



November 2019 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



More Than the Bible

By Mark Hausam

My Early Life I grew up in an Evangelical household. We were not tied to any particular denomination. Due to my father's work, we moved around the country a lot, and we were members of several different types of churches — Baptist, Evangelical Free, Independent — but all basically "evangelical" in nature.

I had no particular interest in Christianity as a child. When I was in third grade, my parents took me to a Lowell Lundstrom crusade (an evangelistic ministry), where they encouraged me to see if I was ready to "ask Jesus into my heart." I remember that I enjoyed the crusade (unusual for me at that age), and I decided to go ahead and say the sinner's prayer and be pronounced a Christian. Soon, however, life returned to its former state.

It wasn't until my seventh grade year (1990–1991) that I again began to experience any interest in religion. Around that time I read the *Chronicles of Narnia*, which impressed me. I also got a computer game for my birthday, *Conquests of Camelot*. It featured the player as King Arthur, as he looks for the Holy Grail. I had already developed an interest in Arthurian stories and the Middle Ages in general. In that game, King Arthur travels to the Middle East and eventually to Jerusalem to seek the Grail. The game is set in AD 800, so the Middle East is Muslim-dominated. Thus I encountered, for the first time, Middle Eastern culture. At that time, the Gulf War broke out in Iraq and Kuwait, and it dawned on me that this was the same region of the world that my game was dealing with. I be-

gan to read everything I could find on the Middle East. Just a few months later, at Easter time, *The Ten Commandments*, with Charlton Heston, played on television, and I realized that the setting of the stories in the Bible was also the Middle East. This got me interested in reading about the Bible.

Around this time, I began to have some concern for my spiritual well-being. I remember, for instance, praying the "Sinner's Prayer" repeatedly. Obviously, God was working in my mind, my heart, and my circumstances in some very interesting, if disparate, ways during this time period, moving me into a more conscious awareness and practice of Christianity and a relationship with God. But I felt self-conscious about it all, so I didn't mention it to anybody.

I determined to live consciously as a Christian. My Christianity was idiosyncratic at first, while I was forming a concept of orthodoxy. In the eighth grade, I decided to read through the Bible. I started in Genesis and read through the whole thing like a novel. Without my knowing it, the Bible version I used was Catholic, the Jerusalem Bible. I chose it because my father had a copy of it lying around. I was still very

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

self-conscious about my new “religiosity,” so I used to hide religious books under my bed. (Just what every parent of a teenage boy is worried about, right?)

Eventually, I told my father that I was reading through the Bible. He asked me what book I was in, and I said, “1 Maccabees,” which surprised him. I had no idea of the differences between Catholic and Protestant Bibles. When I got to Paul’s letters, I didn’t like him very much; I considered him arrogant.

Then Judaism captured my fancy, and I began to go regularly to a local Reformed Jewish synagogue. The congregation consisted of a small number of mostly elderly men and women, and they were delighted to have a young, non-Jewish teenage boy so interested in what they were doing. In tenth grade, I began to study Hebrew with the pastor of our church. With that, the Jewish congregation, which was too small to have its own rabbi, allowed me to join the circle of those who led the services each week. So I began leading services once every month or so.

When I was in eighth grade, I began reading the works of C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer; the latter was a popular Evangelical philosopher and evangelist in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Both of these authors have a strong intellectual and philosophical bent, and they had the effect of introducing me to theology, philosophy, and apologetics, as well as grounding me more solidly in orthodox Christianity. From this point on, my theology was less all-over-the-map and became aligned with historic Christian orthodoxy. C.S. Lewis also influenced the form my Christianity took. His emphasis on the unified vision of all Christians, in what he called “mere Christianity,” gave me a strong interest in historic, orthodox, creedal faith, as it was manifested in all or-

thodox denominations (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox). I developed an intense dislike of “denominationalism.” If anyone asked me what denomination I was a part of, I would indignantly reply that I was a *Christian*! I remember once, when we were visiting a mosque, my grandmother introduced us all as Protestants, I told her later that I didn’t like that identification, since I wasn’t protesting anything.

It was during this time that I had my first real contact with Catholicism. I encountered the music of Catholic musician John Michael Talbot and got into it. I also started reading a bit of Catholic literature. My best friend’s mother married a Catholic around this time, and my friend himself went through the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) program to become Catholic.

I thought I might do the same. I went with my friend to one of the classes, but only one. I wasn’t interested in the Catholic Church at that time because I was convinced of the particular doctrines or positions of Catholicism, but more because I saw that, historically, the Protestant churches had come out of the Catholic Church. My interest in Church unity led me to want to undo those divisions. I stayed Protestant because I was already a member of the Christian Church — I considered the Church of Christ to be the collection of all “mere Christians” throughout the world, whatever denominations they were in — and I saw no point in switching from one church to another within the broader Christian Church.

