



January 2021 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



A Boomer Comes Home to Rome

By Jim Anderson

Growing up My earliest memory is my baptism. It was a Sunday morning in springtime, and I was four years old. I remember the unusual perspective of being at the *front* of the sanctuary, looking out at the congregation. Doctor Trost, our Methodist minister, held me up, and I somehow knew that this was a special moment in my life. I do not recall the water or having any understanding of why it was special, but it has stayed with me as a warm and unique memory of goodness.

Faith was an important part of my boyhood growing up in Lombard, Illinois. As the youngest of four children, going to Sunday school and church weekly was a given. Vacation Bible school in the summer was, too. It was an era when we would sing Christian carols openly at Christmas time in elementary school. Spring vacation was always during Holy Week, and we were never in school on Good Friday.

One particular Good Friday stays with me powerfully. I was seven years old, and I had just watched a dramatic television portrayal of the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus. I was profoundly touched by what I'd seen. When it ended, I wandered over to the front window of our living room and looked out at the traffic passing by on Madison street. All I could think was: "Don't these people know what has happened? How can they just casually go about their lives?" As immature as I was, I knew deeply that the death of Jesus was terribly important and literally crucial.

Nevertheless, when it came time for me to be confirmed in seventh grade, I was still quite shal-

low. The fact that there were 60 kids in our confirmation class meant that there were about 30 girls. That, for me, was the main thing! Also, prior to confirmation, I was caught using a "cheat sheet" for the items we were supposed to memorize (Apostle's Creed, 23rd Psalm, etc.). The fact that Rev. Lichtenberger, our harried leader, showed mercy on me registered in my junior high brain as: "Phew, I got away with it!" Thankfully, no mention was made of my transgression in my final examination with Rev. Sweeney, and at the end of our brief talk, he suggested that I go into the sanctuary (we Methodists referred to the entire worship space as "the sanctuary"). I'm sure Rev. Sweeney had suggested I pray there, but I had no idea of what to do or what to expect. I wandered up towards the front, then simply knelt by the communion rail and closed my eyes. Within a few minutes, I was overcome by an all-enveloping *Presence*. It felt simultaneously wonderful and terrifying. I knelt there for a time, sobbing. The next thing I knew, I was at the back of the sanctuary getting ready to depart. I never told a soul about this singular

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

experience for many, many years, but I've always thought that it was the gracious, personal God of the universe simply letting me know, "Jimmy, I am here. I am real. I am with you. You are mine."

Drifting – Drawn to Faith – Drifting

Despite that extraordinary God-given experience, I sadly soon reverted to an all too typical boyish junior high immaturity. Though our teachers had all implored us to remember that "confirmation is not graduation" I, in fact, acted as if I had "graduated" from church. I stopped attending most church functions, except at Christmas and Easter. A few friends became involved in the MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship). Not me. Over the next few years, I took up smoking, drinking, dating, and hanging out with my version of the "in crowd." A few years later came a surprising and painful turning point. It was April, 1968, the Saturday night after Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. I was all ready to head out with a group of seven or eight buddies for an evening of carousing. However, I had mentioned in passing that I thought MLK was a good man. For that comment I became the object of scornful and embarrassing ridicule. Only one friend stood with me. To good-hearted Russ, I said quietly: "I'll have to get a whole new set of friends."

From that day on, I did. I began to attend a local coffeehouse and associate more with a counter-culture crowd. My friends

were now the "wannabe hippie" group. We published an underground newspaper, grew our hair long, and listened to the Byrds, Jefferson Airplane, and the Beatles in their psychedelic stage. Though I was blessed to meet and develop some true life-long friends, I also began associating with some folks who were deeply involved in mind-altering drugs. In little more than a year, I'd become a full blown devotee of the drug culture of the late '60s. I was a user and a dealer and fancied myself a really cool dude. However, this nearly led to my demise. Again, it was a Saturday night with "friends."

In the summer of my 17th year, I found myself on a basement floor, heart pounding, with a palpable fear of the angel of death descending on me. I'd ingested some substance from an unknown source. Rather than providing a pleasant, uplifting escape, it was inducing deadly terror. I cried out to God in desperation to save me. God heard my cry; my fear subsided. I survived, and I vowed to never again do anything so stupid. Since that night, I haven't. This experience proved to me the great truth that "sometimes one good scare is worth 20 lectures!"

I resolved to straighten out my life. Three events took place later that year that had great significance for my spiritual journey.

