



October 2025 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

From Clueless Spiritual Curiosity to the Fullness of the Church

By Dave Armstrong

When I was a child, we attended an old Protestant church in inner city Detroit. The average age of the people was probably above fifty years. This was my only experience of Christianity, and it appeared to me—insofar as I was able to judge it—to be boring, inconsequential, and removed from the “real world.” The congregation ceased to exist in 1968, and after that, I barely attended church at all for the next nine years. My family never sought another regular church to attend. Despite all this, God instilled in me a certain sense of the sacred. It felt different in church.



After I stopped going to church, I became fascinated with the supernatural, and a vague, open-to-anything occultism (ESP, telepathy, the Ouija board, astral projection, and other practices). These activities and curiosities weren't just frivolous games in my mind. I was genuinely pursuing the occult and believed that it was quite real. Now I know much of it is indeed genuine, but that it lies in the Satanic or demonic realm. G.K. Chesterton noted that when people reject Christianity, the problem is not that they believe in nothing, but that they will believe in anything. That was me!

Meanwhile, my older brother Gerry got involved with the Jesus Movement in 1971. I resisted

all that, and it took the horrific experience of severe depression for six months at the age of 18 to get me to see that I couldn't survive on my own. I accepted the notion that I could live without God, as if He was irrelevant to everyday life. This is what is called “practical atheism”: living as if God didn't exist. I had gone along for ten years living a very secular life, doing in the 70s what is fashionable today. God had to puncture my pride and self-delusion and confront me with the emptiness of that life to jolt me back into reality.

In April 1977, the superb Franco Zeffirelli film *Jesus of Nazareth* was on television. The artistic element of drama powerfully brought home to me the vitality of Christianity in a unique and effective way. What moved me the most was the realistic portrayal of Jesus. I was dazzled by it. For the first time in my life, I saw what He was really like.

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...Journeys Home Continued...

Shortly afterwards, I converted to Christ, or what I thought at the time was being “born-again” or “saved.” However one interprets this, I decided to be a serious disciple of Jesus, which every Christian must do, whether they are born into a practicing Christian home or come to the realization later. But despite my initial burst of zeal, sadly, I settled into a relatively lukewarm routine and still wasn’t going to church on Sunday; only Bible studies. I was extremely unliturgical, because liturgy had always bored me.

In August 1980, when I finally yielded my whole being to God, I experienced a profound renewal in my spiritual life, including—importantly—an understanding as to why sex outside of marriage was wrong. The immediate cause was attending a Non-denominational, charismatic church, part of the larger Jesus Movement among young people. During the next year and a half, all kinds of momentous things happened. I started truly worshiping God from the heart at the Sunday services—a totally new thing for me!

Discovery of Apologetics and My Evangelical Campus Ministry

I began intensely studying (in a group devoted to it) the cults: heretical sects that falsely claimed to be Christian. This was my first foray into apologetics, and I specialized in refuting the errors of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. That led me to a very deep and fruitful study of the divinity of Christ and the Holy Trinity in Scripture. I also experienced a profound filling of the Holy Spirit that changed my life and inspired me to study the Bible, do street witnessing, and to become pro-life, after attending a conference in early 1982.

In 1981, I ran across Evangelical apologist Josh McDowell’s classic 1972 work, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, and this initiated, in a flash, my interest in historical apologetics—reasons why Christians believe that the Bible is trustworthy, etc. Soon, I started thinking that God might be calling me to do

apologetics as my life’s work, because I was so interested in it. Eventually, that led to a full-time campus evangelistic ministry (with church backing; I was no lone ranger). I was now a Protestant Evangelical apologist.

Just before beginning this ministry, I married my wonderful wife, Judy, in October 1984. She has always supported my ministry work 100 percent, which was an absolute necessity, given the various forms of suffering that I have endured, both as a Protestant and a Catholic.

Many of my friends during my Evangelical years were former Catholics. I knew very little about Catholicism until the mid-80s, but I was never overtly anti-Catholic. This was probably because I had always loved Church history, too, which was what eventually led me to the Catholic Church.

Long story short, my campus ministry collapsed. I thought I was trying to follow His will. This was all I wanted to do with my life, and what I strongly felt God directed me to do. Yet it didn’t work, and here I was, at age 31, seemingly a complete failure with no future. I had given it my all, and it wasn’t good enough to even sustain the effort. What was to become of my calling? Would the whole thing turn out to be a false and mistaken path? It seemed like a cruel joke. I was thoroughly confused and didn’t understand how and why all this had happened.

But I knew that God could see what the future held for me (He was already there), and that He had a plan for my life. I had no idea what was to come: nor could I have ever guessed it in my wildest dreams. Holding onto my faith, I didn’t despair and was determined not to re-live the nightmare of 1977 again. I knew that God was in control.

I would have to wait and trust, as I’ve had to do so many times in my life: for my wife (eight lonely years after I started dating), getting a book published (seven years), having children (after six years of marriage), our first daughter (at age 43), full-time Catholic apologetics (also age 43), and many other lesser

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

AUTHORITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

DR. KENNETH HOWELL (DVD)

In this talk from CHNetwork’s 2009 Deep in History conference, Dr. Howell looks at the question of authority in the early Church: What kind of authority did the apostles have? Did they pass on their authority to their successors? Who or what has the authority to teach and preserve the Christian faith?



