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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Being True to the Truth

By David Woodby

I grew up in an extremely marginal Christian home. Even though my parents never went to church, said prayers before meals, or in any outward way demonstrated any commitment to Christ or His Church, we always said we were Christians.

When I was six years old, I attended the vacation Bible school at the Assembly of God. For about three years after that, I would occasionally attend Sunday school.

When I was fourteen years old (1965), my three sisters and I started attending First Baptist Church. After receiving Christ, taking the new member class and being baptized, we became members. I didn't get involved in the youth group or attend Sunday school, but would occasionally go to Sunday worship.

In 1969, I met and fell in love with Harriet Dvorsky. After a whirlwind courtship, we were married in the Baptist church. Harriet had been raised in the Catholic Church but hadn't been attending since she was 14. We settled in Ypsilanti, Michigan, where I was attending the local community college and had a job with General Motors. We lived in Ypsilanti for six years but never found a Baptist church that we wanted to join.

In 1975, we moved to Blissfield, Michigan and started looking for a church. There was a sense of urgency, because the Jesus Movement was popular where I worked, and I got caught up in it. I started daily Bible reading, prayer, and Bible studies at lunch with other "freaks." I developed the habit of daily Scripture reading and read through the Bible

every year. Harriet and I went to Christian concerts and bought records and tapes. The songs not only reinforced what we already believed, they also shaped our belief.

I also started buying Christian books, magazines, and newspapers. My reading had neither rhyme nor reason; I would read material from Catholic and anti-Catholic authors, charismatic and anti-charismatic authors. I figured that every church had both truth and errors. One just needed to hold onto the truth and reject the errors, and the Holy Spirit would guide him.

We settled on St. Paul Lutheran Church and joined the new member class. I had a difficult time with the Lutheran understanding of the sacraments being a means of grace, especially infant Baptism and their belief in the eucharistic Real Presence. I studied everything I could about the Lutheran understanding of the sacraments. But I still couldn't understand why you would baptize someone before he came to faith, and it became the subject of much discussion with my Bible study group at work.

The Christians at work disagreed with what I was learning about Baptism. They insisted that infant Baptism was an empty work. They always quoted Titus 3:5: "God saved

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

us, not on the basis of any righteous deeds we had done, but by virtue of His own mercy." But I argued that Baptism was a gift from God, not a righteous work that we do. I said: "In that text, Paul goes on to say we're saved by, 'the washing of regeneration,' which is our baptism." They would counter that this Scripture could not mean water Baptism, because we are not saved through Baptism. Therefore, the "washing of regeneration" must be washing ourselves in the word of God through the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In return, I pointed out that in Acts 16, when Lydia and the jailer came to faith in Christ their entire families were baptized. Therefore, if the family included babies, they would have been baptized. Scripture doesn't say that there were babies, but it also doesn't exclude them.

We joined St. Paul Lutheran Church, and our two children were baptized shortly afterwards. Harriet and I became deeply involved in the life of the congregation and in the Lutheran Charismatic Renewal. Soon I was teaching Sunday school, and I was elected as a church elder and president of the church council. The more we got involved, the more we enjoyed being part of the Lutheran church.

After a few years, I became convinced that the Lord wanted me to become a pastor. However, I had no desire to do so, since I already had my life planned out. For three months, I argued with the Lord about why this idea was absurd. Interestingly, one of the foundational teachings we had received was on the lordship of Jesus Christ. When the Lord, either through Scripture or the leading of the Holy Spirit, tells you to do something, the only answer a disciple can give is, "Yes, Lord." If you say, "No, Lord,

I won't obey," you're saying that Jesus is not really the Lord of your life. One Sunday, Harriet told me, "Dave, I think the Lord wants you to become a pastor. I've been fighting the idea because I absolutely do not want to be a pastor's wife. But..." After our discussion we both said, "Yes," to God's plan for our lives.

We went to speak with our pastor. He said he would support us one hundred percent. We discussed the next step, which was for me to return to college. In order to go to a Lutheran seminary, you must have a bachelor's degree, and I only had an associate's degree. But I couldn't afford college. Our pastor said that there were funds available. If I signed up for classes and purchased my books, he would reimburse me.

When the Lord tells you to do something, He will provide everything you need, from finances to abilities. I enrolled at Eastern Michigan University. One thing God provided was a place for meditation and prayer; it was a Catholic chapel. Every day, I would pray in the chapel while Mass was being celebrated. I was impressed by the beauty of the liturgy and their humility when they said, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed" (see Matt 8:8).

