



February 2020 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Out and Back

By Nickolas A. Barbin

Childhood My journey of faith is long, starting as a Catholic, then becoming Southern Baptist, followed by non-denominational, Pentecostal, Charismatic Evangelical, then briefly Greek Orthodox, and finally back to the Catholic Church.

I was baptized Catholic as an infant in Louisiana. My parents divorced when I was a year or two old, and my Catholic father immediately remarried. My mother would take me to her Baptist church as my father wasn't really into church. Like many Protestants, she considered Catholics to be idolaters and not Christian. Nevertheless, I did attend catechism classes and received my First Communion, while also spending some Sundays at the Baptist church and Sunday school. Later, my mother remarried an Air Force fighter pilot and they got transferred to Las Vegas, NV. I spent my summers visiting them as a child and attending their Baptist church.

Teens

During my teen years, in the mid-1990s, I moved in with my mother and stepfather and became Southern Baptist by default. We lived in many places around the world, and while we were in Germany, I attended our congregation's Baptist high school. It was during this time that I began to experience a deep hunger for God and the things of God. I began to discern a call to ministry and spent many hours praying, studying the Bible, and attending church weekly. In addition, I was very active in the youth group and church activities.

Later, back in Las Vegas, I attended a Christian high school for my junior year. This school was Pentecostal, and the church's style was different. I continued to attend our accustomed Baptist church on Sundays, as well as remaining active in the youth group there.

At that time, I wasn't sure whether I wanted to be a pastor or a missionary, which seminary or Bible college I should study in, or which denomination I should be affiliated with. My dream at age 13 had been to be a missionary in Africa, but the reality of growing up affects our dreams. After a senior year of much prayer, I felt led to join the military — another dream of mine. So maybe I would do my ministry within the military and use that as my mission field and springboard into a church career.

Military Ministry

In 1998, I enlisted in the Army as an infantryman and, as I grew closer to God and stronger in my faith, I began to use the military as my mission field. My first duty was in Germany, and I joined a Pentecostal style, non-denominational church there. It was in the process of being planted by a missionary pastor, and I arranged to live with him to avoid some issues associated with barracks life:

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

first, the ungodly way of life that held sway there; second, I had been physically attacked one night in the barracks over my faith. I sought a peaceful Christian atmosphere, where I could grow spiritually and prepare for the ministry. And what better place for that than to live with this pastor, who could mold, mentor, and help me daily to become a pastor myself? I also did street evangelizing and acted as a deacon and was a drummer with the church musicians. Except for when I was on duty at the army base, I was in the church environment day and night. After a year and a half, I returned to Fort Drum, New York and joined the same denomination that I was with in Germany.

Upstate New York

In New York, I again stayed with the pastor and did all the same work. I also began to preach and help the pastor more directly, while the congregation grew from a house church to having its own huge church building. About a year later, the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon took place. Since I was in the elite 10th MTN DIV at the time, we were immediately deployed overseas, the first “boots on the ground” in the War on Terror. I fought in the famous Operation Anaconda as a Light Infantryman and worked alongside the Special Forces there.

After this tour of combat, I returned home changed for the worse, drifting away from God, backsliding at church, and associating with godless people. Also, there were some issues in

my church and other, more personal problems, and I left that congregation. By God's grace, however, I was only immersed in the party lifestyle for a few months. God helped me get my life back together, reminding me of my calling, and I soon joined another Pentecostal, non-denominational congregation, which gave me a fresh start.

Again on fire for the Lord, I joined everything I could at the new church — auxiliaries, groups, you name it — and was more involved than ever. I was the pastor's aide, a deacon, a drummer, singing in two different choirs, and vice president of the men's ministry. On occasion, I also preached or taught a Bible study.

A year or so later, I was again transferred, this time to Virginia. Ironically, I now lived in the same town as the head bishop of my New York denomination. So I attended there and quickly became involved once more. The bishop took notice of me and of my calling. We had many talks, meetings and prayed together. He had me going through preparation to become a minister. I took the written and oral tests, went before the church board, did a trial sermon, and ended up a licensed minister. But then I was transferred to Korea!

Korea

In early 2004, I found myself in South Korea, where I was soon installed as a minister on the ministerial staff at the Base Chapel. Soon afterwards, I became the assistant pastor of the Gospel Service there. I also helped out at a Korean Baptist church off base

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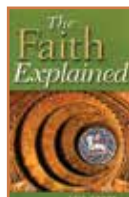
SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Through your donation to the CHNetwork, you become a partner in our ministry of assisting non-Catholic clergy and laity on the journey to the Catholic Church. As a thank you, we are delighted to offer the following resources to help enrich your faith.



