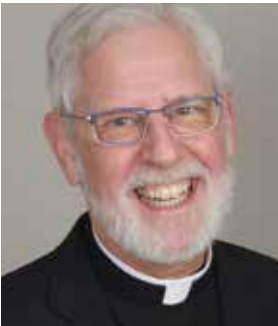




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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



I've Been Becoming Catholic All My Life

By Fr. Peter Davids

There has never been a time in my life when I was not surrounded by a faith centered on the Eucharist/Lord's Supper/Breaking of Bread. I would eventually come home to the fullness of this faith.

I was born in Syracuse, New York, the second of three sons in my family. My parents had an English background, my father having been born in England. More importantly, they had met in a Plymouth Brethren meeting and had planted the Plymouth Brethren assembly (as their churches were called) in Syracuse. For the Plymouth Brethren, worship means the Breaking of Bread, and all adult males "in fellowship" can participate verbally in that meeting. My early life was centered around the Eucharist and the Bible, which my mother started reading to me at age one. Later, we would read a chapter after dinner every evening around the meal table, each of us reading a verse. My father taught a Bible class in our home every Wednesday night. My "naughty" act as a child was sometimes sneaking part of the way downstairs so that I could listen to the teaching and see a bit through the railing. I am very thankful for my upbringing, which, although not without problems, solidly rooted me in a very Protestant and very individualistic Eucharist, but nevertheless was centered on the Eucharist.

My father's company moved his whole department to Lynchburg, Virginia, when I was 10. At age 15, I realized that "it was time to get serious about my faith," as I put it to myself. This was not a conversion, but a realization that I could not simply float along with the family, believing with-

out resistance, but had to step into my faith as a committed "adult." I approached the elders of our assembly (those other than my father, of course) and asked to be baptized and to "come into fellowship." For North American Brethren, Baptism is only a witness to faith, not in any sense a sacrament. Because the congregation was moving to a new church building and the elders did not wish to repair the baptismal tank in Melrose Chapel, I was "received into fellowship" immediately and so began to partake in communion and even read a Scripture or "give out a hymn" in the worship service. Three months later, my father baptized me, and in so doing inaugurated the baptismal tank at Fleming Chapel.

Soon after my baptism, the elders chose three "likely young men," my older brother (5 years older), Dick Adams, and me, and started us preaching once a quarter in the evening "gospel service," with other youth providing music and the other parts of the service. We did well and were moved to Sunday morning, to the "Family Bible Hour," the main preaching service (so long as one understands that, for true Brethren, all preaching services are optional, for worship is the Breaking of Bread). On the Sunday after my 16th birthday (November 22, 1963, the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated), I preached my

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

first Sunday morning sermon. It was well received, and I still have a tape of it. I play it if I need to be humbled; homiletics was not a Brethren strong point.

The next summer, I was at what was then Carnegie Institute of Technology on a summer science program, helping a PhD student in electrical engineering with his research. Of the 20 of us in the program, 18 were atheists or agnostics, one was Catholic, and I was, in my own eyes, the only Christian. Sadly, I never talked with the Catholic about his faith. About halfway through the six week program, I was walking to my dorm from the dining hall with an atheist colleague on each side and felt an unexpected shock inside, hearing a voice in my head: "You don't want to be an engineer, do you!" It was a statement, really, not a question, and I saw in my head a picture of me behind a large desk, somehow chained to that desk, and with a slide rule. Now, my father was an electrical engineer, my brother was in university studying electrical engineering, and I was already deeply into amateur radio, having built my own equipment. The thought had never occurred to me that I did not want to be an electrical engineer. But I saw that picture and knew, "No, I don't want that." The voice responded, "But I have called you to study the Bible."

Now the Brethren, to my knowledge, did not believe in dreams and visions. Furthermore, my father had always studied the Bible at home and had a significant biblical library. So, as far as I knew, there were no pastors in the Brethren; even full-time workers (who itinerated) had studied on their own. I had only heard of one school where one could study the Bible, Philadelphia College of Bible. Still, I went to my dorm room and wrote my weekly letter home, saying, "I am not going to the engineering schools

we talked about, but to Philadelphia College of Bible." I had simply obeyed. Only two days later, on Sunday, did a visiting preacher at the chapel I attended in Pittsburgh quite unintentionally add to my purpose: I was to study the Bible in order to teach the Bible. I was entering my final year of high school, and I would write my paper for Advanced English Composition on 1 John. I also took an extension course from a Bible college in Roanoke in a Lynchburg church. In the fall of 1965, I entered Wheaton College (a better place, I thought, to study the Bible) where, three years later, I would graduate with a degree in psychology, but with all the languages and support courses for a Bible major — and a wife. She had graduated in 1967, three months before we married, and served as my "legal guardian" for the first two years of our marriage.