#1267 - \$15.00

PERSONAL PRAYER: A GUIDE TO RECEIVING THE FATHER’S LOVE

Fr. Thomas Acklin, OSB and Fr. Boniface Hicks, OSB explore the many forms of Catholic prayer. Rich with the wisdom of Scripture, Catholic teaching, and the writings of the saints, *Personal Prayer* is an exhaustive guide for anyone desiring to receive the Father’s love in a profoundly personal way.



#3258 - ~~\$18.95~~ **\$15.84**

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ESSAY BY ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

Cardinal Newman reflects on the growth and development of doctrine in the Catholic Church, from the time of the Apostles to his own era. He demonstrates that the basic principle under which Christianity proceeded through the centuries safeguards the faith from any real corruption.



#3024 - \$24.00

things. I wouldn't get back to full-time work in my vocational field until twelve years later, in 2001: a full twenty years after God called me to it.

Pro-Life Activism and Meeting Serious Catholics

The other major activity in my life in the late 1980s, and one that God directly used to bring me to the Catholic Church, was the pro-life movement, and eventually Operation Rescue. By 1990, I had participated in about 25 rescues (including a national one in Washington, DC). I was very impressed with the Catholic rescuers.

Catholics oftentimes don't understand their faith—why they believe what they do—and are unable to defend it. Informed Protestants know this, and it's a major reason why many of them are unimpressed by Catholicism. When I finally did meet Catholics in the pro-life movement who could and would share and defend their faith, exhibiting a spiritual fervor that I had never observed in other Catholics (not that I had tried very hard to find it!), it was so intriguing to me that it led to extensive discussions, study, and ultimately conversion. Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it sure helped me!

I began to fellowship with my Catholic brethren at rescues, and sometimes in jail, including priests and nuns. Although I was unpersuaded theologically, my personal admiration for orthodox Catholics grew. In one of the rescues (in Toledo, Ohio), I wore Rosary beads around my neck, to the delight of my new Catholic friends.

In January 1990, I started an ecumenical discussion group at my home. Two knowledgeable Catholic friends from the rescue movement started attending. I was pleasantly surprised when they offered good replies to my inquiries, because I used to think, "Catholics don't have any answers to these questions."

In the meantime, I was reading exclusively Catholic books (and all the short Catholic Answers tracts), trying to be fair-minded. One key volume was *The Spirit of Catholicism* by Karl Adam. My two Catholic friends at our group discussion continued to offer great food for thought in their replies to my endless questions about the doctrines of Catholicism (especially Eucharistic theology and Mariology).

Contraception: the First "Domino" to Fall

At that time, being a pro-life activist, I was curious about contraception, particularly the fact that the Catholic Church was against it and claimed that there was a connection between it and abortion. I tried to figure that out, and I thought, "What connection is there, because one is trying to prevent conception, while the other is killing a child?" As I deeply pondered it, one of my friends said to me, "The whole Christian Church was against contraception until 1930." In that year, the Anglicans were the first to change the prohibition, offering exceptions in hard cases.

This was a true bombshell to me, because I thought it was absurd to believe that the 20th century would get a moral teaching right, when 1900 years of Christianity had gotten it wrong. I didn't have a comeback for that. I just stood there,

silent, at one of the meetings, and I kept thinking about the issue and working through the distinction between contraception and Natural Family Planning, which is permitted for Catholics. I came to realize that with contraception, one is deliberately thwarting a possible conception and going ahead and having sex anyway, and that it's against the natural order. One didn't even have to appeal to Church authority to grasp the wrongness of it, after serious open-minded reflection.

Then one day, my friend, the late Al Kresta, was at my house and made this analogy to contraception of how eating entails both the nutritional aspect and the taste buds, and that people would think it strange if someone separated one from the other; if they ate only for pleasure or vice versa. I remember thinking, "Well, if I change my mind on this, I'll be in a small minority among Evangelicals...."

It could possibly develop further, but I told myself, "Well, it doesn't mean I'll become a Catholic." In any event, mere conformism has never motivated me to do anything, and I did become convinced of the wrongness of contraception while still a Protestant—and my wife agreed. But I thought it was strange and puzzling that the Catholic Church had, in my opinion, the best moral theology of any Christian communion, and was so profoundly right about these moral issues, yet was dead wrong regarding Mary and the pope and the typical things that Evangelicals dislike and reject.

My "Protestant Myth" of Church History and Flailing Against Infallibility

At this time, I still had a view that the early Church was Protestant, but had become corrupt with the Inquisition, until Martin Luther had picked up the ball in the 1500s and the Reformation was the way to go after that point. I thought that the Catholic Church was truly Christian, but it wasn't what I would call the mainstream. Evangelicalism was really where it was at: the cream of the crop. Catholics had a lot of truth, but less than we had. Individual Catholics could still be saved (what we would call "real Christians"), but they were in a different league—sort of Class B. That's how I thought as an Evangelical who was not anti-Catholic (I sought to be ecumenical), yet very pro-Protestant.

As a committed Evangelical Protestant with a great respect for the history of Christian doctrine, I nevertheless subscribed to an erroneous contra-Catholic view of Church history: a vague, semi-legendary conception of the early Church as quasi-Protestant and lacking what are now called Catholic distinctives.

