



March 2021 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



The Converting Power of Chastity

By Andrew Comiskey

I remember always loving the cross. Growing up in a beach town near Los Angeles in the sixties and seventies, my three siblings and I seemed unlikely to live a cruciform life. The sun burned hot, as if the moral ozone layer could no longer buffer its rays. Each of us was overexposed — too many drugs, too much flesh. I tended toward same-gender stuff, and found little resistance to “doing one’s thing.”

But my good mother prayed for Jesus’ mercy over us. She refused my dad’s agnosticism (they were attending a Unitarian Church) and routed us to the nearby Episcopal parish, led by a former Catholic priest who broke with Rome in order to marry. *Voilà*: Catholic Lite! It may not have been the most dynamic gathering, but I recall the beautiful cross over the altar and the meal derived from it, the centerpiece of Anglican liturgy.

Upon confirmation, each of my siblings left that church. But the Holy Spirit was undaunted. My older brothers, from whom I felt detached and by whom I felt judged, became “born-again” in a fresh wave of renewal sweeping the West Coast. Their kindness and authentic concern for my rather confusing “gay” identification moved me. I wasn’t ready for their “Jesus,” but I knew He was changing them for the good.

I “came out” formally to my parents. My mom shed some tears and said kindly, “I’ve known a lot of people in that life ... I want more for you.” More? What’s more? Maybe this Jesus ...

In those days, when an unknown killer called AIDS was infecting thousands, I needed badly to discover Him. I needed witnesses who would take me as I am and include me in a community of transformation.

In the late seventies, I was blessed to receive Jesus’ embrace through the arms of a young adult congregation called the Vineyard, which had just begun to gather a few miles from UCLA, where I was a student. Pastor Ken Gulliksen won me over with well-expressed biblical truth, through which mercy ran like a river. He envisaged this Jesus for whom no one is too far gone, who always looks with concern upon our conflicts, and who weeps rather than bristles over our divides. And he practiced what he preached.

While at UCLA, I was courted by the two most obvious counter-cultural groups on campus: Evangelical Christians and the GSU (Gay Student Union). San Franciscan Harvey Milk had just become the first “out and proud” politician in American history, adding momentum to the LA gay scene, which was hip and influential. This posed a big conflict for me: I wanted Jesus! And I also wanted to lose myself in the smart and sexy gay scene on campus.

I took a course in “gay lit” and attended similarly themed meetings, including one on “The Bible and Homosexuality.” I was frankly unimpressed by the way they majored on gay and minored on Jesus. It seemed odd to me that Jesus’ call to leave everything to follow Him mattered

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

less to these gay “Christians” than the defining power of sexual attraction.

In reaction, I joined a Christian fraternity, where really good conservative men embraced me, and I grew alongside them. All they asked was that I abide by the biblical boundaries of no sex outside marriage, regardless of the direction of my impulses. I agreed. And I realized that, through this solidarity, I really wasn’t so completely “other” than they were, after all. As men, we share a common destiny, but also differ along a continuum of temperament, aptitudes, and weaknesses. Mine were no better or worse. Thus began my healing.

Jesus’ real presence was evident in His members. And especially in one member, Annette. We met when she, a manager at the local Christian bookstore, interviewed me for a job. She hired my housemate, not me. Ah well. My zeal for Jesus and His house was a bit much for her, but she relented and nabbed me at the next job opening. We clicked. She needed my zeal to ignite her faith (real, but in need of renewal) while I needed her grounded approach to life. She anchored me in our common humanity, while I jump-started her reliance upon Jesus. A rich exchange.

And a peculiar one. I opened up to her early on about my same-sex issues, before any thought of dating. These were deep, difficult concerns that I lived with daily; it seemed apt disclosure for any growing friendship. Annette shared about her older brother, whose ongoing homosexual and drug adventures soured her on the subject. The gay life had slammed her and her parents.

For Annette, exposure to her brother’s outbursts and breakdowns, combined with a visiting relative who had raped her when she was four, destabilized her childhood. She could not help but pair sexuality with anxiety.

Same sexual revolution, two different impacts: while Annette drew back in defense, I lunged forward, unrestrained. We both needed Jesus and His mercy, though in different ways. We learned to draw “water from the well of salvation” (Isa 12:3) in our common commitment to the Vineyard Church.

Growth came unexpectedly. I was changing. My housemates became good friends, and I was becoming a regular guy among them. One asked why I wasn’t dating Annette. I did not know why. I was actually beginning to experience desire for her. Not for all women, just for this one. And I realized that all that stood in the way was the belief that I could not relate seriously with a woman because “I was gay.” Or had that become an outworn excuse for not wanting to give myself to her or anyone?

My desires were changing. I could no longer use an old “sexual identity” as a disqualifier. I appreciate Josef Pieper’s exhortation when he says: “the sick soul fears more than anything else the demands made on one who is well.”