I should comment on each of those items. First, I graduated in psychology because the Bible department was in a bit of disarray. At Wheaton, one automatically had a Bible minor, and I had soon learned about seminary and doctoral biblical training, so psychology was a good choice for me for both personal and, as I would later learn, vocational reasons. I would learn, for instance, that body and mind/soul affected one another and should be unified. God was preparing me to find bowing, kneeling, and other postures in church part of meaningful worship. I also learned about how one changes people's behavior, something I have used as a priest in the confessional: two minutes of brief counseling about how to stop a given sin and move towards holiness.

Meanwhile, Wheaton College Chapel was teaching me that great music and the arts can be part of worship. It was teaching me that worship can be holistic, not "all in your head." Addition-

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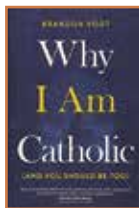


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A Damning System of Works Righteousness

PART II: FAITH AND OBEDIENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT*

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator



Virtually every presentation of the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide* (faith alone) contains within it the following line of thought:

"Justification *must be* received by faith alone. After all, if our obedience to God were required *in order to* receive God's blessing, then God would not receive all the glory for the great work of redemption. Then we would be able to say that we had, at least in part, *saved ourselves*; that we had to some degree *earned* our own salvation. Then we would have something in which to *boast* before God. This cannot be. *Justification must be received by faith alone!*"

For me, the path away from justification by faith alone and toward a more Catholic understanding of salvation began when I came to see that this line of thought was simply not biblical.

And, ironically, this occurred while I was attending Protestant seminary in preparation for a life in Protestant ministry!

Faith and obedience in the stories of Scripture

I can still remember the moment my favorite New Testament professor casually tossed a wrench into this entire way of thinking. He had been talking about Luther and Calvin, faith and obedience.

All of a sudden he said: "It's a curious thing, but when you think about it, the Bible is essentially comprised of one story after another, one illustration after another, of men and women and their relationships with God. And *never* in these stories do we find people receiving God's blessings by 'faith alone.' Instead, the pattern we see in Scripture is *always* 'trust me (faith), do what I tell you to do (obedience), and I will bless you (blessing).' The pattern is *always* faith, leading to obedience, *resulting* in God's blessing."

The professor offered some simple illustrations from Scripture. He talked about Noah, who had to trust God (faith) *and* build the ark (obedience) *in order to* be saved through the flood (blessing).

He mentioned Abraham, who had to trust God (faith) *and* leave his home and family in Mesopotamia (obedience) *in order to* receive what God had promised him (blessing).

He brought in the illustration of Moses and the children of Israel, who in order to be delivered out of bondage in Egypt and inherit the Promised Land, had to trust God (faith) *and* sacrifice the Passover, *and* smear its blood above the doorposts, *and* cook the lamb and eat it, *and* leave Egypt, *and* cross the Red Sea, *and* follow the pillar of cloud and fire through the desert for forty years, *and* cross the Jordan, *and* take the cities of Canaan one by one.

He talked about Naaman the Syrian, who had to trust God *and* dip himself in the Jordan River seven times *in order to* be cleaned of his leprosy, and the man born blind who had to trust Jesus *and* wash in the Pool of Siloam *in order to* receive his sight.

On and on the professor went through the biblical stories, relating what was perfectly obvious to everyone in the classroom. On virtually every page of the Bible, the pattern we find in God's dealings with people is never "faith alone." Rather, it is *always* faith, leading to obedience, resulting in blessing.

What struck me first was simply how easy it was to see that this was indeed the pattern of Scripture. Every single story taught it!

I remember thinking, "If God wanted to teach the world that the blessing of eternal life must be received by faith alone, and that our obedience must never enter into the equation, why did He fill the entire Bible with the stories of men and women whose obedience is *always* an integral part of the equation?"

"I am jealous for Christ to get all the glory"

What also struck me was how these simple biblical stories tore the heart right out of this notion that, for God to receive "all the glory," salvation must be by faith alone.

In the Reformed way of thinking, faith and obedience tended to be viewed as near opposites of one another. You *either* receive God's blessings by faith alone, in which case God gets all the glory and you have nothing in which to boast, *or* you receive God's blessings by obedience, in which case you have earned God's blessings and God does not receive all the praise and glory.

In *Counted Righteous in Christ*, Protestant theologian John Piper explains what motivated him to write a book in defense of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone.

I am jealous for Christ to get all the glory He deserves in the work of justification. My concern is that in the more recent challenges to this doctrine that I am about to address He is robbed of a great part of His glory (pp. 34-35).

This represents a way of thinking that I understood fully. After all, how can God receive *all the glory* if my obedience is a part of what is required in order for me to receive His blessing?

At the same, questions were coming to mind based on these Old Testament stories. For instance, it's clear that Noah's obedience was a part of what was required in order for him to receive God's blessing. He had to build the ark! Does this mean that God didn't receive *all the glory* for Noah's deliverance through the flood?

Abraham's obedience was also required. Does this mean that Abraham is in heaven right now boasting about how he *earned* God's blessing through his obedience?