After graduation, we moved to Columbus, Ohio, where I enrolled at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. It was in seminary that I discovered the writings of the Church Fathers. I was so impressed by them; they were completely sold out to Christ and His Church. I started with the *Didache*, where the teachings about Baptism and the Eucharist sounded Lutheran to me. The Church Fathers definitely moved me away from Evangelical theology to Lutheran theology. The reason they didn't, at that time, help me to become

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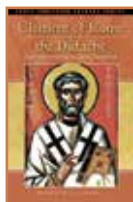
Scripture & the Early Church

— By Fr. Mitch Pacwa

In this talk from the 2004 *Deep in History* conference, Fr. Mitch Pacwa discusses the role of Scripture in the early Church. As a scholar of ancient and Middle Eastern history, culture, and religion, Fr. Pacwa examines the phenomenon of Sacred Scripture and the ramifications of the translation and interpretation of the Scriptures out of their proper context.

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— By Dr. Kenneth Howell

Clement's *Letter to the Corinthians* and the *Didache* reveal how early Christians were implementing and living out the Faith taught by Jesus and passed on by the twelve Apostles. In a time when Christians everywhere are seeking a greater visible unity of faith and order, these documents provide rich food for thought. The *Letter to the Corinthians* by Clement of Rome and the *Didache* are two of the most important documents from the earliest days of Christianity.

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A Damning System of Works Righteousness

PART VI: SEVEN STEPS*

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator



How did this Protestant minister come to abandon the classically Reformed (Calvinist) doctrine of justification and accept as biblical and true what he once considered unbiblical, false, and even damning?

In this article, I want to recap seven intellectual steps I took during my years in seminary and as a Baptist pastor that brought me to the borderland between Protestantism and Catholicism and created in me a desire to *hear* what the Catholic Church had to say in answer to that most important question: What must I do to inherit eternal life?

The answer I had been taught went like this: At the instant I reached out to Christ in faith, all my sins were credited to His account and all His righteousness was credited to mine. This is the doctrine of “imputation.” At that moment, all my sins were forgiven, including all *future* sins. I was *saved*, and no sin I would ever commit could alter that fact.

While obedience to God would follow in my life as a Christian, as I grew in faith and knowledge and as the Holy Spirit did His work in me, any talk of obedience, *as though it were a requirement or condition for salvation*, was to be entirely rejected. After all, if this were the case, salvation would no longer be the “free gift of God.” Eternal life would then be something I had “earned.” Then God would not receive “all the glory” for the great work of redemption. Then I would have something in which to “boast.” In short, this would turn the Gospel of grace into a “damning system of works righteousness.”

No, according to this view, faith is, and must be, the *only* condition for salvation. And since the Catholic Church continually speaks of faith and obedience as though *both* were conditions for entering heaven, Catholicism, I believed, was the epitome of a “damning system of works righteousness.”

So how did things change for me?

STEP ONE *I came to see that in the Old Testament stories of men and women and their relationships with God, God always required faith and obedience of those who would receive His blessing.*

An illustration of this could be found on virtually every page. Noah had to trust God and build an ark *in order to* be saved from the flood. Abraham had to trust God and leave his home and kindred *in order to* seek an inheritance from God. Moses and the Israelites had to trust God and follow the pillar of cloud and fire through the wilderness *in order to* enter the Promised Land. Naaman had to trust God and wash in the Jordan *in order to* be cleansed of his leprosy.

In the stories of the Old Testament, faith and obedience were *always required* of those who would receive God’s blessing. God was always saying to His people: “Trust me and do what I tell you to do, and I will bless you!”

STEP TWO *It struck me that this is never presented as something bad.*

If anything was clear to this Protestant, it was this: the second you make obedience to God a *requirement* for receiving His blessing, you are waist-deep in a damning system of works righteousness. You’ve turned the Gospel of grace on its head. You are now a “legalist.”

So how come there wasn’t a hint of this in these Old Testament stories? Why was there not a whiff of a notion that because obedience had been required of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Naaman, these had now “earned” God’s blessing and had something in which to “boast”? Why was there no sense that by these examples God had now been robbed of His glory? Why is this all presented as something good?

I was beginning at this point to scratch my head a little.

STEP THREE *I came to see that the pattern illustrated in the lives of these Old Testament figures carried right on through into the New Testament.*

In the Gospels, Jesus comes saying “Believe in me!”

But He also comes saying, “If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love” (Jn 15:10). He also comes saying, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:21).

It was the same with Paul. In his letters, the Apostle insists that a man is justified by faith in Christ “apart from works of the law” (Rom 3:28). But he also insists that in order to reap the harvest of eternal life, we must persevere in good deeds. “Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart” (Gal 6:7-9).

The writings of Peter and Paul, James and John are filled with passages like these. But the passage that really hit me was Hebrews chapter 11. Here the inspired author rehearses a number of Old Testament examples of those who through faith and obedience received the promised blessings of God — including Noah and Abraham and Moses — and he sets them forward *as examples for us to imitate!*

But these are all examples of a pattern we Protestants thought of as heresy! If believing that we must trust God *and* do what God says in order to receive God’s blessing is the essence of legalism, why are we being shown these examples? Why are we being cheered on to imitate them?

