suffer and die. I started with the one God being a Trinity since I felt that this would be the key to resolving the other issues. This investigation took several years of intensive study and prayer while the Holy Spirit and God's abundant grace gradually enlightened me to the truth. Having the benefit of being raised in the Jewish Faith, the more I studied Jesus' teachings, the more He fascinated me, and the more He challenged me to discover who He was, what He did, and what it meant for my life. It is because Jesus was a Jew that His words enabled me to understand why He was the Messiah who I believed was yet to come and to accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

Once I had come to terms with the issues of the Trinity and the Incarnation, I began to investigate the inexplicable growth of Christianity. In 1961, more than one billion Christians inhabited the world two thousand years after a Jew named Jesus and His twelve Jewish followers had started Christianity. Jesus claimed to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. But Jews, including His Apostles, had never conceived that the Messiah would be God Himself and would suffer and die on behalf of mankind. After Jesus' death, His disciples claimed that He

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## SUPPORT 25 YEARS OF THE CHNETWORK!



### Paul Through Jewish Eyes CD

— By Dr. Jeff Morrow

In this talk, Dr. Jeff Morrow shows how reading St. Paul through Jewish eyes brings an insightful and deep perspective to the Scriptures.



### Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper

— By Brant Pitre

*Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist* shines fresh light on the Last Supper by looking at it through Jewish eyes. Using his in-depth knowledge of the Bible and ancient Judaism, Dr. Brant Pitre answers questions such as: What was the Passover like at the time of Jesus? What were the Jewish hopes for the Messiah? What was Jesus' purpose in instituting the Eucharist during the feast of Passover? And, most important of all, what did Jesus mean when He said, "This is my body . . . This is my blood"? Inspiring and informative, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist* is a groundbreaking work that is sure to illuminate one of the greatest mysteries of the Christian Faith: the mystery of Jesus' presence in "the breaking of the bread."

\$25

**SUPPORT 25 YEARS OF THE CHNETWORK** with a donation of \$25 and receive *Paul Through Jewish Eyes* CD (\$1 for every year of our ministry).

\$50

**SUPPORT 25 YEARS OF THE CHNETWORK** with a donation of \$50 and receive *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist* (\$2 for every year of our ministry).

\$75

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

# Baptism and the Fathers of the Church

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator

As a “Bible Christian,” I would have said I loved the writings of the Fathers. Of course, what I would have meant is that I loved to read Luther and Calvin and the other heroes of the Reformation. What Christians believed in the early centuries of the Christian era didn’t matter too much to me.

And why should it? After all, when it came to determining Christian doctrine, all that really counted was, “What saith the Scriptures?”

Then I met John Henry Newman. Newman was an Oxford scholar and Anglican minister so renowned in his time that his sermons were printed in the newspapers each week and read throughout England. He was one of the most brilliant Christian thinkers of the 19th century. At the age of 45, however, he left the Church of England to become Catholic — unthinkable!

I picked up and read his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, the defense he wrote of his decision. I also began to read his extraordinary *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* in which a particular series of assertions caught my eye.

“To be deep in history is to *cease* to be Protestant.”

What? I sat bolt upright as though my chair was on fire. To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant?

But this was only the beginning of birth pangs. Newman went on to insist that it is “easy to show” that the Christianity of history was not Protestantism. In fact, he insisted that if the kind of church I pastored at the time — and theological system I taught — had ever existed in the early centuries of the Christian history, there’s no record of it.

“So much must the Protestant grant, that if such a system of doctrine as he would now introduce ever existed in early times, it has been clean swept away as if by a deluge, suddenly, silently, and without memorial.”

Newman had thrown down the gauntlet, and I was inspired to take it up. Was it possible that there was truth to what Newman was so boldly asserting?

I decided I would begin to read the early Church Fathers, straight through, and, as much as it is possible to know, in order. Why not see what these men had to say? After all, these were Christianity’s first bishops, theologians, apologists, saints, and martyrs. A couple of them had been disciples of those who had been disciples of the Apostles. It seemed intuitively reasonable that those closest to the Apostles might have a better handle on what the Apostles thought and meant by the things they wrote than those living two thousand years later, or even fifteen hundred years later in the case of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and the other Protestant Reformers.

## The Meaning of Baptism

I understood that Catholics held a “sacramental” view of Baptism — the belief that in Baptism God acts to accomplish what is depicted. Sins are actually washed away. We are born anew and given the gift of the Holy Spirit. God, of course, can do these things when and as He wishes, but He has chosen to do them through Baptism.

If you want an image of the Catholic teaching, think of Naaman the Syrian being instructed to dip himself in the Jordan River seven times in order to be cleansed of his leprosy.

Think of Jesus commanding the man blind from birth to “go, wash in the pool of Siloam” in order to receive his sight.

