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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

### **Jesus Came to Get Me**

Beverly Whelton, Ph.D., M.S.N.

I grew up in the confusion of mental illness and abuse. This led me to look for peace and stability outside the home. I was drawn to the natural world. In my youth we lived in a semi-rural area where houses were few and open spaces grew trees, grasses and flowers. In the beauty of nature, I was drawn to the Creator. Returning home from six months in foster care, I was sent to Christian summer camp in the mountains of California. As a nine-year-old sitting around a campfire, I looked up into a canopy of stars. Captivated by the immensity of the night sky, I fell in love with the One who could make such beauty. This memory still fills me with awe. I knew in the center of my being that the One who made it all was far greater than anything I could imagine. Throughout the challenges, opportunities, and mistakes of my life, I never abandoned this connection to the designer of the heavens.



The faith of my extended family was Seventh-Day Adventist. I never knew who paid for me to attend that summer camp, but they also paid the tuition to send my older sister and me to the Adventist school, sixth grade through high school. Being

the only church I knew growing up, the Adventist church shaped my understanding of God and life. Belief in this creator God provided the stability I longed for. His Son, Jesus, and His prophet, Ellen G. White, taught us how to live. We honored the Old Testament Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, following guidelines inspired by Jewish laws. It wasn't just a day of rest; as a memorial

of Creation, it was a defining part of who we were.

Our faith wasn't just about worship. It extended to how we lived—what we ate, drank, and even how we dressed. We avoided pork and shellfish and many chose vegetarian diets. Alcohol, drugs and smoking were strictly forbidden, as our bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit. To preserve our minds, we were to avoid novels, plays, and movies that were not historical documentaries. These rules weren't arbitrary; they reflected a commitment to health and holiness, though they could feel heavy at times, especially for a young women trying to understand her place in the world.

As indicated above, the heart of Adventist life was the prophetic voice of Ellen G. White. Though she passed away decades before I was born, her

teachings remained central to our faith. Her words were held in almost equal reverence with Scripture. Her guidance shaped how we approached nearly every aspect of life and faith.

We were taught that the Catholic Church was the "Harlot of Babylon" and that the Pope was the Antichrist—a narrative reinforced so often that stepping inside a Catholic church felt unthinkable. It wasn't just a matter of doctrine; it was fear. I believed doing so would defile me, separating me from Jesus forever.

But the seeds of doubt were already there, quietly taking root. I couldn't have articulated it then, but I sensed that truth shouldn't contradict itself. And contradictions, small and large, began to show themselves. Why did some Adventist rules, like the dress code at my school, seem to shift with time while others were unchanging? I began to separate Adventist culture from doctrine, 'truths'.

Still, my faith in the God of the universe—the One who made the stars and the mountains—remained strong. It was that faith which would carry me forward, even as questions began to multiply. I couldn't have imagined where those questions would lead me. But I would soon discover that the quest for truth, once begun, is nearly impossible to ignore.

#### **Seeds of Doubt**

Growing up in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, I accepted its teachings as absolute truth. Our beliefs were central to our lives, reinforced by years of Adventist schooling. But as I moved through my teenage years and into college, small cracks began to form in what I had always assumed was a solid foundation.

High school and college were defining times for me. I attended Adventist schools from sixth grade through college, where every subject—even music and dress—was shaped by our church's teachings. By the time I graduated, those teachings were part of my identity, though not without challenges.

I remember one specific moment that felt trivial at the time but grew in significance later. In high school, a friend fought to wear pants to a school picnic—something strictly against the dress code. To everyone's surprise, she succeeded. By the time I left college, pants were generally accepted. It seemed like a small thing, but it planted a question in my mind: if these rules could change, what else might be subject to reinterpretation? Could something we viewed as unchangeable one day become negotiable? For me, a shifting standard didn't feel like a hallmark of truth.

The questions only grew more serious in college. I answered an altar call between my freshman and sophomore years, recommitting my life to Jesus. I meant every word of the hymn we sang, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me." Yet I struggled to reconcile this deeply personal commitment with certain Adventist doctrines. If Christ's sacrifice justified all Christians, why did some teachings imply there was no salvation outside the Adventist Church? How could both positions be true?

Another contradiction came to light when I thought about Christian holidays. The Adventist focus on the Sabbath often overshadowed celebrations like Christmas and Easter. If Christmas fell on a Saturday, it wasn't celebrated until the Sabbath was over. This left me wondering why the birth and resurrection of Christ—the most important events in Christianity—were being overshadowed by the sabbath memorial of creation.

These doubts simmered quietly during college to surface later. At the time, I threw myself into my nursing studies, focusing on building a future. Working as a nurse, I stopped attending church. I pulled away from Adventist culture but clung to my God of creation.

Years later, while working in a temporary position at a hospital that specialized in women's services, I encountered a young woman preparing for surgery. She asked me to pray with

### RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### SALT AND LIGHT

BERNADETTE CHOVELON

Élisabeth Leseur was a devout Catholic, and her husband Félix was a firmly decided atheist. Out of love for her



husband, Élisabeth spent her life offering her many sufferings for the sake of his conversion. This book shares the powerful story of the fruit of her faithful prayers for her husband.

