



January 2026 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



To Heal the Division

Michelle Paine

"I tell you these things because this is how we return thanks to God, that after being corrected, and having come to an awareness of God, that we glorify and bear witness to his wonderful works in the presence of every nation under heaven."
(The Confession of St. Patrick)

I grew up in Wheaton, IL (known to some at that time as “the Evangelical Vatican”) in the Orthodox Presbyterian denomination, a conservative offshoot of one of the larger, national Presbyterian denominations. My parents have devoted their lives to serving God and teaching students to love God by learning about his creation. As a child, I was always heavily involved in youth group and mission trips. I made my “decision for Jesus” at an evangelistic youth rally in our town the year our church split. I had always known about Jesus—but I made the choice out of knowledge that choice was necessary, that an active decision on my part was necessary to become a Christian, and I had not yet done so. Later that year, I was baptized and became a “member” of our congregation.



A year later, when I was 13 or 14, our congregation split. Although I was a young teen, it seemed to me that both interpretations of the Scripture passages relating to the church split had valid points. I remember thinking that there was no real way of knowing for certain what the correct interpretation was, and that we had all just chosen the one we liked the best. This experience

primed me to be more open to the unity I saw later on, when I experienced Catholicism in Italy.

I didn’t have a lot of encounters with Catholicism at this point in my life, but my grandfather was Catholic, so I knew that Catholics ate fish on Friday and went to confession. However, that was about all I knew, since my mom had grown up going to my grandmother’s Methodist church.

Upon graduating from high school, I decided to attend Gordon College, a Non-denominational, yet almost entirely Protestant Christian liberal arts

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...Journeys Home Continued...

institution, in Massachusetts. While I was there, my desire to be a disciple and servant of Jesus Christ deepened. Some friends took me to visit their Episcopal church during my freshman year. I visited a number of churches that first year of college and felt ambivalent about most of them. But I wanted to return to the Episcopal church: I wanted to kneel to pray and to receive communion, to have my physical actions mirror the attitude of my heart—I wanted to feel the sting of real wine (instead of grape juice!) on my tongue.

For a year or two, I alternated between attending an Episcopal service and a Vineyard service. In both places I found a physicality of worship which I appreciated. I found in both places a diversity of ways in which God revealed himself. By the end of my sophomore year, I was a regular attendant at an Episcopal church near the Gordon campus.

Encounter with St. Peter

My third year of university, I embraced the opportunity to study in Italy: fall semester of 1997 in Florence, and the spring semester of 1998 in Orvieto, Umbria. I wanted to study art and art history abroad, and in Italy I thought I could find the heart of it all: Ancient Greek and Roman art, Medieval art, Renaissance art. Whatever direction my historical interests might take me, I could find art in its original context. I wanted the core of the Western art tradition. I did not realize at the time that I would find it in Catholicism.

The first few days of that first semester in Italy were a whirlwind tour of the great sites: Pompeii, Rome, Assisi. In those very first days in Rome, we visited St. Peter's Basilica. Not even the gothic cathedrals of France and England had prepared me for the size of St. Peter's. Immediately, when I saw the grandeur and scale of the Basilica, I saw the truth of the Gospel verse: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). Whether or not I believed that St. Peter was buried there, whether or not I acknowledged the Catholic

Church—the fact is that an entire civilization, the faith of billions of people, was centered in this one building, over one rock: St. Peter. This was my first introduction to the power of Catholic metaphor. Peter was both literally the rock upon which the Church was built, but also figuratively the center of the organization through the papacy.

I felt the holiness of the place. In each chapel, I wanted to stop and pray. At the same time, was it possible for someone to discern the truth of the love of God behind all this ostentatiousness? I wrote in my journal:

In rejecting Catholicism and the use of images in the church, we Protestants rejected a rich resource and tradition of worshipping God. We have stifled art in the church because of our fear of idolatry, and in doing so, we have repressed a beautiful way of worshipping God. At Evangelical colleges like Gordon, we talk about "Christian art" or "using art for the glory of God." What is it, and how do you do it? Go to the Vatican. The Catholics have it all figured out. There was room upon room of modern religious art at the Vatican—stuff you don't see in most art museums, stuff I didn't know was being done because we have divorced ourselves so completely from the Catholic tradition.

It was my first sense that perhaps something had been lost along the way, that there might be a need to "return" to a tradition from which I never knew I came.

Upon settling into the semester in Florence with my new secular college student friends, I felt the emptiness of European secular society, full of darkness, drugs, superficiality, and hollow good times. There was also the literal emptiness of the Masses I attended, sparsely attended by a few elderly people in these massive spaces created for throngs of worshipers. The Catholic Church I saw was dying, full of tired old women led by bored old men living religious traditions empty of spirituality. It made

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

MARCUS GRODI

Many Christians today believe that all that is necessary for salvation is an individual's faith in Jesus. But is this biblically, theologically, and historically sound? CHNetwork founder Marcus Grodi argues, from the perspective of a biblical hermeneutic of continuity, that salvation has always involved more than this simplistic expression of modern individualism.