The Cross, Baptism, and the Eucharist CD — Marcus Grodi

Many Christians today see physical expressions of faith as superficial, or unnecessary to the Gospel. For them, salvation can be distilled down to an assent of the mind and affinity of the heart toward God. In this episode of *Deep in Scripture*, Marcus Grodi reflects on how Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, a physical act with eternal spiritual consequences, is an indication of the way that in the age of the Church, God chooses to mediate His grace to us through physical means in the sacraments. Marcus looks at the wealth of evidence from Scripture that points toward this sacramental understanding of the economy of grace.



The Faith Explained — By Fr. Leo Trese

The Faith Explained is an all-in-one handbook to help you understand, explain, and defend the great truths of the Catholic Faith. In brief and readable chapters, it explains the purpose of human existence, God and His perfections, the creation and fall of man, the Incarnation, the redemption, the sacraments, sacramentals, prayer, the importance of the Bible, and much more. Perfect for RCIA classes, this book is also a magnificent refresher course on the Faith for Catholics and an illuminating resource for non-Catholics with questions about the Church.

\$35

Receive *The Cross, Baptism, and the Eucharist* CD for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *The Faith Explained* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive *The Cross, Baptism, and the Eucharist*, CD and *The Faith Explained* for a donation of \$75.

— THESE RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Obtain resources by returning the envelope included with your newsletter, calling 740-450-1175, or by going online to chnetwork.org/respond.

A Damning System of Works Righteousness

PART VII: HOMEWARD BOUND*

By Kenneth Hensley, Online Resource & Pastoral Care Coordinator

What does it mean to be justified? As a Protestant, I would have answered like this: “At the moment we believe in Christ, His righteousness is imputed (credited) to our account. We are from that moment in God’s sight as righteous as Christ Himself. Our salvation is assured. We are *saved* — past tense!”



At the same time, I struggled with this view because it seemed to me that in both Old and New Testaments salvation is never presented as something “assured” at the beginning of one’s journey with God.

I thought about the Exodus, the primary Old Testament image of salvation. Do we see the children of Israel “assured” of reaching the Promised Land from the moment they put their faith in God’s word through Moses? Is the promised inheritance “credited” to them at that moment? No. To reach the end of their journey, they must sacrifice the Passover lamb, *and* walk out of Egypt, *and* cross the Red Sea, *and* follow the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, *and* receive the bread from heaven every morning, *and* keep God’s commandments, *and* offer sacrifice to make atonement when they fail.

The promised inheritance isn’t guaranteed at the beginning, but to those who persevere in faith and the obedience that flows from faith.

I could see this pattern illustrated throughout the Old Testament, and I could see that it continued unchanged in the New. “If a man loves me,” Jesus said, “he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23). “To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7). “For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end” (Heb 3:14).

How was I to take this message seriously when I had been taught that Christ’s perfect righteousness was credited to me the instant I first believed and that my salvation was a “done deal”?

From Genesis to Revelation, the message of God’s Word is consistent: “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments” (Deut 7:9). According to Catholic teaching, justification isn’t about Jesus fulfilling the call to “love God and keep his commandments” and then crediting that to us. It isn’t about righteousness being “imputed” to us. Instead, justification is about God acting *in us* to make us the sort of people who have the *ability* to love God, keep His commandments, and live.

Old Testament Promises

There are a handful of passages in the Old Testament that speak directly to this issue. These passages describe what God will do to solve the problem of our inability to love God and keep His commandments. In none of them do we hear a whisper about the imputation of righteousness.

The first is in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses is preparing the people of Israel to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land. He has reminded them of God’s call upon their lives to love Him and keep His commandments. At the same time, Moses knows that because they are a sinful people they will not be able to do this and therefore they will suffer. But the day will come, Moses promises, when the Lord will step in to solve the problem. “The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6).

Notice, the solution is not to “credit” love and obedience to God’s people so that they can be “regarded” as having loved God and kept His commandments. The solution is to *change them* from the inside, to circumcise their hearts, so that they become the kind of people who “will” love the Lord their God and live.

In Jeremiah 31:31-34 we find the first explicit promise of a New Covenant God will one day make with His people.

The first thing we learn is that this New Covenant will not be “like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke.” So how exactly will this New Covenant differ from the Old? “This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts.” In other words, God will change the hearts of His people, enabling them to love Him and keep His commandments. And then, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” In the New Covenant, God will forgive sins and make His people the sort of people who can *do* what they could not previously do.