I was beginning now to scratch my head a great deal!

STEP FOUR *I came to understand that when St. Paul speaks of “works” or “works of the law” he isn’t talking about obedience to Christ.*

In other words, I came to believe that at the heart of the Reformation view of salvation, a critical mistake had been made. We took Paul to be setting faith in

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opposition to obedience and teaching that we are saved by faith in Christ apart from obedience to Christ.

What I came to understand was that in passages where Paul speaks against “works” or “works of the law,” he has something specific in mind. He was dealing with a situation in which certain Jewish believers were insisting that *in order to be saved* Gentile converts would need to receive circumcision and begin to keep the “customs of Moses” — essentially they would need to become Jews. In other words, when Paul sets “works” in opposition to “faith,” he’s not saying that we are saved by faith alone, apart from obedience to Christ. He’s saying that we are saved by faith in Christ, not by becoming Jews.

And for Paul, faith in Christ *includes* obedience to Christ.

I found that a careful reading of Galatians and Romans confirmed this interpretation. Read through Galatians for hints of exactly what Paul has in mind when he uses the term “works” and you will find him talking about circumcision (1:3-5; 5:6; 6:15), Jewish dietary laws (2:11-21) and Jewish Sabbaths and festivals (4:8-11). You will never find him insisting that obedience doesn’t matter. But you will find him insisting — repeatedly — that it doesn’t matter whether one is a Jew and whether one has been circumcised (3:27-29; 5:6; 6:15).

And the same is true in Paul’s letter to the Romans.

STEP FIVE *I learned that the Reformation doctrine of justification as the imputation of Christ’s righteousness had never been held, had never even been conceived, in the first fifteen hundred years of Christian thought.*

And from a well-respected Protestant theologian, no less!

Given that I was already seeing so many weaknesses in the position, this had a real effect on me. I remember thinking: For five hundred years we Protestants have been insisting that justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ is the heart and soul of the Gospel, so much so that it’s doubtful any who deny it — Catholics, for instance — could even be real Christians. And now I learn that the idea was *brand new* at the time of the Reformation in the 16th century?

STEP SIX *I learned that an increasing number of Protestant biblical scholars were beginning to discard the doctrine of “imputation” as not really taught in the Bible.*

For instance, New Testament scholar Robert Gundry writes: “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.”

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

A new developing standard!

STEP SEVEN *I examined the New Testament evidence for the Protestant doctrine of justification and found it surprisingly thin.*

As it turns out, nowhere in the New Testament is justification described as the legal imputation or crediting of Christ’s righteousness to the account of the one who believes. Nowhere. And nowhere is anything said that necessarily implies this.

In fact, when I examined carefully the primary New Testament passage cited as teaching the doctrine of imputation, it fell apart completely. I’m talking about Romans 4:3, where Paul quotes Genesis 15:6: “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Because the word “reckoned” can also be translated as credited or imputed, Protestants read this passage and take it to mean that when Abraham believed God, God credited or imputed righteousness to him.

But this cannot be what Genesis 15:6 is saying.

First, if Genesis 15:6 is supposed to be describing the moment when God legally credited righteousness to Abraham’s account and Abraham was “justified by faith alone,” what was I to make of the fact that at the time of this event Abraham had *already* been walking in the steps of faith for some twenty-five years? Are we to say Abraham wasn’t justified during all those years? That Abraham didn’t have “real faith” when he left his home back in Genesis 12:4 to follow the Lord to a land he would inherit?

Second, where is the idea of *legal* imputation in Genesis 15:6? The word translated “reckoned” can also be translated “considered,” “counted,” and “imputed.” When I say that I “reckon” someone to be a good man, that I “consider” someone to be a good man, that I “impute” goodness to someone, do I mean that I have legally transferred goodness to that man’s account? No. I just mean that I consider him to be a good man! That’s all I mean. There’s no reason to assume that Genesis 15:6 is talking about what Protestants mean by “legal imputation.”

Third, notice that the passage doesn’t even say, “Abraham believed God and righteousness was reckoned to him.” What the passage says is that Abraham believed God and his “faith was reckoned *as righteousness*.”

In other words, the essential meaning of the passage seems to be similar to what we find in Genesis 7:1, where God says to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for *I have seen that you are righteous* before me in this generation.” Or what we find in Hebrews 11:4: “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, *through which he received approval as righteous*.” The most natural reading of Genesis 15:6 is that because of Abraham’s faith, he received approval as being righteous. God is saying, “I have seen you as righteous before me in this generation.”