First, through the good efforts of a very caring and devout couple I knew through church and my high school, I attended

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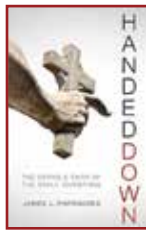
Through your donation to the CHNetwork, you become a partner in our ministry of assisting non-Catholic clergy and laity on the journey to the Catholic Church. As a thank you, we are delighted to offer the following resources to help enrich your faith.



Traditions of Men CD

— By Dr. James Papandrea

One of the verses most commonly used to argue against the Catholic Church is St. Paul's admonition in his Letter to the Colossians to not be led astray by "empty philosophies" and the "traditions of men." To what traditions is St. Paul referring? Dr. Jim Papandrea, a professor of Church History, looks at the implications of this controversial teaching from St. Paul in this Deep in Scripture program with Marcus Grodi.



Handed Down: The Catholic Faith of the Early Christians

— By Dr. James Papandrea

In *Handed Down*, James Papandrea examines that most crucial era in the transmission of Christian truth: the time of the early Church, when the brilliant and holy teachers known as the Church Fathers took the apostolic faith they received and from it shaped the Christian religion. And that religion of the Fathers continues today in the Catholic Church. Papandrea demonstrates that the early Christians were decisively Catholic in how they acted and what they believed, including: the authority of the Church and Sacred Tradition in addition to Scripture; the sacraments, especially the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist; an ecclesial hierarchy; and prayers and devotions to the saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary. *Handed Down* offers a fascinating window into the life of the early Church and the lessons it holds for us today. It's perfect for history-conscious Protestants looking for a friendly defense of Catholic belief, as well as for Catholics who want to deepen their connection with our forefathers in the Faith.

\$35

Receive *Traditions of Men* CD for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *Handed Down* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive *Traditions of Men* CD and *Handed Down* 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.

ON THE JOURNEY

Sola Scriptura & Foundations: Worldviews in Conflict

By Ken Hensley

One of the greatest Church historians in the 19th century was the German Lutheran scholar Adolf Harnack. A university professor for decades, Harnack bewailed and bemoaned the ignorance his mainly Lutheran students displayed of the Catholic Church.

I am convinced from constant experience of the fact that the students who leave our schools have the most disconnected and absurd ideas about ecclesiastical history. Some of them know something about Gnosticism, or about other curious and for them worthless details. But of the Catholic Church, the greatest religious and political creation known to history, they know absolutely nothing, and they indulge in its regard in wholly trivial, vague, and often directly nonsensical notions (Adolf Harnack, quoted in Karl Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, p. 12).

As a former evangelical Protestant minister who has spent the last twenty years studying the Catholic Faith, I can testify that, while Harnack's assessment is harshly worded, it isn't inaccurate. The vast majority of modern evangelical Protestants have no idea what Catholicism is, nor do they have a clue as to what the case for the truth of the Catholic Faith might be.

When they think of Catholicism, what most have in their minds isn't Catholicism at all but a muddle of indistinct ideas, distorted images, mistaken impressions, and absurd caricatures. As to the inner logic of Catholicism as a system of thought, most haven't the vaguest notion.

I suppose I should quickly point out that the reverse is also true: most Catholics haven't a clue as to what Protestantism is either! We have ignorance abounding on all sides.

As a Protestant, I, too, had a distorted view of Catholicism. Although I was a serious student of Scripture and theology throughout my years in Bible college, seminary, and the ministry, when it came to Catholicism, like one of Harnack's wayward students, I indulged "in wholly trivial, vague, and often directly nonsensical notions" about the Catholic Faith. I had many misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and caricatures.

Becoming Catholic required a rethinking of my entire worldview as a Christian, beginning with the foundation of that worldview.

The Issue of Foundations

One of the first things that struck me when I began discussing Catholicism with knowledgeable Catholics was how exhausting it could be. It seemed there were so many issues about which Protestants and Catholics disagree.

It was hard to even know what to talk about first: baptismal regeneration, infant baptism, justification by faith alone, confession to a priest, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, or Peter, the keys, and the papacy?

But it was more than merely exhausting. There was something else at play that made the conversations downright confusing.

Although we were both Christians and both believed in Christ and in the inspiration and authority of Scripture, we seemed to be coming at the issues from different places. Not only did we disagree on a number of doctrinal and moral issues; we disagreed on how one should go about deciding the issues!

We seemed like two carpenters measuring the same board, but using different standards of measurement. Or maybe like two people standing on the beach debating the color of the sunset, one wearing rose-colored sunglasses and the other amber-colored.

It seems Catholics and Protestants have a disagreement at the level of presuppositions, at the level of foundational commitments.