One more Old Testament passage. In Ezekiel 36:24-27 we are given even more detail as to what this New Covenant will entail. The passage is so rich that I think we should read it in full.

For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

Again, there is nothing here about the legal imputation or crediting or transfer of righteousness.

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When the Lord institutes a New Covenant with His people, it will be about imparting righteousness to them. It will be about washing their sins away and circumcising their hearts to love the Lord their God, removing their hearts of stone and giving them hearts of flesh, writing His laws on their hearts. It will be about giving them His own Spirit. In short, the New Covenant will bring the forgiveness of sins and the ability to love God and keep His commandments and live.

The New Testament Fulfillment

Now if this is what we find promised in the Old Testament, this is what we ought to find fulfilled in the New. And we do.

St. Paul offers the fullest treatment of the New Testament doctrine of justification in his Epistle to the Romans. In chapters 1 and 2 he reminds his readers that they are called to love God and keep His commandments. “To those who by patience in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life” (Rom 2:7).

In chapter 3, Paul establishes that both Jews and Gentiles are under the power of sin and have both failed to love God and obey Him as they ought. “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

In chapters 4 and 5, Paul argues that through faith in Christ, who reconciled us to God through His blood, we are brought from the state of being in Adam to that of being “in Christ,” where we have received “the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:17).

In chapter 6, St. Paul explains what exactly *happens* to us when we come to faith in Christ. In our Baptism, he says, we are united to Christ in His death and resurrection and experience our own death to sin and resurrection to life. The power of sin is broken in our lives. We are no longer “slaves to sin” but are given the ability “to walk in newness of life.” The Apostle is clearly not talking about the legal imputation of righteousness but about an experienced reality. And he refers to this dying and rising to as our being “justified from sin” (Rom 6:7).

In chapters 7 and 8, Paul adds the final touch. It is the Spirit of God coming to dwell within us that enables us to love God and keep His commandments. Listen to how St. Paul summarizes his entire teaching on justification in Romans 8:1-4, and as you read it, remember Deuteronomy 30, Jeremiah 31, and Ezekiel 36.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weakened by the sinful flesh, God has done, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, put sin to death so that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom 8:1-4).

According to St. Paul, the righteous requirements of the law — that we love God and keep His commandments — are fulfilled in us as we walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. This is how the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us. This sounds exactly like Ezekiel 36:26-27: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.”

No wonder St. Paul begins his Letter to the Romans by describing the Gospel as “the *power* of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). His message is not about the imputation of righteousness. His message is about power — to become what God has called us to become and to do what God has called us to do. “For the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6).

Conclusion

But how can our imperfect love and obedience be acceptable to a God who is “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity and cannot look on wrong” (Hab1:13)? We can understand God accepting us on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ credited

to our account. But our feeble and inconsistent love and obedience? How can God accept this?

The answer is simple: God is compassionate and forgiving to those who (imperfectly) love Him and (imperfectly) keep His commandments.

Remember when the Prodigal Son returned home? His father didn't say to him, “Son, I see your repentance and desire to do right, but these are imperfect and therefore do not provide sufficient basis

for me to accept you. Come back when a perfect righteousness has been credited to your account!” Instead, what do we read in the Gospel?

While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him ... [And] said to his servants, “Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” And they began to make merry (Lk 15).

Once I understood that this was the Catholic teaching, I was home. A “damning system of works righteousness”?

Not even close. Not even close. ■

“
God is compassionate and
forgiving to those who
(imperfectly) love Him
and (imperfectly) keep His
commandments.
”

The Power of Our Religion

By Marcus C. Grodi

There is a longstanding tradition, reaching back to the earliest days of the Church, of dipping a finger into the baptismal or holy water font and blessing ourselves with the Sign of the Cross. In doing this, we are remembering our rebirth through Baptism in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, following the instructions of Christ.



One of the biggest issues that divides Christians is whether Baptism — or any of the sacraments — actually do anything and whether Baptism and the other sacraments are necessary for salvation.

In fact, it is my opinion that the primary underlying cause of the Protestant Reformation was not Martin Luther's new understanding of justification, but that he had already come to doubt the power and efficacy of the sacraments. He didn't see that they made any difference in people's lives, and so he questioned whether the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Ordination, or even the Eucharist actually change a person. As a result of his doubt, he could not accept personally the forgiveness of God for his many sins — he did not feel that the sacraments had done anything to or for him, so he felt lost and separated from God. As a result, he "discovered" that all that is really necessary is faith "alone," accepting that until we die we are nothing but unchanged sinners, saved by faith because our uncleanness is covered by the grace of Christ.