In both cases, faith was to be expressed in an act of obedience. “Go and wash!” And when this was done, the men were healed — not because the water was made “magical” but because of God’s gracious action in response to their faith and obedience.

According to Catholic teaching, this is how it is with Baptism.

Now, as a Baptist, I looked at Baptism as a symbolic act by which a believer in Christ makes *public profession* of his or her faith. It speaks of what God has done in the life of the believer and, as such, is meaningful. But it doesn’t itself *do* anything.

## Baptism and the Fathers

I began to read the Church Fathers and was struck right away by the language used to describe Baptism.

For instance, I read the *Letter of Barnabas*, one of the earliest Christian writings. The subject of Baptism arises, and I found the author describing Baptism as “the washing which confers the remission of sins.” As he explains, “We descend into the water full of sins and defilement, but come up bearing fruit in our heart.”

What a strange way to talk about Baptism, I thought. Sounds Catholic. But then again, who knows what he meant?

I finished Barnabas and picked up *The Shepherd of Hermas*, another of the earliest post-apostolic writings. Again, I was reading merrily along when, suddenly, I ran into another passage about Baptism.

“I have heard, sir” said I, “from some teacher, that there is no other repentance except that which took place when we went down into the water and obtained the remission of our former sins.” He said to me, “You have heard rightly, for so it is.”

I scratched my head. “When we went down into the water and *obtained* the remission of our former sins”? I would *never* have thought to use such language to describe Baptism.

I continued reading and came to Justin Martyr, the first great apologist of Christian history and a martyr. I read his *First Apology*, written around AD 150, and I ran into this:

As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and entreat God with fasting for the remission of their sins that are past, while we pray and fast with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For in the name of God the Father and Lord of the Universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, “Unless you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”



What? Justin believed that we are “regenerated” in Baptism and that this is related to Jesus’ statement about our need to be “born again”? Did Justin believe that being “born of water and Spirit” is somehow connected to Baptism?

I went on to read Clement of Alexandria, writing around AD 191. Here’s what I found him saying:

When we are baptized, we are enlightened. Being enlightened we are adopted as sons. Adopted as sons, we are made perfect .... It is a washing by which we are cleansed of sins, a gift of grace by which the punishments due our sins are remitted, an illumination by which we behold that holy light of salvation.

I then read Tertullian, writing around AD 203:

Happy is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life ... Baptism itself is a corporeal act by which we are plunged into the water, while its effect is spiritual, in that we are freed from our sins.

It’s hard for me to describe the effect that this reading was having on me. Baptism “confers” the remission of sins? In Baptism we “obtain” the remission of our former sins? In Baptism we are “set free and admitted to eternal life”? What?

Now, I could go on and on with similar quotations. Cyril of Jerusalem said of Baptism, “You go down dead in your sins, and you come up made alive in righteousness.”

St Augustine wrote, “Baptism washes away all, absolutely all, our sins .... This is the meaning of the great sacrament of Baptism, which is celebrated among us.”

St. Gregory of Nazianzus wrote, “Baptism is God’s most beautiful and magnificent gift ... We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth.”

And here’s what was most striking: it’s not as though I found some early Church Fathers speaking in these sorts of ways and others speaking like good Baptists. This is the way *all* of the earliest Christian writers speak of Baptism. Whenever Baptism is mentioned, language of the kind illustrated above is what you find.

Apparently, this is what Christians in the earliest centuries of ecclesiastical history *believed* about Baptism.

## Baptism and Early Church Historians

Almost in a panic, I turned to the works of great historians of the early Church such as J.N.D. Kelly, whose work, *Early Christian Doctrines*, is a classic of historical theology.

I turned to his section on Baptism:

From the beginning Baptism was the universally accepted rite of admission into the Church ... As regards its significance, it was always held to convey the remission of sins .... [It is that washing with] the living water which alone can cleanse penitents and which, being a Baptism with the Holy Spirit, is to be contrasted with Jewish washings. It is a spiritual rite replacing circumcision, the unique doorway to the remission of sins.

I read the *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* by Jaroslav Pelikan, one of the two or three greatest historians of Christian doctrine alive at the time. From Tertullian’s treatise on the doctrine of Baptism (the first ever written on the subject and illustrating well the view of early Church) Pelikan says we learn that four basic gifts are

given in Baptism: “the remission of sins, deliverance from death, regeneration, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.”

It was becoming more and more apparent to me that if anyone existed in the early centuries of Christianity who held the “it’s a symbol only” view of Baptism that I held as a Baptist, the view that everyone I knew held, the view that virtually all evangelical Protestants hold, there is no record of it.

To quote Newman, that person, if he or she ever existed, has from the pages of history been “clean swept away as if by a deluge, suddenly, silently, and without memorial.”

I remember coming home around this time and saying to my wife, Tina, “Listen: I’ve been crawling around in the early Church for months. I’ve looked under every rock and behind every tree, and for the life of me, there ain’t a Baptist in sight!”