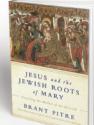


2 #3141 - \$6.95

JESUS AND THE JEWISH ROOTS OF MARY

DR. BRANT PITRE

Dr. Brant Pitre takes readers step-by-step from the Garden of Eden to the Book of Revelation to reveal how deeply biblical Catholic beliefs about Mary really are. Dr. Pitre uses the Old Testament and Ancient Judaism to unlock how the Bible itself teaches that Mary is in fact the new Eve, the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, and the new Ark of the Covenant.



#3250 - \$24.00

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SAVED MY MARRIAGE

DR. DAVID ANDERS

With the Church's teachings and the writings of the saints as his guide, Dr. David Anders shares some of the resources that helped him resolve some of the problems his marriage was facing. He also offers practical, time-tested ways to live in peace despite an unhappy marriage, the value of suffering, and ways to overcome reluctance to forgive grave offenses.



#3245 - \$17.95

me angry, and I distrusted the institution that was clinging to outdated tradition while ignoring the people who were spiritually needy and falling apart all around it.

In my classes, I worked hard to understand the Renaissance and Medieval images. My knowledge of the Bible greatly aided my understanding of these mostly religious art works, but the beautiful and profound images were detached from my 20th century life. They belonged to a time and place far from my own and they did not speak to my heart immediately.

Encounter With Mary

After a semester in Florence, I spent two months traveling the European continent before coming to Orvieto in the spring of 1998, where I was to study as part of the the inaugural semester of the Gordon College-in-Italy program. Our group was to be hosted by the Sisters of the Company of Mary Our Lady. It was an adventure for both the community of sisters (who had never hosted any group for four months, let alone American college students) and for Gordon College. I began to have conversations with Sister Giovanna, the Mother Superior, on a regular basis. She told me about their order, The Company of Mary, the history of the convent, and we talked about faith.

After being in Orvieto for a month or so, I met a woman in the local library who invited me to evening vespers at a nearby convent of the Order of St. Clare. The cloistered nuns there gather six times a day to pray, and are separated from the world by an iron grate. "There is a peace there that is not of this world," my new friend told me.

As I got to know this family better, I found that they had recently experienced profound conversions and were beginning to truly live the faith in which they had been brought up. They were members of a charismatic prayer group, and I asked to go along with them to one of their meetings. I had never experienced prayer in this way before—singing together improvisationally, then falling silent as one person's prophetic song without words floats above the rest; or the clatter of someone (or several someones) speaking in tongues that drowns out the music of the guitar, and then suddenly all ends with a Scripture passage which God sends to the gathering. Here was the convergence of the two worship experiences I had been drawn to in college: the freedom of the Holy Spirit guarded by the constraints of church tradition and the liturgy.

I was suspicious, cautious of this new way of worship and the emotional power in the room, but I was fascinated. I could not doubt the love in the eyes and in the lives of my new friends—something here had to be real. I went to a charismatic Mass with them, and I saw that the "dead" traditions of the Catholic Mass I had experienced in Florence could also be made new with guitars, with the passion of youth, and with the love of Jesus. He was present here with a force I had never seen before in a worship gathering.

Somehow, in my mind, in what I had been taught, there had always been limits to what God could choose to do. Did the Holy Spirit move now the way it had in the early Church? It had been a matter of debate. Here those limits began to disappear in the vastness of God's love.

In Orvieto, I saw unity in diversity in a way I never dreamed was possible. Worship with the Poor Clares was a far cry from praying with the charismatic group with their bongos and guitars, but they were one Church, and my friends prayed in both modes, seeing no contradiction, because they shared the love of one Jesus and His one Church.

On Sunday mornings, while we were studying in Orvieto, some of the college students from our Evangelical Christian college group went to Mass. The closest Protestant church was in Rome, so instead, we attended a church which was, at that time, 994 years old. The altar was even older, dating from the 9th Century. We were worshipping just as they had done for years, decades, centuries, for more than a millennium in this same spot. There were only 30 to 40 people in attendance, usually, so we augmented the congregation considerably.

That year in Orvieto, I heard for the first time that one could come to know God most fully through communion by uniting with him physically in the Eucharist. In my Protestant upbringing, communion was a symbol, perhaps even contained a "presence" of God, but the "union" part of communion had never been mentioned. I began to see the immense possibilities of individual and corporate redemption through the love of Jesus Christ dispensed in the Eucharist.