Moses and the children of Israel also had to obey God in order to receive the blessings. Is Moses for all eternity robbing God of His glory by reminding Him continuously that while He (God) took care of the Egyptian armies and provided manna from heaven, they (Moses and the Israelites) did, after all, make the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land on their own blistered feet?

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*To read part one, please see the August 2019 CHNewsletter, available at chnetwork.org/newsletter-archive.

Are all of these Old Testament stories illustrations of the way God doesn’t want us to relate to Him? Are they all illustrations of what amounts to “a damning system of works righteousness”?

And, if so, why are they consistently held up in the New Testament as examples for Christians to imitate? In the Letter to the Hebrews, the author runs through a long list of Old Testament heroes of faith and presents them as models for us to emulate. In each case, we find this pattern of faith, leading to obedience, resulting in blessing.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous By faith Noah, being warned by God of events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household ... By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance By faith [Moses] left Egypt (11:4,7,8,27).

Faith and the obedience that flows from faith

It was clear in Scripture that faith, and the obedience that flows from faith, were conceived as nearly interchangeable.

I remember the professor asking us: “So, was Noah saved from the flood by his faith, or by his obedience? Take your pick. Which was it? How about Abraham? Did he receive the fulfillment of God’s promises because of his faith or because of his obedience? How about Moses and the children of Israel? How about Naaman the leper? The man born blind? Was it their faith, or was it their obedience?”

The correct answer was clearly “both!” If Noah hadn’t *believed* God’s warning about the coming flood, he wouldn’t have been saved. But he wouldn’t have been saved because he wouldn’t have built the ark. Both his faith and the obedience that flowed from his faith were required in order for him and his family to be saved.

It was the same with Abraham. If he hadn’t believed God’s promises, he never would have left his home in Ur of the Chaldees to follow the Lord to a new land. But if he hadn’t left his home to follow the Lord, he would never have come to that new land. It was likewise with Moses and the Israelites. If they hadn’t trusted in God’s promises, they never would have left Egypt. But if they hadn’t left Egypt...

It was *both*. It was always *both* faith and obedience. And because of this, while at times in the biblical narrative a character’s faith will be highlighted as the reason for God’s having blessed him, at other times his obedience will be highlighted.

We see this in the story of Abraham. Abraham’s faith is something emphasized throughout Genesis 12-25. But notice what is emphasized when Abraham demonstrates his willingness to sacrifice his own son at the command of God.

By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, *because you have done this*, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you (Gen 22:16-17, emphasis added).

Even more striking, notice what is emphasized when, after Abraham’s death, the Lord comes to confirm His covenant with Isaac.

Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves: *because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws* (Gen 26:3-5, emphasis added).

Conclusion

It would be another ten years before the word “Catholic” would enter my mind. But this is where it started. This is where I saw for the first time the way I, as a Protestant, had reasoned about faith and obedience was in some fundamental way flawed. It wasn’t the way Scripture reasoned about faith and obedience.

According to how I had been taught to think, faith had to be carefully separated from obedience as the sole instrument for receiving God’s blessing. Only in this way could the nature of salvation as “pure gift” be preserved. In the Scriptures I saw something entirely different.

Suddenly the idea that our obedience might be as necessary for us as Noah’s obedience was for him no longer sounded impossible.

The next step would come several years later as I graduated from seminary, was ordained into the Protestant ministry and began to preach verse-by-verse through books of the New Testament. It began to become clear to me that the pattern of “faith, leading to obedience, resulting in blessing” I had come to see in the Old Testament continued right on through the New.

To be continued... ■

ONLINE COMMUNITY



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The Necessity of Old Wine

By Marcus Grodi

Our Lord told a parable that appears in all three Synoptic Gospels, which suggests its importance. Only the Mark passage occurs in the Sunday Lectionary readings for Mass, each year during Ordinary time, while all three occur in the readings for weekday Masses. In every Sunday Mass there are readings from the Old Testament, a Psalm, and a New Testament Epistle, along with the Gospel reading, while every weekday has one less reading besides the Gospel. The Church strongly encourages homilies to focus on the Gospel passage, with perhaps references to and support from the other readings. Nonetheless — and here's the point of my article — in the twenty-six-plus years I've been a Catholic, I've yet to hear a homily on this important Gospel parable. In every instance, the homilist has avoided the Gospel, and either focused on one of the other readings, or delivered a message on a completely unrelated subject. Why is it that this important parable seems to be avoided?



First, let's look at the parable, with which I'm sure you are all familiar, as told by St. Mark: "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but new wine is for fresh skins" (Mk 2:22).

As you hear this parable, what do you think it means? Why do you think Jesus taught it to the men who one day would lead His Church? With so many other parables, some of which only occur in one or two of the Gospels, why do you think all the Synoptic Gospel writers included this particular parable? And, finally, what might Jesus have been saying for the Church He will establish in His Apostles through this parable?