The image of a building began to form in my imagination. A number of homes were being built in my neighborhood at the time and I noticed that the first thing the builders do when erecting a house is to lay a foundation. I noticed that everything else is built on this and rises from this. I further noticed that the shape of the foundation determines the shape of the structure. I shrewdly concluded that the foundation is (drum roll, please...) *foundational*.

I had understood for years that the same is true of worldviews. In every worldview — every system of thought — there is some foundational commitment that lies at the bottom and determines the shape of the structure built upon it. This is true of scientific materialism. It's true of Islam. It's true of eastern pantheism. It's true of Catholicism, and it's true of Protestantism.

And the reason the discussion between a Catholic and a Protestant is confusing is simply that the two are operating with different foundational commitments. The two worldviews — Catholic and Protestant — have different methods for determining what is true.

The Foundation of the Protestant Worldview

Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie are two well-respected Protestant scholars. In their book *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* they give, I think, a clear statement of what lies at the foundation of Protestantism as a worldview.

By *sola Scriptura* orthodox Protestants mean that Scripture alone is the primary and absolute source of authority, the final court of appeal, for all doctrine and practice (p. 178).

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In other words, within the Protestant system of thought the answer to the foundational question of authority is Scripture alone.

This is the key idea. As Geisler and MacKenzie recognize, however, there's more entailed by *sola Scriptura* than merely stating that the Bible will serve as "the primary and absolute source of authority, the final court of appeal, for all doctrine and practice." They explain:

A good bit of confusion exists between Catholics and Protestants ... due to a failure to distinguish two aspects of the doctrine: the formal and the material.

Sola Scriptura in the material sense simply means that all the content of salvific revelation exists in Scripture. Many Catholics hold this in common with Protestants, including well-known theologians from John Henry Newman to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI).

What Protestants affirm and Catholics reject is *sola Scriptura* in the formal sense that the Bible alone is sufficiently clear that *no infallible teaching Magisterium of the Church is necessary to interpret it* (pp. 178-180, emphasis added).

Sola Scriptura, then, contains three basic assertions:

- Scripture is the sole infallible rule of faith and practice for the Church and the individual Christian.
- Scripture is materially sufficient, meaning that everything God wants us to know can be found in the pages of Scripture, at least implicitly.
- Scripture is formally sufficient, meaning that everything God wants us to know is set forth in the pages of Scripture clearly enough that no authoritative interpreter is needed.

Christians can read the Bible and see for themselves what is being taught.

The Christian, in other words, does not need for there to exist on earth some authoritative interpreter to tell him what Christianity teaches or to settle disputes among Christians. And there is no such authoritative interpreter on earth. There is no Church or council whose decisions about Christian doctrine or morals are binding on the individual Christian. Only the Bible is binding.

In the words of Geisler and MacKenzie:

The Bible — nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else — is all that is necessary for faith and practice (p. 178)

Worldviews in Collision

This is the foundation of the Protestant worldview.

As I began to look into Catholicism it didn't take long for me to realize that it was at this precise level, the level of foundations, that the disagreement between the Protestant and Catholic worldviews needed to be understood.

Because of this, although I was interested in everything — all the doctrinal issues and differences and disputes that exist between Protestants and Catholics — and I wanted to study them all, the issue that interested me most was this issue of *sola Scriptura*, which I now understood and believed to be the key to everything else.

You see, if *sola Scriptura* is true, Protestantism is true. Period.

If Our Lord intended for Scripture to function as the "sole and sufficient infallible rule of faith and practice" for the Church and the individual believer, then Protestantism is *true*.

Of course you and I, faithfully adhering to the principle of *sola Scriptura*, may have to spend the rest of our lives sifting through the arguments to determine which version of Protestantism is

SHARE SHARE YOUR STORY!

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

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most correct in its interpretation of Scripture. Is it the Baptists, or the Presbyterians, or the Lutherans, or the Anglicans, or the Methodists, or the Church of Christ, or the independent church down the street formed around some bright, charismatic, and convincing young pastor with his new angle on what St. Paul was really saying? If we care to really know, we will have our work cut out for us.

But we will be Protestant!

On the other hand, if Our Lord did *not* intend for Scripture to serve as the Christian's "sole and sufficient infallible rule of faith and practice," then Protestantism is not true. If Jesus would not agree that "the Bible — nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else — is all that is necessary for faith and practice," then Protestantism as a worldview, as a system of thought, is not true.

In which case, all of Protestantism's various iterations collapse at once: Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, Church of Christ — all come falling down together.

I could see that this issue of foundations was *the key issue*.

Slip Sliding Away

At the time of the Northridge, California earthquake of January 17, 1994, my family lived seven miles from the epicenter.