Jesus helped me. The community helped me. Mercy made the way for us. Annette and I learned that Jesus had to be at the center of our union. We needed ongoing mediation, and He was the mediator. We learned to rely upon Him in order to give each other what he/she needed. It was a joy, and a challenge, to discover Jesus in this way.

So we dated, and soon we were engaged. Ken, our pastor, asked Annette and me to help persons facing sexual difficulties in the church, especially those dealing with same-sex attraction. I shared my story with the congregation one Sunday, and the Spirit moved many to come forward with a host of shameful backstories. Included among them was a successful designer from West Hollywood — wearied of his old life and expectant of a new one in Jesus — who volunteered his home as a meeting place where any struggler might grow in relation to Jesus.

In these meetings, we focused on Christ crucified and raised, sang simple songs of love to Him, and welcomed His presence in our midst. Soon afterwards, the relevance of a safe and supportive group for anyone who needed relational healing, combined with some of the problems we faced in West Hollywood by including only persons with same-sex attraction, prodded us to open “Living Waters,” as we called the group, to all persons in need of sexual and relational healing.

We never wanted to lose our edge on ministering hope for persons with same-sex attraction. But the bigger problems of gender issues were traditional abuses between men and women. These less exotic sinners from our church and beyond were eager to receive “living waters,” as they understood our offering to be merciful and powerful, an in-depth group designed to keep shameful secrets safe.

“It seemed odd to me that Jesus’ call to leave everything to follow Him mattered less to these gay ‘Christians’ than the defining power of sexual attraction.”

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



This month, the CHNetwork staff would like to suggest the excellent resource *Journeys Home* to our readers. This book is a compilation of wonderful conversion stories that provide insight, encouragement, and inspiration for those who are thinking about making the same journey and for Catholics born in the faith as well.

Go to www.chresources.com to purchase this book and other resources about the Catholic Church.

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ON THE JOURNEY

Is *Sola Scriptura* Scriptural? Part II: Authority After the Apostles*

By Ken Hensley

Is *sola Scriptura* scriptural? Is this something the New Testament actually teaches? This is the question we've been asking.

What I'm attempting to do in this series is to walk through the "process of thought" that led me over time to conclude that *sola Scriptura* was not the teaching of the New Testament.

I began by looking at the "practice" of those earliest Christians living during the time of the Apostles. I could see that followers of Christ, at least at this stage, were not "practicing" *sola Scriptura*.

For them, binding authority resided in (a) the inspired writings of the Old and New Testaments (as they were being written), (b) the oral teaching of the Apostles, and (c) in the ability of the Apostles and elders to meet in Council, settle disagreements, define Christian teaching, and issue decisions they took to be the decisions of the Holy Spirit. For example, Acts 15:28 states, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."

In other words, those earliest Christians were not looking to the Bible alone to determine what they were to believe and how they were to live. They had the written Tradition (Scripture), the unwritten Tradition (the Apostles' oral teaching), and they had the Magisterium as it existed at that time. It looked rather Catholic in its basic structure.

Okay, but so what?

Great, except that at this point the thoughtful non-Catholic is going to respond: So what? Obviously, believers were not "practicing" *sola Scriptura* when there were still inspired Apostles walking the earth and speaking with the authority of Christ Himself and when the New Testament writings hadn't even been completed! And of course, the Council of Jerusalem could issue authoritative decrees! It was led by the Apostles!

The question that needs to be asked is not, "what functioned as binding authority for Christians living *during* the Apostolic Age?" But rather, "what should function as binding authority for Christians living in the ages *after* the Apostles? What solid foundation are

Christians to stand upon *once the Apostles have left this world*? That's the critical question that needs to be asked!

This made sense to me, and so with this in mind, I wanted to read through the New Testament asking a question that had never crossed my mind to that point: What was the *mindset* of the Apostles with respect to how they expected their teaching to be preserved in the Church *after* their demise?

Do they say anything about this? Do they act like men who believe that once they've left the scene their spiritual children will become "Bible only" Christians? Can we see them preparing their churches for a time when what they had taught them would no longer be authoritative, when their leaders could no longer be able to meet in council and render decisions and say, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us"? What hints at answers to these questions can we find in their writings?

Three observations

Here are three observations I made as I read through the New Testament with these questions in mind.

1 First, it struck me (not as a proof but evidence of a mindset) that most of the Apostles never wrote down what they were teaching. In this, they don't act like men who are preparing their churches for a life of *sola Scriptura*.

After all, if I were an Apostle who had given my life to establishing churches and teaching the believers with the authority of Christ and I knew that once I was gone the only infallible rule they would have was what I had written down, I would want to write!

Well, maybe they did write and we just don't have what they wrote! Maybe they did, but if they did, it's hard to imagine that their writings would not have been treasured and preserved and that we would not have at least *something* from them.