#3263 **CLOSEOUT SALE \$10.77** (Limited stock available).

## COMPENDIUM OF THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Compiled by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger before he was elected Pope, and published in the first year of his



pontificate, this resource summarizes the content of the larger Catechism and arranges it into question and answer form. A handy resource for inquirers, new converts, and others seeking to learn about the Catholic Faith.

#3071 - \$16.95

### ORTHODOXY & CATHOLICISM

DAVE ARMSTRONG

The similarities between Orthodoxy and Catholicism are significant enough that for many discovering



Church history and liturgy, it can be a difficult decision to decide which tradition to join. Dave Armstrong explores the things that Catholicism and Orthodoxy hold in common, and how they differ.

#3236 CLOSE OUT SALE \$12.57 (Limited stock available).

her, and though I couldn't remember the Lord's Prayer in that moment, I prayed earnestly for her, ending with the 23rd Psalm. In that prayer, I sensed the Holy Spirit's presence.

The events that followed shook me. Unknown to me as I prayed for her, the surgery was a late-term abortion, and the baby was delivered stillborn. The young woman, who had sought the abortion to avoid the pain of labor, was devastated. Now she had endured labor anyway and faced the sorrow of losing her child.

I couldn't ignore what I had seen. Deep inside, I felt a conviction that I needed to reconcile with God. The next day, I resigned from my position and sought to work where abortions were not performed. The Seventh-Day Adventist Hospital employment person did not understand my concerns. Knowing that Catholics oppose abortion, I went to work at a Catholic hospital. This was a turning point for me, leading me to make selections based on principles. Now, I was an Adventist working in a Catholic hospital because I believed God valued each human life.

In my studies of Philosophy, I came to understand the Adventist doctrines of human creation and generation. God created Adam and Eve, and all other humans are their descendants. God's breath that made Adam and Eve living souls was transmitted through natural generation to all others. This was why the Adventist church taught that parents controlled the eternal destiny of the unborn to the age of reason when a child developed their own relationship to God. If the parents were resurrected at the end of time, then the child was saved. If not, the child was as if it had never existed.

Thomas Aquinas, however, taught the soul was immaterial, requiring an immaterial source—God. My aversion to abortion was a gift that later came to be understood. Every human being is conceived related to God and treasured by God.

My doubts about Adventist teachings grew. I began to see how much of my faith was shaped by the cultural context I had grown up in. As I questioned the contradictions, I didn't feel like I was turning away from God. Instead, I was searching for Him more earnestly than ever before. Attending the Adventist church, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was missing. My search for a church with the truth was just beginning, though I didn't know it yet. At that point, all I knew was that the answers I needed wouldn't be found by blindly accepting what I had always been taught.

#### **The Catholic Question**

At this time, my life felt like a patchwork quilt—pieces of certainty stitched together with threads of doubt. I had pursued a master's degree in nursing education and began teaching at Columbia Union College, an Adventist institution in Maryland. Nursing was both a profession and a way to live out my faith, caring for others as Christ had taught. But even as I found purpose in my work, questions about my faith lingered in the background.

Pursuing a master's degree in nursing led to my encounter with the Catholic University of America (CUA). Though it might seem strange for a Seventh-Day Adventist to study at a

Catholic institution, my interest was purely academic—or so I thought. I wanted to deepen my understanding of nursing, and at Georgetown Hospital I learned CUA would accept my undergraduate degrees in nursing (AD) and biology (BSN) to enroll in their master's program. I wasn't seeking anything spiritual, and I certainly wasn't looking to further challenge my Adventist beliefs. But God had other plans.

My first exposure to Catholicism at CUA came in subtle ways. I studied and worked on campus, often walking past the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. To me, it wasn't a church. It was a landmark, a beautiful place to study that had nothing to do with my religious life—or so I told myself.

When I started teaching nursing, my interest in research and science drew me deeper into questions about human nature, truth, and gaining knowledge. These weren't just academic curiosities; they were questions about life itself. I decided to pursue a doctoral program in philosophy. My application was rejected at University of Maryland, but It was accepted with a teaching stipend at CUA. That year the Dean of the School of Philosophy accepted two Master's prepared nurses to honor his wife, who was a nurse.

When I began studying philosophy, I didn't realize how much it would challenge and expand my understanding of faith. My introduction to thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas opened a new world to me. I had always believed that faith and reason were separate—faith was emotional and personal, while reason belonged to science. But Aquinas shattered that Kantian divide. Aquinas' arguments for the existence of God weren't just profound; they were rational. Faith and reason could coexist, even complement each other.

One moment during those early studies stands out vividly. My professor handed out an outline of Aquinas' five proofs for the existence of God. I was shocked. Here was a Catholic thinker from the 13th century offering logical, reasoned arguments for God's existence. It was a revelation: intelligent, faithful people had been writing and thinking about God long before the 16th century theologian of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther. This realization felt like a seismic shift. What else had I been missing?