Our Lord Himself, however, emphasized to His Apostles, just before His Ascension, that "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe [and therefore has no desire for baptism] will be condemned" (Mk 16:16). This, along with many other verses, has guided the Church from the beginning to recognize the power and efficacy of all the sacraments, especially Baptism. And it is this conviction that has driven the work of the Coming Home Network from the beginning — not just to help non-Catholics understand the teaching of the Catholic Church on the sacraments, but to help Catholics better understand the importance of the sacraments which, too often, we take for granted.

Recently, I was reading a very helpful, classic book (which we are offering as a premium this month, see page 2 to purchase), written by a Catholic priest who lived and served in Michigan from 1902 to 1970. Father Leo J. Trese was a prolific writer, and his book, *The Faith Explained*, went through many publications. It remains in print as a faithful and easy-to-read clear explanation of the Catholic Faith.

Here is what Fr. Trese writes about the meaning and importance of Baptism:

In order to restore to the soul [of any person, from newborn infant to elderly adult] his lost heritage, Jesus instituted the sacrament of baptism. Baptism is the means devised by Jesus to apply to each individual soul the atonement which he made on the cross for original sin. Jesus will not force his gift on us, the gift

of supernatural life for which he paid. He holds the gift out to us hopefully, but each of us must freely accept it. We make that acceptance by receiving the sacrament of baptism.

With those of us who are "born in the Faith" and baptized as infants, our acceptance is a passive one But, whether it be the passive acceptance of the infant or the explicit acceptance of the adult, when the sacrament of baptism is administered, the spiritual vacuum which we call original sin disappears as God becomes present in the soul, and the soul is caught up into that sharing of God's own life which we call sanctifying grace (p. 253).

This is what the Church believes the Apostle John meant when he wrote, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn 1:12-13).

Father Trese goes on to reflect:

Two big things happen to us when we are baptized. We receive the supernatural life, called sanctifying grace, which dissipates the spiritual emptiness of original sin. And there is imparted to the soul a permanent and distinctive quality which we call the *character* or the *mark* of baptism. If we commit mortal sin after baptism, then we cut ourselves off from God and from the flow of his divine life, as a severed artery would cause an organ to be cut off from the flow of the heart's blood. We lose sanctifying grace. But we do *not* lose the baptismal character, by which the soul has been forever transformed. Precisely because we possess the baptismal character, it is easy for us to regain the grace that we have lost. Because of the character, we have the right to receive the sacrament of penance and to restore the soul to spiritual life (pp. 255-256).

This is why Baptism is both necessary and yet not sufficient; we need the restoration provided by the Sacrament of Penance (or Reconciliation) to once again abide in Christ by grace. But as Fr. Trese himself asks:

If baptism is so absolutely necessary in order to get to heaven (and it is), then what about all those people who die without even having a chance to be baptized; who perhaps don't even know about baptism? Will they lose heaven when it's no fault of theirs at all? (p. 275)

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Here is his explanation of Church teaching — and I find it helpful to envision, as we read, those people whom we know in our lives who are outside the Church:

No one who has reached the age of reason loses heaven except through his own fault. It is an article of Christian faith, defined by the Church, that God gives to every soul He creates sufficient grace to be saved. No one ever will be able to say: "I lost heaven because I couldn't help it." For those who have no opportunity to be baptized, the path to God is the path of love (p. 275).

I want to interrupt here to point out a crucial statement from the *Catechism*: "Even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not however persevere in charity is not saved" (CCC, 222; *Lumen Gentium*, 14). The point being that whether baptized or not, whether a member of the Church or not, in the end the bottom line will be, how have we loved?

Fr. Trece continues:

A person who loves God above all things else and desires to do all that God wants him to do has *baptism of desire*. If circumstances make it impossible for him to receive sacramental baptism, his baptism of desire will be sufficient to open for him the gates of heaven. Just as supreme love for God forgives all sin, even mortal sin, in the soul of a baptized person who cannot get

to confession, so also supreme love for God will take away all sin, original as well as actual sin, from the soul of one who cannot yet receive baptism.