I believe a wrong interpretation of this parable is why homilists avoid it like the plague. Throughout the history of the Church, schismatics, heretics, dissenters, and, specifically, Protestants have used this parable to justify their actions in bringing what they believed to be "new wine" into "fresh skins" while rejecting what they believed to be the dead, "old wineskins" of the Church. Many interpreters have identified this "new wine" with new ideas, directions, vigor, even new, enthusiastic life in the Spirit, and the rediscovery of long forgotten truths, all to supplant the dead "old wineskin" ideas, directions, structures, and lifeless apathy of, not just the Catholic Church, but of whatever church they feel the need from which to cut their cable. And if you look back and re-read this parable, you probably can see just how it might be taken that way. I daresay, however, that Our Lord and His agrarian audience would have certainly understood this parable differently.

First, it's important to recognize that in the mind and life of agrarian people, Jesus was not talking about making "new wine," but about the annual process of producing and preserving "old wine." This distinction is made by St. Luke, who was likely writing later to a Gentile, less agrarian culture, when he added to this parable, "And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, 'The old is good'" (Lk 5:39).

Producing good "old wine" from "new wine" was an annual labor-intensive process. In the fall and spring, grape vines were pruned and nurtured (cf. John 15) so that they would produce their annual yield of grapes. These were then harvested by hand, gathered into vats, and then crushed and strained, producing

"new wine," or what we moderns call "unfermented grape juice." To change this "new wine" into good "old wine" required vessels that could withstand the expansive process of fermentation. In came the use of fresh, new wine skins, which required the annual labor of raising sheep or goats. Every year in preparation for the grape harvest, the skin of a slaughtered sheep or goat was made into a wineskin and the expandable "new wineskin" was ready for the fermentation of "new wine" into good "old wine." Once fermented, the good "old wine" could be left in the newly expanded "old wineskin," or even stored in other already expanded "old wineskins" or, if available, clay jars.

The point is that this was all a part of a continuous process of their lives, that repeated itself every year, which made complete sense to Our Lord's agrarian audience. Jesus was not so much making a point about new versus old wine or wineskins; rather He was playing the G.K. Chesterton of his day, appealing to their basic common sense. To put unfermented new wine in already expanded old wineskins was as obviously ridiculous as planting one's fields first, and then plowing. Or, to use a modern analogy, one would not fill an already expanded JiffyPop aluminum foil pan with unpopped popcorn, and then place it on the stove. Get my drift? So why specifically was Jesus telling this parable?

To further clarify, it's essential to interpret this parable in its preceding context, as related by all three Synoptic Gospels:

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

"No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; if he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made" (Mk 2:18-21).

Working backwards, we see that the parable about mending an old garment is exactly like the parable about producing old wine.

Rather than expanding an old wineskin, a new, unshrunk patch will shrink and further tear an old garment. Combined with the other parable, a key element arises: the parables are actually not about new or old wine, or unshrunk or shrunk patches, but about preserving a good, but slightly damaged, already shrunken old garment and a good, yet already expanded, old wineskin. This is why St. Mark emphasizes that, “the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins.” The primary concern is the bursting and loss of the skins. This is where so many commentators over the centuries have gotten these parables wrong. They begin by assuming that old garments and old wineskins are bad, disposable, and must be replaced by new garments and new wineskins, but this has nothing to do with what Jesus taught. The people of Our Lord’s day were likely the ancient predecessors of modern hoarders — they would never think of throwing out a comfortable old garment or a well-used, carefully preserved wineskin.

Moving to the opening story, we encounter a question about fasting: “Why aren’t your disciples fasting like ours? Or even John’s! Why your apparent disrespect for our traditions?”

Jesus answered with the first of essentially three interconnected parables, again with Chestertonian common sense: “As everyone knows, yes, you don’t celebrate until the Bridegroom arrives. Duh! But once he comes, it’s time to celebrate!”

So what was Jesus trying to tell the Pharisees? What was He hoping they just might possibly see? It wasn’t about fasting, or mending clothing, or producing wine; it was about something far more simple, yet far, far more complex — something only grace could help them see. For standing right before them — in their very presence — was the very Bridegroom for whom they had long been waiting! All the prophetic promises, passed down and preserved in the precious old wineskins of their faith, had now been fulfilled in their midst. This was about the newness of everything in Him, for the old wineskins of their traditions were not being cast aside, but fulfilled in Him. As long as they could only see Jesus as a self-proclaimed upstart, a blasphemous usurper, they could not recognize Him as the long awaited Bridegroom; to them He was nothing more than an unshrunk patch, a mere taste of new wine, that could be nothing but a threat to the

precious old garment and old wineskin of their Faith! But, on the other hand, Jesus wanted them to see that He was not new at all, but the very Ancient of Days, the Lord of Lords, the long awaited Bridegroom, the very already-shrunk patch needed to restore the Kingdom — but not the Kingdom or even the wedding feast they had expected. This is where the necessity of new wineskins for transforming new wine into old comes into play, and, more specifically, the necessity of first shrinking new patches before they can be used to repair already shrunken old garments.