As related above, my philosophical studies also challenged my Adventist understanding of the soul. I had been taught that humans were entirely material beings, with no immortal soul. At death, the body returned to dust, and the breath of life returned to God, leaving nothing behind. But Aquinas argued differently. Human intellect and reasoning pointed to an immaterial soul—a soul that didn't fall apart at death, but endured. This wasn't just a theory; it was a truth that resonated deeply within me. It explained why humans were said to be created in God's image, capable of eternal life.

These discoveries began to erode the walls I had built around my Adventist beliefs. The Catholic intellectual tradition, which I had dismissed as irrelevant—or even dangerous—was revealing truths I couldn't ignore. And yet, I resisted. The Catholic Church was still "the Harlot of Babylon" in my mind,



## Mary as an Icon of Theological Virtue



Dear Friends,

There is a profound sacramentality in the witness of the saints. God chooses, in the abundance of his Fatherly love, to raise up ordinary men and women to reveal and communicate this love to the world. Through their lives, words, and actions, the saints make visible the invisible. They show us not only God's reality but the fact that He is pursuing each and every one of us, that He desires to draw us into friendship with Him,

and that if we would only let Him do His work, He would similarly heal and transform us by grace. This is the lesson of the saints and the reason the Church recognizes and recommends them for devotion and emulation. It is not so much that they were extraordinary in their humanity—not all were necessarily smart, strong, disciplined, or stoic in the face of difficulty. But rather, they were extraordinary in their acceptance of friendship with God and in their surrender to His divine love and grace—which transformed and transfigured their humanity.

One of the ways in which we as Christians sum up this mysterious and transformative relationship with God that we see in the lives of the saints is: "Faith, Hope, and Charity (Love)" — what we now call the "theological virtues", as highlighted by St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (13:13). Like the human or "cardinal" virtues, the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love constitute good habits of the human soul—positive dispositions that allow us to choose what is right and good for us. However unlike the human virtues, which are in a sense "natural" to man according to his "human nature", the theological virtues are supernatural gifts of grace that make possible something which would be otherwise impossible: to enter into relationship with the almighty God. The theological virtues create within us the capacity for friendship and intimacy with the Holy Trinity.

The theological virtues enable human beings who are in time to enter into a relationship of love with God who is eternal. By the theological virtue of Faith, "we believe in God and believe all that He has said and revealed to us" (CCC 1814). In other words, Faith is a supernatural ability to recognize the good things God has done and said, and to make the definitive choice to entrust ourselves to Him. Hope, on the other hand, looks to the fulfillment of God's promises—that at the end of the journey, provided we persevere, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well" (Julian of Norwich). Faith, in a certain respect, remembers God's past deeds and chooses to trust Him, while Hope looks forward to the future fulfillment of God's promises, and chooses to endure. And the fruit of these virtues is Charity-love-our ability in the present moment to begin to "taste and see" the love of God for which we were created and to the total fulfillment of which we are destined in heaven. Through

Charity, we are able to receive, reciprocate, and share with others a love that is entirely beyond our natural human ability—a taste of eternity. Indeed, in heaven, Faith and Hope will pass away, for we will no longer see God only "through a mirror dimly, but face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). What will remain is Love.

In the brief glimpses we receive into the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we have a profound exemplar of the theological virtues and the fecundity of these gifts of grace when put into practice. Mary is esteemed by Catholics as the greatest of the Christian saints, blessed as she was by God's protection from the stain of original sin in her Immaculate Conception (which we celebrate on December 8th) in preparation for the divine invitation to conceive and bear Jesus. To this invitation she responded in Faith and Hope: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; May it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38) A few verses later in the account of the Visitation, St. Elizabeth affirms Mary's incredible Faith and Hope saying: "blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Luke 1:45) And then in Mary's glorious and prophetic canticle, the Magnificat, we see a marvelous interplay of Faith and Hope as Mary alternatively recalls the great things that the Lord has done in the past: "the almighty has done great things for me"-and proclaims her hope in God's future providence: "From this day all generations will call me blessed".

All throughout this anthem of Faith and Hope, throughout this whole scene of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth, and indeed throughout her whole life, what we encounter in the Blessed Virgin Mary is a human soul entirely transfigured with Divine Charity—a soul in whom the love of God was so palpable that St. John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth's womb at the mere sound of Mary's greeting. In the example of the blessed virgin Mary, God gives us the ultimate icon of the meaning and effect of the theological virtues: that by placing Faith in the God who has been faithful and Hope in the God who has promised us eternal life, we will—like Mary—receive the gift of the indwelling presence of God's love within us, here and now.

As we enter this Advent season of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, may we be renewed in Faith and Hope through the witness and example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that we too may conceive of the Divine Charity in our hearts.

In Christ,

Executive Director of the CHNetwork

Host of EWTN's The Journey Home Program

and the Pope was still the Antichrist. I couldn't imagine stepping inside a Catholic church, let alone considering its teachings as true.