When a person who loves God knows about baptism and wants to be baptized, we call that *explicit* baptism of desire. When a person ignorant of baptism loves God and has the desire to do all that God wants, we call that *implicit* baptism of desire. In other words, the desire for baptism is contained implicitly in the desire to do God's will. If the person knew about baptism and knew that God wanted him to receive it, the person would be baptized; what God wants, he wants (275).

St. Paul warned, in his Second Letter to Timothy, that "in the last days" men will be "holding the form of religion but denying the power of it" (2 Tim 3:5). It seems to me, that as the Church grew, she was guided by the Holy Spirit to understand that this power was sanctifying grace, by which you and I share in God's divine life, through Baptism and the other sacraments. In these difficult times, let us pray for and do everything possible to help those we know outside of the Church to come home to the life-changing power of her sacraments. ■

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.

CHNETWORK EVENTS

Please consider joining us for one of our upcoming CHNetwork events!

April 27-30, 2020

CHNetwork retreat in Columbus, Ohio

September 8-18, 2020

Deep in History pilgrimage to Germany

October 12-15, 2020

CHNetwork retreat in Houston, Texas

Go to chnetwork.org, call 740-450-1175, or contact Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org to learn more.

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

February 3

Allison Dreher* (former Baptist)

February 10

Shaun Rieley* (former Evangelical Protestant)

February 17

Cary Dabney* (former Jehovah's Witness)

February 24

Dr. Rachel Lu* (former Mormon)

March 2

Dr. Jonathan Fuqua* (former Evangelical Protestant)

*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 Lori, a recent convert "Thank you for your prayers and emails. This has been quite a journey for my husband and I. We've gone from Church of Christ to Anglican and now finally arrived at home. We will be received into the Church next week. I've been studying for 3 years and my husband 2. We were unable to attend the retreat last April due to his cancer surgery. It was during his rehab that we had so much time to watch all the videos of the Journey Home and videos. Traveling from Dallas to Houston to doctors gave us 4 1/2 hours to listen to all the Deep in Scripture and Deep in History podcasts. We feel as if we know all of you! Thank you, thank you for this ministry you are doing. You are touching so many lives."

From Cindy, a convert "We continue to feel like we've found the pearl of great price. You guys have helped us along our journey in a multitude of ways, and definitely continue to help us as we watch the Journey Home and Deep in History videos eagerly. We have been especially blessed by Scott Hahn's talk on the Forerunners of the Reformation, Paul Thigpen's talk on Martin Luther, and

many, many testimonies, especially Ulf and Birgit Eckman's as well as quite recent ones with R J Snell, David Sanborn, and Mike Davis. These people help 'normalize' our experiences and encourage our hearts. Mike Davis shared about how it takes about 5 years to settle into the Church, and that really blessed us! "

From Claudia a recent convert "I did, in fact, become Catholic ... I just never thought it would happen, but it did ... One day I really would like to meet Marcus Grodi and thank him so much for having *The Journey Home* on TV. I probably would never have converted without it. And I want to thank you for continuing to write to me every six months or so, even though I was sure I would not be able to convert for reasons having to do with moral teachings. But, thank God I am here, and I do want to say 'Thank you!'"

From Jack, a recent revert "You will be interested and no doubt pleased to know that today I made my confession and am once again within the Catholic Church ... I set out today to a local retreat

centre, found an elderly priest having his dinner, and when he finished he kindly agreed to hear my confession as we sat and talked on a bench in the open with the sun beating down ... After nearly 40 years it was a wonderful thing to hear the words of absolution along with some helpful advice. Next step will be Sunday Mass and the Eucharist. My dear wife has said she will come with me for my new 'first' Communion. And then my wife and I are committed to maintain as much unity and shared ministry as we can as we each go on with God. Thank you sincerely for your prayers and support. I'll let you know how I get on with reading the books you suggested. And I'll continue to enjoy reading and participating in the Coming Home Community." ■

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.

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

☐ **Checking account** or ☐ **Savings account**

Bank routing number (9-digit number) _____

Account number _____

☐ **Credit card**

Card number _____

Expiration date / CVV Code _____

☐ Visa

☐ MasterCard

☐ Discover

☐ AmericanExpress

Prayer List

Clergy

- For Eduardo, a pastor who has just let his denominational leadership know that he will be stepping down to become Catholic.
- For a former Methodist minister on the east coast to be able to find ways to serve in the Church.
- For Jim, a minister in Virginia, that his love of the Blessed Virgin and her intercession before the Throne of Grace, would open his wife's heart to the Catholic Faith.
- For Chris, a Disciples of Christ minister in the Midwest, that the Holy Spirit would guide him to the fullness of worship in the Holy Eucharist.
- For William, a Presbyterian minister, that his hunger for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist would be fulfilled by his reception into full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For Christopher, a minister in England, that his desire for deeper contemplative prayer will draw him to the heart of the Church.
- For Justin, a Baptist seminarian, that God may guide him back home to the Catholic Faith of his youth.
- For Andy, an academic in Missouri, that he may answer Jesus' call to venture out into the deep.
- For a Vineyard Fellowship minister in South America, that through the grace of our Lord Jesus he may be called home to the holy Catholic Church.