Studying paintings in the context for which they were created, as altarpieces rather than museum pieces, I found new layers and depth I had not seen in viewing art in books. Traveling around Italy as a student, I encountered a huge quantity of artworks depicting the Virgin Mary, and I began to wonder about her. Why was she the central character in so many masterworks? Why was she, and not Jesus, so often above the altar? The charismatic group here was called the Community of Mary (Comunità Maria), and I was a guest of the Company of Mary. In the spirituality of these two groups and in the art which surrounded me, I began to see the presence of the Mother of God, to whom I had never given a great deal of thought. Through several Italian friends with a strong Marian devotion, I began to understand her place in salvation history, how the Annunciation is the moment of Incarnation, and how the Incarnation—God coming to earth—happens each day in the Eucharist. This is why the Annunciation is the image of choice above the altar: it focuses on the Incarnation. The focus is Jesus, not Mary.

These narratives were deep and complex, telling a story of a communal worldview, connecting it to what had come before, and by implication, what could and will come later. The physical and metaphorical complexity of such works as the Maitani bas-reliefs on the Orvieto Cathedral, or the Maestà altarpiece by Duccio in Siena, pointed to a faith that was more full and multi-faceted than I had previously encountered. These artworks celebrated a humanity that was flesh as well as spirit, story as well as doctrine.

The Maitani reliefs are a visual narrative of salvation history carved in marble on the façade of the cathedral in Orvieto, where I lived and later worked for the study abroad program. There are four panels: Creation, Prophecies of Christ,



C. S. Lewis' Advice to Those on the Journey

"And above all you must be asking which door is the true one."



Dear Friends,

The quote above comes from the last few paragraphs of the preface to *Mere Christianity*, Lewis' famous apologetics for the moral law, the existence of God, and the basic Christian gospel. In the preface, Lewis, an Anglican, begins by answering potential objections from fellow Christians, in particular the concern that he is dismissing the problem of "Which Church?" or that he

is setting up "mere Christianity" itself as an alternative, self-sufficient theology. In response, Lewis explains:

I hope no reader will suppose that "mere" Christianity is here put forward as an alternative to the creeds of the existing communions—as if a man could adopt it in preference to Congregationalism or Greek Orthodoxy or anything else. It is more like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms. If I can bring anyone into that hall I shall have done what I attempted. But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals. The hall is a place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in.

Lewis' goal in *Mere Christianity* was to bring the non-believer to faith in Jesus Christ, and as so many conversion stories attest, he was quite successful in doing just that. But as Lewis himself insists, this "mere Christianity" is not a "room" but a "hallway", and "which [Church] is the true one" must remain a key question for discernment and ultimately for decision.

Lewis goes on to give five pieces of advice worth reflecting upon for every Christian journeyer:

1. Be Asking Which Door is True—First, we must be seeking what is *true* and distinguishing this from our mere preferences. Lewis continues from the passage earlier:

[Y]ou must be asking which door is the true one; not which pleases you best by its paint and paneling. In plain language, the question should never be: "Do I like that kind of service?" but "Are these doctrines true: Is holiness here? Does my conscience move me towards this?"

We're not merely looking for a door that suits us, whether because it matches our current theological conclusions, liturgical or aesthetic preferences, or even, necessarily, because we get along with or find particularly impressive the people (currently) occupying the room. Our guiding question should be: "which church is true?"

We might add an additional clarifying emphasis to Lewis' advice here that in looking for the Church that is *true*, part of what

we mean is that we are looking for the Church that has *true apostolic authority*—authority to discern, to guard, and to teach the deposit of faith. If this search for truth remains purely a matter of individual interpretation, no "mere Christian" would ever be able to fully and finally resolve all of the potential theological questions. The crucial question is: which church can I trust to teach with authority? To which church did Christ send the Holy Spirit to guide it into all truth? (John 16:13)

2. Examine Your Motivations—Secondly, Lewis drives the point home further in challenging us to look inward and consider our motivations in relationship to the truth-question itself:

"Is my reluctance to knock at this door due to my pride, or my mere taste, or my personal dislike of this particular door-keeper?"

As one considers the objective question of "What is true?", one must be wary of the subjective question of "Why do *I** believe this or that?" To extend Lewis' analogy more generally: every one of us has doors we want to be the right ones and doors we are afraid to open. Many people (and this may have been true for Lewis himself) carry around with them a lot of baggage and prejudice toward the Catholic Church as a result of their upbringing and experiences. Part of the journey is recognizing the fears and desires that influence us so that we can be more open to receiving and embracing the truth in its fullness.

3. Trust in God's Timing—While we believe that if we sincerely seek the truth that God will open the door to our knocking, sometimes His timing is hard to understand. Lewis writes:

It is true that some people may find they have to wait in the hall for a considerable time, while others feel certain almost at once which door they must knock at. I do not know why there is this difference, but I am sure God keeps no one waiting unless He sees that it is good for him to wait. When you do get into your room you will find that the long wait has done you some kind of good which you would not have had otherwise.

Why does God seem to give one person clarity while another remains searching for a long time? There is a mystery of grace here. Lewis reminds us that, in His providence, God is working all things for good (Romans 8:28) even if we can't yet see how.