Even so, the questions wouldn't go away. If the Holy Spirit could preserve the teachings of Ellen G. White, as Adventists believed, why wouldn't He have preserved Christ's teachings throughout history? That question led me to the Early Church Fathers. I had been taught that nothing of value existed between

'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, **Everlasting Father, Prince** of Peace." **ISAIAH 9:2,6** 

the New Testament and the writings of Martin Luther. But in addition to Aquinas, here was a treasure trove of wisdom from the earliest Christians—men who lived within a few generations of the Apostles. I realized that I had been deceived. These weren't the "Dark Ages" I had been warned about; they were centuries of vibrant faith and intellectual pursuit.

The Catholic Church was no longer just an abstract idea or an enemy to be avoided. It was becoming a possibility, even if I couldn't admit it to myself yet. My studies had opened a door, but I was still too afraid to walk through it. The Catholic question loomed larger than ever, and I wasn't ready to face it. When asked, I would answer, "I am no longer Adventist, but I cannot be Catholic."

### The Eucharist and the Turning Point

My search for truth took me in directions I never expected. By the time I began studying philosophy at the Catholic University of America, I had left the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and was in a kind of spiritual limbo. I wanted to know God and live according to His truth, but I couldn't bring myself to step inside a Catholic church, let alone consider becoming Catholic. My upbringing had made sure of that.

I poured myself into Scripture, hoping the answers I sought would become clear. One passage, in particular, left a mark I couldn't ignore: John 6. I had read the Bible countless times in my Adventist education, but somehow, this chapter had always slipped past me or was not addressed. Jesus' words were direct: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). He repeated this teaching so many times that I couldn't dismiss it as symbolic. If it were merely a metaphor, why did many of His disciples leave Him, saying, "This teaching is hard"? Jesus didn't call them back to clarify; He let them go, as though He meant every word.

These verses haunted me. What could it mean to eat His flesh and drink His blood? During Adventist communion

Continued on page 10

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

Monday, Dec 1 **Dr. Brian McGee** 

Former Wesleyan Orig. Air: 12/14/2020 Monday, Dec 8 **Gerard Figurelli** 

Former Baptist Pastor

Monday, Dec 15

**Chris Kellam** 

Former Evangelical Protestant

Monday, Dec 22

**Dr. Kenneth** Calvert

Former Lutheran Orig. Air: 12/21/2020 Monday, Dec 29

James Anderson

Former Episcopal

Orig. Air: 2/1/2021



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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 Monday, Jan 5

Vijaya Bodach

Former Methodist and Agnostic

## ST. JOHN DAMASCENE and the Use of Images in Prayer

Matt Swaim

One of the most common Protestant criticisms of Catholic devotional practice is the use of images as aids for prayer. And while many of our Protestant brothers and sisters are comfortable with showing children flannel graph depictions of Noah's Ark, or even having members of the congregation portray the events of Christ's life in an Easter play, the idea of icons or statues of Jesus, the saints, and especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, can evoke a visceral reaction and an accusation of idolatry. During the Protestant Reformation, there was a widespread iconoclastic movement, especially among Calvinists, to go into Catholic churches and smash statues and stained glass, believing that these visual depictions of the faith violated the Ten Commandments. This impulse was so strong that to this day, the list of the Ten Commandments often differs, depending on whether it's posted in a Protestant or Catholic context; in the Catholic tradition, the law against creating graven images is included within the First Commandment of having no other gods other than the Lord, whereas in the Protestant tradition, the reference to graven images is separated into its own commandment.

However, the historical controversy over visual depictions of the faith is not confined to the era of the Reformation. In fact, it goes back at least as far as the Iconoclast debate that was already raging by the time St. John Damascene was born in the latter part of the 7th century. There were many reasons that icons had fallen out of favor in certain parts of the Christian world, among them the rise of Islam, which rejected any visual representation of holy figures, including Mohammed. There were also Iconoclast Christians who, emboldened by the support of the Byzantine emperor Leo III, were actively tearing down and destroying icons.

Into this world was born St. John Damascene, also known as St. John of Damascus. Because his hometown of Damascus was at the crossroads of the Islamic and Christian worlds, he was well acquainted with the debates of the day, and understood both the desire of Muslims and Iconoclast Christians to defend God's honor by destroying images, and the historic Christian practice of honoring God by depicting His marvelous deeds through art.

For St. John's part, his defense of the depiction of Holy Images was rooted in the reality of the incarnation of Jesus himself:

"Previously God, who has neither a body nor a face, absolutely could not be represented by an image. But now that He has made himself visible in the flesh and has lived with men, I can make an image of what I have seen of God... and

contemplate the glory of the Lord, His face unveiled." (As quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 1159)

Depending on what strain of Protestantism one comes from, there can sometimes be a bit of culture shock when walking into a Catholic parish full of statues and stained glass; in recent decades there has been a movement within low church, seeker-friendly Protestantism to avoid the depiction even of bare crosses in their worship spaces, as a way to demonstrate sensitivity toward visitors who might not yet feel comfortable in an overtly Christian setting.