I can still remember awakening to what sounded like a freight train barreling toward my house. I can remember how it felt bouncing back and forth against the walls of the hallway as I made my way to the kids' bedrooms. I kept thinking the floor was going to tear open beneath me. The sound was unbelievable. When it ended, our living room was a pile of furniture, but we were all fine.

There's little that is more frightening than to feel the earth giving way beneath your feet. After all, this is the foundation. This is what we stand on. When this becomes uncertain, everything feels uncertain.

In a similar way, I have to say that my conversion to Catholicism commenced the moment I began to feel the foundation of my worldview as a Protestant slipping and giving way beneath my feet. The moment I began to doubt that Protestantism's method for determining the true teachings of Christianity was correct was the moment the question began to insinuate itself into my consciousness: could the claims of the Catholic Church be true?

Over time my doubts about the foundation of the Protestant worldview formed themselves as four distinct questions:

- Is *sola Scriptura* scriptural? Is it the teaching of Scripture?
- Is *sola Scriptura* historical? Was this the belief and practice of the earliest Christians?
- Is *sola Scriptura* even workable as a method for determining what Christianity will teach as true?
- Is *sola Scriptura* logical? Does it make sense?

And here we have our outline for the series to follow. Stick with me! ■

SOLA SCRIPTURA



To read more about the topic of *sola Scriptura*, our exclusive CHResource *The Bible Alone?* presents a competing look at the biblical roots, historical precedent, and logic behind using only the Bible as an infallible source of truth. This short book affirms the importance of Scripture as a divinely given foundation for our faith and also encourages the reader to consider the need for an authority established by Christ for its trustworthy interpretation. To obtain a copy of this book, please visit www.chresources.com.

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The CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute them to family and friends to encourage them to join our mailing list. They may also request to receive our mailings by using the response card included with this newsletter.

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TAX LETTER

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



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Thursdays 2 PM ET

The Best of The Journey Home: Saturday 6 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 4

Oscar Herrera*
(former Jehovah's Witness)
(re-air from 4/9/18)

January 11

Brent Robbins*
(former atheist and revert)

January 18

Fr. Bob Rottgers*
(former Episcopalian)

January 25

Steve Ray*
(former Baptist)

February 1

Jim Anderson*
(former Episcopal priest)

*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 Angela, a recent convert “I feel like I could write a thousand pages from the overflow of my heart. I'm still floating in wonder and gratitude from all of our Lord's mercies this weekend. I joyfully entered the Church and received the sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist on Sunday morning, and my husband and I had our marriage blessed in the afternoon. As our dear priest put it, it was a “trifecta of the happy sacraments” . . . My Confirmation name was Mary, as I've felt our Blessed Mother's nurturing and strong protection since long before I formally started the road to becoming Catholic. She has led me to love Jesus more than I imagined possible, and it's an inexpressible comfort knowing I'm safe in her mantle as I strive to grow in Him and to love Him more every day, every year! You know, I was fully convinced a long time ago that the Eucharist is the Real Presence of Christ. But upon receiving Him for the first time, I know

in my Spirit what before was only intellectual. I wanted to leap up and sing ‘it's really Him!’”

From Tony, a convert “It's a while since we've been in touch and I'm now a little over a year into my life as a Catholic here in London. All is going well despite the privations of lockdown that we are all struggling with — it really emphasises the differences between churches that take a sacramental position and others that don't consider the physicality of our existence as hugely important to our faith and practice. Going to Mass online is still a great thing to do and to be part of the prayer of the Church but the hunger to return to the physical communion is huge amongst the Catholic community. The reason for my email is to say I'm really enjoying your new series, *On the Journey*. It's such a helpful articulation of the key differences between the Catholic and Protestant faiths and one of a few series

I feel fully confident in sending to my friends who are open to exploring these points honestly. It really helps that you are explaining your own journey into the Church by referencing your interrogation of Scripture.”

From Kent, a recent convert

“During this time of Coronavirus, with all the churches in Colorado shut down, my priest arranged for very small groups to meet to receive the sacraments. Because of this I was welcomed into the Church ... As I drove to the church to receive my first sacraments, I was moved to tears. I basically cried all the way there! I knew the sacraments were visible signs of invisible graces. However, I had no idea what I was going to experience in the sacraments. During my first Eucharist, the reality of Jesus's work on the cross became real to me in a way I had never experienced!” ■