4. Walk by the Light You've Been Given—And when the answers are slow to come, or when there are knots that take time to untangle, Lewis reminds us to:

[K]eep on praying for light: and, of course, even in the hall, you must begin trying to obey the rules which are common to the whole house.

Whether the journey takes two weeks or 10 years, we must

remain faithful every step of the way, living according to the light we have been given. Every Christian is called to prayer, conversion of heart, and to carry out the duties and opportunities of their state in life. In remaining faithful in these little things, we can trust that God will give more light when He is ready.

5. Pray for Those Who Choose Differently—On a final ecumenical note, Lewis reminds us to be kind to fellow journeyers:

When you have reached your own room, be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still in the hall. If they are wrong they need your prayers all the more.

Our goal at the Coming Home Network has never been to stand in judgement or to “push, pull, or prod” fellow Christians into the

Catholic Church—that’s not how conversion works! Rather, our mission has been to stand beside pastors and laypeople as they explore Catholicism; to share the truth and beauty we’ve found in the Catholic Church and to pray for, assist, and encourage them on the journey. With Lewis, we encourage fellow Christians to keep asking which door is the true one, as we persevere together in prayer and fidelity to Jesus.

In Christ,



JonMarc Grodi

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

Joyful Journey Updates

Marcia T., former Non-Denominational Evangelical

On the first anniversary of my confirmation, it's hard to believe it has been a whole year since I came into full communion with the Catholic Church. This last year has begun to shift my understanding of what it means to walk with God from black and white to color: learning more and living life in the sacramental economy is like a treasure trove of “aha!” moments! I feel like I've reached the saddle of a mountain, able to look back and see the difficult trail I've

already navigated right in the middle of a beautiful view, and ahead to more trail and more beauty as I continue upwards. Like C.S. Lewis has Aslan saying in The Last Battle, “Further up and further in!”

I'm incredibly grateful for your willingness to pray and come alongside me last year, amid so much drama. Your wisdom and willingness to listen to my story made a big difference for the series of decisions I needed to make then. Such a juxtaposition of joy and sadness...and I would do it all again in a heartbeat. Thank you—so much. Blessings to you today. ■

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

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

Monday, Jan 5

Ken Oliver-Mendez

Former Presbyterian

Monday, Jan 12

Jeff Hutson

Former Pentecostal

Monday, Jan 19

Jenn Wood

Former Lutheran

Monday, Jan 26

Rebekah Cohen Morris

Former Evangelical Protestant

Monday, Feb 2

Vijaya Bodach

Former Methodist and Agnostic

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



BLESSED VIRGIN MARY Mother of God

Painting by Michelle Paine

Painting by Michelle Paine



While much of the world recognizes January 1st as New Year's Day, on the Catholic liturgical calendar, this date marks one of the great Marian feasts of the Church: the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

This title can be found very early in Church history, but was dogmatically defined at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. And like most Catholic teachings on Mary, at its core, "Mother of God" is a defense of what the Church believes about Jesus.

In the early 5th century, Nestorius, the Archbishop of Constantinople, had been teaching a division between the humanity and divinity of Jesus, arguing that rather than being one person with two natures (human and divine), in Christ there instead existed two persons, a human one and a divine one, dwelling together in a close moral union. Therefore, it was inappropriate, in the thinking of Nestorius, that Mary should be called *Theotokos* (God-bearer), but rather, should be referred to as *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer).

In response to this, the Council affirmed that Jesus was not two persons, but one person with two natures. To deny this would be to insist that Jesus was not eternally divine, confuse the reality of the incarnation, and even undermine the mystery of the cross.

As the Council's definition put it: "**(W)e confess the holy virgin to be the mother of God because (from her) God the Word took flesh and became man, and from his very conception united to Himself the temple He took from her.**"

In these days following Christmas, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, reminds us that Jesus, born of the Virgin, is no mere man with a transitional connection to divinity, but fully human and fully divine, and He has made His dwelling among us. ■



Prayer List

Clergy

■ **For Kelvin, a Baptist pastor** who has been testing the waters of the Tiber for some years and has finally decided, at least intellectually, to swim over to Rome; that the Holy Spirit would continue leading in his life.

■ **For Austin, an Evangelical pastor** who has been drawn to the Catholic Church for a long time and who has recently become convinced that his time as a Protestant minister is nearing an end; that the Lord will bless him as he is currently attempting to find new ways to support his family.

■ **For Scott, an Anglican priest** who at the end of 2024 entered the Church with his wife; that the Lord will help him to find God's calling for him as a Catholic.

■ **For John, a Baptist pastor** who finds himself powerfully drawn toward the Catholic Church, but faces serious difficulties that would make it very hard for him to leave his ministry at this time; that the Lord would provide a path forward and consolation along his journey.

■ **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 Aaron, a Non-denominational pastor** who has entered OCIA and is asking for prayers; that the Lord continue leading as he works to bring his family into the Catholic Church.