During these years, I also developed an interest in St. Francis of Assisi and read a lot about him. I had picked up a booklet from the Knights of Columbus at the local state fair. It had a fa-

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— By Marcus Grodi

In a talk from the Coming Home Network’s 2010 *Deep in History* conference, Marcus Grodi looks at the role of Scripture in the Christian life. Most Christians agree that in their belief that the Bible is infallible and inspired, but can’t agree on how to interpret it. Marcus reflects on his own journey with the Bible, shares how it came to direct and inform his life, and looks at how his respect and reverence for the Word of God played a large part in leading him to the Catholic Church.

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A Damning System of Works Righteousness

PART IV: IMPUTATION: THE HEART OF THE PROTESTANT DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION?*

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator



I had been wrestling for some years with the suspicion that there was something *not right* about the doctrine of justification I had learned.

If anything was evident to this Protestant preacher, it was that in both the Old and New Testaments the promised blessings of God are consistently described in *conditional* terms.

Things always have to be *done* in order to receive them. Whether it's Noah being required to build a boat; Abraham to leave his home; Moses and the children of Israel to cross a burning wilderness; a blind man to "Go, and wash in the Pool of Siloam" in order that he might come up seeing; on every page of Scripture the Lord is saying to His people: *Trust me, do what I tell you to do, and I will bless you!*

And never is there a hint that somehow this requirement of obedience makes the relationship one of brute legalism rather than of grace. No. Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 4:5), and throughout the New Testament discipleship is everywhere depicted as a path one must walk and persevere in to the end. Yes, the disciple walks by faith. Yes, he walks in the power of the Holy Spirit and not his own strength. Yes, his obedience, like his faith, flows from a new heart that God has given him (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). But still he must walk, and choose to continue walking, and not turn back.

[Christ] has now reconciled [you] in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard (Colossians 1:22-23).

All this I could see. And here was my Reformation doctrine of justification insisting that one's salvation is determined *at the moment one first believes*, when Christ's own righteousness is legally credited to his account and that, as evangelicals like to put it, there is "nothing we have to do" in order to inherit eternal life. Nothing.

After all, bringing obedience into the picture as a requirement for receiving the blessing, as a condition for entering heaven, would turn the gospel of grace into a damning system of works righteousness — like the Catholics teach!

Becoming a Theological Detective

About this time, I learned that an old friend from seminary days had left the Protestant ministry to become Catholic. I called to straighten him out and the two of us began to talk.

The more we talked the more I came to understand how the struggles I was having with putting the Reformation understanding of justification together with so much of what I saw in Scripture were struggles the Catholic view of justification answered. I decided to take a fresh run at the entire issue. I would look at

the whole history of Christian thought on this doctrine of justification and everything inspired Scripture had to say about it. Like some theological detective, I would take the evidence boxes from their shelves, dump the contents on my desk and examine the case from scratch.

I drove over to the Fuller Theological Seminary bookstore and picked up Alister McGrath's classic two-volume work, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*. It was recommended as being the most thorough and scholarly historical treatment ever written.

I sat in the coffee shop at Fuller and began to read.

Examining the Historical Evidence

McGrath began with the early Church Fathers. He stated that while these earliest witnesses to the faith of the early Church speak of both faith and obedience as necessary for salvation, there is not a developed doctrine of justification in their writings *per se*.

This doctrine of justification comes with St. Augustine (354-430). And when it comes, it is the Catholic doctrine that is presented. Justification is not the crediting of righteousness to the sinner but the entire process by which the sinner is actually *made* righteous and fit for heaven. McGrath writes: "A real change in man's *being*, and not merely his *status*, is envisaged in his justification, so that he *becomes* righteous and a son of God, and is not merely *treated as if he were* righteous and a son of God" (italics original).

The author went on from here to discuss the development of the doctrine of justification during the long millennium separating Augustine and Luther. His conclusion was that what we have here is little more than an elaboration of Augustine's doctrine.

Then he came to Luther, Melancthon, and the Reformation doctrine of justification as legal imputation. I read the following paragraph and jumped up as though my chair was on fire.

Despite the astonishing theological diversity of the late medieval period, a consensus relating to the nature of justification was maintained throughout It continued to be understood as the *process* by which a man is made righteous The essential feature of the Reformation doctrine of justification is that a deliberate and systematic distinction is made between justification and regeneration ... *where none had been acknowledged before in the history of the Christian doctrine*. A fundamental discontinuity was introduced into the western theological tradition *where none had ever existed, or ever been contemplated, before*. The Reformation understanding of the nature of justification [as imputation] must therefore be regarded as a *genuine theological novum* (italics added).

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So many thoughts raced through my mind. What? For five hundred years we Protestants have been declaring the Reformation doctrine of justification to be the “article upon which the Church stands or falls” and insisting that this precise understanding of justification is *so crucial* to the Gospel of God’s grace that it’s doubtful *anyone* who rejects it could be a true Christian. And now I hear this world-class Protestant scholar admitting that the idea was *brand spanking new* with Luther? That it was *unknown* in the first fifteen centuries of Church history? That the idea had never even been “contemplated” in fifteen hundred years of theological reflection?