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Instead, of the original Twelve, we have writings from only three: Matthew, Peter, and John. The rest seem to have been content to preach, found churches, to ordain leadership in those churches, to teach their people everything they wanted them to know, and die without ever writing their teaching down for Christians who would come after!

They seemed to have believed that their teaching would be preserved in the Church apart from them having to write it down.

2 Second, it struck me that even those Apostles who *did* write didn't write like men who were preparing their people for a future in which "what they had written" would serve as their sole, infallible rule.

John certainly didn't! In terms of instruction to his spiritual children, the Apostle John only left us three very short letters, one five chapters and two more only one page each. And in these letters twice he says that he doesn't even want to write them, but prefers seeing them face to face!

John writes in 2 John 1:12: "though I have much to write to you, I would *rather not use paper and ink*, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete." And then in 3 John 1:13 he states: "I had much to write to you, but I would *rather not write* with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face" (emphasis added).

Again, if I were an Apostle and I believed that once I was gone the sole, infallible authority for the lives of my spiritual children would be Scripture alone, I would have scrambled to write the clearest summaries I could of everything I taught and wanted them to know!

Instead, John says, "I have much to tell you but *I don't want* to write it down! I'd rather wait until I can speak with you in person!" Not a shred of a hint that this Apostle had *sola Scriptura* in his mind!

So, that was John. But even when I looked at writings of the Apostle Paul, who left us more in writing than any other Apostle, I didn't find him writing in the way one would think he would write if he had *sola Scriptura* in his mind!

For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:29 Paul refers to "baptisms being performed for the dead" without explaining what he's talking about. He just mentions it and moves on.

Apparently, his readers knew what he was talking about and so he didn't feel the need to explain himself. It doesn't seem to have crossed Paul's mind that believers *in the future* might also want to know so that we wouldn't have to have 17 New Testament scholars writing 17 monographs speculating on the issue!

Another example is in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 where Paul refers to the

Man of sin, who is to be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

Important stuff! A number of evangelical authors have made themselves as rich as Croesus speculating about the identity of this "man of sin."

What's Paul talking about? Well, he *begins* to speak of this individual and then, right when any human being reading this letter who was not a member of the Church in Thessalonica at the time, is leaning forward in his seat, eager to know who Paul is talking about, he says, "do you not remember that when I was with you I *told* you

this? And *you know* what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time?"

But, of course, what Paul is doing in 1 Corinthians 15, in 2 Thessalonians 2, and in other places seems entirely natural. After all, when he wrote letters to the various churches he had founded, for the most part he was writing to people he had spent a good deal of time with (e.g. three years in Ephesus, a couple of years in Corinth). He knows his readers are familiar with his teaching and because of this he doesn't feel the need to spell everything out in his letters to them. He can presuppose that his readers *know* what he's talking about and will be able to fill in the blanks on their own.

But I remember thinking, "well, thanks a lot, Paul! It's wonderful to know that the Christians in Thessalonica don't need an explanation because, after all, you *told* them when you were with them! But what about those of us born in the middle of the 20th century? Do I have to purchase the entire *Left Behind* series to find out what you told the Thessalonian believers?"

Again, I had to admit that it just doesn't *seem* that Paul was thinking about a future in which his churches would have "Scripture alone!"

The reality is that when we read the New Testament letters, what we're reading are "occasional documents" — letters written to specific churches to address specific issues and problems. They weren't written to summarize Christian doctrine and, except here and there, they *don't* summarize Christian doctrine. And yet, one would think the Apostles would be committed above everything to summarizing their doctrine, if they were thinking that when they were gone, what they had written would serve as the Church's "sole infallible rule of faith and practice."

3 Third observation: There was one case I found in the NT where an Apostle actually talks about the preservation of his teaching beyond death. Does he give any evidence of having *sola Scriptura* in his mind? Not a whisper.

This is in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy. This appears to be his farewell address to his spiritual son and successor in the ministry.

In chapter 4, Paul speaks of his imminent departure from this world: "for I am already on the point of being sacrificed, the time of my departure has come." And then, listen carefully to what he says to Timothy.

Follow the pattern of sound words, which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells in you. You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have *heard* from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Tim 1:13-14 and 2:1-2, emphasis added).

Now this struck me like a smooth stone from David's sling. What Paul is talking about here is *precisely* the preservation of his teaching after his death. And notice, he doesn't say a word here about his "writings." He doesn't command Timothy to gather together his writings and make copies of them. Instead he talks about the "pattern of sound words" Timothy has received from Paul. He speaks of what Timothy has "heard" him teach. And he urges Timothy to guard this body of truth "by the Holy Spirit that dwells in him" and then to "entrust" this teaching to faithful men who presumably will

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also guard what has been entrusted to them by the Holy Spirit who dwells in them and entrust it to others and so forth.

In short, Paul seems to have believed that the *substance* of his teaching would be preserved by the Holy Spirit through a process akin to apostolic succession — and *this* is what he's thinking about as the time of his death approaches. He's not thinking about *sola Scriptura*!