Finally, I found that the exact words “and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” occur only one other time in the entire Old Testament, and in a passage that, to put it mildly, would be *difficult* to interpret as Protestants interpret Genesis 15:6.

In Numbers 25 we read about a terrible time in Israel’s history. The people have fallen into idolatry. They’re offering sacrifices to the gods of the Moabites and committing adultery with Moabite women. The Lord’s anger is kindled and He sends a plague among them. As Moses and the faithful of Israel are on their faces weeping before the tent of meeting and crying out to God, Aaron’s grandson Phinehas sees an Israelite man take a woman into his tent in the sight of everyone. Phinehas rises, takes his spear in hand, runs to the tent, and impales the two of them.

In Psalm 106:31 this event is recalled and hear the most interesting thing said about this man Phinehas: *Continued on page 6* ►

CHNETWORK EVENTS

THE CHNETWORK IS EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE several events this coming year when you will be able to join with CHNetwork staff to go deeper in your faith life. We have two retreats and a special pilgrimage to Germany that we invite you to consider joining.



PILGRIMAGE TO GERMANY!

September 8-18, 2020 the CHNetwork will sponsor a pilgrimage through Germany, where we will study the history of the Catholic Church in Germany with special focus on the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.

After learning about the early centuries of the Catholic Church in Germany, visiting Trier where St. Athanasius was exiled in the 4th century and Fulda, to learn about the life and ministry of St. Boniface the "Apostle to Germany" in the 8th century, we will travel north visiting the sites associated with the life of Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk and Catholic priest who launched the Protestant Reformation when he posted his 95

Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Our travels will take us to a number of picturesque German towns, including Eisleben, where Luther was born and died; Wartburg Castle, where he made his German translation of the New Testament; Leipzig, where Luther debated the great John Eck; and Wittenberg, where it all began.

While this pilgrimage should prove to be an inspiring and educational experience for all Catholics, it may be of particular interest to converts from Protestantism, especially those from Lutheran and Evangelical backgrounds, as well as those still on the journey toward the Catholic Church.

Along the way, we will celebrate Mass in some of the most beautiful churches in some of the most wonderful towns in one of the most breathtaking countries on earth. Please consider joining us! It will be an incredible experience to share our stories and forge lifelong friendships as we experience the beauty and history of the Catholic Church up close. To learn more about this pilgrimage, please go to chnetwork.org/pilgrimage-to-germany/ or contact Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org.

CHNETWORK RETREATS!

We are pleased to announce a retreat in Columbus, Ohio **April 27-30, 2020** and another in Houston, Texas **October 12-15, 2020**. Coming Home Network retreats are opportunities to meet (or catch up with) the CHNetwork staff and other members of the network for a time of discussion, prayer, and worship. Intended for both converts/reverts and those on the journey to Catholicism, the goal is to promote Christian fellowship among the attendees, assist in discernment for those who are facing tough questions or decisions, and to encourage all in an ever greater walk with Christ. To learn more about our upcoming retreats, please go to chnetwork.org/retreats/ or contact Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org.



2020

"They provoked the Lord to anger with their doings, and a plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and interposed, and the plague was stayed. *And that has been reckoned to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever.*"

These are the same words as we find in Genesis 15:6.

Now, I'm not entirely certain, but I imagine there aren't many Protestant biblical scholars who would wish to make Psalm 106 the basis for a doctrine of "justification by execution alone."

In Psalm 106:31, God is commenting on something He sees in this man Phinehas. He sees in Phinehas zeal for the holiness

of God and He approves Phinehas as being a righteous man. He says to Phinehas what he said to Noah, "I have seen you as righteous before me in this generation." It is the same with Genesis 15:6. Neither of these passages has anything to do with the legal imputation of righteousness.

Conclusion

So how does Catholicism put the biblical pieces together on this subject of justification? Having taken these seven steps in my thinking about the Reformed doctrine of justification, I was ready to listen to the answer the Church would give to this important question.

Stay tuned for "the rest of the story." ■

ONLINE COMMUNITY



We have a great way for converts and journeyers to connect online! CHN's Online Community is the quickest and easiest way for people on the journey to Catholicism to connect with converts, as well as CHN staff, for fellowship on the journey home. We

invite you to connect at community.chnetwork.org.

CONTACT THE CHNETWORK



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NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE



Our online newsletter archive is new and improved! Visit <http://newsletter.chnetwork.org/bookcase/xdjce> or scan the QR code to view past newsletters.