And it was true. There wasn’t.

## Theological Time Travel

This was a strange realization, followed by questions I couldn’t shake: How in the world could I have been so cut off from history?

How could I have not known something so basic as the early Church’s view of Baptism? Was I so wedded to *sola Scriptura* that I was never even curious about the subject?

And then I imagined: what if I could somehow be parachuted back in time? What if I were discussing Baptism with Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine? Would I oppose them on the basis of my personal interpretation of Scripture? Would I insist that they were all wrong and that I was right? Would I start my own Baptist Church and denomination?

As someone who still thought mainly in terms of *sola Scriptura*, my answer at the time was that I suppose I “might” oppose the teaching of the universal Church on Baptism and, yes, even start my own denomination — but only if it was *absolutely certain* that the Catholic Church’s sacramental view of Baptism contradicted the clear teaching of Scripture. Only if I was *absolutely certain*.

Otherwise, how could I begin to justify leaving and setting up shop on the basis of my private interpretation of the New Testament?

In other words, a shift in my thinking was already taking place. Before this experience, it seemed natural to approach any doctrinal issue by simply going straight to the Bible and deciding what I thought it was teaching. In this case, I could examine carefully the relevant passages of Scripture and conclude, “I think it teaches that Baptism is merely a symbolic act.”

But after facing such unanimous historical testimony on the meaning of Baptism, I now saw that more would be required.

It wouldn’t be good enough to simply say, “I disagree.” To overturn what amounted to the universal faith of the Catholic Church throughout the earliest centuries of its existence, I would need to believe that the Church’s view was completely and utterly irreconcilable with Scripture. Could I say that?

Clearly, the next step would be to carefully reexamine the teaching of the Old and New Testaments in the light of what I’d seen in the writings of the Fathers. What would I find that I had not seen before? I couldn’t imagine. But I immediately launched into the project.

Stay tuned for part II next month! ■

### 25 Years of CHNewsletters

By Marcus Grodi

"25 Years of CHNewsletters"

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As I pen this celebration of twenty-five years of CHNewsletters, I am deeply grateful for the many ways God has allowed our work to grow and flourish, often in unexpected ways. When that first "Network" newsletter was compiled, cut-and-pasted, copied, and then snail-mailed to several dozen non-Catholic clergy inquirers and converts back in July 1993, none of us imagined we'd eventually be sending out thousands of monthly newsletters, both by mail and online. But God has been very generous and merciful — as have each of you! Thank you!

In that first newsletter, the initial motto of "The Network," as the Coming Home Network International was originally called, was described as "A Fellowship for Converts Called to Ministry." As the CHNetwork grew, however, it turned out that most of our work has focused on helping inquirers discover and come into the Church. In fact, now the most predominant features on our expansive website are mostly outreach to non-Catholics on the journey. However, particularly the online community forum engages many converts and reverts sharing the joys and struggles of their continuing faith journeys as well as helping others who feel drawn towards the Catholic Church.

Yet, our continuing challenge is how we can help the Church be better stewards of "Converts Called to Ministry." In that first newsletter, I wrote: "The purpose of this newsletter and fellowship is to help those who, once called to ministry in the Protestant Faith, are now on the road to becoming or have already become a member of the Catholic Church, and want to continue serving Christ in ministry in the Church." A small percentage of clergy converts become married priests, but most end up serving as laymen or deacons, supporting their families through secular work or retirement. Our files are overflowing with positive, as well as discouraging, reports from former clergy and laity who, after

"coming home," have grown to "be at home" in this diverse Church that is generally quite different from the churches they left — and possibly different from the Church they read about and expected.

As we look forward, we are prayerfully discerning how we can do better in providing an active and helpful "fellowship for converts" who continue to believe that, after their conversions, they are still "called to ministry."

The second item in that first newsletter was a review of our first Network luncheon at the Defending the Faith conference at Franciscan University. We called that first annual luncheon, "How Should We Then Serve?" which again reiterates that our focus was not so much on evangelizing non-Catholic clergy into the Church, but helping converts discover how to continue using their gifts after conversion. Two of our long-time greatest supporters, who have since passed on to glory, spoke at that gathering and helped launch our fellowship: Fr. Michael Scanlan and Fr. Ray Ryland. I cannot thank God enough for the inspiration, encouragement, and guidance of these two fine friends and mentors.

Since that first luncheon, Franciscan University has always generously invited the CHNetwork to have some kind of presence at the annual DTF conferences — Sunday luncheons, Friday night socials, and now Saturday afternoon "Coffee and Conversation" meetings. Hundreds of CHNetwork members have re-connected at these gatherings over the years — and we hope to see you there this coming July 27-29!