But St. John reminds us that even the very words we speak about God call to mind tangible images as a way of understanding His mystery by way of analogy:

"We see images in creation which remind us faintly of God, as when, for instance, we speak of the holy and adorable Trinity, imaged by the sun, or light, or burning rays, or by a running fountain, or a full river, or by the mind, speech, or the spirit within us, or by a rose tree, or a sprouting flower, or a sweet fragrance." (On Holy Images)

In fact, some of St. John Damascene's words to the iconoclasts sound as though they could be lifted right out of a debate today over the use of images in prayer:

"I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. I will not cease from honoring that matter which works for my salvation." (On Holy Images)

Ultimately, the Catholic way of looking at the world is to see it first as created good by God. Through the incarnation of Jesus, and His institution of the sacraments, visible and tangible things have been given a new dignity. By depicting Our Lord, His mother, and the holy men and women who have modeled the Faith through the centuries, we are reminded not just in our minds, but through our senses, what it means to follow Christ.

As St. John Damascene himself put it, "Because of [the Incarnation], I salute all remaining matter with reverence." (On Holy Images)

St. John Damascene, pray for us. (Feast Day: December 4)

# Prayer List

## Clergy

- For Angel, a Lutheran pastor who returned to the Catholic Church and continues to struggle with where he "fits" 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 Ross, a Methodist lay minister who has been attracted to the Church for some time, is learning all he can, and is looking forward to leaving his ministry to enter the Church when the Lord tells him the time is right; that the Holy Spirit would grant encouragement, clarity, and consolation on his journey.
- For Mathieu, a former Protestant seminarian who has returned to the Church in which he was raised; that the Holy Spirit would lead him as he seeks to lead his family home to the Church.
- For David, a Methodist pastor on his way toward the Church; that the Holy Spirit will lead him forward.
- For Hugo, a lay-minister who has been in the Evangelical world since he was 14 and is now beginning to doubt much of what he has been taught; that the Lord pour out His wisdom on him, granting understanding and peace on his journey.
- For Terry, a former Lutheran pastor who after decades in ministry has returned to the Catholic Church in which he was baptized at the age of 16; that the Lord will show him how can use the gifts God has given him in the Church.
- For Steve, a non-denominational minister who is drawn toward the Church but continues to struggle with a number of issues, including how to trust the leadership of the Church and how to understand the Old Covenant as fulfilled in the New; that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead him forward.
- For Caleb, the pastor of a thriving Baptist Church who had his world turned upside down as he began to study the early Church fathers and came to realize that the early Church was not a Baptist

Church; that the Lord's providence would make a way forward for him and the Holy Spirit would pour out wisdom and consolation as he wrestles with the road ahead.

- For Israel, a former Anglican seminarian who came into full communion with the Catholic Church with his wife this past Easter; that the Lord will bless them as they attempt to chart their future from here.
- 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 Calvin, a former Vineyard pastor who has entered full communion with the Catholic Church and is learning, with his family, how to live this new life; that the Lord will bless their faithfulness.
- 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 Tsebaot, a Pentecostal, tha

- For Tsebaot, a Pentecostal, that he may find the fullness of the truth that he is seeking in the Catholic Faith.
- For John, a Baptist, that our Lord Jesus would dispel all of the misinformation he has been taught about the Catholic Church.
- For Johannes, that the Holy Spirit would guide his journey home to the Catholic Church.
- For Rick, a Presbyterian, that God would bless and guide his OCIA journey.
- For a young Muslim, that he may be guided safely on his journey to the Sacrament of Baptism.
- For John, an Anglican, that he may find guidance to feast upon the meat of God's grace and truth.

- For Arya, that our Lord would guide him to the answers he needs to his many questions about the faith.
- For Juan, a former Atheist, that he may be granted the grace to embrace the one living and true God in Jesus Christ.
- For James, an Episcopalian, that the Holy Spirit would transform his disillusionment into the joy of the fullness of Catholic truth.
- For Edward, a Non-denominational Evangelical, that our Lord Jesus would guide him home to the Catholic Faith of his youth.
- For Jeffrey, a Southern Baptist, that he may be granted the grace to embrace the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
- For John, a Pentecostal, that he may find clarity and direction regarding God's will for his life in the Catholic Faith.
- For Joe, an Evangelical, that the Holy Spirit would inspire a continued conversion in his parents, provide protection for his brother as he goes through a very difficult trial, and guide Joe as he seeks new employment.
- For Madeline, a Presbyterian, that the wisdom of God would lead her decision making, to rightly discern and follow God's call in the present moment, and inspire her to move at a slower, healthy pace in exploring the Church and questions she has, while also blessing future interactions with family members about Catholicism and becoming Catholic.
- For Angie, a Baptist, that God would lead her to where shes belong and for and outpouring of grace to grow in her faith.
- For Elizabeth, a Pentecostal, that the Lord would guide her discernment on her journey of faith and bless her with family unity.
- For Sarah, a Baptist, that the Lord may pour out His blessing on her children's journey of faith, as well as an abundance of grace for her family and friends to accept their conversion.
- For Stephanie, a Baptist, that the Lord grants her strength both in body and spirit as she begins her journey into the church.