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

January 6

Patrick Flynn*
(former atheist & revert)

January 13

Jonathan Bading
(former Calvinist)

January 20

John Leyendecker*
(former agnostic)

January 27

Curt & Judy Ashburn*
(former Mennonites)

February 3

Allison Dreher* (former Baptist)

*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 Jeff, on the journey "Thank you for your prayers and encouragement. My wife now knows what is going on. She is supportive but found some humor in it, recalling attempts she made to get me to see things from the Catholic perspective years ago. I've made it through the *Catechism* and found it to be a real treasure. It left me with far fewer questions than I expected, and I really appreciated the extensive footnoting (I have an educational background in history and library science and like when information is well-organized and traceable). I'm going to dig into some of Scott Hahn's materials on Mary to see if I can understand this mystery better through his teaching. I have also been working my way through Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. I've been involved in the Anglo-Catholic movement that he helped create, so it is interesting to see his thought process in moving on from it. On a more practical note, last week I took my four-year-old daughter to Mass with me, and this morning I spoke with the priest about how to move forward. I have submitted an inquiry to the faith formation director and am looking forward to where this journey leads.

From a pastor on the journey "Last Wednesday was my final pastoral conference where I announced to my colleagues my conversion and that I will be stepping back from the pastorate. It was another deep experience for me to do that in the midst of forty or so Protestant pastors. I didn't prepare a speech because I felt that I couldn't and needed not but to put trust in the Holy Spirit. And indeed, words came out fluently, firmly, gently, and appropriately. I told a bit of my way, my regrets for leaving people and projects, and my joy to go this way. At the end, they applauded. Then some came to me to ask me: On what I'll live now? What I missed in the Protestant church? How it was for me to make this decision? etc. They all treated me with respect. Three asked for a personal conversation with me. And since that day I am free! All are informed who should be informed directly. It's open now. And I can behave nearly as Catholic as I want to. And this is a great feeling. No more hiding! After all these years! . . . I try to go to a Catholic church once a day. And it feels so much all right. I'm granted with happiness and the

wish for deeper conversion of my inner spirit and outward life. God bless you!"

From Karen, a recent convert "Yes, I was received into the church . . . received my First Communion, Confirmation and the Sacrament of Marriage on that day. It was truly such a gift and such an amazing day. I feel so grateful for this journey and all the steps that have led to this time. Thank you so much for reaching out and for your support."

From a convert "I must say, discussions with you are enlightening to say the least. Thank you again for all the time and energy you have taken to educate me. I wish there was some way to repay you for all the insight and knowledge you have bestowed on me." ■

TAX LETTER

If you need a record of your 2019 contributions for tax purposes, please contact **Janna Pitcock**:

janna@chnetwork.org | 740.450.1175 x102

SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Could you give \$25 a month or more to help support the CHNetwork as we help men and women come home to the Catholic Church?

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

CHNetwork Attention: Ann Moore
PO Box 8290

Zanesville, OH 43702

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

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☐ Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$25.00 on auto-payment to help support the CHNetwork's ministry.

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☐ MasterCard

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Prayer List

Clergy

- For Eduardo, a pastor who has come to the conclusion that he must become Catholic, that the Lord will give him wisdom to know how to move forward with his denomination and congregation.
- For an Anglican priest, who wants to become Catholic and continues to ask the Lord for guidance as his wife as no interest in becoming Catholic and he has no idea how he would support his family if he left the ministry.
- For Michael, a Pentecostal minister reading and learning about the Church, that he will be able to explain to his wife what he is learning and that she will be open to it.
- For a Protestant seminarian who is studying the Catholic Church, that he will find answers to the many questions he has.
- For Gabriele, who has left the Lutheran ministry and been received into full communion with the Church, that she will continue to grow in her love for the Catholic Faith.
- For a Protestant seminarian who has concerns about her family's reaction should she decide to pursue the Catholic Church.

Laity

- For a convert in the south who is struggling with her faith and the negative experiences she has had within her church community, that Jesus will give her peace during this difficult time.
- For Todd, who has a strong attraction to the Catholic Church, that his wife would also come to share that attraction.
- For Russell, who is on the journey into the Church and is facing extreme opposition in his family, that the Lord may comfort him and soften the hearts of his family.

- For Joseph and his continued discernment about the direction of his faith journey, that he will have clarity as to how to move forward with his interest in the Catholic Church
- For Barbara as she looks towards coming into full communion with the Catholic Church, that she will find good, local support for in her conversion.
- For Richard, that the Holy Spirit will guide his journey and give him peace and consolation as he seeks truth.
- For Jodi, that the Sacred Heart of Jesus will comfort her fears and bring her clarity in her continuing faith journey as a Catholic.
- For a woman on the journey in Arkansas, that her husband and family will be more open to her pursuing her desire to become fully Catholic.
- For Anne who isn't sure how to proceed with her interest in the Catholic Church and hopes to find good Catholic friends to support her journey.
- For Andrew, that his family will continue to be understanding of his faith journey and in time become more supportive of his love for the Catholic Faith.
- For a non-denominational Christian in the United Kingdom who has met with a priest and is moving forward with her faith journey, that she will continue to go deeper in her faith.