Prayer List



Clergy

- **For Brian, a Methodist pastor** who is convinced he must become Catholic and is struggling with how he will support his family.
- **For Jon** who has put his journey toward the Church on hold, that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead him home.
- **For an Episcopal priest** who has wanted to become Catholic for some time and is exploring a possibility that would allow him to support his family and enter the Church.
- **For a man who has resigned his Protestant pastorate** and found a new job and is excited about moving toward being received into the Church, that the Lord will give him wisdom as he leads his family.
- **For Nickolas, a pastor** convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith and beginning to think seriously of how to make the transition.
- **For Adam, a Baptist pastor** on the journey toward the Catholic Church, that he will find a way to convince close family members that he is still a Christian and that the Church isn't what they think it is.
- **For Kent, a former Protestant seminary student** who entered the Church this Easter season and is in the process of discerning the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood or religious life in the Catholic Church.
- **For Paul, an Anglican priest** who needs to find work so that he can resign his ministry to enter the Church.
- **For Jacob, a pastor** convinced of the truth but strongly opposed by everyone around him, that the Lord will give him wisdom and fortitude as he attempts to follow the truth and love his family at the same time.
- **For Michael, a former Pentecostal pastor** and his wife who were raised Catholic and have now made the decision to return home.
- **For Susan, a Protestant minister** who is open to learning more about the teachings of the Church, that the Holy Spirit will lead her.

- **For a man who is on the road to entering the Catholic Church** after decades as a Baptist pastor and street evangelist, that he will find a way to bring his wife along with him.
- **For a Vineyard pastor** who wants to return to the Catholic Church and is struggling with how to deal with everything this will mean for his family and livelihood.
- **For Robert, an Episcopal priest**, that the Holy Spirit may clear away the obstacles he perceives on his path to the Catholic Church.
- **For Christopher, a former non-denominational youth minister**, that he may find answers in RCIA that will lead him to full communion with the Catholic Church.
- **For a Methodist minister in Tennessee**, that the Lord Jesus would guide his search for secular employment to enable him to enter the Catholic Church.

Laity

- **For Steve, an Evangelical**, that he may come to understand the relationship between the Holy Scriptures and Sacred Tradition.
- **For Bob, an Episcopalian**, that he may, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, come into full communion with the Church that is ever ancient and ever new.
- **For Lee, a Pentecostal**, that he may experience the joys of embracing the fullness of the faith in the Catholic Church.
- **For a Seventh-day Adventist in New York**, that he may be freed of the distortions and errors that he embraces about the Catholic Church.
- **For a non-denominational Evangelical in Montana**, that he may not stumble in his journey toward the Catholic Faith because of the opposition of his wife and family.
- **For Frank, an agnostic**, that he may accept that faith and reason are not mutually exclusive.
- **For Jonathan, a non-denominational Christian**, that his transition, as well as that

of his family, back to the Catholic Church would move smoothly.

- **For Alessandro**, that our Lord Jesus would guide him back to the Holy Eucharist.
- **For a Presbyterian in the south** who is no longer pursuing her interest in Catholicism, that she will continue to seek Jesus and His will for her life.
- **For Cindy** to find the right time to pursue her longtime interest in conversion and for her loved ones to be supportive of her journey.
- **For Kenneth in Minnesota**, who is learning that the Catholic waters are very deep and that he is on a steep learning curve, that he will be filled with the many graces of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- **For Bruce, an Evangelical** who enjoys the articles and interviews on the Coming Home Network website, that he may continue to grow in the love and grace of the Lord Jesus.
- **For Matthew**, that our Lord Jesus would guide him to satisfying answers to his questions so that he may return to the Catholic faith of his youth.
- **For a Catholic in the midwest** who is very frustrated at how she has been treated at the parish level as a new convert.
- **For Shirley** who is watching EWTN and reading, that she will have clarity in discernment as she moves forward with her interest in the Catholic Church.
- **For Marian** who hasn't been able to regularly attend RCIA, that God will make a way for her to move closer to becoming Catholic.
- **For an Anglican teen** whose parents are opposed to her conversion, that they will allow her to move forward with her deep desire to become Catholic.

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.

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

a weekend seminar offered by the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago. The weekend was called “Religious Studies I,” and it was inspiring and enlightening. More on that later.

Secondly, in a burst of enthusiasm, I sent away for a catalog for the Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. This was the Methodist seminary located adjacent to Northwestern University. I felt a strong sense of call to pursue ordination as a minister in the Methodist Church. My pastor at that time, Rev. Darby, encouraged me. I began reading the writings and sermons of John Wesley and George Whitefield. I even taped a picture of John Wesley to the case of my Norelco electric shaver! Perhaps that was a bit unusual, but it was a big change from admiring Jim Morrison or Frank Zappa.

Thirdly, I went to Christmas Eve Mass at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Lombard. Not knowing any better, I joined the Communion line and received Holy Communion. When I told my devoutly Catholic sister-in-law, Georgie, that I’d received Communion, she said to me, with real joy in her voice: “Oh, Jimmy, you received the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ!” Because I was so clueless, I did not know how to respond to her; yet I pondered her words in my heart.