I immediately wanted to leave the historical case and move on to examining the biblical evidence. If no one before Luther thought of justification as the Reformers did, what exactly was the New Testament evidence in support of it? After all, one would think that if the evidence was strong, *someone, somewhere, over the course of a millennium and a half would have seen it!*

Examining the Biblical Evidence

I closed McGrath and opened John Murray’s classic Protestant work: *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. I read his chapter on justification and was struck by two things:

First was the simple fact that Murray could point to no passage in the New Testament that actually *describes* justification as the legal imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Not one. Rather, he explained, this “truth” is one that while not stated can be “inferred” from other things that are stated, especially in the writings of St. Paul.

Now this is not necessarily a deal-breaker. Something that inferred rather than stated can be true — like the doctrine of the Trinity, which is nowhere spelled out explicitly in Scripture.

At the same time, given that Paul devoted more space to the doctrine of justification than any other New Testament author, and was concerned specifically with debates about how believers are justified, if imputed righteous really was as central to his thinking as Protestantism has insisted it is, it does seem a bit strange that he never got around to simply saying it.

Second, when I looked at the biblical passages and themes from which Murray inferred the idea of imputation, none of them seemed to *require* the interpretation he gave them or to demand inference he made from them. For most of them, it was as easy to infer the Catholic position as the Protestant!

For instance, he brought forward texts that describe justification, or righteousness (same word in both the Hebrew and the Greek) as the “free gift” of God and inferred from this that justification is the legal imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer. But why? I thought. Catholics also believe that justification is the free gift of God. They just understand the *nature* of justification differently.

He referred to passages that describe justification as received “by faith” and inferred from this that justification is the legal imputation of righteousness. But again, how exactly does this argue that justification is the legal imputation of Christ’s righteousness rather than the actual *imparting* of righteousness as Catholicism teaches? Either one, it struck me, could be received “by faith.”

Murray pointed out that in Scripture the verb “to justify” does not normally mean “to make righteous” but rather to “declare one to be righteous.” From this he inferred imputation.

But again, how does this argue for imputation? OK, the verb “to justify” most often means “to declare one to be righteous.” What if God “declares” His people to be righteous because He has begun the work of actually *making* them righteous?

Murray’s strongest evidence — what Protestants take to be the deathblow to any view other than the Protestant view — was to point to where Paul reminds his readers that “Abraham believed God, and it was *reckoned* to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3). Murray infers from this that God saw Abraham’s faith and imputed or credited the righteousness of Christ to Abraham’s account.

Except that what the text *says* is that God saw Abraham’s faith and reckoned *it*, considered *it*, accounted *it* as righteousness. In fact, Paul right away speaks of the man whose “faith is reckoned as righteousness” and he equates this with the man’s sins being “forgiven” (Romans 4:5 and 7).

To summarize, it seemed to me that once one assumed the truth of the Protestant conception of justification it could be read *into* all these biblical texts, one could *import* it into each of them. But it didn’t arise from what the biblical authors actually said. There was no New Testament passage from which it followed as a *necessary* inference.

No wonder it took fifteen hundred years for someone to see it.

Protestants in Protest Against Protestantism

It turns out that despite the insistence of Reformation-minded Protestants that imputation constitutes the absolutely non-negotiable heart of the Gospel, the actual biblical evidence for it is so thin that a number of high-profile Protestant (not Catholic!) Scripture scholars have in recent years come out advocating that the idea be discarded.

For instance, New Testament scholar Robert Gundry:

The doctrine that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believing sinners needs to be abandoned The doctrine of imputation is not even biblical. Still less is it “essential” to the Gospel.

In fact, there are so many recognized scholars beginning to take this position that Gundry is willing to speak of a new “developing standard in biblical theological circles.”

For me, taking the idea of imputation out of the picture, and with it the notion that because we have been clothed in Christ’s righteousness we are guaranteed heaven and there is nothing we have to do and so forth — was like taking a wrench out of the biblical machinery. Now, when I heard Jesus say, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” (John 15:10), I wouldn’t have to explain how Jesus isn’t really saying what it sounds like He’s saying. God’s word could be allowed to speak.

As the same time I could hear my evangelical friends quoting to me from St. Paul: “For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Romans 3:28) and asking me: How can you read these words and believe that our obedience is *in any way, shape or form* a condition for entering heaven? How?

To be continued... ■



The Similarities of the Mystery of the Church and the Mystery of Hell

Marcus C. Grodi

Understandably, my title begs many questions, and maybe creates some skepticism, yet there are interesting similarities between the mysteries of the Catholic Church, the sacraments, belief in Jesus Christ, and the mystery of hell — but not in the ways that critics of the Catholic Church might suggest.