- For Ruth, that Our Lady will draw her closer to Jesus and His Church.
- For a woman on the journey whose husband doesn't approve of her desire to become Catholic and she is torn as to what to do.
- For Amelia that she will be able to heal from hurts she has experienced and grow deeper in her love for Jesus and His Church.
- For Becky and her discernment and questions she has about the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will guide her heart and mind.
- For a fallen-away Catholic in North Carolina who is uncertain about the role of the papacy, that she will come to embrace the successor of St. Peter.
- For Mary, a recent convert, that her devotion to the Rosary will bring her into an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus and His mother.

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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Catholic was because I knew less than nothing about Catholic teaching or theology. I say “less than nothing,” because most of what I thought I knew was half-truths, slander, and outright lies. I had to unlearn quite a few things in order to learn the truth. Even then, I wasn’t anti-Catholic, just totally indifferent to Catholicism.

In seminary, I took a class on Reformation history. Luther believed that Holy Scripture is the only authority needed for doctrine. He believed that anyone of good will, reading the Scriptures, would come to a correct interpretation. His ideas were very quickly put to the test. The Reformation was fairly new when another Reformer, Zwingli, and Luther got into a huge argument about Holy Communion. Zwingli’s position was that the Eucharist was a symbolic memorial meal. He emphasized the words, “Do this in memory of me.” Luther, on the other hand, emphasized the words, “This is my body.” At one point, the argument became so heated that Luther took off his shoe and, pounding the table for emphasis, shouted, “The text says, ‘This *is* my body, this *is* my body, this *is* my body!’” Both men were appealing to Scripture, but each came up with a drastically different interpretation.

I graduated from seminary in 1985, was ordained, and took my first call at St. James Lutheran Church in Coral Gables, Florida. The congregation was deeply involved in the Lutheran Charismatic Renewal and in Lutheran Cursillo (a name later changed to Via de Cristo). I served as a spiritual director on several teams. One of the other spiritual directors was from the Church of God and spoke of his daily habit of praying the Rosary. This made no sense to me, since the Rosary is a Catholic prayer, but I came to know him as a solid Christian leader, so I decided that the Rosary wasn’t hurting him and might even be helping his spiritual growth. I became involved in the Kairos Prison Ministry (Cursillo for inmates). Kairos was an inter-denominational ministry, and many of those serving on the team were Catholics.

During our time in Coral Gables, I started having a recurring dream, in which I was scheduled to preach at an unfamiliar church. The deacon would come up to me and say, “Sorry, but you’re in the wrong church. The one you’re looking for is up the road.” I would then leave the building to look for the right church. Another dream was that I would be looking at the pulpit, which was mounted on the wall. I asked the deacon, “How do I get into the pulpit?” His answer was, “Go out that side door and around to the back of the church. You’ll find a door there that leads to the pulpit.” Following his directions, I went out the side door, stepped outside and was immediately lost and confused. I never could find the door to the pulpit; indeed, I couldn’t even find the door I came out of. I would wander around anxiously. Both dreams always ended with me standing in the middle of the street with different churches stretching far in either direction.

We left Coral Gables in 1991 and took a call to St. Michael Lutheran Church in Canton, Michigan. St. Michael was the largest of the Lutheran churches I served, with over 1700 members. I was one of three ordained pastors, and my position was the Pastor of Evangelism. I was responsible for all advertising, outreach, and attended all community meetings. Because of this, I came to

know the Catholic deacons and priests serving in our area. My wife and I attended concerts and plays held at the local Catholic church.

Because of my recurring dream of being in the wrong church, I began studying what other churches believed. My assumption was that the Lord was calling me back to a Pentecostal or Evangelical church. However, when I studied their beliefs, there was always much I couldn’t agree with. I could not go back to seeing the sacraments as merely symbolic.

It was around this time that the first version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published. There’s a saying, “The truth will set you free, but first it makes you angry,” and it’s true. I read through the *Catechism* and found much beauty and truth, but also things that I couldn’t agree with. However, my interest in the Church Fathers was revived. I purchased a set of their writings and began to study them. A friend, who is Catholic, began giving me books about the lives of the saints, beginning with my two favorites, Francis and Clare. This was the beginning of the Lord drawing me into the Catholic Church.

There is a scene in the first Star Wars movie, where the Millennium Falcon comes out of hyperspace and gets caught in the tractor beam of the death star. Once someone was in that beam, there was no way out. This is how I see what happened to me. Unlike Hans Solo, I fought against the attraction, so it would be three steps forward and two steps back.