The next item in that first newsletter was a short article by my wife, Marilyn, with the tongue-in-cheek title "I Never Wanted to be a Minister's Wife Anyway!" Her point was to emphasize that the "Network" is not only for former clergy, but also a support network for spouses and families. She extended an invitation for spouses to share "experiences, thoughts, and questions as they pertain to the journeys of [their] families." She was very correct when she said "we need to hear about one another's joy, struggles, blessings, and whatever. Because over the years, the most helpful support has come from the mutual sharing

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### DEFENDING THE FAITH

**Join us at the Defending the Faith conference** at the Franciscan University of Steubenville for **Coffee and Conversations**. It will be held during lunch on Saturday, July 28 and will be a time for networking and fellowship for non-Catholics and converts sponsored by the Coming Home Network. Go to [steubenvilleconferences.com/adult/dfc](http://steubenvilleconferences.com/adult/dfc) for more information about the conference. We hope to see you there!

Member's Section Member's Section Member's Section Member's Section

of our stories. We have shared and compared the "fingerprints" of the Holy Spirit on our lives as He guides us and our families along this "journey home."

In that first newsletter, we also announced the upcoming first "Fall Network Retreat," which was held at Franciscan University. This was a great success, with nearly thirty converts, inquirers, and their spouses in attendance. Since then, we have sponsored several dozen retreats. This year, in fact, we'll sponsor three retreats, with the third coming up in Biddeford, Maine this October. (All clergy and lay inquirers, converts, and reverts are invited to attend. Go to [chnetwork.org/retreats](http://chnetwork.org/retreats) for more information.)

Beginning with that first newsletter in 1993 and continuing on through the present copy you are reading, there have been stories of conversion along with reflection articles addressing key issues of the journey. Our hope for the future is that through the continuing outreach of the monthly newsletter, the witness of stories and other articles related to conversion will help others discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church and encourage those seeking a deeper walk with our Lord Jesus and His Church. ■

## CHNetwork Retreats

*A time of fellowship and prayer with converts and those on the journey to the Catholic Church. Visit [CHNetwork.org/retreats](http://CHNetwork.org/retreats) for more information.*

OCTOBER  
15-18, 2018  
BIDDEFORD, MAINE

REGISTRATION  
DEADLINE IS  
SEPT 28<sup>TH</sup>

*For more information and/or to register:  
740-450-1175 | [retreats@chnetwork.org](mailto:retreats@chnetwork.org)*

Limited spots available!

## REGISTER TODAY!

## Joyful Journey Updates

**This past Easter, over 65 CHNetwork members were joyfully received into the Catholic Church. Below are some encouraging updates and anecdotes from these new converts and also other CHNetwork members. Thank you for helping us to assist converts and those on the journey to the Catholic Church!**

**FROM JACKIE, A NEW CONVERT:** "God has poured out His grace on all of us in a way I could never have anticipated. I am perpetually realizing that I don't understand much of what God does, but if I am willing to trust Him, He really does turn all things to good for me and my family. I have been able to attend Mass almost daily since Easter Vigil, and I can never receive Him without tears. I have found the pearl of great price, Jesus in the Eucharist. I remember (long before my conversion) I used to cry when thinking about the pearl of great price because it was like I only half knew what it was, and I couldn't figure out how to find it. But instead, it found me; He found me!"

**FROM MICHAEL, A FORMER LUTHERAN:** "My journey in the Catholic Faith is getting better and stronger day by day! I am very active with my Knights of Columbus council, and they have been very supportive by helping my small parish stay alive. My children continue to grow in their faith as we all grow together. My wife, Melanie, and I have grown to love each other even more since my conversion. With all that said, I am eternally grateful for you and the Coming Home Network for being there for me in my faith journey."

### FROM A LUTHERAN MINISTER ON THE JOURNEY:

"Thank you for your detailed arguments on infallibility and personal judgment! It still gives me a lot to learn and think about. I came to see, that I had little to no trust that Jesus Christ would save His Church through the ages to the end ... Meditating on this I recognized the connection: It's analogous to relying on the fact that He holds the victory over this world ... So I decided to try out and put my faith on that ground."

### FROM DAVID, A FORMER CHARISMATIC

**SEMINARIAN:** "I hope you and all at the Coming Home Network are doing well. I continue to be blessed through the work you all do and I know others are as well ... Thanks again for all that you do!"

**FROM DEBBIE, A NEW CONVERT:** "I hold you all in my heart. When I felt alone in my journey and knew you were all there praying for me, and I was encouraged to keep going. What a wonderful family I've come into. Forever grateful."