Conclusion

Now, what Protestantism essentially says is that while *sola Scriptura* was not the practice of Christians living *during* the time of the Apostles, once the Apostles had left the scene the rule of faith became the Scriptures.

And yet, when I examined the writings of the Apostles ... they didn't seem like men who were thinking about any of this. The Apostles — John, Paul, all of them — seem to have believed that their teaching would be preserved in the Church, by the Holy Spirit, through their successors in the ministry.

Of course, their writings would bear witness to this teaching. But it would not function alone outside the context of what the Church knew and transmitted. Which is interesting, because this is precisely how the early Church Fathers seem to have understood things.

In one passage, St. Irenaeus, writing around AD 180, says that just like a rich man deposits his money into a bank, so the Apostles “deposited with her [i.e. the Church] most copiously everything which pertains to the truth; and everyone whoever wishes draws from her the drink of life” (*Against Heresies*, 3:4:1).

Writing around AD 220, Origen puts it like this:

The teaching of the Church has indeed been handed down through an order of succession from the Apostles, and remains in the churches even to the present time. That alone is to be believed as the truth, which is in no

way at variance with ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition (*Fundamental Doctrines*).

This was the mindset of the early Church!

Okay, but what about those New Testament passages that Protestant scholars cite as teaching or at least implying *sola Scriptura*?

To be continued... ■

*See the January and February 2021 issues for previous installments in this series.

SOLA SCRIPTURA

To read more about the topic of *sola Scriptura*, our exclusive CHResource *The Bible Alone?* presents a compelling 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 chresources.com or call 740-450-1175.



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NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE



Our online newsletter archive is new and improved! Visit <http://newsletter.chnetwork.org/bookcase/xdjce> or scan the QR code to view past newsletters. We do ask for a \$35 yearly donation to help cover the production costs of the newsletter.

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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

March 1

Marcus Peter*
(former atheist and
Assemblies of God)

March 8

Derya Little* (former Muslim,
atheist, and Protestant)
(re-air from 6/11/18)

March 15

Fr. Matthew Hawkins*
(former African Methodist
Episcopal)

March 22

Mike Peters* (former non-
denominational campus minister)
(re-air from 6/4/18)

March 29

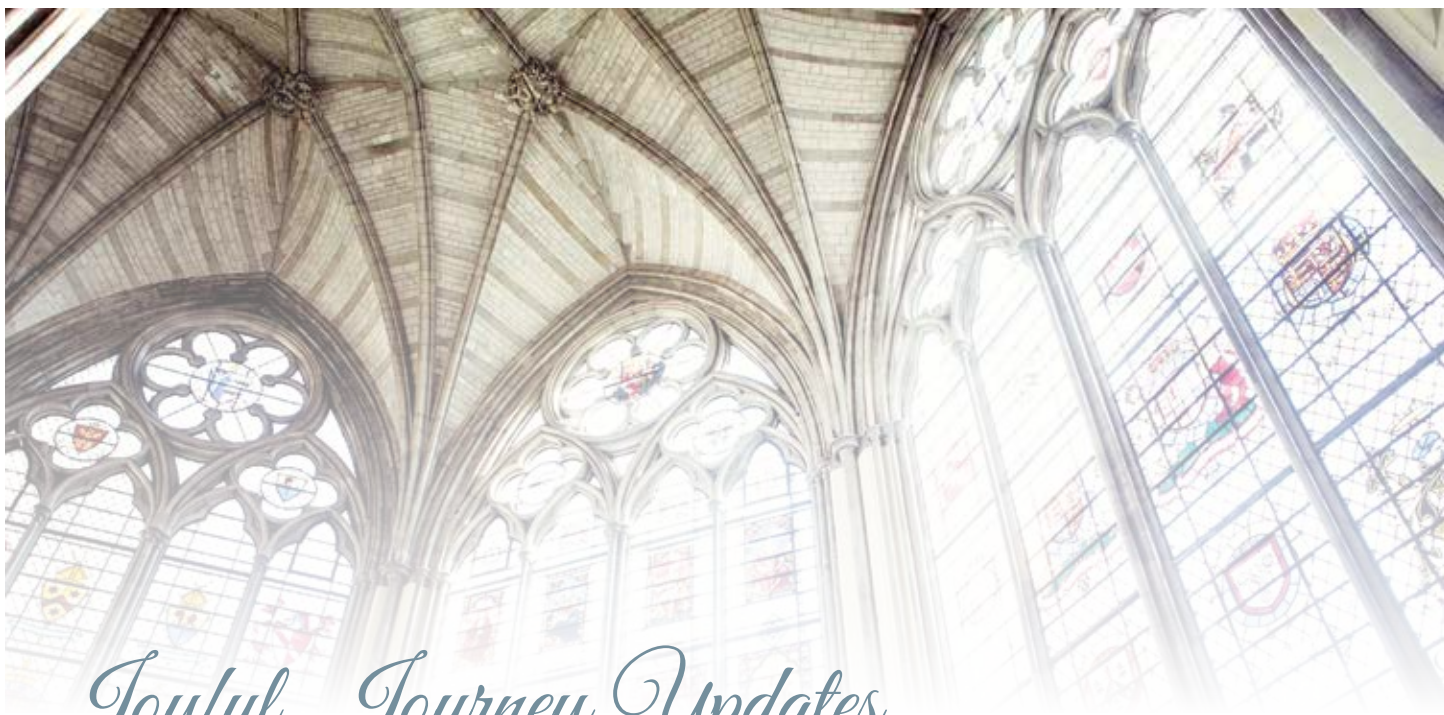
Msgr. Jeffrey
Steenson* (former
Episcopal bishop)