If the early Christians weren't technically and exhaustively Protestant (as defined theologically and ecclesologically by the new movement in the 16th century), they certainly, for the most part, weren't Catholic—or so I had casually, and wrongly, assumed. As far I was concerned, they were "proto-Protestants."

I believed that the Catholic Church had passed the baton in the sixteenth century to the more biblical Protestants, who succeeded in reforming the Church universal. In other words, I held to an organic conception of Church history, somewhat like the Protestant Church historian Philip Schaff, and many



Advice for Evil Days



Dear Friends,

A while back I came across the following rather striking passage in the Office of Readings from an epistle attributed to St. Barnabas:

“When evil days are upon us and the worker of malice gains power, we must attend to our own souls and seek to know the ways of the Lord. In those times

reverential fear and perseverance will sustain our faith, and we will find need of forbearance and self-restraint as well. Provided that we hold fast to these virtues and look to the Lord, then wisdom, understanding, knowledge and insight will make joyous company with them.”

St. Barnabas was a missionary companion of St. Paul and, as I have noted in past articles, is a favorite saint of mine and one of our many unofficial patrons for the mission of the CHNetwork. St. Barnabas' name means "son of encouragement" and we have come to recognize how crucial the spiritual work of "encouragement" is for helping people on the journey of conversion deeper to Christ and His Church. Additionally, St. Barnabas is remembered for encouraging my namesake, St. John Mark, when he temporarily turned aside from his mission field, eventually helping to reconcile him with St. Paul and getting him back out on the journey.

This passage from St. Barnabas struck me for how directly it addresses the situation we all face at times—as individuals, as families, as a Church—of being discouraged by the apparent proliferation and unanswered power of evil in this world. In the time of St. Barnabas, as in our time, as in every age and time in the life of the Church, the "powers and principalities" at war with God and the people of God, seem often to have the upper hand. Even when we seem to win the occasional victory, we remain a people at spiritual war this side of heaven. As J.R.R. Tolkien once wrote in a letter:

“Actually I am a Christian, and indeed a Roman Catholic, so that I do not expect 'history' to be anything but a 'long defeat'—though it contains (and in a legend may contain more clearly and movingly) some samples or glimpses of final victory.” (Letter #195)

In light of the "long defeat" of this life, with hope in the final victory in the life to come, let us take a moment to consider St. Barnabas' poignant and powerful advice.

First and foremost, St. Barnabas exhorts us that during evil times "...we must attend to our own souls and seek to know the ways of the Lord." However fierce and perhaps dire the battle

may rage "out there" in the world, our primary concern should be the battle "in here"—the battle for our own soul. This is, after all, the only, ultimate, place of victory or defeat. To know and love the Lord Jesus—this is the question upon which all else hangs. There is always the temptation for the Christian, especially during evil times without as well as within, to place one's hope in the multiplication of effort, activity, and worry. But any and all good we might do can only proceed as our obedient response to God's grace. The foundation for our active life must always be that one "needful" thing: seeking to know the ways of the Lord and His will for our lives.

Secondly, St. Barnabas then goes on to note key virtues—habits of soul—by which we will be able to "hold the line" and keep our eyes faithfully on Jesus during evil days: "reverential fear and perseverance will sustain our faith, and we will find need of forbearance and self-restraint as well." There is a connection between virtues like forbearance (patience) and self-control on the one hand, and our ability to persevere in faith during difficult times in the journey. Through patience and self-control we are enabled to guard our hearts, holding on to the peace that Christ has given, and looking only to Him for help and fulfillment.

Third and finally, St. Barnabas suggests that, "Provided that we hold fast to these virtues and look to the Lord, then wisdom, understanding, knowledge and insight will make joyous company with them." If during difficult and evil times we seek to know the Lord and we guard our hearts so that our eyes do not stray from Him, what will be the result? St. Barnabas suggests that if we hold fast in this way, we will receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and insight. In other words, we will not only be enabled to endure evil times but be equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit to know when and how to meet them head on—to bring light to the darkness, to speak the truth, to show God's love to those neighbors He puts in our path.

Jesus' life and example make it clear that the Christian disciple will experience evil days along the journey. Sometimes this evil comes to us from without in the form of a culture that is inimical to our faith, or friends and family that do not understand the journeys we are on. Sometimes that evil comes to us from within in the form of doubts, temptations, worries, and anxieties about the path forward. St. Barnabas reminds us at all such times to look to our own souls, make sure we are right with God, seek to know His ways, and to guard His peace and love in our hearts. If we do so, then surely the Holy Spirit will guide and empower us to navigate every twist and turn of the journey ahead.

In Christ,

Jon Marc Grodi

Executive Director of the CHNetwork
Host of EWTN's *The Journey Home* Program

Joyful Journey Updates

From Denise H., former Baptist

"Great news to share: this Easter Vigil my 29-year-old daughter, a former Southern Baptist, joined the Church. Her dad and I converted in 2022, and I serve on the OCIA team. I asked her to come to the inquiry session. She came with no intention to join the Catholic Church, but to learn how to answer questions about why her parents are Catholic. We homeschooled and raised her a Protestant.