These parables were not about new versus old Church ideas, traditions, rituals, and liturgies. Jesus was preparing His disciples for the ongoing process of producing mature Christian members for the Body of Christ out of new converts — of producing spiritually mature Christians out of “unspiritual” or “natural” men, out of men and women that the Holy Spirit had led to declare “Jesus as Lord” (1 Cor 12:3).

This is precisely what Saint Paul explained to the Corinthian Christians:

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified ... The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned ... But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you are still of the flesh (1 Cor 2:1-2; 3:1-3a).

The author of the Book of Hebrews also referenced this process, implying that many of the good “old wine” mature Christians had digressed in their knowledge and practice of the Faith, and needed to return to the formation of their original “new wineskin” catechesis:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God’s word. You need milk, not solid food; for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word

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September 2

Sonja Corbitt* (former Southern Baptist)
Re-air from Dec 5, 2016

September 9

Chad & Vern Steiner* (former Evangelical Free Church)

September 16

Noel Culbertson* (former Southern Baptist)

September 23

Dr. Francis Beckwith* (former Evangelical & revert)

September 30

Russell Saltzman* (former Lutheran pastor)

October 7

Dr. Mark & Desiree Hausam* (former Orthodox Presbyterians)

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of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with instructions about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement (Hebrews 5:12-6:2).

In other words, the “new wine” of the Church are her new members, new believers, who need to go through a time of catechetical instruction (a time of “new wineskins”) about the basics or “milk” of the faith. Since the earliest days of the Church, this has evolved into a special time of catechetical training to prepare new members for Baptism and then reception into the Church. A time when, under the continuing tutelage of the Church, this new, unspiritual wine can be changed, by grace, into old mature spiritual wine, equipped to be teachers — “new wineskins” — for the training of new members: new wine in new wineskins constantly and continuously becoming good old wine in the old mature wineskin of the Church.

So what’s so hazardous about putting “new wine” in “old wineskins” and why might this destroy both? Saint Paul also discussed this: “The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task ... [h]e must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Tim 3:1,6). New converts must be given time to mature before they are allowed into positions of leadership, for many reasons. As Richard Baxter wrote in his AD 1650 classic treatise, *The Reformed Pastor*, addressing the corruption in the century old Anglican Church:

Alas! it is the common danger and calamity of the Church, to have unregenerate and inexperienced pastors, and to have so many men become preachers before they are Christians; who are sanctified by dedi-

cation to the altar as the priests of God, before they are sanctified by hearty dedication as the disciples of Christ (*The Banner of Truth Trust*, reprinted 1979, p. 56).

So what about that piece of “unshrunk cloth on an old garment”? If you will, this refers to the necessary process of growing in humility, of being “shrunk,” for an unspiritual, immature Christian can be unsuspectingly susceptible to the temptations of the devil, and a source of great upheaval in the Church.

These parables are about responding to grace, opening our hearts to the truth of Jesus Christ, and the Church He gave us, guided by the Holy Spirit — the process of continual conversion in which we are changed from “new,” unfermented, immature, unshrunk babes in Christ to “old” mature, humble replicas of Jesus Himself.

All of this to emphasize that we need to pray for our Church leaders, for Pope Francis, for our bishops, priests, deacons, catechists, liturgists, for all new members of the Church, actually for all of us. Any one of us — at any level of the Church — can take our faith, and our vocations, for granted; we can digress from being mature, good “old wine,” partakers of solid spiritual food in the trustworthy “old wineskin” of the Church, into becoming immature, unspiritual, “new wine,” “puffed up with conceit,” and in danger of falling “into the condemnation of the devil”; in need once again of the basic milk of re-formation — not Reformation of the Church (as Luther thought) but the reformation of ourselves.

May we grow by grace to become shrunken patches, able to humbly assist in the authentic renewal of the Church, rather than unshrunk, self-assured, “all-knowing” “new patches” with novel new ideas, whereby, in the end, through our well-meaning efforts, “a worse tear is made.” ■

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Prayer List

Clergy

■ For Mark, a Pentecostal minister, that his desire for unity and growing understanding of authority in the Church will bring him home to the Catholic Church.

■ For Meghan, a non-denominational lay minister, that the Holy Spirit would guide her as she strives to better understand Catholic parish life.

■ For an Assemblies of God minister in India, that our Lord Jesus Christ would fill her with an ever more deepening desire to enter the full life of the Catholic Church.

■ For Julius, a minister in the Midwest, that he will learn to understand that the Catholic Church is interested in him and will welcome him in the love of Jesus.

■ For Steve, a Pentecostal minister in the south, that his growing love for the Catholic faith would bring him to the Eucharistic altar of our Lord Jesus Christ.

■ For a priest of the Church of England, in the United Kingdom, that our Lord would clear away all annulment obstacles blocking his path to full communion with the Church of Rome.

■ For an Episcopal professor in Georgia, that his wife would become more open to the fullness of the truth found only in the Catholic Faith.