For many, the doctrine that the Catholic Church and her sacraments are necessary for salvation is an awkward thread that runs throughout the history of the Church. Over the years, many have challenged the justice of this claim: “What about those who have never heard of the Catholic Church or her sacraments? What about those who, due to no fault of their own, have a lifelong visceral alienation from the Catholic Church? Are they morally culpable for remaining outside the Catholic Church? What about those who have been so scandalously treated by the Church that they were essentially forced out of the Church? Are they culpable? What about the good, sincere followers of Jesus Christ outside the boundaries of the Church, who have faith in Christ, but may not have received Baptism or any of the other sacraments? Are they also outside of salvation?”

These and other challenges to the long-standing doctrine that the Catholic Church and her sacraments are necessary for salvation have tended toward diminished endorsement and enforcement of the doctrine, to the point where today one rarely hears a Catholic, cleric or lay, even mention, let alone affirm, the necessity of the Catholic Church and her sacraments. As a result, one finds that the majority of modern Catholics no longer believe that membership in the Catholic Church is necessary for salvation, or that her sacraments are of any true significance — as a recent Pew Survey showed, less than a third of self-proclaimed Catholics even believe that the Eucharist is truly the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ.

One can make the same analogy of the necessity of belief in Jesus Christ for salvation. Our Lord claimed that no one comes to the Father except by Him, yet one could pose the same caveats mentioned above, leading to the same result of today’s indifference. The common conclusion is that anyone to whom God eventually grants salvation is mysteriously saved through Christ and His Church, regardless of whether that person was in the Church or believed in Christ, or even heard of either. The result is that few today believe that belief in Christ, membership in the

Catholic Church, or reception of any of the sacraments are ultimately necessary for salvation: “Our God is a much too loving, merciful, understanding, kind, and fair God!”

So how is all of this similar to the mystery of hell? The long-standing doctrine and thread running throughout the history of the Church is that there are ultimately only two destinations for all of humanity: either eternal union with the Trinity in the Beatific Vision (i.e., heaven), or eternal separation from God and eternal punishment in hell. From the beginning, theologians and others have posed caveats similar to those mentioned above: “But what about those who never knew about God, Christ, or the Catholic Church? What about those who never heard about sin and the law, or about heaven and hell? Will they face eternal punishment? What about those who have been taught all their lives that all these things are but myths? Will they face eternal punishment? This seems highly unfair and unjust! What about all the ‘good’ people we know, who certainly are far from perfect and often fail, yet have good intentions and a sincere desire to be better? Will they roast for eternity?”

Over the years, people have offered alternative theories about hell, starting with the third century theologian, Origen, who suggested that eventually even Satan himself would be saved. The rise of 18th century Universalism grew out of a conviction that a loving God would hardly punish anyone eternally for a temporal mistake.

And so, today, few believe in the reality of hell, just as few (even self-proclaimed Catholics) believe in the necessity of the Catholic Church or her sacraments, just as fewer and fewer (even self-proclaimed Christians, Catholic or non-Catholic) believe that explicit faith in Christ is necessary for salvation.

These are all signs of the deeper apostasy in which we are all now living. This apostasy was predicted in Scripture and emphasized as yet another thread running throughout the history of the Church. Christendom has grown complacent and numb to the pervasive influence of the evil one and the resultant pervasive indifference.

With humility we must begin by recognizing and affirming the mystery of God. He is not merely a much larger, more powerful version of man (i.e., of ourselves), but a wholly, Holy Other, far beyond the myriad ways in which we project upon Him the weaknesses of our fallen humanity.

There is indeed a heaven and a hell, and all that Our Lord, the Scriptures, the Church Fathers, and the Church have taught about heaven and hell, about eternal judgement and punishment, are still true. As our Lord proclaims in the book of Revelation, "He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:7-8).

How this will work itself out for the ignorant, for the supposed innocent, for the seeming undeserving, is beyond our understanding. We simply need to stand in judgement of no one, to proclaim the truth in love as long taught by Christ and His Church, and to prepare ourselves daily for our own eventual place in the dock, to seek by grace through faith in love to live in holiness, so that one day — maybe soon — we can stand before Him without embarrassment. We must also affirm that it is still necessary for salvation to have faith in Jesus Christ and to persevere in Him to the end. And, as has long been taught, we must also affirm that Christ did establish a Church as the "pillar and bulwark of the truth," as the primary means of salvation, giving her the sacraments as the primary channels of salvific grace.

And lest we wonder whether the doctrines of heaven, hell, and the necessity of belief in Christ and His Church are indeed still the teachings of the Catholic Church, she herself proclaimed them in the Second Vatican Council and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, reaffirming what has been believed and taught throughout the ages (emphases added):

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at

the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it (CCC, 846; *Lumen Gentium*, 14).

Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation. "Since 'without faith it is impossible to please [God]' and to attain to the fellowship of his sons, therefore without faith no one has ever attained justification, nor will anyone obtain eternal life 'But he who endures to the end'" (CCC, 161).

The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation (CCC, 1129).

The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, "eternal fire" (1035).

Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers (cf. Lk 18:8; Mt 24:12). **The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth** (cf. Lk 21:12; Jn 15:19-20) **will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth** (CCC, 675).

Certainly, both the Vatican II documents as well as the *Catechism* offer qualifications of mercy for those who are invincibly ignorant, but we must never presume the knowledge to judge whether someone is invincibly ignorant; we have only the right and responsibility to proclaim and live the truth of Jesus Christ, His Church, her sacraments, and her teachings, so that we, in imitation of St. Paul, "might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22). ■

EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 2 AM ET, Thursdays 2 PM ET

The Best of The Journey Home: Sunday 7 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-Friday 1 AM ET

November 4

Leah Libresco* (former atheist)

November 11

Art Lohsen* (former Lutheran)

November 18

Fr. Daniel Bowen* (former Jehovah's Witness)

November 25

Jonathan Bading* (former Calvinist)

December 2

Fr. Richard Rojas* (former Presbyterian and Anglican priest (re-air from 6/5/2017))

*Schedule is subject to change.

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

Joyful Journey Updates

From Zoya, a recent convert "Thank you so much for checking in! ... What a feeling to be in full communion, our family has been blessed and we are so grateful."

From Darby, a recent convert "I was received into the Church at the Easter Vigil. I spent Holy Thursday through Holy Saturday at my local parish and went and spent Easter Sunday with the Carmelites, whose community I am still interested in joining. It was the most wonderful Easter I have ever had! I had so many hang ups when I first thought about entering the Church. There are still things I struggle with, but as far as I can see God has done the impossible with me and I am so blessed to have become

Catholic. You just never know what will happen in the future until it happens."

From Shaina, on the journey "Thank you so much for taking the time to write me and address my concerns and questions. I appreciate and want to follow your advice regarding studying the Catholic Faith in depth. Thank you for the links to the websites as well that have been helpful for me to read. I look forward to this journey and thank you for being supportive!"

From Doug, on the journey "Thanks for your recent inquiry. I'm still on fire for the

Lord!!!! Each day I try to encourage everyone I come in contact with to get one step closer to God. I am still constantly defending the Catholic Faith despite the fact that I'm currently Southern Baptist. I guess that makes me a closet Catholic at this point, although all my closest friends and family know where my heart lies. I'm constantly reading the latest conversion stories ... The Coming Home Newsletter is always uplifting and inspiring. Please tell everyone on your staff to keep up the good work!" ■

YEAR-END GIVING

Please remember the CHNetwork in your year-end giving. Your donation may be tax-deductible and is a tremendous help to our ministry as we seek to assist non-Catholic Christians on the journey to the Catholic Church. You may donate by calling 740-450-1175, returning the envelope included with this newsletter, or going to chnetwork.org/donate/.



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Prayer List



Clergy

■ For a former Anglican priest in the state of Washington, that the Holy Spirit may heal the broken relationships that have been caused by his entry into the Catholic Church.

■ For a Southern Baptist minister, that his concerns over the divide between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches may be rectified.

■ For Joseph, a non-denominational minister in New York, that he may complete his journey to the Catholic Church.

■ For an Anglican priest in New Zealand, that he may find gainful employment to enable him to enter into full communion with the successor of St. Peter.

■ For Jose, a Nazarene minister, that by the grace of our Lord Jesus, all obstacles in the path of his returning to the Catholic Faith of his youth may be cleared away.

■ For Robert, a minister in the south, that our loving Lord would dispel all his fears of becoming a Catholic Christian.

■ For an Anglican priest in the United Kingdom, that her intellectual objections to Catholic doctrine may be answered.

■ For Frank, a minister in Arizona, that he may be able to set his finances in order to enable him to enter the Catholic Church.

■ For a Pentecostal minister in Colorado, that his wife's resistance to his interest in becoming a Catholic may change to a personal desire to become a Catholic herself.

■ For Robert, a United Methodist minister, that he may find a good spiritual director who will guide his journey to full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ For a clergy convert in Nebraska to be able to utilize his gifts in the Church.

■ For the wife of a minister in Canada, that she will find good support for her journey.

■ For the wife of a military chaplain who is continuing to learn more about the Catholic Church, that she will have clear direction as to how to proceed with her faith journey.

Laity

■ For Barbara, as she returns to the Church after being away a number of years, that she will grow in her faith and love for Jesus.

■ For a Baptist in Kentucky who is attending Mass and becoming involved in the local parish but isn't sure about formally moving forward with her interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For Melody to find a good, supportive faith community as she looks to move forward with her desire to become Catholic.

■ For Terry and her husband as they seek to strengthen their marriage despite the differences in their faiths.

■ For a Presbyterian in North Carolina, that she will continue to grow in her love for Jesus and His Church as she goes through RCIA and discerns a possible call to the religious life.

■ For Doug who has recently returned to the Catholic Church, that he will be strengthened by the sacraments.

■ For Stella to know how best to move forward with her faith journey and be attuned to God's will for her life.