The Holy Spirit worked in her heart and mind, and it all came together for her. Now she is cantoring and singing in the choir!! An answer to prayer indeed!

It is a joy that we are all home in the fullness of the Church able to receive Christ in the Eucharist." ■

From Sandra D, former Baptist

"Glory to God—I'm finally home and all I've been looking for has been given to me! I discovered the Church in the Spring of 2019, coming from a Baptist background. After much discernment, studies, prayers and promptings, and even some most unusual events, I was confirmed on December 21, 2023 after an extended wait due to a necessary annulment. Even now, after every Mass I attend, I am in awe of it all! I even ask myself, 'Why isn't everyone running to Mass?! What a gift!' I walked out of Mass just the other day and was teary-eyed! I'm beyond thankful to be included in this fullness of our rich faith and I can never praise nor thank our Lord enough for what He has done for us all. I'm home, and there's truly no place like being home. Praise the Lord!" ■

Do you have a journey update to share? Submit it to info@chnetwork.org.

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on.
The night is dark, and I am far from home—
Lead Thou me on.
I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on...

ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN—FEAST DAY: OCTOBER 9



EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & radio, hosted by JonMarc Grodi, CHNetwork Executive Director

Monday, Oct 6

Michael Garcia

Former Oneness
Pentecostal Minister

Monday, Oct 13

**Heidi Hess
Saxton**

Former Evangelical

Monday, Oct 20

Shane Page

Former Methodist
Minister

Monday, Oct 27

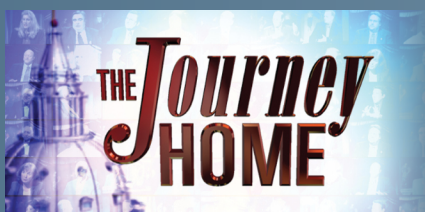
Susan Sucher

Former Pentecostal

Monday, Nov 3

Eben Emerson

Former Church of
Christ Minister



TELEVISION

Mon. 8PM ET—Encores: Tues. 1AM ET, Thurs. 2PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Sat. 6PM ET

RADIO

Mon. 8PM ET
Encores: Sat. 7AM ET, Sun. 1AM ET and 5PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Mon.–Fri. 1AM ET

Schedule is subject to change.

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



ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, *Doctor of the Church*

On July 31st of this year, staff and members of The Coming Home Network awoke to the exciting news that many of us had anticipated for some time: Pope Leo XIV formally approved the title Doctor of the Universal Church for St. John Henry Newman, with the official conferral date to be announced later. Thanks be to God!

Newman has been a towering figure in the more than three decade history of CHNetwork. The core of our mission has always been to assist Protestant clergy who are seeking a home in the Catholic Church; that was the situation of Newman himself, who spent the first half of his life as an Anglican, and after much prayer, study and discernment, felt the movement of the Holy Spirit on his heart to become a Catholic. Like so many of the clergy converts we work with, he faced bitter opposition and deep misunderstanding from people he once called friends; like them, he had to figure out how to understand his gifts and call in his new life as a Catholic. And in the process, he left us an extraordinary collection of letters, essays, homilies and poetry to help us better understand his journey.

Our work has taken many cues from the life and legacy of Newman; our Deep in History conferences and podcast were named for his famous statement that "to be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant." In our archive of more than 1700 conversion stories, some two hundred of them directly cite his influence. And just this year, at our first ever Clergy Convert Conference, Dr. Scott Hahn and the St. Paul Center presented our founder Marcus Grodi with the inaugural St. John Henry Newman Award.

So what, exactly, is a Doctor of the Church? This is a distinction that is reserved for canonized saints who are specially recognized for their intellectual prowess and extraordinary holiness, and who have made concrete and enduring contributions to the life and thought of the Church. With the addition of Newman, there are now 37 such Doctors, and they include many other great minds who come up often in the stories of the men and women we work with at CHNetwork. Some of the most prominent names among them include St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who, prior to Newman, was the most recent saint to be given the distinction of Doctor, having been named so by Pope Francis in 2022.

Among the interesting next steps is which title Pope Leo might give to Newman as Doctor. Not all Doctors of the Church have titles that go along with their names, but several do: St. Thomas Aquinas is known as the Angelic Doctor (*Doctor angelicus*), and St. John of the Cross is the Mystical Doctor (*Doctor mysticus*); meanwhile, St. Therese of Lisieux was referred to by Pope John Paul II as the Doctor of Love (*Doctor amoris*) and by Pope Francis as the Doctor of Synthesis (*Doctor synthesis*). Some possibilities for Newman, based on his body of work, could include Doctor of Conscience, Doctor of Development, or Doctor of Apologetics. It will be fascinating to see what title, if any, is chosen for him by Pope Leo.

As our founder, Marcus Grodi, once stated, "It would require reams of paper to enumerate all the ways that the writings and example of John Henry Cardinal Newman sparked, guided, and completed my personal journey into the Catholic Church, as well as the work of The Coming Home Network." Ken Hensley, our Director of Pastoral Care and a former Baptist pastor himself, has echoed that sentiment many times, remarking that "statements by John Henry Newman... rattled my Protestant bones and forced me for the first time to look seriously at the early Church." It is impossible to overstate the impact that St. John Henry Newman has had on our work as an apostolate, as well as on so many of our members, especially current and former Protestant clergy.