■ **For Joel, a Presbyterian pastor** who recently resigned his ministry to enter the Catholic Church with his family and has already found a ministry position within the Church; that the Holy Spirit will bring comfort to a difficult situation and bless him in his new work teaching in a Catholic context.

■ **For Joseph, who after many years as a pastor in various Protestant denominations** has begun to explore Catholic teaching and has now entered OCIA; that the Lord will encourage him as he attempts to communicate what he is learning to his family, some of whom are extremely anti-Catholic.

■ **For Toby, a Baptist pastor** who two years ago began a deep study of the early Church and the case for Catholicism; that the Lord will lead him in his studies and eventually 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 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 Karl, a Mennonite missionary** who is learning, praying, and finding himself drawn to the Catholic Church; that the Lord will help him as he faces many difficulties.

■ **For Joshua, a Baptist pastor** who was raised Catholic and knows now that he must return to the Catholic Church, but who loves his current ministry and has no idea how and when to make a move back; that the Holy Spirit will give him the wisdom and courage needed.

■ **For Elijah**, that, as he delves ever more deeply into the Catholic Faith, the Holy Spirit would guide him to the altar of our Lord Jesus.

■ **For Nir, a Jewish brother**, that the Holy Spirit would call him to full-communion in the Church of his Messiah.

■ **For Gavin, a Methodist**, that after many years attending Mass, our Lord would motivate him to finally swim the Tiber.

■ **For William, a Southern Baptist**, that Jesus would clear away the stumbling block he perceives in the communion of the saints.

■ **For Cathleen, a Non-denominational Protestant**, that the Lord may guard the spiritual wellbeing of my children and grant traveling mercies for an upcoming trip.

■ **For Bonnie, an Evangelical Protestant**, that the Holy Spirit may continue to guide her journey and provide the grace for promptness in her coming home to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Abbey, an Evangelical Protestant**, that she may find fellowship at her new parish, and that her friends may be respectful of her journey.

■ **For Mia, a Methodist**, that the Lord would bless her with good health and perseverance as she continues on her journey into the Church.

■ **For Angie, a Baptist**, that she may find a home in the Church as she continues her journey in OCIA.

■ **For Amarah, an Evangelical Protestant**, that the Lord may grant her continued grace as she goes through OCIA, and wisdom and perseverance in her studies in school.

■ **For Dalima, a Muslim**, that she may find the grace to fully open her heart to the Catholic Faith and accept Jesus.

■ **For Julie, a Methodist**, that the Lord, in His providence, would help her to find a job based in the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Marlyn, a Methodist**, that she may find transportation to Mass and OCIA.

■ **For Carrie, a Non-denominational Protestant**, that the Lord may grant her the grace to overcome stress and spiritual battles as she seeks to journey home to the Church.

Laity

■ **For Tonio, a former Episcopalian**, that as he deepens his faith in Christ, our Lord would give him a deep hunger for the Holy Eucharist.

■ **For Vincent, an Anglican**, that in wrestling between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches, the Holy Spirit would give him clarity.

■ **For John, a Non-denominational Evangelical**, that God would introduce him to faithful Catholics who will relieve the loneliness and isolation of his journey.

■ **For Dylan, a Lutheran**, that our Lord Jesus would grant him the grace to clear away all the misconceptions he was taught about the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Tim, a Non-denominational Evangelical**, that our Lord would give him a deeper understanding of what it means to be Catholic.

■ **For Alexey**, that his prayers and studies would lead him home to the Catholic Church.



Introducing a new avenue for you to partner in mission with the Coming Home Network!



**PROTECT YOUR FAMILY & HONOR YOUR FAITH WITH
MyCatholicWill**

MyCatholicWill.com/CHNetwork

Preserve what matters most to you and pass on the faith to future generations. Go to MyCatholicWill.com/CHNetwork today and use referral code **CHNETWORK** to create your free will. There is absolutely no cost to you. Complete the easy online form, prayerfully consider a legacy gift to the Coming Home Network, and finalize with witnesses. That's it!

Together, let's build this legacy and help more people come HOME to the fullness of Christ in the Catholic Church for generations to come.

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YOUR LEGACY CAN KEEP OUR MISSION MOVING LONG INTO THE FUTURE

By Kenny Burchard



Since 1993, The Coming Home Network has helped non-Catholic Christians (clergy and laity) discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church. We've walked alongside thousands as they've made the journey home to full communion, providing fellowship, resources, and pastoral care during what can be a difficult transition. Faithful Catholics have sustained this work through their generosity, including those who have quietly included the CHNetwork in their estate plans.

While we have never before proactively discussed assisting our donors with estate gifts toward our work, we are excited to announce our new partnership with MyCatholicWill.com. Through this initiative, The Coming Home Network is now able to help you create your own will—free of charge—and help you ensure that your values and legacy of giving are honored and carried out according to your final wishes.