- For a Messianic Jewish minister, that her doctrinal and relational struggles may be set right, opening a path for her to enter the Church.
- For Mitchell, a Church of Christ minister in the south, that his desire for a more intellectual depth to his faith would guide him to the fullness of the Faith.

■ For Tim, a United Methodist minister, that he may find peace in his journey to the Catholic Church.

■ For Paul, a minister in Louisiana, that the love and many graces of our Lord Jesus Christ, found fully in the sacraments, may grant him healing in body and soul.

Laity

- For a convert in Florida and her continuing struggles understanding Church teaching.
- For Melissa, a convert, as she shares her faith with her loved ones, that they will, in time, be more open to the Catholic Church.
- For Barry, a convert, that he will be able to experience a vibrant parish life and go deeper in his faith.
- For a woman in Nebraska who is returning to the Catholic Church but doesn't have her husband's support, that Jesus will make her journey smooth.
- For a Lutheran couple who are learning more about the Catholic Church, that their concerns about Marian doctrines will be answered.
- For Sheila and her husband as they read and continuing studying about the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit will guide their journey.



- For David who is having difficulty going forward with his faith journey on account of his family's reluctance and his challenges understanding Mary's role in Catholicism.
- For an Anglican in Kansas who loves many things about the Catholic Church but is uncertain about ever becoming Catholic.
- For a Baptist on the journey as she tries to understand the Church's position on moral issues.
- For Roger who is having a hard time understanding the biblical basis for the Mass.
- For Catherine who is frustrated with her RCIA experience and the bad witness of Catholics.
- For Elizabeth, that she will know how and when to move forward with her desire to become Catholic.
- For Dawn, that her faith-filled witness will bring her loved ones closer to the beauty and truth of the Catholic Church.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the *CHNetwork* and its members and supporters. We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

as their youth pastor/Sunday school teacher, working through an interpreter since I didn't speak Korean. God's blessing was on everything I did in those days. The small service on base quickly grew into a large crowd of fervent Christians.

Before arriving in Korea, I had transferred out of the infantry and was now a sergeant working as a helicopter maintenance supervisor with the aviation squadron on base. Toward the end of my tour, the head pastor had to leave, and I was made head pastor, leading the church during my final months there and leaving as a fully ordained minister.

Return to Afghanistan

Back in the US, it was early 2005, and I was helping a pastor friend of mine with his church. The congregation met at a Ramada Inn, and I was his assistant pastor. A year later, I returned to Afghanistan, this time as a helicopter flight crewman and maintenance supervisor. Then, in January 2006, another stint in Afghanistan, this time for 13 months. I joined the on-base ministerial staff, and as providence would have it, I was again selected to be the assistant pastor, even though I was by far the youngest and lowest ranking person on the ministerial staff. This seemed to confirm my calling, especially since I was elevated to senior pastor of that congregation within a few months of serving as the assistant pastor.

We were on a NATO base, so we had troops from several different nations from every continent. My ministry there was a glorious time of fellowship and worship. The services quickly attracted several hundred weekly. We had praise dance teams, choirs, musicians, and amazing preaching. I led prayer meetings, taught weekly Bible studies, was in the choir, and played the drums as needed. Many were led to Christ through us, and the chaplains began to wonder what was going on, since so many were abandoning their services to attend ours. The chaplains ended up attending with us, too. The head chaplain gave me the keys to his office, with full access to the chapel anytime I wanted.

Full Time Ministry

Upon returning home in February 2007, I left the military to pursue my passion for ministry. I had finally finished a degree in ministry while in the military, and my head bishop had heard about all the things God had done overseas. He offered me a position as head bishop working with him. It seemed that my lifelong dream was coming true! I announced my departure to my congregation back in New York and went through the process of leaving the military. By July 2007, I was ready to enter the next chapter of my life. My only concern was that I had dreamed

of becoming a missionary, not a leader or a bishop. This bishop knew of my passion for mission, since we had discussed it often. But the bishop was old and wanted to retire. So he needed me, and after much prayer, I acceded to his request. It seemed to be where God wanted me at this moment.