April 5

Marshall Fightlin*
(convert from Judaism)
(re-air from 6/18/18)

*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 Joanne, on the journey "I prayed this morning asking the Lord to show me whether I should be praying to Mary or not. Then on opening my Bible, I opened exactly to Luke 1, the Magnificat. I could never have made that happen. A little while later, as I was walking, I prayed one Hail Mary. I prayed slowly, acknowledging the prominence of Scripture throughout the prayer. I was very nervous about praying it but did it by faith, believing that the Lord led me to Luke 1 in response to my prayer to Him. Thank you for being faithful in following up with me or I might not be in the place I am in at this moment."

From Wesley, a new convert "It's official, this morning at the 8:30 Mass I was received into the Church. When I picked this date due to scheduling I did not realize it's the day Catholics celebrate Mary's birthday ... seems a good day to come into the Church. I want to thank you and the Coming

Home family for all your support and resources in helping me on my journey. Please share my gratitude with all those involved. Again thank you personally for all your help. May God lead and guide you!"

From Elizabeth, on the journey "I have been on the receiving end of continued grace that God has been delivering to me where He is calling me to this sacramental life. He knows I desire understanding in spite of my faith and that I desire to love Him and obey His calling, which has brought me here, seeking membership in the family of the Catholic Church. I'm glad to be where I am. God has used this time over the past year to grow my devotion in His Word, discover our Mother through Our Lady of Guadalupe, and increase my faith and understanding. The belonging and love that I have experienced on this journey from my Heavenly Father are incomparable to anything I could ever

imagine. I would love for my husband to receive and experience the same."

From Kierra, on the journey "I am doing extremely well in my faith journey and it seems like graces from all directions are coming my way which is very encouraging. I am still striving to pray the Rosary daily and have started finding graces in the Divine Mercy and meditating on the Passion. I recently met with a priest who was able to give me more insight into the faith but that was a priest from another diocese. I am currently hoping to speak with the priest from the parish I go to, but with the pandemic, haven't gotten around to it since I live in one of the more populated and virus-stricken areas in my state. Other than that, I am continuing my devotions and readings and allowing Our Lord to guide and strengthen me. I have even gained more courage to live out my newfound faith in small and modest ways around my Protestant family." ■

Prayer List



Clergy

- **For Robert, an Episcopal priest** who has begun exploring the possibility of becoming a Catholic priest through the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter.
- **For a Bible Church pastor** who has been watching *The Journey Home* and other video resources and finds himself drawn to the Church with many questions, that the Lord may lead him to the answers he seeks.
- **For Nickolas, a pastor** convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith and beginning to think seriously of how to make the difficult transition with his family.
- **For Andrew, a pastor** who is attracted to the teaching of the Catholic Church but has no idea how he could move forward given what he believes to be his calling as a pastor and his responsibilities as a family man.
- **For Joshua, a Protestant pastor** facing extreme opposition to his interest in the Catholic Church, that the Lord will give him grace to deal with this while he continues to learn and grow in his love for the Church.
- **For John, a Baptist pastor** who recently started watching *The Journey Home*, had never even heard of a convert from Protestantism to Catholicism and found himself curious, that the Lord will lead him along a sure path as he begins slowly to study the Catholic Church.
- **For a non-denominational pastor** who has come to the Coming Home Network looking for assistance in finding the truth in the midst of so many Protestant denominations and sects, that the Holy Spirit will lead and give him clarity.
- **For Angel, a pastor** convinced that he must return to the Catholic Church where he was baptized as an infant, that the Lord will help him overcome his fear and lead him forward.
- **For David, an Anglican priest** who is convinced of his call to the priesthood and also convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith, that there may be a path for him to enter the Church through the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter and become a Catholic priest.

- **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 past 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 Bill, a non-denominational pastor** who is struggling with how to become Catholic and financially support his wife and kids at the same time, that the Lord will show him the way.