**FROM SUE, A FORMER METHODIST:** "It is going well. I LOVE the Faith, absolutely love it. No regrets whatsoever!"

**FROM RAYMOND, A CRADLE CATHOLIC:** "I have been listening to a lot of the conversion stories; very powerful and profound ... Please keep praying for us as we for all of you at the Coming Home Network. It is such a great ministry: a testament of God's grace and kindness. God bless you all and all the good things you do." ■



## SHARE SHARE YOUR STORY!

The CHNetwork **always welcomes** those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their **written conversion stories** of how they were drawn (or drawn back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story, please feel free to go to [chnetwork.org/converts](http://chnetwork.org/converts) to review our writer's guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

## WEEKLY UPDATES!

**Do you subscribe to our weekly e-mails?** Join thousands of other supporters of the CHNetwork in receiving an inspirational weekly update with information about the latest Journey Home program, resources to help you grow in your faith, and news from around the Catholic world. Go to [CHNetwork.org/email](http://CHNetwork.org/email) to keep up to date with all the wonderful resources we make available!

## SUPPORT CHNETWORK

For your convenience, CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to [chnetwork.org/donate/](http://chnetwork.org/donate/) or complete this form and mail to:

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

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or [ann@chnetwork.org](mailto:ann@chnetwork.org) if you have any questions or concerns.

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## 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 the online community forums and groups at our website [CHNetwork.org](http://CHNetwork.org), we strive to ensure that each person touched by grace has fellowship and resources for their journey of continual conversion to Jesus Christ.



**CHNetwork**

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740-450-1175



[info@chnetwork.org](mailto:info@chnetwork.org)



The Coming Home  
Network International



[www.chnetwork.org](http://www.chnetwork.org)

# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For Alan, a retired minister who is well on his way to becoming Catholic, but his wife doesn't share his interest.
- For a former Seventh-day Adventist pastor who recently became Catholic, that he find gainful employment.
- For Brian, a former Anglican priest, and his family whose home was destroyed in an explosion, that the Lord would enable them to rebuild their home and their lives.
- For Scott, a minister in Oregon, that our Lord's truth and love would guide him and his wife home to the Catholic Church.
- For a former minister in the United Church of Canada, that her meeting with a Catholic priest would open doors for her and her husband to enter the Church.
- For Ray, an Episcopal priest, that his research into the truths of the holy Faith would bring him to full communion with the Successor of St. Peter.
- For a deaconess in the Church of England, that, as she reads the writings of Blessed John Henry Newman, the Holy Spirit would guide her to answers to her many questions about the Catholic Faith.
- For Sammy, an Episcopal priest, that his love of our Lord Jesus and his desire for the fullness of God's truth would guide him and his family to the Catholic Church.
- For a Seventh-day Adventist minister in California, that our Lord's faithful guidance would bring him to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

- For a United Church of Christ minister, that her wish to be immersed in the Paschal Mystery will guide her to the Eucharistic altar of the Catholic Church.
- For a former non-denominational Bible college student, that the Holy Spirit would guide him home to the Catholic Church of his youth.

## Laity

- For Kathleen, who is on the journey towards the Catholic Church, that she be able to understand the beautiful role of Marian devotion in our faith life.
- For Brett, who is awaiting word on an annulment petition, that all goes well for him to be able to begin RCIA in the fall.
- For a Hasidic Jew who loves Jesus, that his love for his Messiah may bring him home to the Church of that same Messiah.
- For Linda, who is asking lots of questions about the Catholic Church and is struggling knowing how to move forward with her journey.
- For Cindy, who is drawing closer to the Catholic Church, that Jesus in His mercy makes her way smooth.
- For a Jewish woman who recently came to believe in Jesus and is now intrigued about the Catholic Church.
- For Becky, a fallen-away Catholic, who is struggling with various relational and doctrinal issues in her journey back to the Church.
- For Jason, who is alone in his family in wanting to become Catholic, that he find good support in his journey.
- For Cindy, who is interested in the Catholic Church but has lots of questions and doesn't know how best to move forward with her journey.
- For a woman in Ohio who is struggling with the antagonism of her family members who are opposing her desire to be Catholic, that she have the courage and grace to follow God's will in her life.
- For a Southern Baptist who would love to become Catholic but her husband is adamantly against her conversion.
- For Tina, who is married to a Catholic and is beginning the initial stages of exploring becoming Catholic, that the Holy Spirit guide her steps.
- For Mary, who was surprisingly drawn towards the Catholic Church and is now longing for the Eucharist.
- For John, who is very discouraged about the unnecessary delays in his annulment petition, that he be able to come into full communion with the Church soon.
- For MJ, who is considering returning to the Church but doesn't know what steps to take.
- For Laura, a new convert, that her family be moved to join her in the Catholic Church one day.
- For an Episcopalian in the northeast, that she will have the strength to continue pushing forward with her desire to be Catholic though her husband doesn't yet know of her journey.

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. 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, Thursdays 2 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

<b>July 2</b> Daniel Ali* (former Muslim, re-air from 6/15/15)	<b>July 9</b> Stephen Gleason* (former non-denominational pastor)	<b>July 16</b> David (former Presbyterian) & Margaret Bereit* (cradle Catholic)	<b>July 23</b> Rob Marco* (formerly unchurched/secular)	<b>July 30</b> Dale Pollard* (former Protestant, re-air from 7/22/13)
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\*Schedule is subject to change.