The platform is completely free to users. Prompts rooted in Church wisdom will guide you to protect your loved ones and clarify your intentions. As part of the will-creation process, you'll have the opportunity to include a gift to The Coming Home Network. A percentage of your estate, a fixed amount, or a specific asset can help ensure that others exploring the Catholic Faith have the fellowship and support they need to come home.

If you do not yet have a will—or it's been years since you reviewed it—we encourage you to visit mycatholicwill.com/chnetwork today and use promo code CHNetwork. In a few guided steps, you'll gain peace of mind knowing your faith and values will continue supporting the work of helping Christians discover the fullness of the faith, even after God calls you home.

Thank you for your partnership in this mission.

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling..."

EPHESIANS 4:4

CHNetwork
P.O. Box 8290
Zanesville, OH
43702-8290

740.450.1175

info@chnetwork.org

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ComingHomeNetwork

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*.



THE INFALLIBILITY OF Christ's Church

By Thomas Storck

Msgr. Ronald Knox, in his book, *The Belief of Catholics*, notes a very important point which separates Catholics from Protestants in our approach to the contents of the Christian faith. What is this point? That "a proper notion of the Church is a necessary stage before we argue from the authority of Christ to any other theological doctrine whatever. The infallibility of the Church is, for us, the true induction from which all our theological conclusions are derived."

Christians naturally want to know what our Lord taught and seek to obey his commandments. But how do we know what they are? From reading the Bible, most Protestants will say, it's all set out there. But we know that the text of Scripture is often far from clear; moreover, we cannot say with certainty that the whole of divine revelation was necessarily committed to the written Scriptures, let alone exactly how this teaching must be applied to subsequent theological or moral questions that were unthought of at the time. For this reason Christ established a living Church, to teach, guide and sanctify us. It is from her that we learn what we are to believe and what we are to do. As the First Vatican Council of 1870 put it:

Further, all those things are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the Word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church, either by a solemn judgment or by her ordinary and universal teaching [*magisterium*], proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed.

The implications of this are crucial. A new convert, for example, may well be, and usually is, convinced of many of the truths of the Faith quite apart from the question of the authority of the Church. In fact, this is often what attracts someone to the Church in the first place. But at some point a potential convert must step back and realize that it is the infallibility of the Church upon which the whole structure of belief rests. We believe what the Church teaches and we believe all that the Church teaches and we believe because the Church teaches it. Otherwise we get the too familiar notion of the "cafeteria Catholic," one who picks and chooses, who stands in judgment on the Church's doctrines. We should note, of course, that the First Vatican Council speaks of what is taught "either by a solemn judgment or by her ordinary and *universal* teaching," the word *universal* being key here. For the Church does have a sophisticated taxonomy of what is called the theological note to be accorded to each of her many utterances over the centuries; the upshot, however, is that what one may call her *settled* teaching is not up for grabs. It is not something Catholics may disagree about. To do otherwise,

whether it be a failure to accept Catholic teaching on economic justice or sexual morality or any other doctrinal or moral point, is deficient and ultimately self-contradictory.

It is self-contradictory because such a convert would profess his faith while at the same time taking exception to the very basis of that Faith, namely, the teaching authority of the Church. To take an extreme and certainly unlikely hypothesis, even if someone accepted each and every item of Catholic belief for reasons of his own, but failed to acknowledge his obligation to accept the Church's teaching authority as such, he would fall short in his approach to the Catholic faith.

I remember well on my own journey the clarifying moment when I read for the first time St. Irenaeus's famous dictum, a dictum that is such a strong and clear witness to the faith held by the early Church:

For this church [i.e. the church of Rome] has a position of leadership and authority; and therefore every church, that is, the faithful everywhere, must needs agree with the church at Rome; for in her the apostolic tradition has ever been preserved by the faithful from all parts of the world. (*Adversus Haereses*, iii, 1)

Of course this is only one of numerous declarations by the Fathers and other early ecclesiastical writers regarding the central position of the papacy in Christ's Church. But the second-century Irenaeus was particularly well placed to make it. He was a bishop and had worked in both the Greek and Latin-speaking portions of the Church, he was of the last generation who knew some who themselves had actually known the Apostle John, and in his statement Irenaeus puts the accent on the crucial point, the authority of the Church. *This* is what ultimately must be accepted by a Catholic, whether a new convert or a cradle Catholic first becoming aware of the theological basis of his religion.

It is surely good if we see the beauty and coherence of the individual doctrines of the Faith, how they accord with truths both supernatural and even natural. But we must recognize these truths as a theological structure that is supported by an acceptance of the Church's teaching authority itself, the foundation upon which all her doctrines rest. As Msgr. Knox further wrote, "It is through the Church that the Catholic finds out what he is to believe..." whether a new Catholic or one baptized decades ago as a tiny infant. This is what gives us as Catholics a security, a comfort, an assurance - qualities certainly needed in a world growing ever more tumultuous and confused. ■

...Journeys Home Continued...