In the fall of 1999, the Lord led Harriet and me to our final Lutheran church, Redeemer, in Owosso, Michigan. This was a small congregation, of which I was the only pastor. I continued my involvement in community events, served on a variety of ministry boards, and was the president of the Ministerial Association. Owosso churches seemed to have an unusually high number of church splits, leading to new church plants around town. This bothered a lot of the pastors in Owosso, and there were frequent discussions on how we needed to find a way for Christians to walk in unity. The general feeling was that unity would happen if only people would read their Bibles and obey the teachings of Jesus. I asked, “Who would have the authority to interpret Scripture?” The others answered, “If people would stop interpreting the Bible and just read and obey it, everyone would see that I’m right and we could walk in unity.”

The lack of unity was also evident in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), where I was. Every year, each synod (a geographic area under the authority of a Lutheran bishop) would have a business meeting. There would be debates, forums, and discussions about abortion, divorce and remarriage, the blessing of LGBT unions, global warming, etc. Everyone who spoke quoted Scripture to strengthen his argument. Ultimately, I realized that you couldn’t just pull a verse out of the Bible to solve arguments over contemporary issues. Depending on their background, people interpret Scripture in different ways, leading not to unity, but to division. During discussions people would often say, “For 2,000 years the church has taught...” which was

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an appeal to tradition. The appeal to tradition was made because Scripture alone could not bear the weight of these arguments.

The need for Scripture and tradition is seen most clearly in the current arguments about contraception and abortion. The ELCA passed a resolution in which they made a commitment to remain neutral on the discussion of abortion. However, the S.E. Michigan Synod gave \$1,000 a year to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights, a very pro-abortion organization. It is not just Lutherans who are pro-abortion. You can find pro-abortion Christians in every denomination, even those who use Scripture alone as the basis for their argument. Since I became a Christian, I have always been pro-life. When I read the *Didache*, I realized that Christians have been pro-life for 2,000 years. Once again, Scripture alone cannot handle the weight of the abortion debate. However, Scripture and tradition together become a bulwark for the truth.

In August of 2007, the National Assembly of the ELCA voted to ordain homosexuals living in a committed relationship, and to move toward the blessing of gay unions. Immediately, the congregation I served began the process of leaving the ELCA. Strangely, it was this process that convinced me that I needed to become Catholic.

Personally, I was torn. I didn't like the idea of belonging to a splinter group, but I also could not, in good conscience, remain in the ELCA. My reading had convinced me that Apostolic Tradition was a very important consideration when voting on new ideas. I began reading and praying over Scriptures to see how the Lord felt about all these different church splits.

In the third and fourth chapters of Revelation, Jesus sends letters to seven churches in Asia. The churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea had huge problems. In these churches, you would find false teachers and prophets, sexual immorality, apostasy, lukewarm believers, and a total loss of love. In every case, Jesus calls the congregation, and the individuals in it, to repentance. Not once does He ask, "Why are you staying in this dead church? Why haven't you started a new one?" When you read Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17, you can see why Jesus never recommends schism. How could He pray for unity in John 17, then call for division in Revelation? What I experienced in almost every Protestant church wasn't even hinted at in this text.

I bought the revised Catholic *Catechism* and read it four times. The more I read it, the more I came to understand and believe

everything it taught. Along with that, I continued buying books about the Church Fathers and contemporary conversion stories. I came to a place where I began to love everything about the Catholic Church. I prayed that the Lord would open my eyes if my bias was blinding me to the truth. A couple of times a week, I would attend morning Mass. I also started praying the Rosary, but I couldn't pray the prayers and meditate on the mysteries at the same time.

When we went on vacation or to visit relatives, we often worshipped at Baptist, Pentecostal, or Charismatic churches. All these churches love the Lord and claim that everything they teach and believe comes out of Sacred Scripture. Yet, I would often hear the pastors of these churches contradict or explain away the plain words of the Bible.

One Sunday, we were invited to my cousin's baptism. During the prelude to the baptisms, one of the pastors wanted to make sure we understood that *nothing* was going to happen in baptism: "The Bible is very clear that Baptism does not save you!" Immediately the Scripture came to mind: "God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you" (1 Pet 3:20-21). That pastor went on

to say, "And let me assure you that Baptism does not wash away your sins, because only the blood of Jesus washes us white as snow!" My thought was: "Then why did Ananias say to the Apostle Paul, 'And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins' (Acts 22:16)?" I was troubled that, while every denomination made the claim that their teaching and doctrine came from Scripture alone, it was becoming clear to me that everyone twists, ignores, and even contradicts the Scripture to keep their doctrine. This was especially true when it came to the teachings about Baptism and communion.

Several times we've been at Evangelical churches when they celebrated communion. On one occasion, the pastor, during the words of institution said, "On the night in which He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This *represents* my body which is for you...' (supposedly from 1 Corinthians 11:24). There is not one single manuscript in which the word *represents* is found. However, being a Lutheran, I understood what the pastor was doing. When Luther added the word "alone" in Romans 3:28, so that it read, "We are saved by faith alone," he said it was implied

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in the text. I was sure that these pastors would give me the same excuse for changing “is” to “represents” in this text. In reading the writings of the Church Fathers, I came to see that they *never* say that the bread or wine only *represents* the body of Christ. Rather, they uniformly agree and always declare that it *is* the Body and Blood of Christ.