Laity

- **For Patrick, a non-denominational Protestant in New York**, that the Lord would bless and guide his journey.
- **For a Southern Baptist**, that the Lord will soften her husband's heart so that she can move forward with her wish to become fully Catholic.
- **For Brent, an Episcopalian**, that the beauty he sees in the Catholic Church would draw him to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- **For a woman who is coming from a Mormon background** and isn't quite sure how to move forward with her interest in the Catholic Faith.
- **For an Independent Baptist in India**, that the Holy Spirit may guide him and his family home to the Catholic Church.
- **For Tim, a member of the Church of Christ**, that his annulment may be approved to enable him to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.
- **For a former agnostic in Illinois**, that the love of Christ would bring him home to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
- **For Robert, a Universalist**, that the Catholic faith of his son would enable him to embrace the truth of the Catholic Church.
- **For a teenager** whose parents don't know yet of her interest in Catholicism, that they will be supportive and open to her journey.
- **For Andrew, an Anabaptist**, that his study of the history of the Reformation would bear fruit and guide him to unity with the Catholic Church.
- **For a Jewish man in California**, that he may discover and embrace the grace and truth found in the Catholic Church of the Messiah of Israel.
- **For Graham, a Southern Baptist**, that as he and his wife study the Church Fathers, they may be guided to fully embrace the Catholic Faith.
- **For Julie, a Lutheran**, that her struggles with Catholic doctrines will be resolved and the Lord will give her peace on her journey.
- **For a non-denominational Protestant** in West Virginia, that the Holy Spirit would bless and guide his RCIA experience.
- **For a woman whose husband is a Seventh-day Adventist** and is adamant against her return to the Catholic Church, that she will find excellent local support for her journey and her marriage.
- **For John, an Anglican**, that our Lord Jesus would guide him and his wife home to the Catholic Church.
- **For Mary** who wishes to fully return to the Catholic Church but hasn't had success with finding a priest to visit her since she is homebound.
- **For Joanne** who has a number of theological struggles with Catholicism and doesn't know if she will continue considering becoming Catholic.
- **For Richard**, that he may find guidance as to how to go about becoming a Catholic Christian.
- **For Martin, a member of the Reformed church in Canada**, that, in his search for a broader view of Christianity, he may discover the fullness of the truth in 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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I was able to lend more breadth to the offering as a result of graduate studies in psychology and theology.

Annette and I have shared our unique vocation for four decades now; with it we have helped forge a language of sexual brokenness and wholeness. Most importantly, we have made a case for sexual redemption through Jesus and His Body, doing our part, through His mercy, "to present to Jesus a radiant church" (Eph 5:26).

As my language suggests, our work grew out of the Evangelical, charismatic world. Brave were the Catholics who entered our midst, having to translate our traditions into a much older one. I had always loved the quiet depth of my Catholic colleagues. I knew from my liberal arts degree (I majored in English and French) that Catholicism was the foundation of our Western culture. I recognized, also, that the Catholic Church was the foundation of all other churches and worthy of much respect. Her problems did not bother me. I knew the problems our 2-year-old church had and couldn't fathom the problems of that nearly 2000-year-old Bride!

We left the Vineyard movement and southern California in 2005. We did so with regret, but expectancy, as we joined Mike Bickle in Kansas City to help build up Living Waters for the flood of young adults joining their 24/7 prayer efforts. Nevertheless, we missed the main and plain of regular church life. We joined another local church, a good one, but....

Questions remained for me. What is the Church? What composes her? What holds her together? What defines worship? Or morality? As a young man, I attributed all church life to movements of the Holy Spirit, who revealed Jesus to persons like me, who would not have found Him in a traditional church setting. I am only grateful for the pioneers like Ken Gulliksen, John Wimber, Leanne Payne, and Mike Bickle, who made a way for Annette and me to grow in our salvation and to help others do likewise.

But the "here today, gone tomorrow" nature of many such gatherings, combined with the subjective interpretation of truth (yes, the Bible as authoritative, and yes, the Bible actually must be interpreted by people who have done so decisively through the years) left me cold. To whom should I listen now?

The Evangelical premiums on personal freedom and evangelizing the culture contributed to the culture influencing the church. This shifted the goal posts in regard to sexual morality. Many in my Evangelical corner became worldly; we assimilated contraception and divorce, and "gay marriage" began to appear reasonable for

those "born that way." Could a highly individualistic approach to biblical interpretation hold up amidst this sexual evolution?

I was greatly helped by Christopher West; we met in Denver, 1999, at one of our conferences. He handed me an early edition of Pope St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* (TOB), which I devoured.

Equally helpful was partaking of several rounds of deeper study at West's TOB Institute. The Catholic Church's "culture of life" was converting me. I recall thinking: "this moral teaching will endure."

At the same time, I hungered for worship that transcended a string of popular songs. And I grew allergic to one pastor's "leading," shifting the course of our entire church life. I began to find the "free" church disintegrating. Though I loved its freedom to change and rearrange itself, the Evangelical church began to lack ballast, that centripetal force which anchored our worship and our wholeness.