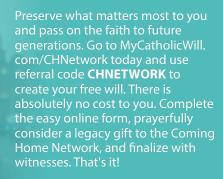
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CHNetwork was founded to help men and women, clergy and laity, from every background imaginable, discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church and make the journey *home*.

## YOUR GIFTS ARE A FRAGRANT OFFERING TO GOD

By Kenny Burchard



"I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." (Philippians 4:18)

These words have shaped my understanding of Christian generosity for over twenty years. As a Protestant pastor, I would receive the Sunday offering report and pause to pray, thanking God for our members' generosity and asking His blessing on them. I continue this weekly in my

role as Director of Development for the Coming Home Network.

I want to share how your generosity has borne fruit this year:

**More than 130 Protestant clergy contacted us in 2025** seeking assistance on their journey toward the Catholic Church. Each one was assigned a caseworker who continues to walk with them through theological questions, family concerns, and practical challenges. Your gifts make this care possible.

**In May, we hosted our first-ever** *Clergy Convert Conference* with the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology. Former pastors (and some still on the journey) gathered with Marcus & JonMarc Grodi along with Scott Hahn and John Bergsma, and our staff. Many attended only because your gifts provided assistance.

Your partnership sustains our online community of over 5,000 seekers. Your donations fund the creation and distribution of apologetics resources, books, and media, all given freely. Your offerings make possible EWTN's *The Journey Home* television program, our digital media, the CHNetwork newsletter, and our growing *Journeys Home* book series.

Your generosity enables us to bring Protestant clergy and spouses to retreats where some will later go on to enter full communion with the Catholic Church.

**Seven years ago, I was one of those pastors** who, along with my wife and son, was making my journey home. The Coming Home Network was there for us, supported by people we had never met who understood their gifts were acts of worship.

As this final newsletter of 2025 reaches you, I express deep gratitude for every gift you've shared. As you consider year-end giving, know that whatever you offer becomes, in Paul's words, "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."

We have received your gifts, and we thank God for you.

Kenny Burchard has served as Director of Development for the Coming Home Network since November 2021. He, his wife Mary Jo, and their son Victor entered full communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil in 2019.

# THE CHURCH FATHERS ON THE INCAPACION OF JESUS

The season of Advent and its culmination in the great feast of Christmas are an annual reminder to us of the reality that anchors us as Christians: that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." (John 1:14)

From the very beginnings of Christianity, the greatest minds in Church history have reflected on the incarnation; here's what some of them have had to say about the mystery we celebrate together as a Church here at the twilight of the year:

"The Lord took the form of a servant so that man might be turned to God. The Founder and Inhabitant of heaven dwelt upon earth so that man might rise from earth to heaven. The Word of the Father, by whom all time was created, was made flesh and was born in time for us. He, without whose divine permission no day completes its course, wished to have one day [set aside] for His human birth."

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Sermon 191

"Christ is born: glorify him. Christ comes from heaven: go out to meet him. Christ descends to earth: let us be raised on high. Let all the world sing to the Lord; let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad, for his sake who was first in heaven and then on earth. Christ is here in the flesh: let us exult with fear and joy—with fear, because of our sins; with joy, because of the hope that he brings us."

St. Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390), Oration 38

"This is our God, this is Christ, who, as the mediator of the two, puts on man that He may lead them to the Father. What man is, Christ was willing to be, that man also may be what Christ is."

St. Cyprian of Carthage (210-258), Treatise VI

"The Word became flesh by exaltation of the flesh, not by failure of the Godhead: which so tempered its power and goodness as to exalt our nature by taking it, and not to lose His own by imparting it... (a)nd to every one when he is re-born, the water of baptism is like the Virgin's womb; for the same Holy Spirit fills the font, Who filled the Virgin, that the sin, which that sacred conception overthrew, may be taken away by this mystical washing."

Pope St. Leo the Great (391-461), Sermon 24

"Glory to that Voice Which became Body, and to the Word of the High One Which became Flesh! Hear Him also, O ears, and see Him, O eyes, and feel Him, O hands, and eat Him, O mouth! You members and senses give praise unto Him, that came and quickened the whole body! Mary bare the silent Babe, while in Him were hidden all tongues! Joseph bare Him, and in Him was hidden a nature more ancient than anything that is old! The High One became as a little child, and in Him was hidden a treasure of wisdom sufficing for all... The sea when it bore Him was still and calmed, and how came the lap of Joseph to bear Him? The womb of hell conceived Him and was burst open, and how did the womb of Mary contain Him? The stone that was over the grave He broke open by His might, and how could Mary's arm contain Him? You came to a low estate, that You might raise all to life! Glory be unto You from all that are quickened by You! Who is able to speak of the Son of the Hidden One who came down and clothed Himself with a Body in the womb?" St. Ephrem the Syrian (306-373), On the Nativity, Hymn 3

"What shall I say! And how shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men... For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, to sanctify me; He gives me His Spirit, that He may save me."