I should say, at this point, that Georgie was a much-beloved member of my extended family, as was my aunt Loretta, who was married to my mom’s brother, my uncle Tom. Uncle Tom in the 1940s and my brother Ed in the 1960s had each converted and become Roman Catholics. This set a pattern of young Protestant men in our family marrying lovely young Catholic women and converting. This was to come into play for me, in a major way, a decade and a half later. No one should ever underestimate the power of feminine beauty as a means of Catholic evangelization!

When I was eighteen, I joined the religious community of the Ecumenical Institute, which at its peak had over 3500 members worldwide. During the next four years, I lived in this unique and intentional Christian community known as the Order. We worshipped together, had meals together, sang and studied together, and lived in close quarters. Our mission, in the early 1970s, was to change the world through the renewal of local Christian churches. At the same time, I was studying for my degree in education so I could become a teacher. Strangely, considering that there were many Methodist ministers who were members, and indeed leaders, in the Order, I somehow lost my calling to ordained ministry while at the Institute. How and why that happened remains a mystery to me. Perhaps it’s not a coincidence that, at the same time that I was drifting back into secularism, the Ecumenical Institute was becoming the Institute for Cultural Affairs, a thoroughly secular entity focused on social transformation.

The next four years, after I left EI, were truly years of drifting. I was not grounded in any serious or mature way. I went from praying daily morning prayer in a community of hundreds to basically not attending worship on any regular basis. I had a series of odd jobs after college graduation. I wound up living in a variety of different places. I’d become so self-centered that I

treated personal relationships with a casual, careless approach. Looking back on that period of my early to mid-twenties is mortifying. I am not at all proud of my lack of character. At the exact mid-point of my twenties, I hatched the idea of a really long walk as a way to “find myself.” My original thought was to hike from Key West, Florida to the northwestern tip of Washington State. Arriving in Georgia after walking the length of Florida in two months, I decided to head for the Appalachian Trail to continue my hike. By Independence Day, I’d made it to Roanoke, Virginia, where I chose to end my journey. During these five months, I had only two books with me: the collected works of Henry David Thoreau and the New Testament. As it turns out, God was using this time of drifting to gently draw me back to the beauty and life-changing power of the Gospel. I returned to the Chicago area lean, calm, and focused. God was merciful to me. It was as if God were saying to me: “Jimmy, I’m not done with you. I will give you a fresh start. I have a future for you. I have a purpose for you!”

Becoming “Anglo-Catholic”

During the summer of 1978, I was able to get a teaching job at a suburban high school close to the city, in a heavily Catholic area. I found it an interesting and refreshing change from the WASP background of my home town, further out in the ‘burbs. This soon became important as I was given the opportunity to home tutor Gina, a fourteen-year-old student who was four months pregnant. As was normal at that time, she was not allowed to attend classes. This became a providential turn of events in several key ways.

For the rest of the school year, from November through June, I tutored Gina and was in her home usually three days a week. I became almost like a member of the family. Rose, Gina’s mom, was an amazing lady. She was welcoming and cheerful. She was also proudly and vibrantly Catholic! She was pro-life, pro-family, and always made room at the table for whomever showed up. Gina turned fifteen in the springtime and gave birth to a healthy baby boy a few weeks later. Giving the baby up for adoption was traumatic for her, but that had been the plan all along. Decades later, Gina was able to connect with her son. He had been brought up by a loving family, become an architect, and started a family of his own.

I mention all this to show that those months spent with this family in their humble bungalow opened up a whole new perspective for me. Gina’s home was a “domestic church” that subtly, but effectively, evangelized me into Catholic living at its vibrant, unpretentious best. Fittingly, it was her brother Mike who had a key role in introducing me, a year later, to the young Catholic woman who was to eventually become my wife.

Later that year, in October of 1979, I was profoundly moved by the visit of Pope John Paul II to Chicago. Mass in Grant Park was attended by a million and a half people. His message of God’s love and presence touched me deeply. My heart and mind were being opened to larger truths.

...Journeys Home Continued...

After only two years of teaching, I received the dreaded “reduction in force” notice and, along with seven other teachers, was let go. It was the “last in, first out” principle in action. The end of the Baby Boom was leading to decreased enrollments all over the country, and my district was not spared. In the summer of 1980, I was employed teaching summer school one last time. I was attending church regularly, training for the Chicago Marathon, and enjoying some great reestablished friendships. However, I was not really happy. My desire to marry and have children was not progressing, for a variety of reasons. Though I was seeing several ladies, there was no momentum to get serious and settle down. One July Saturday night in 1980, in near despair, I simply prayed from the heart: “Please, God, let me meet someone I can love.” That was it. I then drifted off to sleep. I’d never actually prayed a prayer like that before. God, with tender mercy, heard and answered my prayer.