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



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

rose from the dead and then, after forty days, ascended to heaven to sit at God's right hand. On the Jewish feast of Pentecost, they claimed God's Holy Spirit came upon them, and they went out to preach about Jesus. The Apostles were not from the Jewish elite. They were ordinary men, not especially skillful or gifted. Yet they converted many Jews to Christ. The first Christian community, made up exclusively of Jews, lived together lovingly, as described in the Acts of the Apostles (2:42-47):

These remained faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers ... And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all people.

That Jews could form this kind of community amazed me. Then along came Paul, a fanatical and learned Pharisee. He saw Christ in an apparition and started converting pagans. At that time in history, there were no rapid transit systems, radios, televisions, telephones, newspapers, or internet. Yet within thirty years after Jesus' death, thousands of Christians suffered persecution and death for their belief. This tiny sect continued to grow over the next several hundred years in spite of the brutal persecution. What explanation could there be for this growth? Why didn't this movement die in its infancy? If Jesus was an impostor and did not have God on His side, how could His followers have been so effective?

By Christmas of 1961, I had reached the conclusion that God, indeed, had been behind the growth of Christianity because it presented the truth. I will always thank the Trinity for allowing me to grasp that the God of Israel was indeed behind the growth of Christianity, as Rabbi Gamaliel had prophesied in Acts 5:27-42.

On the evening of December 24, 1961, an event took place that was to change my life forever. After spending a tense year struggling with the idea of conversion to Christianity and what effects it might have on my family, I decided to watch midnight Mass via television from St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. During the consecration, as the bishop elevated the consecrated host, I looked at it and said, “I believe! My Lord and my God.” Instantly, all the tensions within me disappeared, and I felt at peace. Everything I had read and studied about Jesus came together. No more doubting or wandering! Jesus was my Savior and my God.

After accepting Jesus, I faced the important decision of choosing a church. The existence of so many Christian churches, each with its own structure and understanding of Scripture, overwhelmed me. As an Orthodox Jew, I found it difficult to believe that God would send His Son to create many competing Christian churches. Where was the unity that St. Paul wrote about in his letter to the Ephesians 4:1-6? St. Paul would have been horrified if he knew that by the 21st century there would be great divisions within Christianity. Jesus, according to Scripture, intended that there be only one Church, founded on the Rock, Peter. We read in John 17:21 that, at the Last Supper, Jesus prayed to the Father:

May they all be one, Father; may they be one in us as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.

Men, not God, created the divisions. Divisions within Christianity are a scandal and an obstacle to belief in Jesus Christ.

If a Christian Church is truly the fulfillment of ancient Judaism, then it should possess characteristics similar to those of the ancient faith. What, then, was ancient Judaism? Judaism was a revealed religion with God-ordained faith, worship, and way of life. As an organic religion, Judaism dated from the time of Moses, the lawgiver, through whom God instituted the religious and civil requirements of the Israelites. The Torah and the other inspired, prophetic writings of the Old Testament set forth Judaism, pure and unadulterated. Based also upon the Oral Law, God is said to have communicated the Commandments to Moses. But Jews did not reduce them to writing during the priest-functioning ages of Israel. Hence, to this day, Orthodox Judaism holds that the source of revelation is both the written and the unwritten word of God, as contained in both Scripture and Tradition (Talmud). The Talmud is the main repository of Judaic Tradition. The Church's belief in both Scripture and Tradition is why I focused mainly on Catholic sources during my conversion process.

It was Catholic beliefs and doctrines regarding papal infallibility, Mary, purgatory, and that God's revelation comes to us through Scripture and Tradition that led me to believe that the Catholic Church was indeed the one true Church founded by Christ. But above all, it was the Church's teaching on the Eucharist that proved to me that the Catholic Church was indeed the fulfillment of Judaism.

The Exodus event stands as the central fact of Israel's history. It is the basis of Israel's faith: redemption from Egypt and God's selection of the Israelites as His people. His promise remains the basis of Israel's hope. The whole purpose of the Passover celebration (the Seder) is to recall in thankfulness the saving works of the Exodus and to stir up hope in a greater deliverance yet to come.

We know from the New Testament Scriptures that Jesus looked at His life's work and mission in terms of the Old Testament. It is significant, then, that the sinless Jesus chose the Passover meal, the sacramental memorial of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt, as the sacramental memorial of the passage, or “exodus” (see Luke 9:31), of humanity from its fallen condition, due to man's sin, to its transfigured life in God. In the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus linked the central event of the New Testament — His passion, death, and resurrection — with the central event of the Old Testament, the passage from slavery in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land.