Life of Christ, and Last Judgement. The design of the creation panel mirrors the panel depicting the end times; prophecy and fulfillment converse through similarities of format and design. Through this work of art I was introduced to typology, a mode of reading Scripture which was new to me. Prophecy wasn't simply predicting the future but pre-figuring it: Old Testament narratives became a model for a story that would be fulfilled through Christ, and could also be fulfilled even in our own lives. Scripture was revealed in a new way, as I discovered that the story of Gideon's fleece was a type, or model, for the way Mary absorbed the Holy Spirit, and for the way we, in turn, should be open to soaking in the presence of God.

After returning from my junior year abroad, I continued to pursue an academic interest in Mary. During that senior year back at Gordon College, I took a Byzantine history class and researched an icon of the Virgin that was rich in typology. I also did a project on a feminist theology of Mary for a women's studies course.

After graduating from college, I returned to Orvieto in the fall of 1999 to work for the Gordon College program. I continued my discussions with Sister Giovanna; I continued to attend vespers with the Sisters of St. Clare; I continued to attend Mass; and I continued to pray with the charismatic prayer group. I continued reading and researching and learning, and I experienced art and the Church, now not as a tourist, but as a pilgrim, in my heart as well as my mind.

The pain of the division of God's Church began to penetrate my heart deeply during the fall I worked in Orvieto. As I learned more about the Catholic Church, about the place of the Magisterium, about apostolic authority and the communion of saints, I saw how much of my perceptions of Catholicism had been informed by ignorance and colored by misunderstanding. This misunderstanding comes partly from an ancient bitterness towards the Church on the part of Protestants, but also from a complete lack of communication and dialogue—500 years of a complete fracture, in which the wounds of misinformation were allowed to fester.

Through prayer, I began to see this division not as one which separates, but as one which was waiting to be healed. During that time working in Orvieto, I saw ancient walls of church divisions broken down around me in the lives of the students, the Sisters and the community, and I began to pray for church unity: a prayer for the coming of the kingdom of God. Even the history of our hosts at the religious hospitality house confirmed this. The founder of The Company of Mary (the order of Sisters who hosted our student group) was St. Jeanne de Lestonnac. Her mother had been a Calvinist and her father a Catholic during a time of great religious violence in France in the 1600s. Although ultimately she chose her father's Catholic

faith, her vocation to found a school for girls was radical at the time. Her dedication to evangelizing the family by teaching women to read the Word showed the influence of her Calvinist upbringing and was a great gift to the Catholic Church.

Encounter with the Eucharist

During the autumn of 1999, I would go on occasion to daily 9:00 a.m. Mass in a side chapel of the cathedral. I loved the music that the "Sisters-in-gray" (later I found out they were the Sisters of Jesus Redeemer) would sing for those morning Masses. In addition to Orvieto's artistic treasures, it has a spiritual treasure in its cathedral, a relic from the Miracle of Bolsena. This Eucharistic miracle was the final impetus in the Church's decision to institute the festival of Corpus Domini (Body of the Lord). In 1263, a Bohemian priest was making a pilgrimage to Rome. He stopped in Bolsena, eight miles from Orvieto, to say a Mass. He was doubting the doctrine of transubstantiation, and when he lifted the host to consecrate it during the Mass, blood dripped from it onto the altar cloth. The altar cloth is now housed in a transept chapel of the Cathedral of Orvieto, where Mass is said every day.

One morning, I remained in that chapel after Mass. Filled with peace from the Mass just completed, I contemplated the cloth relic before me, and my eyes wandered to the chapel walls, frescoed with its miraculous story: this thirteenth century altar cloth is stained with Christ's blood which dripped from a Eucharistic host being consecrated by a doubting priest.

There were only ever ten or fifteen people in attendance at that morning Mass. That morning one of the "Sisters-in-gray" touched me on the shoulder and asked me to come to the "festa" they were having in honor of the founder of their order. After she left, I smiled and prayed. I had never met a Catholic nun or priest before I came to Italy, but here I encountered them every day! And these Catholics, even the nuns, were always hosting parties, it seemed!

Another friend from the charismatic community had been at the morning Mass as well, and he had greeted me warmly. I stared at the cloth and realized that this was God's house, that these were my brothers and sisters. God was inviting me, too, to be at home here. I was sitting, literally, face to face with the reality of Communion, of Jesus's Body and Blood. I had the choice to reject or accept it, but I could not avoid a decision. Here there was no in-between: either accept full communion with the Church, with human suffering and with Christ, or reject it. I felt the voice of God as I wrote in my journal that morning:

Tell me the story, Michelle: my house is your house. You are included in the space-time continuum which manifests itself in this chapel through the convergence of Word, flesh, image, and

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...Journeys Home Continued...

life itself. You have entered into the narrative of salvation which has unfolded in this chapel for 700 years. And now you, too, seated before my body and blood, have been invited into my body by your sister, Sr. Rafaella, and your brother, Louis. This church is your family, too.