I discovered a hunger for the Eucharist. I landed on the belief that Communion is the premier expression and experience of the cross. I delighted to know

that the second meaning of the Greek word for "eat," as employed in John 6:53, involves crunching — the use of teeth. How fitting for this meal in which we consume the cross! Deeper still is this mysterious means through which Jesus' Real Presence intermingles with our humanity. He could give no more than He did at Calvary, and He could come no closer than He does in this holy meal. He allows us to consume Him; He hands Himself over, again and again, to become our Source. This is divine intimacy, the bond of love which supersedes all others.

I wanted to consume Jesus, Catholic style. Prior to beginning RCIA (adult catechism), I spent a year in the neighborhood Catholic parish, watching the faithful process before the cross and tabernacle and partaking of Jesus. I needed that meal; I was famished.

I underwent a couple rounds of RCIA, beginning in 2009. The pushback began. Many voiced conflicts over my pursuit. Veering off the straight path to confirmation at the Easter Vigil that year, I waited. In 2010, I resumed RCIA as the hunger increased.

In the meantime, I stayed fixed on the parish tabernacle that held the Host beneath the huge crucifix; Jesus appeared to be descending into "bread" to become our very life. In faith, according to Scripture, I accepted that the elements of bread and wine actually become Jesus' Body; I also accepted the prayerful mediation of the priest in that transformation, which integrated the meal with the author-

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...Journeys Home Continued...

ity structure of the Church. Such a high and earthy take on John 6 should involve spiritual authority.

In the meantime, I wasn't ready to receive Communion. I had to wait until I was sure of becoming Catholic, just as one waits (or should wait) to intermingle bodies with his fiancée until the wedding. It's a huge commitment; you do not commingle with another only to abandon her! If that is evident on the human level, how much more does it apply to the union between a fallen creature and his Creator?

That union applies as well to Jesus' members in the Catholic Church. I love my Evangelical family and friends — still do — yet I realized that, in becoming Catholic, I was uniting myself with over a billion new family members in this one meal. Would I be faithful to them, with all the unbelief and scandal and (at times) barely evident devotion to Jesus that marks the historic Church? Would I be true? Could I be?

Offering oneself to Jesus and Church in Communion is surpassed only by His self-gift. He matches our commitment and eclipses it with His unfailing divine love that burns for us. He proved it at Calvary: Jesus' ardent desire to love us through the holy meal cost Him everything. As I grew in my love of Communion, I realized that Jesus passionately wanted to unite Himself to me. I knew something about desire "going south." Jesus' passionate longing to become my bread is the antidote.

My life has been defined by sorting out conflictual desires, interpreting them correctly, and getting on with the business of loving those I love most, especially Annette and our four offspring. God helps me to offer myself well through the gift of Himself. More than an idea or an historic event, His Body and Blood shed for me are re-presented with full effect every time I go to Communion. What a gift!

Back to my Catholic "engagement." I would show up for 6:15 AM Mass and couldn't understand: why aren't partakers of this most divine encounter dancing, falling, swooning, or singing? OK, this isn't a Pentecostal meeting. But now and again we need to celebrate God-with-us using our whole bodies!

St. Alphonsus Liguori's prayer became my own: "ah! My Lord! Who am I that You should so desire to be loved by me? But since such is Your desire, I wish to please You. You have died for me; have given me Your flesh for food. I leave all, I bid farewell to all, to attach myself to You, my beloved Savior. My dear Redeemer! Whom shall I love if not You, who are infinite beauty and worthy of infinite love? Yes, my God!"

Jacques Philippe puts it succinctly: "the Eucharist makes clear the degree of intimacy into which God wants to draw us. In the Eucharist, the mad dream of all lovers is realized: to be one in being with

the object of our love. God lets Himself be eaten by us: He becomes our substance, and at the same time, He draws us out of ourselves to make us His."

At last came the day when I was ready for love, prepared to partake of His Body and Blood and thus unite myself with Jesus and His

members. Having taken St. John at his word, that through this meal I might actually "live and dwell and abide with Him" (Jn 6:56) and His Church — well, that was not only beyond me but profoundly needed by me.

How else can I live? I cannot do the good by knowledge or discipline alone, although I value both; I need Him, with me, within me — yes, through the Spirit, but more intimately and viscerally, in His very self-gift. As soon as I consumed Him that Easter Vigil in 2011, I experienced a nourishment and composure and source of strength that helped me act a bit more like Him toward others.

I needed that life. And I needed the delivering power of mercy as realized in the holy meal.

My spousal union with Jesus through Communion has since become a focused aim: to be the best husband and father I can be. That is my calling!

My wife, Annette, could not in good conscience proceed on with me to become Catholic. That has been hard on both of us, especially her. Yet the truth remains that God has called me to love her above all else and so make evident His love for His bride, the Church.