■ For Greg, a youth minister, that his desire for a richer and deeper faith will draw him to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

■ For the wife of a pastor in the south who is unsure how to move forward with her longstanding desire to be Catholic, that the Holy Spirit will give her clarity and direction.

■ For a lay minister in the Vineyard church, that the Holy Spirit will continue guiding her journey towards the fullness of His truth.

Laity

■ For all those beginning RCIA and discerning God's leading in their faith journeys.

■ For a woman on the journey who is struggling with not being able to receive the Eucharist yet and is having a difficult time understanding why Anglicans don't have a true Eucharist.

■ For an Episcopalian in Tennessee to be able to move forward with her longstanding desire to be Catholic and for her husband to be willing to go through the annulment process.

■ For Elizabeth who is no longer pursuing her interest in the Catholic Church, that she will continue seeking truth.

■ For an Evangelical in Canada, that her husband will be more open to the Catholic Church and allow her to come home.

■ For Rhonda who is searching and struggling in her faith journey, that she will have the peace and clarity she needs in her discernment.

■ For Bill's wife to become supportive of his interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For a convert in the south who has stopped practicing her faith, that she will be able to find the help and support she needs.



■ For Kristina and her continued struggles settling into living a Catholic life.

■ For Olivia who is studying and praying as she discerns the best timing to fully become Catholic.

■ For Jennifer who is searching spiritually and trying to find a church to attend, that she will be open to pursuing the Catholic Church.

■ For Richard and his many questions and concerns about the Christian Faith.

■ For a woman in Virginia who feels overwhelmed with all the requirements to be Catholic and is considering the Anglican church, that she will discern God's leading in her life.

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.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

ally, the support courses included not only Greek and Hebrew, but also Ethics and Philosophy of Religion. All of these were well taught, the latter two by the late Dr. Stuart Hackett. He was a realist philosopher, in actuality something of neo-Thomist, although he never gave any indication of Catholic leanings. I had no idea then that God was preparing me to read, understand, and relish Catholic theology some 40 years later.

Finally, my wife, Judy, whom I met when I was 18 and married at 19, was herself a staunch Plymouth Brethren. That common faith was what made me acceptable to her. But she had had her own experiences with God and as a pre-teen had promised God that she would “be His missionary,” going anywhere He sent her. She would need to make good on that promise as we lived our lives together.

After Wheaton, we moved to Deerfield, Illinois, where I earned my MDiv at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. There I deepened my theological and biblical understanding and widened my world view. I had entered Wheaton as something of a fairly rigid Fundamentalist, and I left Trinity very much an Evangelical, open to interacting with the arguments of those from any denomination. I developed this way because of two professors, both Plymouth Brethren (especially Dr. Walter Liefeld) and one Baptist professor, Dr. Richard Longenecker. When I left Trinity in 1971, I had a diploma, experience working in the psychiatric ward of a hospital, and our first daughter. I also had the experience of God providing for us when we discovered that my wife was pregnant and would have to quit teaching (which was required in those days).

Leaving Trinity, I spent the summer in US Army Chaplain School, becoming a Plymouth Brethren chaplain in the US Army Reserve (although I would only serve with regular Army units in Germany). I then traveled with my wife and daughter to Manchester, England, where I spent another three years working on my PhD at the University of Manchester. I still had almost no contact with Catholics, other than the biblical studies books they wrote. But, while we attended Ford’s Lane Evangelical Church, a Plymouth Brethren assembly in Bramhall, I did have contact with evangelical Anglicans, including my thesis supervisor, Rev. S.S. Smalley. The head of the department, Prof. F.F. Bruce, was Brethren. England was good for me, for I felt culturally at home; it was much harder for my Houstonian wife, for she had a toddler when we arrived and a preschooler and another toddler (our second daughter) when we left. But through more miracles of God’s grace, we left without debt and with the coveted PhD. And we were still married — perhaps the greatest miracle of all.

My first teaching position was in Germany, at what was then called Bibelschule Wiedenest, located in a valley about 60 km east of Cologne. The institution was a missions agency as well as a theological school. It was both Plymouth Brethren and Baptist; those groups had been forced together into a union by Adolf Hitler — ecumenical unity by decree. It was totally a German institution in every way, so after eight weeks of language school (for me, on top of some basic German I learned for thesis re-

search in England), we were dumped into total immersion in the German church and cultural world. This would change our lives in three ways: (1) I discovered Christian social concern; (2) we became involved in the German form of the charismatic movement (which is contemplative); and (3) we discovered the Christian spiritual tradition, immersing ourselves in its literature from the Desert Fathers through Henri Nouwen. We did all this in the context of our interest in Christian community. What sticks in my heart is my reading Carlo Carretto’s *Letters from the Desert* and being haunted by his description of kneeling alone in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on the sand floor of a chapel in Algeria. That was foreign to me, but it tugged on my heart. A little later, at a week-long fasting retreat, I felt that God unexpectedly spoke to me and told me to become an Episcopalian.