Do these walls lie? I cannot say. But do the lives of my friends—the Comunita' Maria, the Sisters of the Company of Mary and of Gesu' Redentore—do they lie?

Could I be a Catholic outside of Orvieto? Outside of Italy? This is an important question. Here lies everything I need. Can I possibly leave it at all?

I made no decision that day, took no action, but in the following months I began to see more how that day was a turning point—a call, even. In the months to come (the spring and summer of 2000), I began to see that to NOT join the Catholic Church would have been a rejection of what God had revealed to me that day in Orvieto. Once I had seen the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, I could not un-see it. I did not know for sure what I was moving towards, but I most certainly could never go back. I could not be a Presbyterian again, or even an Episcopalian.

It was the fullness of the Incarnation that I desired in the Catholic Church: Jesus, my Lord, embodied in the Eucharist and in the Church, his body on earth. I saw the “Word made Flesh” in the community of the Church. I caught a glimpse of freedom and space for my soul to grow by the grace of the Holy Spirit, not limited by time, space, or culture.

If the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ which enables us to commune with Him and His suffering and the Church and her love, how could I show that I wholly accept that truth and fully desire to live that truth daily? If there is power in the story of Jesus, power in His body, the Church, and in His body, the Eucharist; if Jesus is as fully present on the earth today in the Eucharist and in the Church as He was when He had the flesh of a single man, then the healing, loving power He brought to Palestine can be multiplied thousandfold the world over. I saw no other way to say, “Yes, I believe this IS Jesus, with all the power to save and love that he had 2000 years ago,” than to join the Catholic Church.

It would still be 12 to 18 months before I could accept some of the “difficult doctrines” of the Catholic Church for myself. In time, it was simply God’s grace that allowed me to see a new way to interpret God’s Word so that I could, with good conscience, accept the authority of the Church of which I already desired to be a part.

After that fall in Italy, I spent some time abroad in England. By the time I arrived back in the US, I had received a job offer to return to Italy the following year to work for the study abroad program in a permanent position. When I received the news, I was certain I did not want to go back to Orvieto and not be Catholic. I did not want to return to Italy and be “separated brethren.” However, I needed to be sure that this call was from God, not from the wine and geraniums of Italy. It would mean I would have to be Catholic in the U.S. as well. I understood it as

a permanent choice, not like choosing a Protestant church to attend.

After I settled in to living in Massachusetts for my six month wait to go back to Italy, I knocked on the door of the Catholic Church rectory down the block and said, “I might want to be Catholic.” Father was “in” and able to see me immediately—if he hadn’t been, I might have run away! I began RCIA there in my parish in Massachusetts that fall and finished it under the tutelage of Sr. Giovanna in Italy, at the beginning of my three year tenure working for the study abroad program.

I was confirmed in the Cathedral of Orvieto (the “Duomo”) at the 2001 Easter Vigil Mass at midnight. Twenty-one Protestant college students and several Protestant professors were in attendance. After midnight Mass, the Sisters and the Comunita' Maria hosted a reception for me back at the convent which hosted our group. Italians and Americans, Catholic and Evangelical, lay and religious, young and old celebrated until 2:30 a.m. It was a taste of heaven; it was communion. It is still, twenty-three years later, one of the highlights of my life.

My decision was not a rejection of my family’s tradition or faith: they helped to bring me here. Through my comings and goings of those several years (Italy, America, England, and back again), God had assured me that he had a home for me. He has prepared a place for me in heaven, in his house of many rooms, a Promised Land to which he will lead me.

In the traditions, theology, and diversity of Catholicism, I saw room to grow. The wind of the Spirit brought me here to a vast landscape of space and time, a rich, nourishing soil in which I could rest my seed, take root, and grow and love and flower.

After my confirmation I worked for Gordon-in-Orvieto for another two years. During that time I immersed myself in studying the innovations of Renaissance painters who brought a contemporary twist to the ancient stories to speak to their own time. Through my own spiritual encounter with Mary and the Catholic Church, I began to desire to enter the dialogue as an artist and interpreter of these narratives, and much of my artwork continues to be inspired by the images I encountered in Italy. ■

Michelle Arnold Paine is a visual artist living and working in northwest Ohio. Through her art’s Christian themes, she has collaborated with and served churches, colleges, and non-profit organizations exploring the convergence of art and Christian faith. She is co-founder of the Network of Christians in Visual Arts (ncva.community), an ecumenical organization serving Christian artists. Michelle is also the wife of Seth Paine, CHNetwork’s Studio Manager and Developer of Web & New Media.

View her paintings and purchase prints at shop.michellepaine.com.

The Coming Home Network International
PO Box 8290
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