■ For Georgina who is on the journey, that she will continue to draw closer to our Lord Jesus and His Church.

■ For Kim, who recently went to Mass for the first time, that she will find good local support for her journey.

■ For a Southern Baptist who has completed RCIA but isn't able to move forward with her desire to be Catholic because of family issues, that God will clear the path for her to be able to come into full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ For Mary who is regularly attending Mass, watching *The Journey Home*, and feels like she is being led gently towards the Church, that she will have peace and clarity in her discernment.

■ For an Evangelical in the northeast as she learns about the role of Mary and the Communion of Saints, that she will be able to come to appreciate the role of holy men and women in our faith 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 from page 2

mous prayer attributed to St. Francis in it (“Make me an instrument of your peace,” etc.), which I liked.

In those days, I would defend Catholics when people challenged whether they were truly Christians. In the summer of 1995, my parents moved to Utah. Since I was in the high school and youth group where we were in Columbia, Missouri, they gave me the option of either moving with them or staying where I was. They were going to rent the house out to some friends who were moving to Columbia. I decided to stay, so my parents moved to Utah and I stayed in Missouri. The father of the family that rented the house was a conservative Protestant, and he didn’t like Catholicism. I would defend Catholicism to him, and at one point he wrote a letter to my parents, expressing his concern that I was getting too close to Catholicism. I think my parents were more amused than anything.

The Calvinist Days

In 1996, I went to Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, which is a well-known Evangelical liberal arts school. My big theological transition during this time was that I became a Calvinist. I’m using “Calvinist” here in the Evangelical sense of the word, referring to a person who has come to be convinced of what Calvinists call the “doctrines of grace” — which basically amount to a strong insistence on the absolute sovereignty of God over all things, including over salvation and damnation, as well as on the utter graciousness of salvation. If Bob ends up saved and Sally ends up damned, such a difference cannot fall outside the oversight of God’s providence, who fulfills His plans in every aspect of history. And why did Bob choose Christ while Sally didn’t? Surely not because Bob was a naturally better person. It must be because God led him to salvation by His grace. God made the difference between Bob and Sally ultimately. I very much hated Calvinism when I first encountered it. I was leaning rather towards a universalism in which everyone would be saved. Calvinism, though, kept nagging at me. Eventually, during Christmas break of my freshman year (January of 1997), I accepted the Calvinist point of view. I started dating my future wife, Dez, shortly after this time, and I eventually helped convert her to Calvinism as well. We were married in December of 1998.

Becoming Calvinists gave us a natural impulse towards the Reformed tradition, and so when we graduated from college and moved out to Salt Lake City, Utah, in the summer of 2000, we became members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), a small, conservative Reformed denomination. We continued as members there for the next fourteen years. Six of our nine children were baptized there. Over our time there, we became more and more Reformed in our thought and practice. In 2005, I became a ruling elder in the church, and I continued in that role for seven years. In addition to helping to govern the church, I preached sermons on many occasions, usually when our pastor was out of town.

Over those years, my idea of the church as nothing more than an amorphous collection of “mere Christians” was shaped into

a view that took seriously the formal dimensions of the visible church as well: the authority of elders, formal membership, the importance of the sacraments, etc. I gained a greater sense of the seriousness of worshiping God according to His will and an appreciation for the importance of church tradition in addition to Scripture. Of course, I believed in the classic Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura* during this time — that the Bible is the only infallible guide to doctrine and life, and there is no infallible tradition or infallible church to interpret Scripture — but I also came to see how Christian theology and life need to be embodied in a visible church and a visible tradition, with formal creeds and catechisms, rules of order, a sense of its own history, etc. I highly prized the Westminster Confession and Catechisms as immensely helpful summaries and systematizations of biblical teaching.

During this time, there were curious aspects of my thinking that were very “Catholic” or at least “Catholic-friendly,” the significance of which I would only later fully realize. One of the greatest examples of this was my doctrine of justification. In the year 2001, early in our OPC days, I came to the conclusion that I disagreed with the Protestant doctrine of justification. I decided I agreed with what I called the “Augustinian” doctrine of justification instead, which is basically the Catholic point of view. I had no interest in Catholicism during this time; I remained a strong and proud Calvinist. But I felt that the Protestants had gone astray on this point, and that the earlier Catholic Augustinian tradition had gotten it right. A couple of years later, I discovered I was able to interpret the Protestant position in such a way as to avoid conflict with the Augustinian view, so that resolved my dilemma, but I never did give up the Augustinian view.