However, once I had begun, it quickly became clear that nothing was as expected, and I had made a huge mistake. It was a rough time for me, and even though I did a crusade in Africa and some seminars stateside, after a few months, the church broke apart, and it all ended badly. I ended up bankrupt and homeless, no job and nowhere to go.

Return to Las Vegas

In early 2008, I decided to head out to Las Vegas for a fresh start. Working part time and saving just enough to make the trip, I went to start a new mission. Las Vegas was my home as a teenager, so the return was nostalgic. As I began, I met a woman evangelist there, and we combined our efforts into a single ministry. Ultimately, we got married and worked with youth and the poor, providing Bible studies, a radio ministry, internet ministry, and street preaching. We ran this ministry as head pastors and founders for several years, planning future overseas missions and evangelization. But we struggled financially. We didn't believe in asking for money, so we just continued

on faith, and God always seemed to provide, but not nearly as generously as we wanted. So after several years, I joined the Air Force Reserve, working as a Special Operations Intelligence Analyst, at first part time, then full time. The pay and the working conditions were much better than my former security officer job, and I put my heart into it. But between the job and the ministry,

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...Journeys Home Continued...

plus studying for another degree, we were stressed out, our marriage was doing poorly, and we had to reduce the ministry to a bare minimum. Then, after a few years, the military ordered us to Florida. Pack and move again!

The Real Journey Begins

It was during this troubled time that I stumbled upon the greatest jewel of my life. I had always wanted more of God and had looked for His authentic Church. I wondered why there were so many denominations and why their doctrines and practices differed so widely. I just wanted to be part of a universal, undivided body, the way it ought to be if there is one God, one Savior, and one true divine revelation.

Leaving Nevada for Florida, I was frustrated, upset, and dissatisfied with “church” and the status quo. In those last few years before moving, I went so far as to blame Christianity itself and the “gospel” the churches today were preaching. I knew that something wasn’t right, that somehow there had to be more, something deeper, ancient, with fullness. I began to pray and fast and cry out to God for something to change. Oh, I had prayed and fasted my entire life, but now I was getting really desperate. Between going through a lengthy and nasty divorce, a dysfunctional career that caused me to leave the military, and a general inner depression over not being sure of the truth, I was at my wits’ end.

I recalled the Scripture about Jesus and Peter:

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth

shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt 16:18-19).

This passage of Scripture resounded continually in my head. I knew Jesus didn’t lie — so why was there so much confusion, dissension, schisms, cults, and endless nonsense within Christianity? Why were there so many different gospels, so many heresies? My heart was full of questions, and I kept asking God, praying to Him to lead me to the ancient Church of the early Apostles. I knew it had to exist somewhere on this earth!

Could I make a pilgrimage to Greece to locate those original churches that the Apostle Paul had founded, to see if they were still there, to listen to what they were teaching and believing?

Would they still be there after 2,000 years? Ironically, I attended a Greek festival in Florida a few months after these musings (August 2015) and discovered the Greek Orthodox Church. I had never heard of it before and couldn’t believe that such a Church existed! I visited there, studying with them and reading the early Church Fathers. Their liturgy seemed so divine and beautiful — I was dazzled! It seemed like this was everything I

I just wanted to be part of a universal, undivided body, the way it ought to be if there is one God, one Savior, and one true divine revelation.

was looking for, that I was finally home.

But I wanted to be sure, so I took my time researching everything I could get my hands on about this ancient Church. I learned about the Great Schism as I attended their catechism class. Then, a few months later, I wanted to make a comparison between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, that other ancient Church. Although I had heard all of the reasons from the Orthodox side, I wanted to get the Catholic take on it all. So I began attending a nearby Catholic parish and reading about the Catholic Church. I enrolled in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and read through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, more Fathers of the Church, and many other Catholic books. I also absorbed the Catholic articles, programs, and videos presented on the Coming Home Network, Symbolon, and EWTN. In reading Scott Hahn’s *Rome Sweet Home*, I was amazed that there were actually other Protestants, even ministers like me, who became Catholic. I devoured it all, studying, praying, and visiting both churches. I had friends in each that I would question, in addition to talking to the priests of both parishes. After a lengthy period of prayer and discernment, I decided that the Catholic Church was the one I was looking for.