When I awoke Sunday morning, it was already hot — it hit 99 degrees that day! I soon found out that the lady I was taking to a play on the north side of Chicago was ill and couldn’t go. After a few fruitless calls, I was able to reach Marlene, a friend to whom I was introduced by Gina’s brother, Mike. But Marlene was not able to go. I asked her if she knew *anyone* who might be willing to go on such short notice (the matinee was beginning in less than four hours). She told me that, yes, she did know someone who might go with me. She called her friend Bernie and explained the situation, and a few moments later I was set up on the very first “blind date” of my life. We had a wonderful time and really did fall in love on that very first date, a blazingly hot day in mid-July, 1980.

We began seeing each other on a steady basis. We talked on the phone every day. Bernie was very devout in her Catholic faith. I would go with her to Mass much of the time, and sometimes she would attend Methodist services with me. She enjoyed the vigorous singing and the engaging and thoughtful sermons there. When I attended Mass, I found the devotion to Holy Communion very compelling. I’d never forgotten what Georgie had told me, years before, about it being the actual Body of Christ. As a Methodist, I’d been taught that the Lord’s Supper, observed quarterly, was simply a way of recalling the Last Supper. But now I was beginning to think more deeply about the Catholic teaching on the Eucharist.

At that same time, I was again thinking about the possibility of attending seminary and pursuing ordained ministry. Somehow, I found out about the Episcopal Church and went to a service at Grace Church in Oak Park, Illinois. Struck by how similar it was to the Catholic Mass, I picked up a small tract there entitled “The Real Presence.” This gave me many answers to questions that I’d been thinking about. Their belief that communion was

truly the Body and Blood of Christ was a revelation. The more I explored the Episcopal Church, the more it appealed to me as a middle ground between Catholicism and Methodism. I learned about apostolic succession and the role of the saints, including Mary, in God’s plan of salvation. I acquired a deep appreciation for beauty and reverence in liturgical worship. The first time I saw the Gospel book elevated and then kissed, it choked me up. I was hooked! Best of all, it was Catholic! Well, “Anglo-Catholic.”

At least they said so. It seemed to be the best of all possible worlds. I planned on converting.

Bernie and I got married in late October of 1981 at St. Daniel the Prophet Catholic Church in Chicago. I was confirmed into the Episcopal Church a few weeks later.

We started our married life together with great hopes of future blessings. I’d found a niche in the world of investing that seemed interesting and rewarding. Bernie was working full time, until we were expecting our first child. We spent our first anniversary in Loyola Hospital, where Bernie was transferred, because it was considered a high risk pregnancy. Our son, Christopher, was born and lived only four

hours. His rare syndrome is 100% fatal in the first 24 hours of life. We were devastated. His brief life seemed to mock all hopefulness and joy. Still, he was baptized by a Catholic priest, and though our pain was intense, the loving support of family and friends was very consoling. The memorial service at St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church brought healing. This loss made us think deeply about our faith in eternal life and also prompted us to think that perhaps I *was* meant to go to seminary. Our planning began to center around that idea.

Five years and two healthy kids later, we did pack up and move to Sewanee, Tennessee to attend the School of Theology at The University of the South. For these Yankees from the big city, it was a major change. Sewanee is a charming little town, and the university campus is lovely. Our children, Jenny and Danny, thrived in the family-centered community of married-with-children theology students. Bernie and I recall fondly the simpler life we had there. I am grateful to the many fine professors who loved God and embraced their calling to teach and help form future ministers of the gospel.

When it came time to graduate and move on, we were happy to be offered the chance to move to Baton Rouge, Louisiana to serve at St. Luke’s Church. This was a large Anglo-Catholic parish. I was one of four priests there, and it was a dynamic church with reverent liturgy and excellent Christian education. Our time in Baton Rouge was great. Our children went to the parish school, and we all made many friends.

Still, in the background, I was made increasingly aware of the battles that were raging in the Episcopal Church. The new Presiding Bishop was an unrelenting, humorless progressive who saw



Jim Anderson (R) meeting CHNetwork staff member Jim Anderson (L) on the set of *The Journey Home*.

...Journeys Home Continued...

everything through the lens of his own version of social justice. This meant gay ordination, abortion rights, etc. He even went so far as to say that “for those that cannot accept these changes, perhaps it is time to say to them, regretfully, there’s the door.” By the early 1990s, I came to feel that it was certainly not the same church I had joined a decade before.