Conflict

The year 2012 was very important in my spiritual journey. During that year, my theological focus shifted to church unity and church government. I became very interested in tracing out the logical implications of a Presbyterian view of church government. Presbyterianism, like Catholicism, has a strong view of the unity and authority of the visible church. Each congregation is ruled by a body of elders (the “Session”), and these elders are parts of larger bodies of elders up to, in theory, a body of elders comprising all the elders on earth. Nineteenth-century Presby-

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terian theologian Charles Hodge put it this way: “The Presbyterian doctrine on this subject is, that the Church is one in such a sense that a smaller part is subject to a larger, and the larger to the whole.” In this system, there cannot exist more than one legitimate denomination, for the very idea of multiple denominations involves elders who don’t submit to other elders in larger governing bodies. When churches professing Presbyterianism are divided, therefore, the implication is that they reject each others’ *de jure* legitimacy. However, Presbyterianism is also very divided. There are many Presbyterian denominations. Presbyterians, therefore, have come to settle for a practice that does not live up to theory.

When I realized this inconsistency, I decided that, to be a consistent Presbyterian, I had an obligation to sort through the tangled mess of denominational divisions to figure out which denomination had legitimacy. I decided, for various reasons I need not go into here, that I ought to join the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland (FPCS). But there is only one FPCS church in the US, and that one is in Texas. We were living in Utah. I decided, given the less-than-ideal circumstances, that I could remain with the OPC for the time being, until it was possible to join the FPCS. But since I was still a ruling elder in the OPC, I decided I needed to communicate what I was thinking to the rest of the Session. This resulted in conflict. The conflict came in stages, finally ending in the fall of 2014.

At the end of it all, the Session made its position clear. By talking and writing publicly about my views about Presbyterian church government and the FPCS (I had written several blog posts, for example), I was committing slander against the OPC by denying their *de jure* legitimacy. They ordered me to cease talking to anyone about these views. They also told me that if we left membership in the OPC and joined up with the FPCS in Texas, we would be removing ourselves from membership in the visible church altogether (since the church in Texas was too far away to have effective oversight over us) and would therefore have, in effect, relinquished “all rights to be considered Christians.” They said that if I didn’t agree to stop talking about these matters, I would be banned from even attending worship with them.

I didn’t feel that in good conscience I could agree to stop talking about a matter I considered important and biblical. I hadn’t spoken with anyone in our OPC congregation about my views, except for some close friends, in order to avoid any conflict. I had only written blog articles and talked mostly with people in Scotland. But I didn’t feel that I could agree not to discuss the subject at all. I also felt that we ought to continue to seek to be members of the FPCS.

So, after fourteen years, we found ourselves banned from our former church. We began going to a local PCA (Presbyterian Church in America) church, a slightly less-conservative Presbyterian denomination, in our area. We went there for six months and were received very warmly by the pastor and the members. (Also, during this time, I became very interested in reading Church history. Dez and I had begun reading through

the Church Fathers. Some former members of our OPC church had become Catholic, and they were sending us Catholic literature, which I was reading.)

Into the Catholic Church

In March of 2015, our eighth child was born. We wanted to have him baptized, so I asked the elders in the Texas FPCS what steps needed to be taken to make that possible. Now, I knew that the FPCS was a very conservative denomination, but I was surprised at their response. The main elder we’d been interacting with told me that he had some problems with some of my behavior. One of those things was that I was into reading fiction, and particularly, fantasy. He suggested that this would likely be an obstacle to our ability to have our new baby baptized. This led to a crisis, because we felt that reading fiction is not a sin. On the contrary, we felt that fiction, as an expression of our creativity as human beings made in the image of God, is an important aspect of our humanity. We felt it would be not only unnecessary, but even wrong to systematically cut this out of our lives and the lives of our children. We had already come to the conclusion that the FPCS was the only right denomination to join. So what if we couldn’t even join *that* denomination? Would we have to start our own?

At that point, we began to reconsider *sola Scriptura*. We had been trying to follow that path, but it seemed to have led to a dead end. In fact, it seemed to have led to a dead end, not just for us, but for the whole Protestant world. If *sola Scriptura* is the way God intends for us to learn His will, then why has it resulted in a situation where agreement and unity in the truth — which is so important, according to the Bible — seems to be impossible? I felt like a hiker trying to follow a path in the woods. The path keeps getting more and more obscure, until it finally disappears altogether. At that point, the hiker begins to wonder if he took a wrong turn at some point. That’s where we were.

We began to look at *sola Scriptura* very closely. Very shortly after that point, I came across a flaw in my earlier reasoning. I had been looking at things without a proper regard for history. I had taken Scripture, Church Tradition, and the Magisterium as if they were separate, independent elements that needed to be independently confirmed. I knew that the entire Christian tradition throughout history had affirmed the central importance of Scripture as a locus for knowing the will of God, so I felt sure on that point. But I didn’t feel that the idea of an infallible Tradition or an infallible Magisterium could be justified, since it seemed that Scripture could function on its own without them.