I met with the priest and told him that I wanted to return home to the Church I was baptized in as a baby. I made my general confession and was received back into the Church during Holy Week 2016. I also received an annulment for my first marriage and eventually married a wonderful woman named Joan.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

I registered at the parish and followed up by attending Mass every Sunday and occasionally during the week, as time permitted. I was in the midst of transitioning to a better job at the time, and shortly afterwards, the government employment again took most of my time, working long hours and strange shifts. I finally took a different job, but it was going to be out of state. I was sent back to Las Vegas in early 2017, where I finally was able to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in May 2018. I'm attending a local parish in Las Vegas, but my work constantly takes me away, so I am not able to become as deeply involved in the parish as I would like. Being an ex-minister and pastor, it is disheartening to have to live with this division of my time and labor, but such is life. I have re-enlisted in the Air Force Reserve, and my civilian job is a classified position with the Department of Defense. I travel a lot, keeping me away from home and working strange schedules. I attend Mass in whatever place I find myself, pray the rosary, watch EWTN, and listen to Catholic radio, doing whatever I can to maintain contact with God and, in a quiet way, evangelize others.

Dealing with Doctrinal Differences

I think God used the Orthodox Church to pull me back home. I was so anti-Catholic, there was no way I ever would have set foot inside a Catholic church or have had any involvement with it. So it did take an open and loving third party influence to make it possible.

As for hurdles, of course, *all* of the major doctrines were originally problematic for me. Fortunately, because I had been learning these same doctrines on the Orthodox side, I was able to understand why the Catholic Church believes as it does.

For instance, as a Protestant, it seemed to me that Catholics were “worshipping Mary,” or at least placing too much emphasis on her. It felt like idolatry. For an Evangelical Protestant, it's all about just you and Jesus, or you and the Holy Spirit, or you and God. But after studying Orthodox and Catholic doctrine and practice, I could finally see that Mary is merely venerated and honored as the mother of God — and that is something both beautiful and powerful and important for all Christians.

Another issue was the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. I was Catholic as a child, but I was Protestant so long that this seemed a preposterous claim. However, as I studied the Fathers of the Church, I learned that the early Church really did believe in Christ's Presence in the Eucharist, and that the Eucharist was central to their worship. Christians were even called “cannibals” by some pagans as a result. It definitely wasn't a symbolic Protestant “communion,” but the actual Body and Blood of Christ! Again, I discovered that the early Church services were nothing like a modern Protestant service, but much more like today's Catholic Mass.

Then there was the “praying to saints” issue. I quickly learned that this is not “prayer” as in worship of God. Instead, they were just asking them to pray for us, in the same way that we ask a loved one to pray for us. What better way to handle prayer than

to ask the saints, who are in God's presence in heaven, to pray for us? This is another thing that the Church did from the earliest time.

So many things that Catholics get blamed for are not even true! What they really believe and practice is stuff that has been around since the very beginning of Christianity. This is the Body of Christ that Jesus Himself established on earth, and I wanted to be part of it!

One of the things that I had disliked about Orthodoxy was its disorganization and lack of unity. They were like Protestants in that way. It was frustrating to try to learn and understand what they believe, because there was no organized program like the Catholic RCIA, no definitive doctrinal textbook like the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Not only that, but Orthodoxy was much too ethnic for me. At times, the Greek Orthodox Church felt more like a Greek social club than a Church. Then there is the fragmentation: Why so many different Orthodox Churches, each one functioning autonomously, separate from the others? There is no intercommunion, no commonality, even within a single national Church: one parish would say and do things one way, another parish would be completely different. Nobody is on the same page.

On the other hand, what I had once disliked about Catholicism, I was now beginning to love. I came to appreciate that there was a Pope, an overseer of the entire Church, to help provide overall structure and unity. I also began to understand the Mass, not only its beauty, but also its sensibility. I can now see that it is evangelistic, missionary, and universal. You can walk into any Latin Rite Catholic church and know exactly what is going on. You can feel at home there. Certainly, there are beautiful things about Orthodoxy — the liturgy and the architecture, for instance — but after all my research, the Catholic Church seems to be more like what Christ wanted the Church to be: universal yet evangelistic, ancient and traditional but relevant for today. And it has a global leader who ties it all together. That is exactly what I needed. ■



NICKOLAS BARBIN is a career military man and former non-denominational Evangelical international pastor and evangelist. He returned to the Catholic Church after years of frustration, disappointment, and searching. Nickolas lives in Las Vegas, Nevada with his wife, Joan, and works as a Department of Defense military contractor. He enjoys traveling internationally, reading, and studying theology.

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