In the book of Exodus, God orders the remembrance of the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt by celebrating, each year, the feast of the Passover (Exodus 12:14). As I studied these things, I wondered why Christians did not celebrate the Passover since God had ordered it to be observed forever. Jesus, being a Jew, celebrated the Passover each year (see John 2:13; 12:1). By the time I entered the Catholic Church, it had become evident to me that the Mass, which is a sacrifice and communion meal led by a priest, was indeed the fulfillment of the ancient Jewish Passover celebration and that God's edict in Exodus 12:14 remains intact.

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

I decided to enter the Catholic Church because I believed that, of all the thousands of Christian denominations, it alone possessed the authority given by Jesus, when He gave Peter the keys of the Kingdom, to be the authentic teacher of His Gospel, along with the other Apostles. Since the time of Moses, the authority that Moses and Aaron received from God was passed on from generation to generation. In the same manner, the authority given by Jesus to Peter was also passed on to Peter's successors, the Bishops of Rome and those bishops in communion with him. They make up the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.

One final observation: Judaism at the time of Jesus was much more like Catholicism (with priests leading worship centered on sacrifice), whereas rabbinic Judaism after the Temple's destruction was much more like Protestantism (a rabbi, leading worship without blood sacrifice).

I had been taught to believe in a glorious Messiah who would restore Israel to greatness, raise the dead, and end suffering and death. In addition, the Messiah would restore the one Temple with its Holy of Holies, the priesthood with its High Priest, the altars for the animal sacrifices, and reinstate all the ancient laws. Once I came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, I saw it would be at His Second Coming that the resurrection of the dead and an end to suffering and death would take place. And I saw that Jesus had already fulfilled in the Catholic Church the other things I expected the future Messiah would do. These are:

- All Catholic Churches throughout the world, with their tabernacles, in which resides the Real Presence of our Lord, are greater than the one Temple in Jerusalem with its Holy of Holies.
- At the Last Supper, Christ instituted the new priesthood not based on genealogy. And the Catholic Church is the only Church that has a High Priest, the Pope in Rome, who is the successor of Peter.
- In each Mass, a bloodless sacrifice takes place on an altar, with a priest presiding.
- At the Last Supper, Christ made a new and everlasting covenant with all peoples.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, He reinstated the ancient laws with their real meaning (see Matthew 5–7).

I was baptized on February 23, 1963, at the age of 29, at Christ the King Catholic Church in Commack, NY. My wife, Irma, also a Jew, was baptized later that same year.

Sometimes the question is asked, "If a Jew becomes a Catholic, does he still remain a Jew?" If being a Jew means living the Mosaic way of life, the answer is no. While the convert from Judaism to the Church is no longer a Jew in the sectarian sense of the term, he continues, as a Catholic, in his love of the faith of his fathers of old in Israel, seeing in Catholic principles and practices Judaism full-bloomed.

Jesus cannot be fully understood unless Christians have a better understanding of the Judaism of Jesus' time (i.e., its beliefs, devotions, and practices). If you really want to know who Jesus is and what He said and did, then you need to interpret His words and

deeds in their historical context. The Catholic Church teaches that the Old Testament is the promise and the New Testament is the fulfillment. But how can you truly understand the fulfillment if you have no clue as to what was the promise?

As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us:

It must be said that the message of Jesus is completely misunderstood if it is separated from the context of the faith and hope of the Chosen People: like John the Baptist, his direct Precursor, Jesus above all addresses Israel (cf. Mt 15:24) in order to "gather" it together in the eschatological time that arrived with him.

Jesus' Jewish context has been repeatedly ignored and, as a result, many readers of the Gospels have not understood Him. When one focuses on the Jewish context of Jesus' teachings, all His words not only begin to make sense, but they come alive in a way that is exciting and powerful. Unfortunately, many Christians believe that the only legitimate revelation from God is that which is contained in Scripture alone. They also believe that, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, one can interpret the Sacred Scriptures in order to know the truth that is contained in them. This has resulted in over 30,000 Christian denominations, each claiming to know the truth revealed in the Bible.

About a year after I entered the Church, I had a discussion with a Protestant friend on the interpretation of the Bible. How does one know the revealed truth? He told me that he was taught by his church that he could know the truth by reading the Bible and praying to the Holy Spirit for inspiration to interpret the Bible. I asked him, since I was a baptized Christian who believes that the Bible is the inspired word of God, could I do the same in order to know the truth. He answered "Yes." I then asked him whether he believed that when Jesus said, "This is My body; This is My blood" (Luke 22:19-20) and "If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will not have life in you" (John 6:53), He was speaking symbolically or literally. He replied, "Symbolically."

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

I then said, "But I believe that Jesus was speaking literally. How come the Holy Spirit is telling you one thing and me another?" Since the Holy Spirit is incapable of misleading anyone, it seems only reasonable to believe that the gift of correctly interpreting the Bible does not reside in every Christian. My Orthodox Jewish faith also did not admit of private interpretation of Scripture.