When he was 87 years old, my dad gave his life to Christ and asked me to baptize him at the family reunion in August. Since my mom had never been baptized, I thought maybe she and dad would get baptized together. But when I asked my mom about it, she responded, “I don’t need to be baptized, because my mother said we were good enough without it.” I tried to discuss this with her, but she only got angry that I would want her to disrespect her mother. They began going to church every Sunday, either at the Quaker church, where my mom’s family were members, or at the Assembly of God church. They took their questions about Baptism to the pastor of the Quaker church. He told them that, certainly, mom was free to be baptized, if she wished, but she was right that Baptism was not in any way necessary. The pastor went on to speak about John the Baptist, who said, “I baptize you with water ... but he who is coming after me ... will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt 3:11). He went on to say that we no longer needed water because the main thing is to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which Christ gives to everyone when they come to faith. Somehow my mom felt that getting baptized would be an insult to her mother, and she had to be loyal to her mother.

The disagreement over Baptism was a real clarifying factor for me. How can the doctrine of Scripture alone work when the differences of interpretation go so deep into the very question of salvation? Jesus teaches that the way we will know false teachers is by the fruit of their teaching. It seems to me that the fruit of Luther’s teaching on grace, faith, and Scripture alone was continued division — never unity. I wondered, is it possible that everyone is wrong at some point, and some are closer to the truth at other points? Or is it possible that there is one denomination that has the fullness of truth? For me, this became more than just a philosophical question. My mom was refusing to be baptized, and her pastor said it didn’t really matter one way or the other. He assured her that she was saved by faith alone, not by works of righteousness like Baptism. However, if she had gone to him and said, “I was baptized as a baby by the pastor sprinkling water over my head,” he would have insisted that she be rebaptized, because infant Baptism and sprinkling made her Baptism invalid. Sadly, my mom died in April of 2017, having never received the grace of Baptism.

Harriet and I agreed that the Lord was calling me to retire from the Lutheran ministry. On January 1, 2016, we moved to Adrian, Michigan and started attending Mass at St. Joseph Catholic Church. Since Harriet was baptized and confirmed a Catholic, she only needed to make a confession to Father Anthony and have Bishop Boyea declare our marriage valid to return to full communion with the Catholic Church. I say “only,” but her confession was a huge deal, and she felt very nervous about it. It

had been over fifty years since her last confession. One Sunday morning, Father Anthony told us that Bishop Earl Boyea had declared our marriage a valid, sacramental marriage. Harriet made her confession on Tuesday, in Father Anthony’s office. We then needed to go to Owosso for some business the next few days. On Thursday, we went to Mass at St. Paul’s. I never realized the amount of guilt Harriet had been carrying around. She received the host and returned to her pew. She had her eyes closed and was praying and weeping. Afterwards, she told me that, when she received the host, all her guilt and shame was gone. Nothing she had ever done, no prayer she had ever prayed, no confession to a Lutheran pastor, could set her free from the burden of guilt and shame she had carried around for fifty years. But when she participated in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and received the Holy Eucharist, the shame and guilt were suddenly gone.

After weeks of discussion with Father Anthony Strouse about what I believed, I was received into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church on April 9, 2016. As a result, I have a strong feeling that I’ve come home. Also, the dreams about being in the wrong church have stopped.

I still love and have great respect for all my brothers and sisters in the faith who attend Protestant churches. I received such good teaching in those churches that there is nothing I had to give up by becoming Catholic. Rather, I am blessed with receiving more. Thank God I no longer must argue and decide who has the correct doctrine. I have the Pope and the Magisterium. Thank God I no longer must wonder who has the truth. The Catholic Church has the fullness of truth. Thank God our unity isn’t in how we interpret the Scriptures; our unity is found in the Pope, the bishops, and the Eucharist in the Church that Jesus Christ instituted. ■



DAVID WOODBY was a Lutheran pastor for over thirty years. For the past twenty-five years he struggled with the feeling that he was in the wrong church. He began studying the core beliefs of various denominations, beginning with Pentecostal/Evangelical groups. His study of the Church Fathers drew him to look at the Catholic Church. After reading the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* five times, he knew that the Lord was calling him home. He retired five years before he had planned to, on January 1, 2015. David was received into full communion with the Catholic Church on April 9, 2016. His wife had previously returned to the Catholic Church. David and Harriet have been married for fifty years. They have three children and seven grandchildren. They currently live in Adrian, Michigan, and are enjoying retirement.

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