St. John Chrysostom (347-407), Homily on the Nativity

services, we read Paul's words in Corinthians as purely It was as though I were dying, slipping into the unknown. In the symbolic. Yet here in John's Gospel, the message seemed unavoidably literal. Once again, I had to confront the possibility that I had been deceived or had misunderstood.

Around this time, I began studying Scripture with the Jehovah's Witnesses. They, too, rejected the Catholic interpretation of John 6, claiming that the Real Presence of Christ in communion (the Eucharist) was reserved only for the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation. But this explanation didn't satisfy me. The numbers didn't add up, and neither did the logic. Still, I was grateful for the Witnesses, because they would study in my home. These studies sharpened my focus on the passages that mattered most, like John 6:53 (communion) and Matthew 3:13-17 (baptism of Jesus with manifestation of the Holy Spirit).

One night, as Christmas approached, I found myself longing for something more. I wanted to be in a church, to worship Jesus in a way that felt real. In my stubbornness, I reasoned that I couldn't enter just any church until I was sure its teachings were true. But the desire was there, growing stronger with each passing year.

Christmas Eve of 1992 was a turning point. A friend suggested attending Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. I convinced myself it wasn't really a church—just a place I had studied and worked within for years. Arriving that night, I was overwhelmed by the sheer number of people. The Great Upper Church was packed, standing room only. Disheartened, I walked down the long hallway to the Crypt Church. It was quiet, almost empty, and seemed safer somehow.

I slipped into a pew near the back, trying to stay unnoticed. The stillness of the space was captivating. As I prayed, I felt a deep sense of my own unworthiness, bent over, and a bit sick at my stomach. When I looked up, my eyes fell on a crucifix over me. The body of Christ was over my head, and in that moment, I felt crushed by my sinfulness. Even though I had often asked God for forgiveness, I couldn't escape the overwhelming realization of my brokenness. Then, as clear as day, I heard an interior voice: "That is why I gave the Eucharist."

The awareness faded as quickly as it came, leaving me shaken. Looking around, I found the cross and Jesus in the middle of the room far away from where I was sitting. I didn't tell anyone—not my Adventist friends, not my Catholic classmates. The words lingered, quietly working their way into my heart. But I wasn't ready to act.

A few weeks later, as I lay in bed, I felt a sinking sensation.

stillness, Jesus on the cross spoke again: "Don't you want to be united to me?" My answer came immediately: "Yes, Lord, take my soul. If I die, please take my soul." I didn't die that night, but I made a promise to seek out my Catholic friend, Steve, who was a convert, and tell him everything.

The very next day, I saw Steve walking by the Shrine. Words tumbled out of me as I tried to explain what had happened. He listened patiently for a few minutes, then said, "Calm down, that's what Catholics believe." He suggested I either come now and join him and his wife for Mass or pick up a booklet on the sacraments. I wasn't ready to attend Mass, so I chose the booklet: The Seven Sacraments by Bishop Donald Wuerl. It was a revelation. The sacraments weren't just rituals; they were lifelines, connecting us to the grace of God. For the first time, I saw the Eucharist as nourishment for the soul, like manna for the Israelites in the desert.

Still, fear held me back. I couldn't imagine becoming Catholic. My upbringing had taught me to see the Church as the enemy, and old habits die hard. Even with the voice of Jesus and the truths I was discovering, fear wouldn't let me go. I was on the brink of something life-changing.

### A Leap of Faith

The truth had been unfolding before me for months, and I could no longer avoid it. By early 1993, I had come to accept that what I had been taught as a child about the Catholic Church was wrong. The Church wasn't the "Harlot of Babylon," and the Pope wasn't the Antichrist. But letting go of decades of fear and prejudice was easier said than done. I felt trapped between what I knew intellectually and what I feared emotionally.

After my experience in the Crypt Church on Christmas Eve, I continued to wrestle with the idea of becoming Catholic. It felt impossible. I couldn't reconcile the beliefs I had held for so long with the pull I now felt toward the Church. On one particularly frustrating day, I decided to seek out my Adventist friend, Jack, a former pastor, but a Catholic in his youth. Surely, he could help me sort through my doubts.

"Jack," I asked, "can you remind me what Adventists believe about the soul?" His answer startled me: "We can't really be sure. Human knowing is so uncertain. No matter what we decide, we could be wrong." His words hit me like a jolt. "Jack, that's Immanuel Kant!" I exclaimed. "I can't accept that." The idea that truth was so subjective, so fluid, was unbearable to me. I left our conversation knowing I couldn't go back to the

## READ, PRAY, **GIVE AWAY!**

Once you've finished reading this issue of the CHNewsletter, consider sharing it with someone who might enjoy it as well! (They can always sign up to receive their own at *chnetwork.org/join*)

uncertainty of my Adventist beliefs.