I must also say something about our Blessed Mother Mary. There was a time when I belittled and made fun of the greatest woman in all Scripture, Mary, Mother of God. I couldn't see why Catholics put her on a high pedestal. They prayed to her, lighted candles at her statues, and asked her for favors. I could not comprehend it. Of course, at the time I didn't believe in Christ, either.

The Catholic Church has fostered great devotion to Mary from the earliest moments of Christian history. If all my life I had been taught to honor and praise the great Jewish women of the Old Testament, then why should I not honor and praise the Jewish woman who gave to the world the Son of God? Very quickly, it became evident to me that the Blessed Virgin Mary was the greatest human being ever created, superior even to angels. Recognition that devotion to the Mother of God was warranted and important was a gift I received from my Jewish heritage.

Mary can never be an obstacle to Jesus. She can only lead us to a closer personal relationship with her Son. After all, who knew Him better than she did? I have a difficulty understanding why Mary is almost entirely ignored by most Protestants and many Catholics. If we ignore Mary, it can only be because we really do not know Jesus, either as God or as Man. But then, how can we understand the Fulfillment, which is the Gospel, if we know so little about the Promise, which are the Old Testament and the faith of Israel?

Months before my baptism, I prayed intensely to Jesus that my mother would not be devastated by my conversion. After all, it was she who raised me in the Jewish Faith. I had been the only one in my family who could pray in Hebrew and lead the Sabbath worship services as a cantor in the synagogue. She was very proud of that. When I told her that I had become Catholic, her reaction surprised us. She simply told me that I was nuts but that she still loved me and her grandson. I was also able to remain close to my mother's three sisters and my cousins.

I had neglected, however, to pray for Irma's parents. I thought, because they were Jews in name only, they wouldn't care about our conversion. I was wrong. Her father never talked to us again and would not even acknowledge his grandson, whom he loved deeply, or the existence of a granddaughter he never saw. Irma's mother kept in touch with us, saw us occasionally, and, of course, blamed me for the break in our family.

After my baptism, I wanted to deepen my knowledge of the Catholic Church. So, in 1964, I started to pursue a degree in theology at St. John's University in Queens, NY. In 1967, I received a Master's degree in Theology. In 1968, my wife, children, and I moved to Silver Spring, Maryland. In 1970, I entered the Permanent Diaconate program and was ordained a permanent deacon on September 30, 1972. As a deacon, I preached once a month at several Masses, performed baptisms, and witnessed marriages. I was involved in private instruction of converts and also had a social ministry.

After a lengthy illness, my wife, Irma, died in 1982. I was laicized in 1984 so that I could marry my present wife, Sara. We have been blessed with five children and nineteen grandchildren.

At this critical time, I believe that the Church needs once again to proclaim Jesus Christ crucified, especially through its preaching, and in the manner of Saints Peter and Paul. The passion and death of our Lord is the greatest act of love, compassion, humility, and forgiveness the world will ever know. We did not earn it, did not deserve it. Jesus experienced this agony solely because of His unconditional love for us.

Most Protestant churches display crosses but not crucifixes. Protestants will tell you Jesus was resurrected and lives in heaven; therefore, there is no need for a crucifix depicting His suffering and death. Messianic Jews, who try to bring other Jews to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, have no crosses. They say that the cross is a sign of persecution of Jews by Christians. How very sad!

Jesus, by means of His cross, leads us through our own exodus. We are still in the world, suffer, and must face death. Looking at and praying before a crucifix can make our exodus bearable. I believe that Jesus rose from the dead and is now glorified at the right hand of the Father. But while I still live in this world, it is His passion and death with which I can best identify. It helps me realize that my sufferings are nothing compared to His suffering and death. The passion and death of Jesus has been a constant reminder to me of the extremes God was willing to undergo for a sinner like me, and, indeed, all sinners. ■



*As a Jew, Charles Hoffman fled the Nazi Holocaust, settling with his mother in England. In 1943, they migrated to the United States where he was educated and trained in the Orthodox Jewish Faith. While studying at the university level, he encountered Christianity for the first time. Several years of investigation ensued, during which Charles found the keys to Christianity in his own Jewish Faith. He came to believe in Christ and entered the Catholic Church, with his wife, Irma, following soon after. Subsequently, Charles was ordained a permanent deacon. Then his wife died. Charles chose to be laicized so that he could marry Sara, who worked for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Charles has written a number of booklets, such as The Holy Rosary, Rich in Jewish Tradition; Twice Chosen; Jewish Roots of the Catholic Church; The Mass: The Jewish Passover and Temple Sacrifice Fulfilled; and Who Was Responsible for the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ? Various articles by Charles on the Jewish roots of the Catholic Faith can be found on the CHNetwork's website, [www.chnetwork.org](http://www.chnetwork.org).*

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