Newman was beatified only a decade and a half ago, on his native English soil in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI. Nine years later, in 2019, he was canonized in St. Peter's Square by Pope Francis. The Coming Home Network joins the universal Church in celebrating his recognition as Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIV here in 2025.

St. John Henry Newman, pray for us!

Prayer List

Clergy

- **For Tyler, a Pentecostal pastor** who recently stepped down from ministry as he feels drawn to the Catholic Church; that the Holy Spirit will bless him with peace as he seeks to lead his family home and discover God's plan for his future employment.
- **For Justin, a former Protestant pastor** who has become Catholic and is dealing with a great deal of fallout in his personal life; that the Lord will console and heal.
- **For Mike, a Protestant campus minister** for many years before becoming Catholic; that the Lord will bless him as he's had to change jobs a few times.
- **For Israel, an Anglican seminarian** who with his wife this past Easter came into full communion with the Catholic Church; that the Lord will bless them as they attempt to chart their future from here.
- **For Angel, a Lutheran pastor** who returned to the Catholic Church and continues to struggle with where he "fits" in the Church and with feeling that after so many years in ministry the Lord is finished with him; that the Holy Spirit will fill him with consolation and encouragement and hope for his future.
- **For Richard, a Presbyterian pastor** who recently resigned his ministry to enter the Catholic Church with his wife and children; that the Lord will bless them living in a new city with new jobs in Catholic education.
- **For Mathieu, a former Protestant seminarian** who has returned to the Church in which he was raised; that the Holy Spirit lead him as he seeks to lead his family home to the Church.
- **For Randy, a Protestant** with many years of successful ministry who began a deep dive on the Catholic Church and is now facing the difficult question of what to do; that the Holy Spirit will enlighten him and give him the courage he will need.
- **For Caleb, a young Presbyterian pastor** who left the ministry last year to

enter the Church with his wife and children; for God's blessing as he begins a new position as Director of Spiritual Formation at a large Catholic parish in his area.

- **For Daniel, a Protestant minister** raised by extremely anti-Catholic parents who has recently come to believe that "Bible only" Christianity cannot be true and finds himself on a path toward the Church, that the Holy Spirit will give him courage to follow His leading.
- **For Corbin, a young Protestant pastor** who has been exposed to the writings of the early Church and begun to struggle with how Catholic they seem to be; that God will give him much wisdom as he continues to pursue the truth for his ministry and family.
- **For Paul, a Baptist pastor** who recently stepped down from ministry to enter OCIA with his wife; that the Lord will bless him in his work as a chaplain and lead him and his wife home to the Church.

Laity

- **For Rebecca, a Seventh Day Adventist**, that she may find spiritual guidance for herself and her family, and that the Lord may grant good health for her grandson and provide a path home to the Church.
- **For Meg, a Lutheran**, that the Lord's wisdom may guide their discernment regarding a new job for her husband, a possible move for them, and her continued journey home to the Catholic Church.
- **For G.L., a Church of Christ member**, that she may experience an increase in her faith and for her children's salvation.
- **For Hannah, a non-denominational Protestant**, that the Holy Spirit would offer direction in her vocation following college, the courage to join OCIA this Fall, and the grace for her parents to accept this news well.
- **For Erin, a non-denominational Protestant**, that the Lord might grant healing and good health for her daughter and wisdom regarding a possible move.
- **For Nandi, a Pentecostal**, that God would bless her husband's spiritual journey, and bless them with a healthy and safe delivery of their baby.
- **For Ray, a Lutheran**, that the Holy Spirit would guide his journey to full-communion with the Catholic Church.
- **For Adam, a former United Methodist**, that, as he prays and studies, our Lord Jesus would guide him home to his Church.
- **For Paul, a member of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod**, that his OCIA journey would be one of growth and fulfillment.
- **For Erik, a Non-denominational Evangelical**, that he may find a mentor willing to assist him with his questions and concerns.
- **For Johnny, a former Agnostic**, that as he studies the traditions and teachings about God and Jesus he would be drawn to the holy sacraments.
- **For Isaac, a young Non-denominational Evangelical**, that his parents would become more open to his interest in the Catholic Faith.
- **For Charles, an Anglican**, that he may find answers to his questions in the apostolic authority of the Catholic Church.
- **For Lee, a member of the Church of England**, that our Lord would grant him the grace to resume his journey to the Catholic Church.
- **For Gerson, a Pentecostal**, that, as he studies the Church Fathers, he may enter the Church of which they are witnesses.
- **For Douglas, an Evangelical**, that the love of Jesus would draw him back Home to the Catholic Faith.
- **For Gary, an Eastern Orthodox Christian**, that he and his family may enter rejoicing into full-communion with the Successor of St. Peter.
- **For Charles, a Southern Baptist**, that he may soon receive a positive response to his petition for an annulment enabling him to enter the Church.

COMPASS

Become a COMPASS Donor, an ever-growing community of benefactors who give a monthly gift of \$10-\$100 (or more) to support the CHNetwork as we help to guide men and women who are coming home to the Catholic Church.

Please contact Ann at 740.450.1175 or via email ann@chnetwork.org if you have any questions.