My Adventist upbringing had left no room for reverence toward Mary, let alone devotion. But my years of walking the halls of the Basilica gave me a feeling of warmth and trust towards Mary, the kind and faithful mother of Jesus. As I walked the halls of the Basilica, I found myself seeking her out in quiet moments, trying to understand her role in all of this. Early in February 1993, I stopped in front of an image of Mary, somewhat like the women from Revelation that I had been searching for, but a depiction of her surrounded by the nations. I hesitated before praying, unsure of what to say. Then, almost as if she interrupted my thoughts, I heard her words clearly: "Do what He says, do not be afraid, it will be all right."

Her words brought an unexpected peace, though I still hesitated. The idea of becoming Catholic felt overwhelming, but the pull toward the Church was undeniable. As I stood there in the Missionary Chapel, I realized I couldn't turn away any longer. If this was the path God was leading me to, I had to follow it.

On February 11, 1993, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, I made the decision to act. I contacted Fr. Kurt Pritzl, a Dominican priest and professor who had guided me during my early studies at CUA. I wrote out my experiences and shared my recent insights with him, the journey that had brought me to this point. I could not speak. After quietly reading for several minutes, he smiled and said, "So, you're not Catholic. Is that the problem? Well, this will be a beautiful spring."

I wasn't so sure. "I can't be Catholic," I told him firmly. But even as I said it, I felt the walls around my heart begin to crumble. The words "do not be afraid" echoed in my mind, a reassurance I desperately needed. My friend, the Dean's secretary, told me this was the Feast of Bernadette of Lourdes and I ought to take the Confirmation name of Bernadette. It took time to understand what these words meant, but that is what I did.

The two months that followed were filled with preparation and prayer. Each step brought me closer to the Church I had once feared. On April 11, 1993, at the Easter Vigil, I was received into the Catholic Church. I remember the joy of that night, the overwhelming sense of being in the home I had resisted for so long, while Jesus pursued me with relentless love. He didn't just wait for me to find Him—He came to get me.

Looking back, I am humbled by the words Jesus spoke to the apostle, Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (John 20:29). I had to see to believe. My journey had been full of fear and resistance, but His grace broke through every barrier. Becoming Catholic wasn't just a change in belief—it was the fulfillment of everything I had been searching for.

### Life in the Fullness of Faith

Becoming Catholic was not the end of my journey, but the start of a new chapter. After my reception into the Church at the Easter Vigil in 1993, I began to experience what it truly meant to live the truth in the fullness of faith. For the first time, I understood how the sacraments connected us to Christ in a

deeply personal way, nourishing our souls and strengthening us for the challenges of life.

The Eucharist became the center of my spiritual life. Jesus' words in John 6—words that had haunted me for so long—now bring comfort and joy. I see the Mass as a foretaste of heaven, a place where we are drawn into the very heart of God. It isn't just a symbolic ceremony; it is life itself.

For several years, I searched for a religious community that Jesus might be calling me to join. I stayed close to Dominican communities, drawn by their devotion to truth and their love of study. But none of them was quite right. On February 11, 1999—the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes—I made a private personal vow of proerty, chastity and obedience which allowed me to dedicate my life fully to Christ, living out my vocation in the world while remaining closely united to Him.

These vows have shaped my life in countless ways. They've given me a focus and clarity I didn't know I needed, enabling me to reflect Christ's love in all that I do. While I haven't been called to join a specific lay apostolate, I've found my place within the Church by embracing its universal mission to love and serve.

Looking back, I am filled with gratitude. Jesus didn't just open a door for me; He came and found me when I was lost. He pursued me with a love that wouldn't let go, breaking down the barriers of fear and misunderstanding I had carried for so long. Every step of my journey, from Adventist roots to Catholic conversion, has been a testament to His faithfulness.

Now, I strive to live as a witness to His love, embracing the beauty of His Church and sharing the joy of the faith I once feared. My story isn't extraordinary—it's simply a reflection of God's extraordinary patience and grace.

Beverly Whelton currently serves as Emeritus Associate Professor of Philosophy at Wheeling Jesuit University. As a troubled nine-year-old who fell in love with the creator of the sparkling night sky, she found solace and peace at school. Nonetheless, in seeking truth, she came to question her 'secure' foundations in the Seventh-Day Adventist church. After college, she separated from Adventism, but she never separated from the God of nature. Her heart yearned for truth and to worship this God of Truth. The joy of her story is that while blindly searching, Jesus came to find her and share the beauty of union with Him in His Real Presence in His universal Church. Today, Beverly rejoices in teaching the truth of the beauty and dignity of God's creation, especially His presence in human life, the beings created to love Him. She is the co-author of two books, Humanity at the Heart of Practice: a Study of Ethics for Health-Care Students and Practitioners and A Study of Ethics for All Disciplines with Foundations in Humanity. She was a guest on The Journey Home in May 2005.

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