When God speaks, He has a plan. So a year later (1976), we headed to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where, sight unseen, I had been hired as the biblical studies professor at a new evangelical Episcopal seminary, Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry. At TESM, besides learning a lot about praying for funds (and trusting God’s providence would meet our needs) for the seminary and the challenges of a new foundation, God was forming us in other ways. Our third daughter was born (March 1978), but died of SIDS 40 days later. My wife’s obstetrician heard about this and, as a devout Catholic, had two Masses said for Elizabeth. This deep experience of loss transformed us both, and it gave me a pastoral heart. This would eventuate in my being ordained deacon and priest in the Episcopal Church 18 months later (October 1979).

My first Eucharist was a healing Eucharist — and, yes, a woman was healed. Furthermore, while confession is not common among evangelical Episcopalians, during the next two Lents, I did a self-directed Ignatian retreat (in the form used by those who cannot leave the active life) and during Holy Week went to an Anglo-Catholic priest for confession. Furthermore, during my preparation for teaching classes, I resolved the doctrinal issues I had with the Catholic Church: for example, Fr. Raymond Brown’s commentary on John 6 resolved issues over the Eucharist, and studying Revelation 12 gave me a new appreciation for Mary.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

Also, the summer of 1980 found me attending the National Catholic Charismatic Conference for Priests and Deacons in nearby Steubenville, Ohio. The main speaker was an Episcopalian, which was a draw, but what I received from the talks and small groups was the deep experience of these Catholic priests and deacons as brothers, and then the brokenness of the Church when, in the final Mass, we Episcopalians had to process out of the tent to celebrate Eucharist in a room by ourselves. We wept, of course, but our Catholic brothers and sisters did as well. There was more, but the main thing I took away was the fervent hope that ecumenical talks would succeed and the knowledge that if I ever left the Episcopal Church, it would be for Rome, not Geneva (where John Calvin had presided).

God has never let us stand still for long, and in 1982 we left Trinity for Berkeley, California, where my wife earned a MCS degree, and then on to Regent College, Vancouver, BC, Canada, where I taught for five years and we both were tutored in spiritual direction (by a Plymouth Brethren scholar who was deeply and personally immersed in Teresa of Ávila!). We were also involved in church renewal movements. But God kept us moving, first to Regina, Saskatchewan for two years of teaching, then back to Vancouver. When my main job in Vancouver rained out in 1995, we felt called to join the faculty of the Schloss Mittersill Study Center in Austria and help rebuild theological education in central and eastern Europe. We were also involved with the Vineyard movement in the German-speaking world, which included some Catholic groups. Furthermore, the Catholic pastor in Mittersill was himself very welcoming. Our children were not with us on this journey, for we were now empty-nesters. Even our son, born in 1980 while we were at TESM, stayed in Canada.

In 2002, we would go from Austria to Houston, TX, where my wife was called to help build pastoral care for pastors in the Association of Vineyard Christian Fellowships. I realized then that I needed to lay down my ministry to support her. She would be ordained a year later as a Vineyard pastor. Yet four years later, she moved that ministry to Canada, where we lived in New Brunswick, teaching at a small university. I was involved in the Anglican Diocese of Fredericton. Back in Pittsburgh, the Episcopal diocese I officially belonged to was splitting. I stayed Episcopalian, because that is what the Anglican bishop wanted. However, as the splitting was going on, I heard that Pope Benedict had established the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter. “If I have to leave the Episcopal Church,” I thought, “that is where I am going.”

Not long later, the university we taught at ran out of money for our jobs, so January 2011 found us back in Houston. A depart-

ment chair at Houston Baptist University had asked me to apply for a job, and I was accepted. Besides teaching, I became an “honorary assistant” in the same Episcopal church I had been in before. Yet, now that we were settled again, we started looking in earnest for a community with our spiritual or “monastic” values. Perhaps, I thought, Episcopal Franciscan Tertiaries. But God drew my attention to a concert in an Anglican church by John Michael Talbot. Judy and I were both drawn to the Brothers and Sisters of Charity and ended up going to their regional gathering in May 2013. We knew God was calling us to that group, for they integrated all our core values. But they were Catholic. I struggled with this, for it meant we could not share in Communion.

Finally, driving home from a meeting one evening, I said to God, “OK, Lord, I’ll suck it up and be an Episcopalian in the Domestic expression of the BSC, painful as that is. You are calling me.” In my head a voice said, “But why

not...?” I knew that the rest of the sentence was “become Catholic.” I did not tell Judy, who was in the car, any of this. She flew off to Canada to visit our children spread across that country, and I explored the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter. No promises of ordination or ministry were made; I was only told that I would have to lay down my ministry and be received into the Church, then see what God would do. “That’s God,” I said. “Die and see what God resurrects. I’m in.” I applied. My wife, Judy, was not part of this, and, in fact, was resistant. But God brought her around in October at the Gathering of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity. (That, however, is her story to tell.) We were received into the Catholic Church in Our Lady of Walsingham, Houston, February 16, 2014.