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CHNetwork was founded to help men and women, clergy and laity, from every background imaginable, discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church and make the journey *home*.

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Jenny James

Compass Donor since August of 2019

I was born and raised in a Syro-Malabar Catholic family in the Chicago suburbs. My early years were rooted in the traditions of this Eastern rite of the Catholic Church—I attended CCD, was confirmed, led high school youth ministry, and made lifelong friends. My faith journey took a meaningful turn in middle school after reading *The Purpose Driven Life*, which prompted me to make my faith my own. I was the “good kid” who generally followed instructions, but around high school, I began to truly seek what it meant to be Catholic.

During college at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, I grew more involved in small groups—including Orthodox and Protestant communities—while still attending Mass. I started dating someone from a Pentecostal/Non-denominational background, which led to lots of questions about Catholicism that I couldn’t always answer. To resolve these theological differences, I began researching, praying, and meeting with priests and nuns on campus. My prayer was simple: I just wanted to be in the truth, wherever that led. That’s how I encountered the Coming Home Network.

I don’t remember exactly how I found CHNetwork, but I was fascinated by stories of Protestants—especially former pastors—who converted to Catholicism. CHNetwork and Catholic Answers became invaluable resources for apologetics, and I especially appreciated reading conversion stories from so many backgrounds.

Discovering others with similar faith questions and witnessing marriages across different faiths gave me comfort during my own journey, even when things didn’t work out in my relationship. After grad school, it was an easy decision to begin supporting CHNetwork financially. The help I received and the impact their work has made inspires me to give back and help others find the fullness of truth too. I hope you will join me in supporting CHNetwork’s mission! ■

Jenny James has been a member of our COMPASS monthly giving program since August of 2019. To join her in supporting our work with a one-time or monthly gift, visit us at chnetwork.org/compass

From Satanist to Saint

THE STORY OF BARTOLO LONGO

By Matt Swaim



Back in 1993, The Coming Home Network was founded to help people from all kinds of backgrounds find a home in the Catholic Church, but especially those who served in some capacity as non-Catholic clergy. St. John Henry Newman, recently declared a Doctor of the Church, is a prime example of a saint who typifies that experience; his journey from Anglican priesthood to the Catholic Church gives him a unique credibility among our clergy members who are looking for heavenly intercessors who can relate to their experience.

On the extreme opposite end of that spectrum, however, is another, far less conventional figure, who will be canonized soon. In February of this year, it was announced by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints that Bartolo Longo, a former Satanic priest, would be officially recognized as a saint. It was later announced that the canonization would take place October 19th of this year, with Pope Leo XIV presiding.

So how did a vehement enemy of Christ and His Church—a former Satanic priest—end up having an extraordinary conversion, and becoming known as the "Apostle of the Rosary?"

For Longo, the journey began in a devout family; his Catholic parents tried to instill the faith in him from childhood. However, after the death of his father when Bartolo was only 10, he decided he wanted to become a lawyer, and wandered far from his Catholic roots. This was the mid-1800's, when Italian nationalist forces saw the Catholic Church as an obstacle to efforts to unite the country under the *Risorgimento*. That, combined with a rising fad of interest in spiritualism and occult practices, had a seductive effect on Bartolo, especially during his time at the University of Naples.

Like many college students confronted with new ideas and disillusioned with their upbringing, Longo gravitated toward these occult practices, through seances and other spiritualist experimentation. Some of the experiences he had during this time solidified his belief in dark and supernatural forces, and he sought ordination as a Satanic priest.

In that role, he tried to argue Catholics away from their faith and into fortune telling, as well as much more unsavory pagan ritualistic practices. However, rather than finding freedom and power through these practices, Bartolo felt increasingly oppressed by them, undergoing nightmares, paranoia, depression, and eventually a mental breakdown that led him to the edge of suicide.

At the bottom of these horrific experiences, Bartolo seemed to hear the voice of his late father impressing upon his heart to return to God. He sought the help of a practicing Catholic friend, who introduced him to a Dominican priest, Alberto Radente. Fr. Radente was able to disciple Bartolo back to faith, and in the course of it, he saw devotion to Mary, especially through the Rosary, as a powerful antidote to the effects of his occult obsessions. They had pointed him away from Christ; Our Lady was helping to continually point him back toward Christ.

Bartolo eventually settled in Pompeii, and seeing that spiritualism had a strong grip on the popular imagination there, decided to found a Marian shrine to stand as a public witness against the superstitions and occult practices that were running rampant, even among otherwise practicing Catholics. Word spread, and people eventually flocked from all over Italy, Europe, and the world to visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Pompeii.

In addition to the Shrine, Bartolo devoted his life to providing for the needs of orphans and prisoners, especially in Pompeii. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1902, and again in 1903.

Longo died on October 5th, 1926. In the 1940's, his writings were reviewed, and after receiving approval by Vatican theologians, his cause for sainthood was formally opened. In 1980, he was beatified by Pope John Paul II, who also mentioned Longo in his 2002 Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*—the same letter in which the Holy Father introduced the five Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary. In that letter, John Paul II wrote that "Bartolo Longo promoted the Christocentric and contemplative heart of the Rosary." What a powerful statement for a pope to make about a man who had once promoted Satanism!