In 1991, we gratefully moved to Burlington, Wisconsin, only an hour or so from most of our families. There I became the rector of St. John the Divine Episcopal Church. St. John’s was a fine community with about 200 devoted members. Our three and a half years there were largely joyful. I loved the ministry of being a local church pastor, most especially presiding at Holy Eucharist twice each Sunday. However, as the years went by, I continued to be alarmed by the battle lines being drawn. One priest in our diocese, a fellow traditionalist, said to me at a priests’ convocation: “The problem with our church is we don’t have a Magisterium.” I nodded knowingly, all the time wondering: “What’s a magisterium?”

It all came to a head in the spring of 1994, when I attended a diocesan gathering to discuss “cutting edge” issues. The ground rules were set up whereby no critique could be offered to any speaker, at any time, no matter the statement. I will not belabor the point; suffice to say that many outlandish statements were made, to which no counterpoints were allowed. I went home that afternoon and told Bernie that the Episcopal Church was no longer our home. It was time for us to make some serious changes. Our planning began that very day. We would move and begin a new life. We would also become Catholics.

Coming Home to Rome

Although it was sad to say goodbye to our parish and it was hard for our children to leave their friends, we had to make this change. I was fortunate to be hired by a national brokerage firm. Through an amazing series of coincidences, we found ourselves moving to Pickerington, Ohio, near Columbus. I took it as a great sign that our new church home, our *Catholic* home, was St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parish. Mother Seton, the first American born saint, was a former Episcopalian who’d “swum the Tiber” two centuries before. Our new parish welcomed us with open arms. Bernie was overjoyed to return home to the Church of her childhood. We became active with the parish RENEW process, which was beginning just as we arrived. The small group faith-sharing format was ideal for us to get to know our new community. I was confirmed the following spring. For the next two decades, I was deeply involved in parish life. I was on the RCIA team for many years; I helped with Confirmation preparation for two years; worked with stewardship campaigns and led several Bible study groups. I also found that the men’s faith sharing groups were particularly rewarding, as was the year and a half I spent working with St. Gabriel Catholic Radio in Columbus.

I believe that all of my experience and training has come together to help me in my current ministry. For the past four years I’ve been a Catholic chaplain at Palos Hospital in the southwest-

ern suburbs of Chicago. The hospital was founded by an order of Catholic nuns a century ago. Currently, nearly two thirds of our patients are Catholic, though, of course, I visit all patients. Each day I am blessed to share a message of hope as well as to “rejoice with those who rejoice and grieve with those who grieve” (Romans 12:15-16).

Joining the Church founded by Jesus was and is a joy. I’d become “Catholic” many years before, though in retrospect it was but a pale imitation of the Catholic Church. What I came to realize was that the English Reformation needed to end, and not just for me. Through the great movie, *A Man For All Seasons*, I’d come to know that, given the choice between the rebel tyrant King Henry VIII and the heroic martyr St. Thomas More, a prudent person must choose St. Thomas. I was done with the “splinter groups” of Methodism and Anglicanism. I was now part of the true fullness of the Christian Faith: one that actually has that all-important Magisterium! I was home.

The last quarter century has been a journey of growth and deepening knowledge. This is particularly true concerning the Blessed Mother. Mary, in her gentle wisdom, is still inviting me to stronger faith in her Son, our savior Jesus. So too are we all called to such faith.

“Life must be lived going forward, but can only be understood looking backwards.” That is a paraphrase from the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, and it aptly sums up my conversion to the Catholic Church. Looking back, I see many moments of grace and many people of faith that contributed. When I made the change in 1994, there was nothing impeding me. I was happy to join the Church of St. Peter, St. Mary Magdalene, St. John Paul II, St. Teresa of Calcutta, and St. John Henry Cardinal Newman. I have never once looked back in regret.

Let me close by saying that I also believe that my generation, the famous (some might say infamous) “Boomer” generation has a rendezvous with destiny, before we pass from the scene. Those of us in our mid-50s to our mid-70s have a crucial calling to help further the divine mission of the Catholic Church. We are all, whatever our age or place in life, to be the living presence of Christ in this world, which our God loves and desires to save. ■



JIM ANDERSON is a former Episcopal priest who has served, for the past four years, as a chaplain at Palos Hospital in the southwestern suburbs of Chicago. He and his wife, Bernie, live nearby and enjoy spending time with their families, including their two grown children and three young grandchildren. Jim loves being Catholic and vows, someday, to finish reading St. Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologica. Jim will be a guest on The Journey Home February 1, 2021.

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