But it then occurred to me that I was simply *assuming*, without argument, that Scripture could function independently in that way. How did I know that it could function independently? How did I know that it didn’t need to be interpreted within the context of an infallible Tradition and an infallible Magisterium? In fact, I discovered, it seems to have been the consistent position of Christians throughout Church history up until the Reformation that the three are interdependent. The earlier Fathers did not hold to *sola Scriptura*. That position was embraced fully and formally by no group prior to the Reformation. Certainly, it was

...Journeys Home Continued...

not the view of the historical Catholic Church, from which the Protestants emerged. When I realized this, I saw that I had put the default in the wrong place. The burden of proof was not on Catholics to prove that we needed to add Tradition and Magisterium to Scripture. The burden of proof was on the Protestants to show why they were justified in wresting Scripture out of its original context, together with Tradition and the Magisterium, to be interpreted independently on its own. Once I saw that the question needed to be reframed in this way, I saw that it had no good answer. Protestants could not prove from Scripture, reason, or Church history that Scripture ought to be so torn out of its original context. The Protestant Reformation, then, was groundless. It was a needless church split, violating without cause the unity, authority, and continuity of the historic Church. My wife came to similar conclusions in her own way as we worked through all of this together.

We decided to enter into a time of investigation, in which we would study Catholic teaching in depth and deal with any concerns or objections as we encountered them. This period lasted for about five-and-a-half months. Dez was able to do a lot of studying during this time, especially earlier on, since she had just had a baby and was consigned to nursing for large portions of the day. By God's providence, I ended up having a good bit of time for research the following summer as well, so we were able to do a lot of studying and thinking. We studied issues like salvation, justification, predestination, the saints, Mary, the Eucharist, confession, penance, purgatory, indulgences, and alleged papal contradictions. In all of these things, once the question-begging *sola Scriptura* glasses had been removed, we could not find any solid objection to the Catholic Church.

In August of 2015, we decided to join RCIA. We had already started attending St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Orem, UT, back in March. The people of St. Francis gave us a very warm welcome and were immensely helpful and encouraging to us as we made our transition into the Church. It was not just my wife and I, but several children, who were old enough to require their own personal process of transition.

We greatly enjoyed our RCIA class. At the Easter Vigil in March of 2016, the family was received into the Catholic Church. Our eighth child, Timothy, was baptized that same night. Since then, we've moved a couple of times, and now live in Columbia, MO, where we are parishioners at Our Lady of Lourdes Church. Our children go to Catholic school. I help out with the RCIA and also sing with one of our Mass choirs. My wife is in the process of becoming a member of the Order of Secular Franciscans, (a worldwide community founded by Saint Francis of Assisi made up of women and men, married or single, who feel called to incorporate into their lives elements of Franciscan practice and spirituality).

Most of my intellectual difficulties with Catholicism were rooted in *sola Scriptura*. Once that bastion fell, the difficulties fell with it. For example, I used to object to talking to the saints in heaven and honoring them, because I couldn't find reference

to it in the Bible. But once I realized that it was not my job to personally derive all practices from my own individual interpretation of Scripture, this objection lost its force. It is the task of the Magisterium to derive doctrine and practice from the explicit words of Scripture as well as from what is implicit in its principles and ideas, in the context of the Tradition of the Church, the authority of Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I have no authority or competence to correct the God-guided interpretation of the Church. My greatest practical (as opposed to intellectual) difficulty has been accepting the teachings and practices of the Church related to Mary. Catholic devotion to Mary still sometimes feels like "too much" to my Protestant-trained sensibilities. I'm like a person raised in a republic, suddenly finding myself having to live in the world of a traditional monarchy, with all the ceremonies and high-sounding reverential titles that typically go along with that. I am still not entirely over the culture shock. But I recognize that those feelings reflect the natural difficulties human beings have when they cross cultures, rather than objective difficulties with Catholic practice. Despite the continuing cultural adjustments, and despite all the imperfections in the Church (a matter of human limitations), and despite the fact that becoming Catholic has not ended all the difficulties that go along with living life, I am immensely grateful to God for bringing me and my family into full communion with His people, giving us the great riches of His Church. We have the Eucharist. We have the God-guided Magisterium and Tradition. We have the visible Church, that Christ Himself founded. We have the saints and Mary. And, most importantly, we have God Himself, and His fellowship and grace. What more can one ask for? ■



MARK HAUSAM lives with his wife, Dez, and their nine children in Columbia, MO, where his family attends Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church. Mark teaches philosophy at State Fair Community College in Boonville, MO. and runs a blog, *The Christian Freethinker* (freethoughtforchrist.blogspot.com). His wife also has a blog, *The Green Catholic Burrow* (greencatholicburrow.com). Mark has also written several books, including one of general Christian apologetics, *Why Christianity Is True*, and one addressing the claims of the Catholic Church to Protestants, *No Grounds for Divorce: Why Protestants (and Everyone Else) Should Return to the Unity of the Catholic Church*. Both of these are linked to on his blog. Mark and Dez were recently guests on *The Journey Home* program. The show can be viewed at chnetwork.org.

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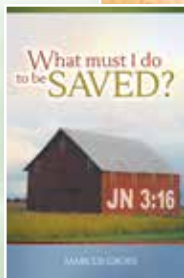
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