Bartolo Longo is certainly not the first example that comes to mind when considering the conversions of non-Catholic clergy to the Catholic Faith! But his story reminds us that no matter how far we are from God, He is always calling His children, however invisibly, to return to Him.

St. Bartolo Longo, pray for us!

...Journeys Home Continued...

Reformed, Anglican, and Lutheran theologians and historians, whereby Protestantism was a legitimate development of, heir to, and legatee of, historic Catholicism. It was a more advanced and theologically superior version of Christianity.

I vehemently tried to shoot down the idea of infallibility. This was, by far, my biggest objection to Catholicism: the infallibility of the Church and the pope (with a particular aversion to the Inquisition as well). I'd say, half tongue-in-cheek, "Okay, you guys can be the Church, or *a* Church, but you're not infallible." I thought that was totally out of the question: it just couldn't be—there were too many Catholic errors and self-contradictions throughout history, and so forth.

But one of my Catholic friends claimed that the Catholic Church had never contradicted itself in any of its dogmas. This, to me, was self-evidently incredible and *a priori* implausible, so I embarked immediately on a massive research project designed to debunk once and for all this far-fetched notion that any Christian body could even rationally claim infallibility, let alone actually possess it. I quickly found some of the most influential polemics against Catholic infallibility, such as a book by the Irish Anglican anti-Catholic George Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church*: a relentlessly wrong-headed and acidic work that has been refuted many times by Catholic apologists. Yet, even C.S. Lewis recommended it to his friends.

Using this severely biased source, I parroted Salmon's tired and poor arguments: for example, bringing up the supposedly heretical Pope Honorius. I produced two long treatises containing difficult problems of Catholic history and alleged contradictions (much like atheists do with the Bible), to provocatively challenge my Catholic friends at the group discussions.

I wasn't being objective; I was special pleading, starting with a preconceived notion and looking for only what fits in with it. What I was trying to do, and the methodology I used, was in retrospect ultimately an intellectually dishonest effort. I proceeded with my hostile research, cavalierly assuming beforehand that the early Church was much more Protestant than Catholic. I now know, as a Catholic apologist, that there are solid Catholic answers to all these so-called charges of heresy and massive Catholic doctrinal self-contradiction. I've produced them myself.

I was like two persons in one: I had great respect for Catholic moral teachings, but much less for (what was a caricature of) the doctrinal history of the Catholic Church. Yet when my friends talked about Mariology or the Eucharist, I listened with sincerely respectful wonder. Then, when we discussed infallibility and history, I was scornful and acted like an atheist who thinks he has demonstrated 384 contradictions in the Bible: almost all obviously fallacious when scrutinized by someone who understands the interpretation and exegesis of Scripture. I didn't have a clue as to how to properly interpret Church history.

A Paradigm Shift

My Catholic friend, John McAlpine, confronted with the mass of jaded, highly selective contra-Catholic historical

evidence I had compiled, and my relentless polemics about supposed Catholic errors and corruptions through the centuries (citing and parroting Salmon), was understandably exasperated with me. I was getting into some pretty technical things and was thoroughly obnoxious. He didn't have instant replies concerning Pope Honorius and all these alleged "difficulties" in history. So, as a way to counter my onslaught, he urged me to read St. John Henry Cardinal Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and gave me a paperback copy.

The timing, in God's providence, was perfect. I was ready to receive and be convinced by the arguments I was about to encounter, despite having fought so hard, almost ferociously, against infallibility. Cardinal Newman's brilliant reasoning utterly destroyed the whole conception that I had—this notion that the early Church was simple and Protestant, and had become corrupt—because he explained what it meant to be a consistent development as opposed to a corruption. A doctrine can grow, but remain the same in essence, just as an acorn grows into an oak tree. Understanding grows over time. I quickly realized that I couldn't refute his reasoning and the facts of Church history.

I had thought that the early Church was a bunch of on-fire "Jesus Freaks" meeting in caves. Certainly they didn't believe in the Catholic Eucharist, or any of that kind of "highfalutin' stuff." But that's really not what we find when we study early Church history. I didn't do this in 1990, but since then, I've read the Apostolic Fathers and learned that the early Church was very Catholic indeed.

It believed in the Bodily Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, regenerative baptism, apostolic succession, bishops, the communion of saints, the Mass—all the things, pretty much, that Catholics believe today, only in more primitive form. And we can't find anywhere the idea or practice of Scripture alone as the rule of faith. It's just not there. Even faith alone, or imputed, extrinsic, forensic justification, was well-nigh non-existent all through the patristic period, and in fact, all the way up to the time of the advent of Protestantism: even according to Protestant scholars Norman Geisler and Alister McGrath.

Newman's essay was probably the best thing I could have read at that time, regardless of whether I was going to be convinced or not. It provided the best shot that the Catholic Church was likely to give in defense of its doctrines that exhibited a marked growth throughout history, to the dismay of Protestants. Finally, I was now reading some sort of response to the research I had been doing for months, under the influence of thoroughly Protestant (and anti-Catholic) presuppositions. It was a revelation.