That sounds grand, but I do give better when I am aligned with Jesus' self-giving through the merciful gift of Communion. Early on in my Catholic faith, I heard Jesus say distinctly to me, as I buried myself in the works of St. Edith Stein and St. John of the Cross: "your first call is to your wife, not to the Church or to mystical union with Me." I stood upright. Our home church really matters to God. My radical commitment to Jesus and His members could and should have one evident impact: to give myself more squarely and purely to wife and children as a sure sign of Jesus' self-giving to the Church.

For that reason, I love Pope Francis' take on approaching the Eucharist hungrily, weakly, in need of taking hold of what we feel we may not adequately possess. Jesus gives Himself freely, abundantly, in the holy meal. "The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak." This merciful meal is unsurpassed in its quiet, steady way in which it renews my love, with Annette as its first fruit. I do so in fits and starts, but the way is clear.

Jesus' Real Presence in the holy meal became everything to me. It was the antidote to the pushback I received from Evangelical family members and colleagues. Painful was the discovery that devout friends, who welcomed Catholics in principle, failed to do so when a close brother became one. Yikes! I was not expecting that.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

Gut wrenching. Peace came through daily Eucharist that week and an invitation to attend an afternoon service on Divine Mercy Sunday (the Sunday after Easter). I knew nothing of St. Faustina and the origin of this devotion; I just knew that I needed mercy in order to endure the judgment and rejection I faced from my erstwhile fellows. I wept through the whole service and eagerly confessed to the priest how my wounded heart could readily harden toward intolerant Evangelical friends. I received mercy to forgive them and to allow “the blood and water that gushed forth from the heart of the Savior” to save me again, to keep me pliable and peaceful amid these reactions.

I picked up St. Faustina’s *Diary* that Divine Mercy Sunday and have never stopped reading it. It rang true and loosed a flood of mercy for miserable me. To personalize a quote: “the knowledge of my own misery allowed me to know the immensity of Jesus’ mercy.” I quickly came to realize that many of my colleagues throughout the world would no longer work with me, and that familial bonds would be strained. I also realized that I would have to give continuous explanation for my decision as well as doctrinal defense for Catholicism (as if I had the expertise...).

Would God’s mercy be enough for me to endure this? Our labor was difficult and controversial enough. Could we be true to our original mission while taking on the Catholic/Evangelical divide? Only mercy made a way. My helplessness became the ground for a more pure reception of the Body and Blood. Jesus spoke these words to Faustina, which I heard directed to me: “bring your ear close to My Heart, forget everything else, and meditate upon My wondrous mercy. My love will give you the strength and courage you need in these matters.” Jesus, lead on.

He showed me His friends. Though I had never wrestled with Mary and the saints (I mean, no one is competing with Jesus), I did not rely on them. Old Evangelical ties were breaking down fast, and I needed new friends. Look no more — the heavens are declaring the communion of the saints! Yes, that included the somewhat remote souls with whom I shared pews at Mass. With most of these I connected limply — the “passing of the peace,” then racing out to the crowded parking lot.

But in the leanness, the long season of gaining enough traction to be known as a sinner among a few, I realized something deeper was holding us, the Church, together. Centuries of faithful ones, united by the line of Peter, who now in heaven cry out for us on earth; they “fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 956).

I was lonely but not alone. Looking out at my large parish, I realized that we were woven together by golden threads spun through centuries of heavenly intercession. Connection was profound, if not yet socially realized. This freed me: “realization of our oneness in Christ is the only cure for human loneliness For me, the greatest joy in being once again in full communion with the Catholic Church has been, and is now, the ever-growing reassurance given by the Mystical Body of Christ ... and that Christ and His Church are one” (Caryll Houselander).

Starting one Lent, a small group of us prayed every week for the chastity of our Church, beginning with our need for greater whole-

ness. People came in fits and starts: each one came from a diverse background and was treated with the utmost dignity. Finally, our pastors gave the go-ahead for our core team to run a full Living Waters group.

During the group’s initial run in the parish, I recall waiting in line for the Eucharist one Sunday morning. I looked ahead of me and saw several of my Living Waters friends and fellow Catholics:* Kim, a beautiful single woman facing unwanted singleness and a spirit of rejection because of it; Jim, seeking to overcome porn addiction, Sara and Bill, whose daughter had just “come out” as gay; Christopher, who as a teen had been abused by a pastor; Karen and Jim, whose marriage had been frustrated by the sexual baggage both had brought into the relationship.

We endured shame for the joy of real food, Jesus Himself. And quietly blessed each other as we ate. We took heart: we were not alone in our efforts to become chaste for Jesus and each other. Starting with our own lives, we were helping to prepare a Bride for Jesus without spot or wrinkle.

“Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word, and to present to Himself a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph 5:25–27). ■



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*Names changed to protect privacy.

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