Two weeks later, the rector, fresh back from leading a pilgrimage to Rome, excitedly told me that God had so worked events in

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...Journeys Home Continued...

Rome that the Ordinariate needed my experience in theological education, and I was on the fast track to Catholic ordination. But first things first: we made our temporary profession in the Domestic expression of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity in October 2014, at Little Portion Hermitage in Arkansas. Then I was ordained a deacon (December 13, 2014) and a priest (December 19, 2014) in the Catholic Church at Our Lady of Walsingham and appointed the first Director of Clergy Formation (Vocations) in the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter.

Looking back, just over four years later, I can sum up the result of all this in the words that I said to a fellow priest from the Archdiocese of Galveston–Houston as we got ready to process in the Easter Vigil at Our Lady of Walsingham in 2015: “I feel like I am living a dream that I did not know that I had.” I had never heard a confession during 34 years as an Episcopal priest, but I heard two or three the day I celebrated my first Mass in the Catholic Church, and hundreds and hundreds since. God brought my spirituality, biblical, and psychological formation together to prepare me, and I leave the confessional with thanksgiving for how He worked. I had celebrated Eucharist in the Episcopal Church, but in the Catholic Church my Brethren sense of the Breaking of Bread as the center of worship became my daily experience as I feel the wonder at every Mass that “I get to do this,” and almost feel like dancing as I distribute the Body of Christ to those coming to receive. (I do restrain myself, but congregants often comment on how I smile.)

Now that I am a Catholic, I am joined in one body to those spiritual masters that I had read for decades. There are 2000 years of church history I am living into. I had never found a community in the Episcopal Church that would integrate what I had learned from St. Francis and St. Benedict, from charismatic experience and the contemplative tradition, but now I had found that in the Brothers and Sisters of Charity (where we are now permanently professed). In fact, we are living in a garage apartment in St. Clare Monastery. I had hardly attended a Catholic Mass before the summer of 2013, but now I get to celebrate Mass in two versions of the Latin rite (the typical version that is most common, and the Ordinariate version, each with their version of the Roman Missal) and in the local Byzantine Catholic church (I was granted bi-ritual faculties in 2018). I breathe out of both lungs, both east and west.

While I had grown to accept the basic truths about Mary over my years as a biblical scholar, I had hardly had any experience in Marian devotion, but in the summer of 2016, I had an experience at Creighton University, where I was taking some further formation at the direction of our new bishop, the Most Rev. Steven J. Lopes, in which I, in a sense, met Mary and some of the issues of my childhood and youth were healed. I am, indeed, living a dream I did not know that I had.

There have been pains and struggles: one book contract that I had was dropped by the press when I became a Catholic; none of our children or siblings have followed us into the Catholic Church, nor do they wish us to talk about our Catholic life; and,

given that I entered the Ordinariate before they had a pension plan and that the retirement age was dropped to 70, we live on limited income without anything like a full pension — but ask St. Francis or St. Anthony of the Desert or numerous others how God supplies. We live in a deanery with huge parishes (even the smaller ones have 2000 families) and two or three priests per parish. Those parishes are delighted to find another priest at their service. Age also brings health issues, especially for my wife, and we feared cutoff from our former friends and colleagues. But we have not experienced cutoff from most of my Evangelical and Anglican friends. I am still involved in publishing projects with a number of them. Some are intrigued, perhaps even drawn, by our journey. I feared that this might divide my wife and me, but while not initially welcoming my journey, it should be clear from the above that she entered the Church with me. Judy now offers spiritual direction and pastoral counsel in St. Clare Monastery. That was the work of the Spirit, for she is a woman of that Spirit who used Scott Hahn (*Rome Sweet Home*) and numerous friends and advisors, including the Brothers and Sisters of Charity and the Bishop of Little Rock to draw her “home.”

God did not start late in life drawing me to the Catholic Church. He began virtually at my birth. He prepared me step by step; He was in no hurry. I have narrated some of the key points, but I could not narrate even those in detail or tell all the stories. Many less critical events have been left out. Yet it should be clear that God slowly and surely drew me home. There were the key events; there were insights here and there as I studied and taught Scripture. Then He created the opportunity, and here I am, living the dream I did not know I had and expecting it to get even better. ■



FR. PETER H. DAVIDS has been married for 51 years to the former Judith (Judy) Bouchillon whom he met and married at Wheaton College. Together they have three married children (and one who died of SIDS) and nine grandchildren, all of whom live in Canada. Judy is a spiritual director and pastoral counselor, whose ministry is based in St. Clare Monastery in Houston, Texas. Most of Fr. Davids' current ministry is in the Archdiocese of Galveston–Houston, although he is bi-ritual and so also assists at St. John Chrysostom Byzantine Catholic Church. He is known for his expertise in the Catholic Epistles, on which he has written most of his 10 books, but has taught the whole of the New Testament, and also the Old Testament, History of Christian Spirituality, History of Christian Worship, and many other topics.

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