After consideration of Cardinal Newman's extensive comparisons of Protestant innovations and Catholic developments, it became quite clear to me that Protestantism in several ways (not all) represented a corruption of historical Christianity, rather than a progressive and consistent development, as I formerly believed; and my thinking underwent a paradigm shift of massive proportions.

Various Protestants had introduced radically new doctrines such as *sola fide*, *sola Scriptura*, sectarianism, private judgment, a non-hierarchical, merely democratic (or state) church, and symbolic baptism and Eucharist, which were sheer novelties, rather than reforms, supposedly hearkening back to the alleged state of affairs in the early Church. But they simply can't be found there. It's a losing battle.

Fr. John A. Hardon and the Final Stages

During my intense conversion year of 1990, I had the great privilege of meeting the late Servant of God Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J., the eminent Jesuit catechist and author, and of attending his informal catechetics classes at the University of Detroit. This gave me the opportunity and blessing to be able to learn personally from a scholarly, authoritative Catholic priest, who was a delightful and humble man as well. This was as good an introduction to living, breathing Catholicism as anyone could ever hope for, and I shall always be grateful for it.

It almost felt like being in the presence of Jesus, listening to him teach and taking in his extraordinary insight. I had the immense honor of knowing him. Encountering him proved to be a watershed event in my life and that of my family. He helped me to convert, received me into the Church, wrote the Foreword of my first book, *A Biblical Defense of Catholicism*, and also baptized my first two children.

I also knew by this time that I needed to more closely examine Protestantism's historical roots. I had previously read some material on Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, and considered him one of my biggest heroes. I passionately endorsed the standard textbook myth of Luther as the bold, righteous rebel against the darkness of Catholic tyranny and superstition added onto pristine early Christianity.

But—as with any controversial historical topic—it's necessary to read the other side in order to get a fuller, balanced, and more accurate picture. When I studied a large portion of the six-volume biography *Luther*, by the Jesuit historian Hartmann Grisar, my opinion of what is called the Protestant Reformation dramatically changed. Grisar showed how several foundational tenets of Protestantism that contradicted Catholicism were novel and unable to be traced back to the early Church.

I had formerly espoused the myth whereby Martin Luther came onto a scene where the Bible was forbidden and the Church was in darkness, and where he heroically brought back the Bible to the people in their own language. The Catholic Church—so we were told—had deliberately hid it, so that no one would see how Catholicism contained many false, unbiblical teachings. In actual fact, in the hundred years before Luther's time, there were fourteen versions of the Bible in German, *translated by Catholics*. This fact effectively debunks the myth, once it is known. But the problem is that so many people (including myself up to that time) don't know it.

Widespread literacy and mass printing of Bibles didn't happen until the advent of Johann Gutenberg's movable type printing press in the 1450s. Chained Bibles had to do with the scarcity of copies before the printing press made them widely

available at an affordable price. Libraries would chain Bibles in order for people to have access to them while preventing them from being stolen, since copies were so rare and valuable. It was the rough equivalent of today's special collections under lock and key in libraries.

My conversion, in summary (in terms of the persuasive ideas), was a combination of the cumulative effect of my change of mind on three issues: contraception, development of doctrine, and Catholic scholarly opinions on the origin of Protestantism, all pointing in the same direction. But ultimately, it's all due to God's grace. I happily fell victim to Chesterton's observation that one cannot be fair to Catholicism without starting to admire it and eventually becoming convinced of it.

I was received into the Church in February 1991, and my wife Judy returned as well. Immediately I started writing many treatises about the biblical rationale for distinctive Catholic doctrines, in order to explain my decision to my Protestant friends. Eventually, Catholic friends urged me to turn it into a book, and it evolved into *A Biblical Defense of Catholicism*, completed in May 1996 and officially published by Sophia Institute Press in June 2003.

In the meantime, my conversion story was published in Catholic Answers' *This Rock* in September 1993, and I also wrote articles that year for *The Catholic Answer*. I began my website, *Biblical Evidence for Catholicism*, in February 1997. The company I worked for (making deliveries) went out of business in December 2001, and (at long last!) I launched my full-time Catholic apologetics apostolate. God has graciously provided for our needs ever since, and as I defend Catholicism, my own faith is invariably strengthened. This is the great blessing of Catholic apologetics work. ■

Dave Armstrong was a nominal Methodist as a child, became an evangelical (Arminian) Protestant in 1977, and started writing apologetics and doing street witnessing in 1981, eventually entering into campus ministry for four years in the late 1980s. He was received into the Church in February 1991 and his conversion story was included in the bestseller, Surprised by Truth (edited by Patrick Madrid) in 1994. He has been a full-time Catholic apologist since 2001, with more than twenty "officially" published books (and 56 total), including the bestsellers, The Catholic Verses, A Biblical Defense of Catholicism, The One-Minute Apologist, and The New Catholic Answer Bible, and his recent volume from Catholic Answers Press: The Word Set in Stone: How Archaeology, Science, and History Back up the Bible (2023). His blog, Biblical Evidence for Catholicism, has been online since 1997 and contains over 5,000 articles. Dave also contributes to two YouTube channels, in partnership with Coming Home Network staff member Kenny Burchard, called Catholic Bible Highlights, and Lux Veritatis.

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“Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

ST. TERESA OF AVILA
Doctor of the Church

Feast Day: October 15



October 2025 Newsletter

